OnWisconsin

FOR UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON ALUMNI AND FRIENDS WINTER 2026

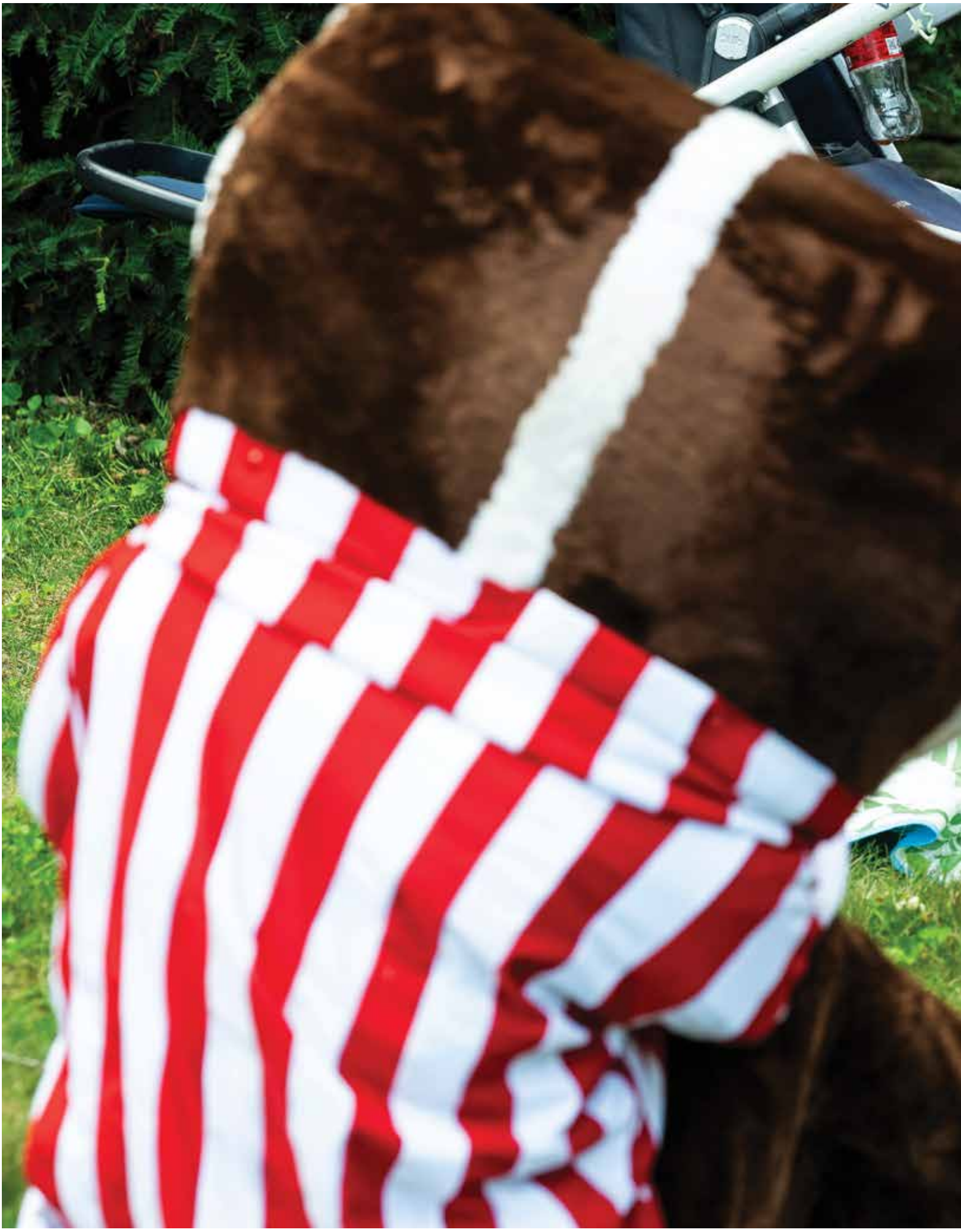
A Bright AI Future?

A new UW college seeks responsible uses for the transformative technology.

Badgers Investigate True Crime

The Greatest Campus Pranks







Vision

During the 2026 new faculty picnic, UW–Madison's top ambassador welcomes two new Badgers to campus: Marijn Bolhuis, partner of religious studies professor Suzanne van Geuns, and their son. Each year, the chancellor brings new faculty members to Olin House to give them and their families an introduction to UW traditions.

Photo by Jeff Miller

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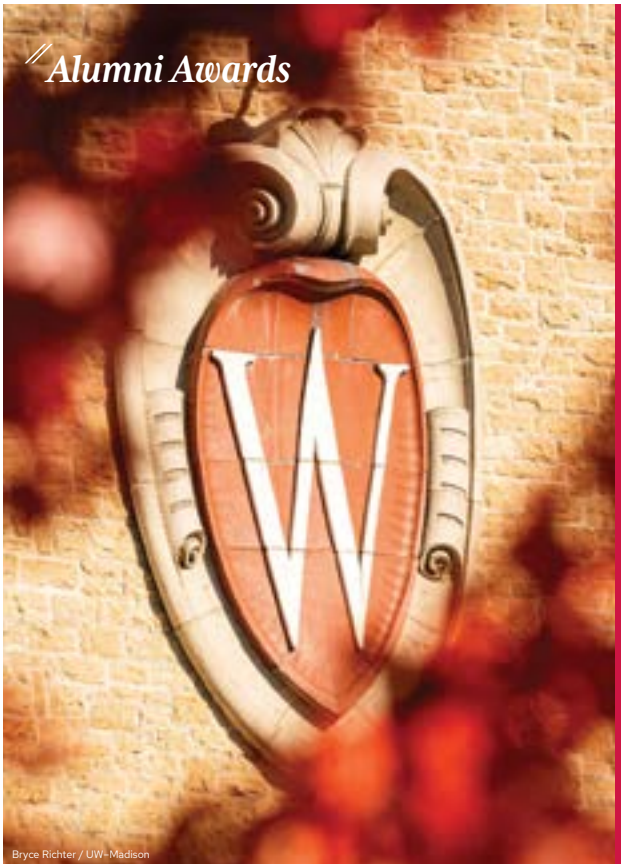
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Bryce Richter / UW–Madison

Nominate a Badger

Do you know a UW–Madison graduate who exemplifies the Wisconsin Idea? Could that someone be you?

Scan to recognize an inspiring Badger!

Nominations are open for the 2027 awards.

WISCONSIN ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

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The Chazen Museum's bold new reinstallation shows the collection in a new light. See page 36.



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TAYLOR WOLFRAM

New athletic director Shawn Eichorst has a plan for Badger sports. See page 22.

Cover
The new College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence shines brightly on campus. Prism photo by Jeff Miller.

Communications

Football Optimism

Please pass on my thanks to Preston Schmitt for his excellent article on Badger football ("Can the Badgers Bounce Back?" Fall 2026 *On Wisconsin*). As an alum, I recall the excitement when Barry Alvarez arrived on campus. He jogged the campus daily with his staff and gave us all the impression that we now had a winner in the locker rooms. Schmitt's article gives old-timers like me some confidence that the football alarm clocks have gone off! Even the front offices in Bascom understand that the school's reputation is impacted by a successful football program. Schmitt's article makes that abundantly clear.

Charles Maxwell MS'90
Pittsford, New York

Keep On Walking

I enjoyed Melanie Conklin's "UW–Madison in Four Walks" (Fall 2026). It seems I may have missed a few choice spots, which I will search out on my next campus visit. The feature brought back fond memories.

Ron Engstrom '73
Jenks, Oklahoma

What Is "On, Wisconsin"?

"What Is UW–Madison?" (Fall 2026) reminded me of my experience as a *Jeopardy!* contestant in 2009. I was in the studio audience, watching a game and waiting for my turn to play. The Final Jeopardy category was "State Songs," and the clue was, "It was originally dedicated to a Midwest football team; it's said that Sousa called it the best college song he'd ever heard." Ugh! Why couldn't I have been chosen to play in *this* game? To make it even more frustrating, none of the contestants got it right.

I was selected to play in the next game. When Alex Trebek noted that I was from Wisconsin, he asked me whether I would have gotten the previous game's Final Jeopardy question right. "Absolutely!" I replied. I ended up playing in three games, but unfortunately, none of the questions I faced were as easy as that one.

Ingrid Nelson '92, JD'95
Waterloo, Wisconsin

Beyond Fake Money

I was not at first inclined to read the article on Professor Brad Chandler's course ("Making Crypto Less Cryptic," Fall 2026). I overruled that. The article was interesting for its depictions of the direction of finance, the definitions, and the variety of opinions and experiences. I write in appreciation of Aunt Marian's definition of cryptocurrency as "fake money." As I am two years Marian's senior, I wish to add to it. It is "imaginary fake money." Think fairy dust.

That said, I believe I have, although not through my deliberate choice, a minuscule amount of the stuff.

Anna Marie Stubenrauch Mulvihill MS'59
Vienna, Virginia

In "Making Crypto Less Cryptic," writer Niki Denison admits that for many people, including her 90-year-old Aunt Marian, crypto is "fake money." I would go a step further than that. The game Monopoly uses fake money. Crypto is not so harmless. It sucks up vast resources to produce it, it is ideal for money laundering, and it is easily manipulated, as Donald Trump has shown in his shameless accumulation of billions.

George Savage PhD'85
Madison

Porta Bella Memories

When we visited Madison last spring, it was with great sadness that we found our favorite campus restaurant had closed. My wife, **Dee MA'78,** and I spent many memorable evenings there over the years. We shall never forget the great food, Porta salads, and dark, wooden private booths that created the warm ambiance that we irreverently described as "early bordello." My first evening in Madison in 1972 included dinner there. I reflected on that moment just last weekend while I was in town for the game and saw the construction on Frances Street — probably soon to be another glass-and-steel monolith. RIP, Porta Bella — you sure had style!

William Bozeman PhD'78
New Smyrna Beach, Florida

I worked at Porta Bella from 1982 to 1987. I lived across the street on Hawthorne Court above the Cardinal Beauty Salon and didn't have a phone (too expensive). If they found themselves short staffed, Mike McCormick, the original owner's son, would run across the street and ring my doorbell. I still have good friends from my Porta Bella days over 40 years ago — great memories!

Lorraine Downes '86
Providence, Rhode Island

We want to hear from you! Please email your letters to onwisconsin@uwalumni.com or mail them to WFAA, *On Wisconsin*, 1848 University Ave., Madison, WI 53726. You can also post comments online at onwisconsin.uwalumni.com.

Online



JEFF MILLER

PORTA BELLA, *CON AMORE*

Our Fall 2026 issue mourned the closing of Porta Bella, the beloved campus-area Italian restaurant. Readers responded with their own memories of first dates and marriage proposals in the romantic private booths. See a sampling on this page and read the complete collection by searching our website for "*Arrivederci,* Porta Bella! Letters."

Visit us at onwisconsin.uwalumni.com.



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Your connection to the animals in your life has been an important part of your journey – but it's just one part of you. There are so many things you'll want to care for as you plan your legacy: your loved ones, your values, your hopes for future generations of both humans and animals. With the right team on your side, you can do it all.

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OnWisconsin

Winter 2026

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No Ordinary Alumni Magazine

On Wisconsin strives to be worthy of UW–Madison.

After a career in book and newspaper publishing, I came to *On Wisconsin* because it aspires to be a world-class general-interest magazine, rather than simply an advertisement for UW–Madison. Along with "reporting news about the university accurately and honestly," our mission statement requires us to "seek high standards of writing, photography, illustration, graphic design, and printing."

How to measure "high standards"? Our favorite metric is reader feedback. The discerning UW audience lets us know what's working and what isn't, and we take your suggestions to heart. In that way, *On Wisconsin* serves as a kind of communal Badger project, reflecting UW–Madison values. For example, Kacie Lucchini Butcher of the Center for Campus History argued that our 2026 article "The UW's Lost Traditions" ignored the "painful histories associated with those traditions" for excluded minority students. Her letter made an impression, and we revised the story online.

We're grateful for your encouraging letters, too, like a recent one from Thomas Straka '72, MS'73. "I am not sure how it is possible," he charmingly wrote, "but lately each issue of *On Wisconsin* seems better than the last." Blush!

Awards are another measure of high standards. *On Wisconsin* competes with alumni magazines around the world in an annual contest sponsored by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). We also go head-to-head with the state's top newspapers and magazines in the Milwaukee Press Club's Excellence in Wisconsin Journalism competition. We've won dozens of honors from both organizations during the past decade, including CASE gold awards for best alumni magazine and best single issue. Credit UW–Madison and its alumni for providing an endless supply of rich material for our staff to dig into.

This year, almost everyone on our masthead — writers, designers, illustrators, photographers — earned state and international awards for articles such as "A New Era for College Sports," "In the Kitchen with Patricia Wells," "How to Win a Nobel Prize," "Quantum Leaps in Education," and "Paper Magic." Check them out on our website, onwisconsin.uwalumni.com — not because they won prizes, of course, but because they strive to provide in-depth reporting, stylish writing, dazzling visuals, and insight into important subjects.

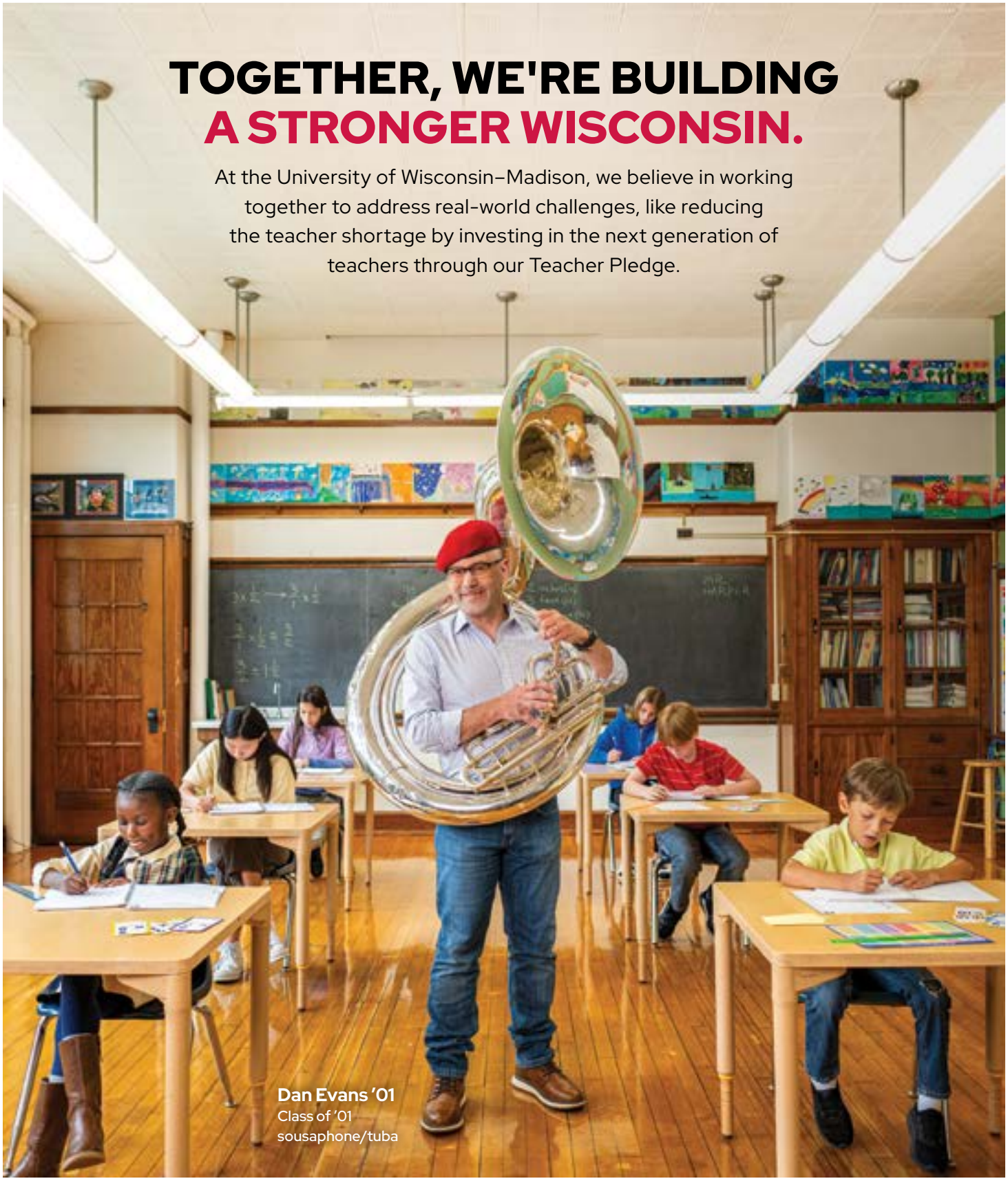
And check out our current issue for the latest reports from campus and beyond. You'll learn about the UW's new College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence, the incorrigible Pail and Shovel Party, the Chazen Museum's innovative reinstallation, and fascinating true-crime studies.

Is this issue of *On Wisconsin* "better than the last," per Thomas Straka? As always, we gave it our best shot.

DEAN ROBBINS

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OnCampus

News from UW–Madison



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Halzen: "I was fortunate to be at UW, where unconventional ideas can thrive."

UW Professor Chosen as Nobel Laureate

Francis Halzen was honored for his groundbreaking work on neutrinos.

On October 6, UW–Madison professor **Francis Halzen** was named the recipient of the Nobel Prize in physics at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden. The prize was conferred for Halzen's contributions to our understanding of the astrophysical particles known as neutrinos.

"This is a celebration of a very unusual project," says Halzen. "It is difficult to imagine that we could have pulled this off anywhere but at UW–Madison, with its unique research infrastructure. The success of this project involved some luck, and I was fortunate to be at UW, where unconventional ideas can thrive and where I had the support of a remarkable community, from talented engineers at the Physical Sciences Laboratory to longtime colleagues on the faculty and supportive administrators."

Halzen is the principal investigator of the NSF IceCube Neutrino Observatory, the world's largest — and perhaps strangest — telescope. The U.S. National Science Foundation–funded observatory is operated by an international collaboration of scientists led by the Wisconsin IceCube Particle Astrophysics Center based at UW–Madison.

Embedded in a cubic kilometer of Antarctic ice, IceCube uses thousands of light sensors to survey the universe for neutrinos, nearly massless particles that rarely interact with other matter. Neutrinos provide information about the workings of black holes, galaxies, and other objects in the cosmos.

Along with observations by other telescopes, the neutrino first detected by IceCube provided the earliest evidence of a source of high-energy cosmic rays, whose origins have been notoriously difficult to pinpoint since their discovery more than 100 years ago.

In 2013, IceCube announced the first detection of high-energy neutrinos from outside the solar system. The discovery won the 2013 Physics World Breakthrough of the Year Award.

Four years later, IceCube detected a high-energy neutrino from a supermassive black hole at the center of a distant galaxy in the direction of the constellation Orion. Since then, it has provided the first evidence of high-energy neutrino emission from an active galaxy 47 million light-years away, and also from the Milky Way.

This is the 23rd Nobel Prize tied to UW–Madison, in a legacy that spans medicine, chemistry, economics, engineering, and physics.

ALISA KING-KLEMPERER '12

CAN AI ASSESS OUR TEACHERS?

A new study explores whether artificial intelligence can help assess teaching quality using real classroom data and whether it can do it as well or even better than traditional human ratings, which can be time-consuming, expensive, and inconsistent.

The international team of researchers included **Courtney Bell,** a professor of learning sciences in the UW's School of Education and former director of the school's Wisconsin Center for Education Research. The team's goal was to see whether machine learning could produce reliable and meaningful scores on 18 widely used indicators of teaching effectiveness.

The study showed that the automated scores often aligned closely with human ratings and sometimes outperformed them. Machine learning models were more reliable than human scores on 11 of the 18 measures, including classroom discourse and eliciting student thinking. These areas rely heavily on language cues, which machine learning analyzes with "fine-grained precision," the study found. Human raters may overlook these cues or interpret them inconsistently.

The reviewers preferred human scores in elements of classroom management, such as judging how well teachers established routines and handled disruptions, suggesting humans are better at interpreting complex or ambiguous behaviors.

"Human professional judgment remains essential," Bell says. "The promise here is real — but so is the need for caution as we explore how these tools might support educators."

KAREN RIVEDAL



DANIELLE LAWRY

PRESCHOOL EMPATHY

Research from UW–Madison and the Madison Metropolitan School District shows children as young as four years old begin forming social networks shaped by shared characteristics, offering new insight into how early peer relationships develop.

The study, completed under the Madison Education Partnership and coauthored by **Rebecca Bier MS'23, PhDx'27,** examines how preschool students choose their playmates. The findings suggest these early interactions may lay the groundwork for how friendships later form.

Early childhood may represent a critical window when interventions to promote cross-group friendships could have lasting benefits. Research suggests interacting with diverse peers can foster empathy, reduce bias, and support both social and academic development.

"At this stage, peer groups are still relatively fluid, and children are engaging with a broader range of classmates than we often see in later grades," the researchers conclude. "This creates important opportunities for educators and policymakers to support inclusive peer environments from the very start of schooling."

KATIE GRANT

A MICRO-PREDATOR IN MADISON'S LAKES

Madison's serene lakes are home to a deadly, vampire-like hunter with tentacle-like structures that first poison and immobilize prey, then act as straws to suck them dry. This microscopic monster is the predatory single-celled organism *Podophyra collini*.

While many of these organisms retain their original structures and proportions as they grow, *P. collini* can increase or decrease its number of appendages to suit its environment. In lean times, it sports fewer, longer tentacles that probe the surrounding water in search of prey. When prey is plentiful, it rapidly produces dozens of new tentacles to maximize prey capture.

"Normally, when we think about how biological structures scale, we expect different features to change proportionally: a larger structure should have corresponding increases across all dimensions," says **Zhejing "Maggie" Xu PhD'26.** "But our observations reveal that *P. collini* follows a different scaling logic. Changes are biased toward increasing tentacle number rather than tentacle length."

Figuring out how, why, and when single-celled organisms adjust their tentacle number has been the quest of Xu and biochemistry assistant professor **Scott Coyle.** The researchers first watched *P. collini* under a microscope after a trip to Lake Mendota along UW–Madison's campus. Their interest was piqued by the morphological differences among individuals.

Coyle, Xu, and other researchers scanned hundreds of thousands of individual *P. collini* cells to determine the number and spatial distribution of their tentacles under different environmental conditions, including varying the amount of available prey.

"There is a lot of basic research to be done on this organism because the only literature you can find is back in the 1970s and 1980s," says Xu. "I really feel like I'm communicating through time, talking to people who did research 50 years ago."

RENATA SLOAN



JAKE PIPER

Marching to Their Own Beat

In August, the UW Marching Band held a five-day training program for returning and prospective band members, called Registration (or Reg) Week. The prospectives rehearse the band's music, learn the distinctive marching style, and, at the end of the week, audition for a spot. Returning members lighten the mood by wearing silly costumes. The tradition serves a not-so-silly purpose: creating a community that will bring joy to the Badger faithful.



TOM ZIEMER

Dreams of Robotic Fish

The UW's unique device can aid watercraft design and ecological monitoring.

Jack Stonecipher PhDx'28 grew up on the shore of Minnesota's Light Foot Lake, hooking bluegill and smallmouth bass. These days, he's building robotic fish (above) as a UW–Madison mechanical engineering student. Stonecipher and **Wei Wang,** a UW mechanical engineering assistant professor, have devised a unique mechanical version whose body stiffness can be adjusted, allowing it to better mimic the swimming mechanics of real fish.

"There are a lot of different stiffnesses in different kinds of fish, and it can be a big indicator of how they move. But it's very difficult to actually measure," says Stonecipher. "Using robotic systems, we can get a better gauge of how much they're stiffening and why they would want to do this."

In nature, fish activate muscles, increasing the stiffness in their bodies and allowing them to accelerate. Conversely, they can also maintain efficiency in their locomotion while moving at slower speeds when their muscles are slack. Those biological machinations could hold important lessons for designing watercraft.

"Most of our current boats or underwater vehicles can only maintain a high efficiency within a very narrow speed profile," says Wang, whose lab develops physical prototypes of aquatic robots as well as the control and sensing systems necessary to operate them. "But fish can maintain a very high efficiency over a very wide speed profile."

Stonecipher, Wang, and former undergraduate researcher **Allen Gao '26** built their bluegill-inspired robot with a lentil-filled polymer body that can stiffen on command without significantly changing its shape or size, thanks to a vacuum pump. The fish can freely swim, allowing the researchers to test the effects of altering the body stiffness in a realistic environment.

Beyond informing watercraft design, Wang and Stonecipher see bioinspired aquatic robots as tools for ecological monitoring, where they're able to blend in among animals and better capture photos and other data without disrupting the natural environment. They could also reveal new insights about aquatic animal movement, since it's not possible to force a fish to selectively tense its muscles and then study the effects.

"I like this idea that robotics is spurred on by biological research, and then robotics can be used to inform biological research," says Stonecipher.

TOM ZIEMER '07



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

The *Washington Post* picked Madison as one of the 10 best college football towns in the country, name-checking the Badger Bash, the Lakeshore Path, the Memorial Union Terrace, and the famed "Jump Around" ritual. " 'Jump Around' plays in plenty of stadiums around the country," the article says, "but all of these celebrations feel inauthentic or derivative compared with Madison."

Two teams of UW–Madison engineering students worked together to take first and second place in the Cast in Steel national competition, which challenges contestants to design a historically inspired object as preparation for careers in manufacturing. This year's assignment was a medieval horseman's ax — and who knew that was a Badger specialty?



UW ATHLETICS

Camp Randall Stadium debuted a menu of creative hot dogs for football home games, including a Badger Dog with beer cheese sauce and an appropriately feisty hot pepper relish. Other hot dogs pay tribute to that week's opposing team, such as the University of Southern California (smoked with bacon jam), but the Badger Dog can beat them any day.

DANIELLE LAWRY



Beyond the Headlines

Some pervasive popular beliefs about the university are actually not accurate.

Several fallacies about UW–Madison and higher education have arisen in recent years. Read on to get the scoop about these misconceptions as they affect Badger students and alumni.

NIKI DENISON

Fallacy: UW–Madison is financially inaccessible for many and offers little financial aid.

Fact: Of the 16 public Big Ten schools, UW–Madison was fifth-lowest in tuition and fees in 2025–26. UW–Madison has boosted its financial aid by nearly 20 percent since 2021–22, with students receiving $738 million in financial aid in 2024–25.

Fallacy: A college education often results in debt.

Fact: Two-thirds of UW–Madison students graduate with zero debt. More than 6,500 students have benefited from free tuition since 2018 through the Bucky's Tuition Promise program.

Fallacy: Earning a degree takes longer than the traditional four years.

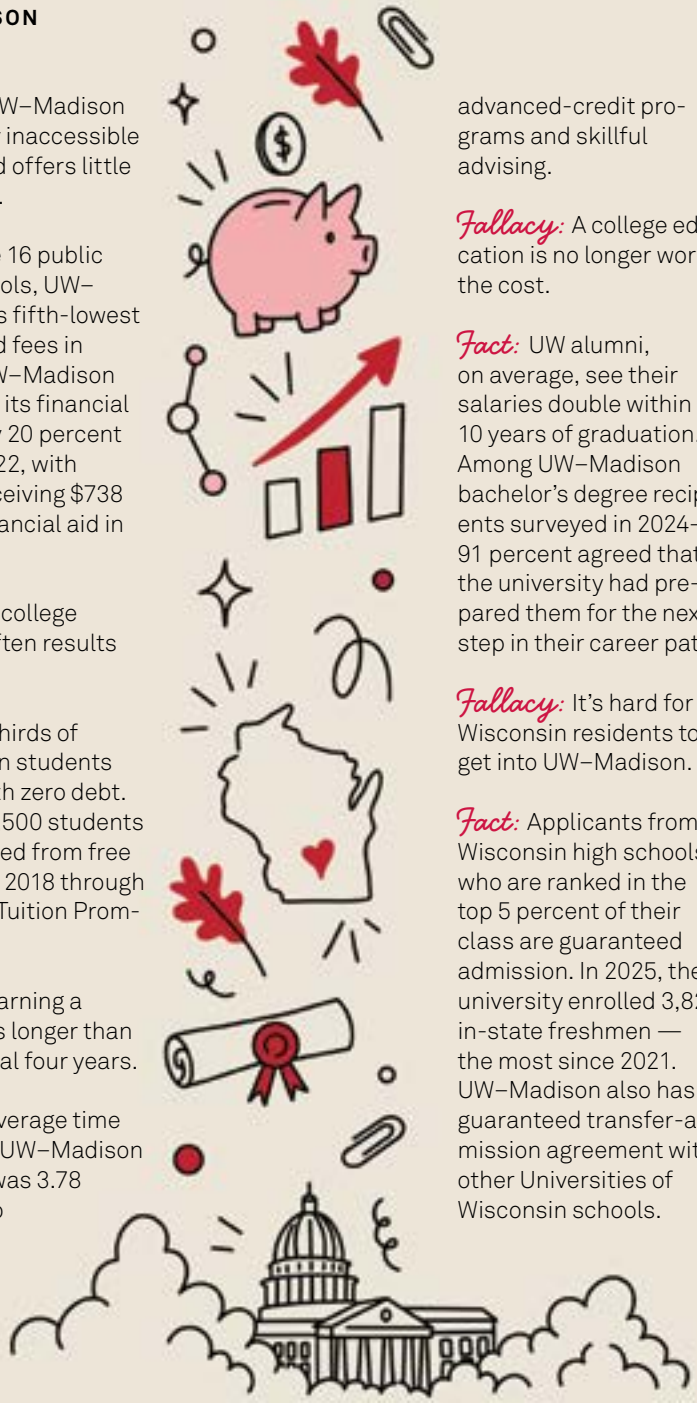
Fact: The average time to degree at UW–Madison in 2024–25 was 3.78 years, due to advanced-credit programs and skillful advising.

Fallacy: A college education is no longer worth the cost.

Fact: UW alumni, on average, see their salaries double within 10 years of graduation. Among UW–Madison bachelor's degree recipients surveyed in 2024–25, 91 percent agreed that the university had prepared them for the next step in their career path.

Fallacy: It's hard for Wisconsin residents to get into UW–Madison.

Fact: Applicants from Wisconsin high schools who are ranked in the top 5 percent of their class are guaranteed admission. In 2025, the university enrolled 3,828 in-state freshmen — the most since 2021. UW–Madison also has a guaranteed transfer-admission agreement with other Universities of Wisconsin schools.





SIRTAJ GREWAL/MEDIA SOLUTIONS

Ingenious Solutions to Real-World Problems

Student teams pitch entrepreneurial ideas in a School of Pharmacy competition.

Parents might expect their kids to come home from summer camp with scraped knees and a touch of sun. Those whose kids have Type 1 diabetes, however, have to worry about camp counselors who don't know how to recognize or manage medical emergencies.

But what if a quick glance at the child could immediately convey that they're okay? That's the transformational idea behind the winning pitch at last spring's ShaRx Tank at the UW School of Pharmacy, a competition where student pharmacists pitch entrepreneurial ideas for new products and services to a panel of alumni judges in the field.

First-place winners **Olive Cerniglia PharmDx'28** and **Callie Berg '26, PharmDx'28** developed a prototype of Sugar Safe: a bracelet that would connect to a continuous glucose monitor to show whether blood sugar is low, high, or in a target range. A phone app paired with the bracelet would display colors to help parents, children, and caregivers understand the readings.

The team (above) earned $3,500 to develop their idea, including pilot-testing the bracelet with real families.

Other pitches included a device for filtering out antibiotics that enter the water system; a counseling service for GLP-1 users; an app to help patients track their supplements; and a device to lessen pain related to IUD insertion. Each idea was refined by speaking with the potential patients who would benefit from the new products and services.

The ShaRx Tank program has grown to include collaborations beyond pharmacy, with students from biomedical engineering, computer science, law, and business. The teams met throughout the academic year with program leaders such as pharmacy professor **Beth Martin '90, MS'03, PhD'06** and **George Zorich '78,** who helped launch the entrepreneurial student group at the School of Pharmacy and continue to mentor its participants.

"This teaches a lesson in how a corporate or business environment would work in real life and the collaboration and communication required," says Zorich, who funds the competition's prizes.

Judges included **Sarah Sorum PharmD'05,** CEO and executive vice president of the Pharmacy Society of Wisconsin.

"The teams connected their ideas to real-world challenges facing patients, pharmacists, and the health care system," Sorum says. "The quality of the pitches reflected strong innovation and problem-solving but also a genuine commitment to improving patient care and advancing the profession of pharmacy."

KATIE GERHARDS AND LOGAN UNDERWOOD '26



JOEL HALLBERG

BATTERY SAFETY

Many hybrid vehicles use lithium-ion batteries, which can be flammable if a car gets in an accident. Some manufacturers are switching to solid-state batteries, so **Eric Kazyak,** a UW assistant professor of mechanical engineering, decided to test whether these next-generation power sources would be safer and less likely to catch on fire.

Solid-state batteries have a high energy density that could give electric vehicles much longer driving ranges. These batteries use a nonflammable, solid electrolyte instead of a flammable, volatile liquid electrolyte. The electrolyte is the material in a battery that allows ions to move between the positive and the negative ends to release power.

Jonathan Fakkema PhDx'28 (above right with Kazyak) manufactured a range of solid-state batteries made of different materials. Researchers then placed each battery directly inside a propane flame to see how long each one burned and how much heat it generated.

They found that batteries with a ceramic solid electrolyte burned significantly more slowly and generated heat at a lower rate than lithium-ion batteries under the same conditions.

"We showed that this type of solid-state battery will still burn, but it's less likely to quickly result in a catastrophic event because of the slower flame propagation," Kazyak says.

"That's beneficial for safety because it allows for more time for people to get out of a vehicle in a worst-case scenario."

ADAM MALECEK '04



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

The Rarest Books You'll Ever Touch

At UW Special Collections, visitors can handle some of the world's most extraordinary objects.

Many of us know what it's like to go down a rabbit hole in UW–Madison Libraries, losing track of time while pursuing a research obsession. At Memorial Library, arguably the best place to get lost is Special Collections.

The ninth-floor wonderland is a portal to books, handwritten manuscripts, periodicals, maps, posters, and other objects that are, well, special. They're old, rare, fragile, or invaluable and require delicate handling. Many are part of scholarly archives such as the Cairns Collection of American Women Writers or the Duveen Alchemy and Chemistry Collection. They're stored in a secure, climate-controlled environment to keep them safe for knowledge-seekers into the 22nd century and beyond.

Special Collections reopened its reading room and exhibition space this summer after an 18-month renovation to the all-important fire-suppression systems. For visitors, accessing the vast holdings involves making an online request and having the treasures brought to you, like academic room service. Be advised that these beauties don't leave the ninth floor, lest you expected to stuff a first century BC papyrus fragment in your backpack.

Special Collections dates to the 1940s, under the original name Rare Book Department. Through donations and purchases, it has amassed 300,000-plus objects — everything from a 1582 German bible to books from Isaac Newton's library. The collection's strengths include literary magazines and natural history. Among its most renowned items are first editions of *The Birds of America* by John James Audubon and *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* by Phillis Wheatley, both of which are used extensively in UW teaching and research.

***David Pavelich carefully handles one of the collection's most renowned items, a first edition of John James Audubon's* The Birds of America.**

For more photos of Special Collections, see this article on our website, onwisconsin.uwalumni.com.

Indeed, the UW's rare books don't gather much dust. Scholars from around the world seek them out, as do students from dozens of UW classes each year. While a small fraction of the collection is digitized, the primary appeal is the chance to hold these extraordinary objects in your hands.

"It can be an emotional experience to interact with something that was created, say, in the 14th or 15th century — different from interacting with something online," says **David Pavelich '98, MA'04,** UW Libraries' associate dean for collections. "You pay a different kind of attention to it, appreciating the materiality and the workmanship. How was this thing produced? How was it experienced by people of the period that it comes from?"

Pavelich says library staff can see the excitement in students' faces. "They say, 'Can I touch this?' And we say, 'Yes. You can touch that.' "

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm off to Memorial Library's ninth floor to get lost.

DEAN ROBBINS



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

A New Home for the Athletic Hall of Fame

Ray Kubly Plaza outside the Kohl Center recognizes hundreds of Badger greats.

As Badger fans head to the Kohl Center to catch future Hall of Famers in action, they can now pay their respects to past UW–Madison legends at a new installation outside the arena. The UW Athletic Hall of Fame's new home, the Ray Kubly Plaza, opened on September 18 with an induction ceremony for the 2026 class.

The Hall of Fame, established in 1991 by Wisconsin Athletics in partnership with the W Club letterwinner organization, recognizes exemplary athletic achievement and contributions to the university both on and off the field. More than 330 Badger athletes, coaches, administrators, and benefactors have joined its distinguished ranks.

The new exhibit, stationed in front of the Kohl Center and along Frances Street, honors each Hall of Famer with a plaque detailing a list of accomplishments. The plaques are organized by induction class and displayed on three long concrete walls. The exhibit is spaced to allow many visitors to casually walk through and learn about Badger greats, such as Heisman-winning running back **Ron Dayne '17,** Olympic gold medalist runner **Gwen Jorgensen '08, MAcc'09,** and longtime football coach and athletic director **Barry Alvarez.**

The freshest plaques, representing the 2026 class, honor football players **Chris Borland '13** and **Melvin Gordon x'15,** basketball players **Sam Dekker x'16** and **Janet (Huff) Dyer '85, MS'86,** and track and field star **Kelsey Card '16,** among others.

The Hall of Fame was previously located outside the Camp Randall Memorial Sports Center (known as "the Shell") prior to the building's 2024 demolition, which made way for the Kellner Family Athletic Center. The new location affords the Hall of Fame more visibility and increased foot traffic, with an anticipated 750,000 visitors per year. The plaza is named for **Ray Kubly 1926,** the founder of Swiss Colony (now Colony Brands), who was a Badger cross country athlete and later president of the W Club.

The old location was running out of space to add plaques, so the new installation includes plenty of room for future Hall of Famers — including, perhaps, players you cheer on at the Kohl Center today.

PRESTON SCHMITT '14



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

The 2027–29 budget request from the Universities of Wisconsin has several priorities for UW–Madison, including demolishing the aging Humanities Building (above), creating modern learning spaces in Music Hall, and expanding housing capacity to support the growing demand for a UW degree. Wisconsin's governor and legislature will finalize the budget in summer 2027, so fingers crossed.

After a yearlong renovation, Steenbock Library's first floor has reopened with active learning classrooms, new study spaces, updated technology, and a fresh look and feel (hello, earth tones). The goal was to create an environment where students and instructors can easily gather and collaborate.



UW ATHLETICS

The first phase of the Kellner Family Athletic Center is now open, offering a state-of-the-art indoor training facility for student-athletes in UW–Madison's 23 varsity sports. The $285 million project is scheduled for completion in 2028, with a large, turfed space for multisport training and other amenities.

Heading Off Doomsday

Professor Sébastien Philippe is improving collective security through nuclear science and policy research.

Nuclear risk affects everyone, says **Sébastien Philippe,** so more people should be discussing nuclear weapon policies.

"That's the thing with nuclear weapons and nuclear war," he says. "There is essentially no safe place. The work we do here at the UW is really to improve our collective security."

Philippe is an assistant professor of nuclear engineering and engineering physics, with associate faculty appointments in the La Follette School of Public Affairs and the Department of Political Science. He joined the UW in 2025 to create an interdisciplinary research lab to study nuclear security and arms control. He's a 2025 MacArthur Fellow and serves on a United Nations panel conducting the organization's first comprehensive study of the effects of nuclear war in nearly 40 years.

What does your lab do?
We monitor nuclear activities everywhere in the world and develop new technologies and approaches to do that. Another big area of research that we do these days is model the consequences of nuclear weapons use and nuclear war. Over the summer, we hosted a workshop where we brought scholars from political science, scientists, and people who serve in the government to review most-likely scenarios, discuss the types of nuclear events we foresee, and share things we would like to know. We hope to influence nuclear weapons policies, arms control, and long-term disarmament, and to make the world a more peaceful and safer place.

How do politics affect the risk of nuclear weapons being used?
Many of the structures and agreements built since the 1960s and '70s have now disappeared. There are no longer any limits on the number of nuclear weapons that can be deployed. We see states spending hundreds of billions, if not even trillions, of dollars in building up and refurbishing their nuclear arsenal — the United States included. And we see China building up its nuclear capabilities. When I think about risk, I consider both the probability of something happening and the consequences if it does. Right now, we are seeing governments taking decisions that undermine our long-term ability to reduce either that probability or those consequences.

How can the risk of nuclear war be reduced?
As long as nuclear weapons exist, there will be a chance that they will be used, and the consequences are likely to be devastating. But wherever we can act, we must. We can develop technologies that give policymakers new options for verifying future agreements and that support diplomatic engagement and cooperation. We should also increase transparency and engage actively with our adversaries. To borrow the title of a book edited by former Los Alamos National Laboratory director Siegfried Hecker, we are "doomed to cooperate."

You encourage people to engage with nuclear policy conversations. What are some ways they can do that?
Nuclear weapon policy is often seen as the exclusive domain of national security experts or the military, but that's not true. As with every area of public policy, anyone can take an interest and participate in the debate. Voting and understanding what your government is doing in your name — especially in matters of national security — are fundamental ways to stay engaged.

Interview by Blake McCoy MA'23
Photo by Jeff Miller



Philippe serves on a UN panel that studies the effects of nuclear war.



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Rankings on the Rise

The UW moves up in the U.S. News & World Report list of best colleges.

UW–Madison fared well in the 2027 edition of U.S. News & World Report's Best Colleges rankings. The university was ranked 34th overall out of 422 public and private doctoral institutions and eighth among public universities, its highest placements in close to two decades.

This year's rankings demonstrate UW–Madison's strength across a broad range of academic disciplines. The university's undergraduate economics program ranked fifth among public universities and 19th overall, while the undergraduate psychology program rose to fourth among public universities and eighth overall. Wisconsin School of Business's undergraduate real estate program retained its first-place ranking for the fifth consecutive year, while the undergraduate insurance/risk management program rose two places to claim the first-place spot. Overall, UW–Madison undergraduate programs received top-25 rankings in business, computer science, economics, engineering, nursing, and psychology.

"These rankings — while only one measure of a school's success — reflect the incredible breadth of educational programs, research opportunities, and cross-campus collaborations that makes UW–Madison unique," says interim Chancellor **Eric Wilcots.** "From real estate to psychology, nursing to engineering, and in every discipline on campus, we are dedicated to excellence and preparing today's learners to be tomorrow's forward-looking leaders."

The report also reflects the university's ongoing commitment to financial support for its students. UW–Madison rose 23 places, to 24th, in the "Best Value Schools" ranking, and was ranked fourth in the nation for "Best Value Schools for In-State Students," a new category this year.

Wilcots says that UW–Madison's high placement in these categories is a "validation of the many innovative programs we offer to make college accessible and affordable, such as Bucky's Pell Pathway and Bucky's Tuition Promise."

Both programs are designed to put a world-class education within reach for lower-income students. In 2024–25, nearly 57 percent of all UW–Madison undergraduates received financial aid, and the total value of scholarships was close to $129 million. Two-thirds of Badgers earn a degree with no student-loan debt.

In the 2027 Best Colleges ranking, UW–Madison also saw increases in its faculty resources rank, student outcomes rank, and faculty research rank. In the "Best College for Veterans" ranking, the UW ranked eighth among public universities and 16th overall.

GAYLE WORLAND



DANIELLE LAWRY

That's how many passes wide receiver **Tyrell Henry x'27** caught in the Badger football team's 54–10 win against Eastern Michigan on September 19, breaking the UW's single-game record that had stood since 1995. Amazingly, Henry accomplished this feat despite dislocating a finger in Wisconsin's opening drive.

"The true measure of the UW experience is not only what we learn but what we do with what we learn."

— **Azi Fanale x'28,** student speaker at September's New Student Convocation



UW ARCHIVES

Humph Day!

The Stock Pavilion was once the go-to spot for political rallies.

Wisconsin: it's where politics and cattle mix.

Look closely at this Stock Pavilion photo, and you'll see the generous forehead of Senator Hubert Humphrey as he addresses a packed crowd. It was taken in October 1964, and Humphrey was nearing the culmination of his run for vice president. He came to Madison to rally support, not only for Lyndon Johnson's presidential reelection but also for Governor **John Reynolds '47, LLB'49** and soon-to-be lieutenant governor **Pat Lucey '46.**

The image of a national politician in the UW's cow palace isn't as strange as it sounds. The Stock Pavilion was, for many candidates, a hot stop on the campaign trail. Though it seats a modest 2,000 (3,500 with chairs on the floor), the building was renowned for its acoustics. This made it a popular venue for concerts as well as speeches: the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, John Prine, Bonnie Raitt, and Muddy Waters all played the Stock Pavilion, and music instructor Edgar "Pop" Gordon 1927 held children's concerts there, broadcasting them on WHA radio's *Journeys in Musicland.*

Vice presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey held the spotlight at the Stock Pavilion, a venue valued for its un-barn-like acoustics.

Over the decades, the Stock Pavilion hosted speeches by many political leaders, including U.S. presidents Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and Harry Truman; three-time Democratic presidential nominee William Jennings Bryan; and Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali, who each gave addresses about civil rights. The most recent politician to visit the Stock Pavilion was former president Bill Clinton, who arrived in 2008 to promote the presidential primary run of his wife, Hillary.

JOHN ALLEN



DANIELLE LAWRY

Does Alzheimer's Start in the Gut?

Dementia patients have distinct intestinal microbes.

A compound produced by bacteria in most people's digestive tracts increases the risk of developing Alzheimer's disease and speeds up cognitive decline in dementia patients, according to a new study.

Nearly 10 years ago, researchers led by UW–Madison professors **Barbara Bendlin** and **Federico Rey** discovered that microbes in the intestines of Alzheimer's disease patients differ from those of healthy people.

"Since then, we've been trying to figure out how this difference in the gut perhaps leads to changes in the brain," says Bendlin, a professor of gerontology in the UW School of Medicine and Public Health.

In a recent study, the researchers found that a compound called imidazole propionate (ImP) — produced in the gut by some types of bacteria — plays an important role in brain changes that result in Alzheimer's disease and related cases of dementia.

"ImP–producing bacteria are present in a large fraction of people, but they're not very abundant in most people," says Rey, a UW–Madison professor of bacteriology. "But something we have learned over the years is that a microbe doesn't have to be abundant to have an impact on the host."

ImP can spread from the gut to other parts of the body, where it has been implicated in type 2 diabetes and coronary artery disease. The researchers showed that ImP that reaches the brain in mice increases the buildup of clumps of two abnormal proteins.

"That process eventually results in the death of neurons, and in humans is a key feature of Alzheimer's disease," Rey says.

By looking at ImP in the blood of almost 1,200 people who have participated in the Wisconsin Registry for Alzheimer's Prevention and studies at the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, the researchers found that people with high ImP levels were far more likely to also show markers of dementia-related protein and neuron dysfunction. They identified a genetic variation, present in about 43 percent of the people in the study, linked to accumulating much higher levels of ImP in the blood.

"This genetic variation has been associated with increased Alzheimer's risk in large genetic studies before, and now we may understand why it's connected," Rey says.

Further studies could reveal whether targeting ImP might be an effective treatment to reduce Alzheimer's risk.

CHRIS BARNCARD

HISTORIC PRINTING PRESS RETURNS TO CAMPUS

After a decade on loan at the Hamilton Wood Type and Printing Museum in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, UW–Madison's Silver Buckle Press is returning to campus.

The return marks the next chapter in Silver Buckle's more than 50-year history at the university. The press, which supports instruction in printing, typography, book arts, and related disciplines, was acquired by the UW–Madison Libraries in 1973 from the estate of hobby printer and Ford Motor Company art director Robert Shaftoe at the urging of UW art professor **Walter Hamady.** For decades, it served as a working letterpress resource, producing fine press books, broadsides, exhibitions, and educational programs, while introducing generations of students to the history and craft of printing. The press will be transported back to campus before the spring 2027 semester under the new ownership of the UW Art Department.

"Silver Buckle Press is an extraordinary addition to the department of art's teaching resources," says **Leslie Smith III,** department chair and professor. "Having students learn by working with a historic printing collection gives them a rare opportunity to connect craft, design, history, and contemporary artistic practice in meaningful ways."

The return reflects the UW's continued commitment to preserving cultural heritage while ensuring that historic collections remain active resources for teaching, research, and creative practice. By bringing Silver Buckle Press back to campus, the university expands opportunities for faculty and students to engage with the art, history, and techniques of letterpress printing in an instructional setting.

MARIANNE SPOON MA'11

"Excellence Can Become Contagious"

Amid dramatic changes in college sports, new athletic director Shawn Eichorst aims to position UW–Madison as a leader.

A lot has changed in the landscape of college athletics in the 15 years since **Shawn Eichorst** last worked on campus. What hasn't changed is that UW–Madison still feels like home.

Eichorst, who started as UW–Madison's new athletic director in July, has all the credentials of a true Wisconsinite. He grew up in the small village of Lone Rock, played college football at UW–Whitewater, earned his law degree at Marquette, and climbed the administrative ranks at Wisconsin Athletics under **Barry Alvarez** from 2006 to 2011.

"I know what this university means to people across the state because it has meant so much to me and my family," he says.

Eichorst's homecoming follows stops as athletic director at Miami and Nebraska and an eight-year run at Texas, where he served as deputy athletic director and chief operating officer for a department that won the Learfield Directors' Cup for the overall success of its teams in five of the last six years.

Eichorst will draw on that deep experience and a legal background as he guides UW–Madison through a new era of college athletics, which includes direct revenue sharing and third-party NIL (name, image, likeness) deals for student-athletes; a largely unfettered transfer portal; and ongoing questions around player eligibility.

In a conversation just weeks into the job, an even-keeled Eichorst shared why he believes "Wisconsin has a chance not only to navigate that change, but to be one of the institutions that helps lead through it."

How does your personal history shape your belief in college athletics?

Growing up down the road in Lone Rock, and as a first-generation college student, I couldn't have imagined as a young person that these opportunities could be available to someone like me. When I was competing in athlet-

ics, education always mattered the most. You took care of your schoolwork for the privilege to compete in athletics, and that led me to the path of being a lifelong learner. Athletics was just the key to unlock the box of opportunity. I always say it to our student-athletes — coming here is a decision they're making for the next 50 to 60 years, not for one to four years.

What did you learn at Texas about sustaining an elite, broad-based program?
The biggest lesson was that excellence can become contagious. When people see programs across the department competing for championships, it raises everybody's expectations. It also reinforced how important alignment is. Great coaches and student-athletes matter most, but they need strong support around them — sports medicine, performance development, academics, facilities, fundraising, and administration. When all of those pieces are working together, special things can happen.

You've talked about recentering the value of a UW education when it comes to the student-athlete experience. What does that look like?
We absolutely have to be competitive in NIL and in the benefits we provide student-athletes. That is part of college athletics today. But I never want us to undersell the rest of the Wisconsin opportunity. You can come here, compete at the highest level, receive a world-class education, build lifelong relationships, and become part of an alumni network that can change your life long after your playing days are over. That complete experience is incredibly powerful. So we want to lead with the academic piece and articulate how valuable of a decision and investment is being made by the young person, then counterbalance that with the benefits that come behind it.

In this new era, what changes do you think are necessary for college athletics?
Some stability would be a very good start. There are different state laws, ongoing litigation, and rules that continue to change. It's difficult for student-athletes, coaches, and institutions when the framework keeps moving. I'd like to see clearer national standards that protect student-athlete opportunities, allow institutions to compete fairly, and preserve what is special about college athletics.

What will success look like to you in this role three to five years from now?
I'd love for people to look at Wisconsin Athletics and see a department that is competing for championships across the board, providing an extraordinary experience for student-athletes, and making the university and state proud. I also want our student-athletes, coaches, staff, campus, alumni, and fans to feel that we're building something together. I really believe that when Wisconsin is united — when we all pull in the same direction — there is no limit to what we can accomplish.

Interview by Preston Schmitt '14
Photo by Taylor Wolfram '24

"When Wisconsin is united," Eichorst says, "there is no limit to what we can accomplish."



THE UW'S AI MOMENT

The new College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence offers thoughtful leadership amid technological upheaval.

BY PRESTON SCHMITT '14

DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

"IT FELT LIKE A PIECE OF TECHNOLOGY HAD BEEN DROPPED ON US FROM THE FUTURE."

That's how Remzi Arpaci-Dusseau, the founding dean of UW–Madison's new College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence, describes the moment in 2022 when OpenAI publicly released ChatGPT, the generative AI chatbot that foreshadowed a technological — and societal — revolution.

In this domain, it's hard to surprise a preeminent computer scientist who literally wrote the book (or at least the most downloaded textbook) on operating systems alongside his wife and longtime academic partner, Andrea. After all, their work had helped set the foundation for generative AI. But suddenly, with enough computing power and training data, techniques that had been around for decades — and that a lot of people even in artificial intelligence said would never work — finally broke through.

At the time, Arpaci-Dusseau was getting ready to step down as chair of the UW computer sciences department and return to a professor's life in the classroom and lab, where he's won many teaching awards and co-advised 37 doctoral students.

"But there was this drumbeat of AI that I could just hear in my head," he says. "My wife said to me — with some reluctance, because she likes having me around more rather than less — 'Maybe you should think about how you can help the campus move forward in this space.' "

Fast forward to July 1, 2026, when the College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence (CAI) officially launched to become UW–Madison's first new standalone college or academic division since 1983. With Arpaci-Dusseau as its first leader, the college is both a rapid, visionary response to this AI moment and the culmination of a deliberate, decade-long effort to consolidate and elevate campus investment in computing. It's also an acknowledgment that institutions must rethink education and how to prepare students for an uncertain future.

"Universities that take leaps and restructure based on significant things happening in society are ones that become leaders in the space," Arpaci-Dusseau says.

"Universities that take leaps and restructure based on significant things happening in society are ones that become leaders in the space."

The mission of CAI matches the moment: to position UW–Madison as a nimble leader and a reasoned voice at a time of great change.

A Moment of Crisis

Perhaps more than most universities, UW–Madison was prepared for the AI moment because it had been planning for it — or at least something like it — since 2014.

Leadership within the College of Letters & Science had observed growing student interest and career demand in computer sciences and approached the department with an ultimatum: you can restrict the size of enrollment and admit only the highest-achieving students, or you can open it up and expand your offerings.

Computer sciences faculty, part of a department that for decades had been ranked among the top 15 in the country, voted on the inclusive path forward.

"We said, 'We should serve the public mission. If our area is important, why should we be gatekeepers?' I remember that vote because it was unanimous, and we don't often vote unanimously," Arpaci-Dusseau says.

From 2013 to 2017, enrollment in computer sciences nearly tripled, from 574 to 1,674 students, making it the largest major on campus — a distinction it's held ever since.

In 2018, then-Chancellor Rebecca Blank asked a working group of faculty, alumni, and industry leaders to assess the future of computing on campus and explore opportunities to increase the number of students exposed to computational thinking, big data, and artificial intelligence (this before the term was omnipresent).

Among the working group's recommendations was to bring together three related units — the computer sciences and statistics departments and the Information School (formerly the School of Library and Information Studies) — under one umbrella. The School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS), operating within the College of Letters & Science, was born in 2019. (This original structure, Arpaci-Dusseau says, gave the new unit time to find

its footing and made it possible to evolve into an independent entity in the AI era.)

The working group also advocated for a top-level leader to facilitate cross-campus collaboration at a time when nearly all research fields relied on computing ability to make sense of massive data sets.

"Put simply," the report stated, "there must be someone who wakes up thinking about computing and goes to bed thinking about computing."

Arpaci-Dusseau, who served on the working group, did not know then that he would eventually become that person. He took over as the head of CDIS in 2024, when the school was humming. Since its establishment in 2019, enrollment across its programs had nearly doubled to 6,200, and a new data science major introduced in 2020 was an immediate hit.

By fall 2025, the momentum had taken physical shape in the form of Morgridge Hall, which opened as a seven-story, state-of-the-art hub for the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences and several other units sharing a data mission. Named for lead donors John '55 and Tashia '55 Morgridge, it's the largest privately funded building investment in UW–Madison history at $267 million.

Still, with the emergence of generative AI, the future of computing on campus was facing yet another inflection point.

"AI is going to change how we do research, how we do education, and how we do work in the world," Arpaci-Dusseau says. "Having a unit front and center to help steward that change and lead it toward outcomes that are good for people — for society — was something we needed to do as a university."

Andy Konwinski '07, who knows a thing or two about artificial intelligence as the cofounder of Databricks, Perplexity AI, and the Laude Institute, frames this moment for the university even more urgently. He and a group of other prominent UW–Madison alumni formed the Catalyst Collective, which contributed $100 million alongside the university's $50 million annual investment to support the launch of the College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence — one of the first college-level academic units dedicated to AI at any university in the United States. The three units that composed the former School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences shape the core of the new college, which will now have operational autonomy, the ability to create its own degree programs, and a seat at academic leadership tables. Several other universities have tried to create such a college and failed, stymied by bureaucracy and internal politics.

"We want to advance AI that meets the needs of the moment, preserves our values, and reduces risk to vulnerable communities."

"The resources required, the types of research areas, the collaborations with industry — those all have to be reimagined if universities are going to continue to do AI research, which is the frontier of technology for our species right now," Konwinski says.

He argues that academia faces a moment of crisis and, without bold action, risks losing access to the front lines of AI innovation, where actors with a profit motive and less of a focus on the public good can move faster, monopolize talent, and make progress proprietary rather than open and collaborative.

"We have top AI researchers at Wisconsin," Konwinski says. "If we don't innovate, they will leave in the next five or 10 years. Those are the stakes."

Laboratory for Experimentation

If you get the impression that UW–Madison is naively racing ahead with artificial intelligence, fear not. CAI's inaugural associate dean for research is no stranger to the risks of innovation.

Patrick McDaniel is an expert in cybersecurity and adversarial machine learning — that is, when bad actors trick or attack artificial intelligence systems by altering data. He's also the director of the federally funded Center for Trustworthy Machine Learning.

"My understanding of cybersecurity goes back almost 30 years, and I've gotten the ability to understand how things might fail and what the economic and human consequences could be," he says. "One of the beautiful things about this new college is that we have people working from the one end on the very hardcore underlying mathematics of AI, all the way to the impact of AI on tribal communities and society at large, and everything in between."

McDaniel doesn't view innovation and responsibility as opposing forces.

"Understanding risk is simply part of using anything," he says. "If you use a car, there's risk, right? So we build cars that reduce that risk to us and others. Innovation provides us ways to mitigate the risk, but you have to be thoughtful about it. We can't just say we want to advance AI. We want to advance AI that meets the needs of the moment, preserves our values, and reduces risk to vulnerable communities."

He adds: "Society over hundreds of years at times like this has turned to universities to help understand the moment."

To that end, some of the largest research questions regarding artificial intelligence revolve around how to lessen the energy consumption and reduce the environmental impact. These downsides have



Remzi Arpaci-Dusseau is stepping up with a bold vision to lead UW–Madison into the AI era.

PHOTO: JEFF MILLER; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP

"Some of the largest research questions regarding artificial intelligence revolve around how to lessen the energy consumption and reduce the environmental impact."

led to a public backlash to the construction of large data centers.

CAI's faculty, already 100 members strong with 50 new hires expected over the next few years, will explore these and other problems.

"There's a sense of wonder at the possibilities here," McDaniel says. "Literally every day, I have 10 interactions on things that I would like to spend the next 10 years working on. It's a unique time."

The College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence has already been approached by seemingly every area of campus to explore ways to supercharge their work. When I talked to Arpaci-Dusseau over the summer, he had just met with the School of Pharmacy about drug discovery and pharmacist training, brainstormed with the School of Business on supporting student and faculty entrepreneurship, and lunched with the Law School over the future of legal education. As our interview wrapped up, Badger football coaches arrived at his Morgridge Hall doorstep to discuss how AI technology could lead to a competitive edge on the field.

"If our hypothesis is true that there's a significant technological shift happening right now that is going to fundamentally affect research and education," Arpaci-Dusseau says, "then what better laboratory for experimentation than a university that literally studies almost every field?"

Among the early promising developments is a partnership between CAI and the School of Medicine and Public Health on a new initiative at the intersection of health and artificial intelligence. It will be sponsored by Epic Systems, a leading medical software company based in Verona, Wisconsin, and founded by Judith Faulkner MS'67.

"It will advance how we do computer science research and how people study cures for cancer and do new drug discovery," Arpaci-Dusseau says.

The college is also leading a collaboration with Microsoft and TitletownTech, which are providing early access to AI platforms and connecting university researchers to companies in high-impact fields such as manufacturing and the life sciences. Industry partnerships that address real-world problems in real time will be a significant part of CAI's research portfolio.

There's also an educational component to the research, helping students gain the skills, experience, and connections they need to enter the professional workforce — one that is rapidly changing due to artificial intelligence.

Top Priority: Flexibility

Will AI take our jobs?

That question is top of mind for today's college students. Enrollment in computer sciences, at UW–Madison and elsewhere, is projected to dip as a result. Given AI's capabilities in coding, it's easy to imagine how a software company would only need a team of two developers where it once needed five. Still, Arpaci-Dusseau believes we're about to enter a "golden age of software creation."

"I just saw an AI-enabled group of programs that is going to build the type of health care software that would have sounded like science fiction 10 years ago," he says. "But it's going to need people behind it that care about software."

The College of Letters & Science will continue to administer the degree programs within CAI's departments until the 2027–28 academic year. In the meantime, CAI is exploring how to structure its curriculum to best prepare students for a workforce that is evolving by the day. The top priority is flexibility.

"It's hard to say what's going to be important in four years," says Michael Swift, CAI's associate dean for academic affairs. "We need to have a nimble program where students have a lot of choices and ability to change paths, and we can use advising to direct them according to their interests and how things are changing."

The heart of the curriculum will be what the college's leaders call AI resilience and enablement — resilience being the fundamental knowledge, skills, and critical human thinking that can ride out any technological trend; enablement being proficiency with the technical tools that will make for a desirable job candidate.

"AI is a tool that can accelerate a lot of things," Swift says, "but you still need to know how to drive it. What used to be entry-level work is what can be done by an AI, and so employers are telling us they're looking for students who have a bit more skill than they used to."

The College of Computing & Artificial Intelligence hopes to create a teaching support center to help instructors — both inside and outside of the college — revamp their courses in the age of AI. As a former associate department chair, Swift has already seen faculty members innovate along these lines. One instructor of an introductory computer sciences course, knowing that students would use AI if they took assignments home, turned the classroom into something like a chemistry lab so all the work would

be done on site.

Spinning off from a large liberal arts college, CAI plans to stay true to its roots by continuing to offer a deep education with exposure to diverse viewpoints.

"We'll be working with departments like philosophy, where they have ethics, and psychology, where they understand the depths of the mind, and I could list many others," Arpaci-Dusseau says. "We want our students to enter the world with a much broader and richer viewpoint than a person who's just been technically trained. We're trying to make the full connection between developing technology and seeing where it lands in society so we can help shape it toward a positive end."

A Sense of Wonder

The first time Arpaci-Dusseau felt like a piece of technology had been dropped on us from the future was when his parents, Turkish immigrants who met in Ann Arbor, Michigan, brought home a primitive TRS-80 Model I computer in the late '70s. Even his engineer father didn't know exactly what to do with it, so it sat in the basement. Young Arpaci-Dusseau fired it up and found magic.

"You could write a small program, and it would immediately do something," he says. "My first program would say, 'Type in your name,' and if I typed in my name, it would say, 'Remzi is great,' and if it was my sister's name, it would say, 'My sister is dumb.' Which wasn't really super empowering. But it just felt like you could, even as a young person, do something amazing."

That sense of wonder carried Arpaci-Dusseau through graduate school at the University of California–Berkeley, where he met Andrea, his future wife and careerlong collaborator.

"Like every love story, it began in an operating systems class, working on a project together," he says with the trademark dry humor that made him a beloved lecturer.

The two computer scientists have been a unit ever since, save for a brief time at the end of grad school when they thought working separately would help their chances of landing faculty jobs. It turned out the opposite was true, at least at UW–Madison, which at the height of the dot-com boom saw an opportunity to land two top minds — and a de facto research group — in one fell swoop.

When it came time for the tenure decision, the dean wrote, "It's my unusual and, in fact, unique privilege to promote two people with this one letter."

"I thought that was really cool," Arpaci-Dusseau says. "The university, though it's big and bureaucratic, was able to make it such a personal decision to support us."

Such an environment may help explain why Arpaci-Dusseau has stayed in academia and at UW–Madison throughout his career, and why he's stepping up now with a bold vision to lead the university into the AI era.

"I'm sure Silicon Valley companies believe they're shepherding this technology into the world for good," he says. "But it's hard to say, with so much wealth behind it, there's not a significant conflict of interest. The role of our university is to be a counterpoint to this. The root of academic freedom is to be able to look into the world with clear eyes and to speak the truth. If universities can't do it, then who will?" ●

Preston Schmitt '14 is a senior staff writer for On Wisconsin.

PHOTO: JEFF MILLER; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: DANIELLE LAMBERSON PHILIPP



Morgridge Hall is the largest privately funded building investment in UW–Madison history at $267 million.

Rereading Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

BY SANDRA K. BARNIDGE '09, MA'13



The author, whose works evince a reverential respect for nature, was commemorated with a U.S. postage stamp in 2008.



MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS PAPERS, GEORGE A. SMATHERS LIBRARIES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA (5)

***The UW alumna is influencing a new generation of environmentalists, decades after publishing the Pulitzer Prize–winning novel* The Yearling.**

On a chilly January morning, the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings homestead in Cross Creek, Florida, was unexpectedly crowded. My former UW roommate and I nabbed the last two spots on the formal tour and shuffled through the well-preserved green-and-white house and orange grove that Rawlings, who graduated from the UW in 1918, managed for decades. Dutifully, we took pictures of the indoor bathroom the author famously installed with the proceeds of her most successful novel, and we accepted a few sour oranges from trees Rawlings herself may have planted on the estate almost a century ago.

Yet by the end of the tour, I wasn't fully convinced that one of UW–Madison's most famous writers is still relevant to modern audiences. After all, the descendants of the farmers and ranchers she wrote about are now losing more than 120 acres a day thanks to urban sprawl, and even Florida's iconic orange industry is in steep decline due to citrus disease.

I asked the tour guide, "Why do you think Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings still matters today?" She seemed taken aback by the question.

"Rawlings captured the culture of this place," she said, and moved on to demonstrate how to operate Rawlings's cast-iron stove.

My roommate, Casey Harris '09, nudged me along. We read the informational plaques describing Rawlings's life and career. She was born in 1896 to a bureaucrat family in Washington, DC. Her first novel, *South Moon Under*, was published in 1933 and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. Her third and most famous novel, *The Yearling,* was published in 1938 and became an instant literary classic. It won the Pulitzer and was turned into a major motion picture. She wrote three more books and died in 1953. Her widower donated her Cross Creek house and orange grove to the University of Florida, and the property is now a small state park.

On the plaques, Rawlings's life reads like a tidy biography of early promise and sustained success — the kind that prompts (for this contemporary novelist at least) a sense of dismissive envy.

"Why her?" I asked Harris, a botanist who specializes in water quality and has made central Florida her home for a decade. "Why is *she* still such a big deal?"

Harris gave a botanist's response. "People like to read her descriptions of what this area used to look like," she said. "And some people really love that book about the deer."

Like many visitors to the Rawlings homestead, we stopped for lunch nearby at the Yearling Restaurant, which has been capitalizing on Rawlings's reputation since the 1950s. In earlier days, the restaurant had a dress code and white tablecloths, but these days, the vibe is decidedly more casual. I ordered fried frog legs and sweet tea.

On our way out, I paused to ask a young hostess who'd lived in a nearby town all her life, "Why are people still into Marjorie Rawlings?"

The hostess leaned toward me to confess, "I have no idea!"



At the UW, Rawlings (shown here in 1918), threw herself into writing. Her body of work has been called a repository for the flora and fauna of Florida, and she became an advocate for the state's environment.

We laughed, and she pointed to a glass case on the wall. Inside was a first edition of Rawlings's second novel, *Golden Apples*, which the restaurant was selling for $200.

In Gainesville, I picked up a copy of *The Yearling* and a biography of Rawlings from the local library. "Do you think she's still important?" I asked the checkout librarian, who'd once been a volunteer at the Cross Creek homestead.

She thought for a long minute before answering. "Marjorie lived on her own terms, which was hard for a woman in those days. I admire that."

The Maturing of an Author

Rawlings was a woman both of and ahead of her time. She evolved from a socialite student into an adventurous woman who hunted alligators and baked blackbird pies. She used racist language in her early work and had a complex relationship with her Black orchard staff, though her attitudes changed gradually in the 1940s after she befriended fellow writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Rawlings subsequently removed racial slurs from later editions of her novels and wrote about her efforts to actively combat her own prejudices. She also struggled with alcoholism and chain smoking for much of her life, which may have contributed to her early death from a cerebral hemorrhage at 57.

The biography, *The Life She Wished to Live* by Ann McCutchan, offers considerable detail about Rawlings's college days in Wisconsin. In 1914, Marjorie Kinnan arrived on campus with several trunks of new clothes and a tube of scandalous red lipstick to enroll in the UW's up-and-coming English department. She'd been a schoolmate of future politician Robert La Follette Jr. x1917 at their exclusive high school in Washington, and Rawlings's socialite mother believed that if the UW was good enough for that illustrious family, it was good enough for her children, too.

Rawlings had only been admitted to the UW on probation, thanks to a cautionary note on her application from her former principal. "[Rawlings] has great natural ability, particularly in the line of literary work and languages. She is capable of doing rather extraordinary work — tho' she is easily distracted by social interests," he wrote.

Yet it didn't take long for Rawlings to put any doubts about her academic abilities to rest. She immersed herself in advanced writing and composition courses, won campus playwriting competitions, had poetry and short fiction published in the *Wisconsin Literary Journal,* edited *The Badger* yearbook, and wrote a senior thesis about the influence of paganism on English poetry.

Her class-obsessed mother was horrified when



Rawlings meets with MGM executives in Salt Springs, Florida, to discuss the movie adaptation of **The Yearling.** *Starring Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman, it became the ninth-highest-grossing film of 1946.*

she fell in love with a classmate named Charles Rawlings, the son of a shoe-factory foreman from upstate New York. Charles was also an aspiring writer, and he enrolled at the UW as a special student but ultimately dropped out. After Marjorie graduated, the pair moved east for her to launch her writing career in New York City while Charles enlisted in the U.S. Army and deployed near the end of World War I.

Marjorie had a letter of introduction from a UW professor to meet with Honoré Willsie 1902, a magazine editor who would go on to write 16 novels. "Well, you've got the gift of gab all right," Willsie reportedly told her. "Only God Almighty can tell you whether you'll do anything with it. ... You have to have a private gospel that you want terribly to preach. I don't mean moralizing. I mean that there has to be something close to your heart that you want to talk about."

At the time, this was not helpful advice. Instead of figuring out her "private gospel," she got a more practical job writing marketing copy for a local YWCA. When Charles returned from the war, the pair married but struggled to make ends meet. They bounced from New York City to Rochester and Louisville, Kentucky, but by the late 1920s, the newlywed writers were desperate. Every time Rawlings landed a job writing for a magazine or newspaper, Charles would get jealous and make her quit. Rawlings then wrote a memoir about her mother's unexpected death in 1923, but publishers turned her down.

On a whim, they visited Charles's older brothers in Jacksonville, Florida, and fell in love with the landscape. They used the last of Rawlings's small inheritance to purchase a decrepit house and orange grove in rural central Florida, in a hamlet called Cross Creek. After years of financial and marital insecurity, both Rawlings and Charles thought they'd finally found a place where each of them could settle down and flourish. To spoil the ending, though, it was only Rawlings who managed to break through, and the success of her debut novel proved too much for Charles. The pair divorced in 1933. Charles spent the rest of his life sailing around the world, writing about yacht races, and Marjorie married again in 1941, to hotelier Norton Baskin.



A Paean to Rural Roots

At more than 500 pages, *The Yearling* is a brick of a book, and the plot follows the daily routines of a 12-year-old boy named Jody and his "Cracker" parents in the Florida scrub. While the term *cracker* is sometimes used as a racial slur, in central Florida, it is used in a historical context (often with pride) to refer to the state's earliest settlers.

Early in the book, Jody's father kills a white-tailed deer, and they adopt its orphaned fawn, naming it Flag. For a year, Flag follows Jody everywhere as the family navigates economic hardship and entanglements with their neighbors. Flag matures and eats the family's corn crop, and Jody is forced to kill his pet. He believes he will never love anything so intensely again, and the book ends with Jody dreaming of Flag.

After reading it, I finally began to understand. "That book about the deer" is a deeply emotional story about how challenging it can be to balance human tenderness with economic survival. It's a theme that is still relevant, says Ashley Lear, a humanities professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach. She's also the executive director of the Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Society, an active group of academics and non-academics who share an interest in Florida history, literature, culture, and environmental concerns. Every year, the society hosts a conference in Florida for Rawlings aficionados, and they run the *Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings Journal of Florida Literature*.

"For me, Rawlings represents an element of American culture that still looks for authenticity and individualism by traveling to frontier areas both literally and figuratively and discovering oneself outside the influences of the modern world," says Lear. "She found within the community at Cross Creek lifelong friends who struggled together to make a life on farms that were removed from the creature comforts of the city. What they lacked in material wealth, they made up for in a reliance on their neighbors and their own hard work and perseverance. Now, more than ever, there is a longing and a nostalgia for the deep satisfaction and connection that such a lifestyle produces."

A Changing Legacy

Lear has noticed that Rawlings's legacy is shifting to recognize her early environmentalist leanings. "In addition to her writing on the lumber industry after being commissioned by the U.S. Forest Service to tour the industry and advocate for reforms, her works serve as a biological repository for the flora and fauna of Florida," she says.



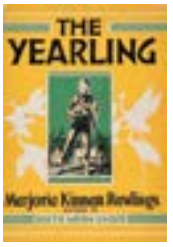
Similarly, Rawlings is one of the inspirations for The Marjorie, a new independent investigative journalism outlet dedicated to the intersection of social justice and the environment. "The Marjorie is inspired by the legacies of three famous Marjories, including Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings [along with Marjory Stoneman Douglas and Marjorie Harris Carr], who were fierce advocates for Florida's environment," says cofounder Hannah Brown. "We strive to build on the work that they did by highlighting the human connection to environmental issues in the state. Rawlings's creativity and connection with rural communities in Florida, such as Cross Creek, resonate clearly with our mission."

Above, Rawlings's Cross Creek, Florida, home is now a National Historic Landmark and a Florida state park. Left, the author is shown on the set of* The Yearling *with neighbor and storyteller Julian Bauknight, one of the locals who inspired her writing.

I went back to Rawlings's homestead in the spring, alone this time. I skipped the formal tour and followed a trail into a mature stand of orange trees. *Why should we still care about a long-dead UW author?* I asked myself as I listened to birds chirp above me and water lap at the muddy shores of nearby Orange Lake.

I care that she cared about this place, I realized. I care that she wrote lines like: "No man should have proprietary rights over land who does not use that land wisely and lovingly" in her 1942 memoir, *Cross Creek*. "We cannot live without the Earth or apart from it, and something is shriveled in a man's heart when he turns away from it and concerns himself only with the affairs of men."

Perhaps the greatest testament to Rawlings's storytelling talent is that she still inspires her fans to appreciate — and to strive to protect — the wild, rural Florida she chose as her home. ●



The first edition of the Florida writer's prize-winning novel came out in 1938.

Sandra K. Barnidge '09, MA'13 is a Gainesville, Florida, writer who authored The Diamondbacks. *Her former UW roommate has taken her kayaking through alligator-infested waters, the sort of thing that Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings used to do.*

Museum, Reimagined

With innovative changes to its gallery space, the Chazen offers a bold new perspective on the collection.

BY MAGGIE GINSBERG '97
PHOTOS BY ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Among the 25,000 works in the Chazen Museum of Art's collection is a striking 17th-century painting called *Village of Olinda, Brazil*. Most visitors have never seen it, as it was rarely on view before. Now it's front and center in one of the Chazen's newly reimagined galleries — not for what the artist painted, but for what he chose to leave out.

Frans Post is believed to be one of the first European artists to go to the Americas and paint landscapes for wealthy collectors. Although *Village of Olinda, Brazil* has been in the Chazen's holdings since 1913, it never quite fit into any of the existing galleries — not really Baroque or contemporary European — and so it spent much of its life out of view.

Now, the painting is on prominent display because of an innovative reinstallation project several years in the making, one that transformed the entire museum. The Chazen no longer organizes its collection by time period, media type, or geography, but instead anchors each new gallery space with a focus object surrounded by thematically connected constellation objects.



Village of Olinda, Brazil

This image of a tropical landscape withholds the full story of the nefarious global economy rooted in the European colonization of Brazil.

By 1600, the Portuguese had turned Brazil into the world's principal source of [illegible] coveted by Europeans and cultivated [illegible] laborers on plantations. The [illegible] extractive system inspired Europe[illegible] the Americas, fueling the [illegible] riches of the transatlantic [illegible]

In 1637, Brazil's [illegible] Post to document the [illegible] and dance in the [illegible] of Olinda, a sugar [illegible] overseas the scene from [illegible] buildings to the right [illegible] reminder of European [illegible] native plants and wildlife [illegible] however, are the [illegible] and the ongoing [illegible] economy. Post-[illegible] idealized, [illegible] at edge: [illegible] who [illegible] of the [illegible]





Amy Gilman and Katherine Alcauskas were determined to think outside the box and flip challenges into strengths.

"To me, this painting was just screaming to be a focus object," says former Chazen curator Janine Yorimoto Boldt, who recognized that it pleasantly depicted a handful of laborers tending the idyllic sugarcane fields in the Americas — but neglected to show the brutal infrastructure of Brazil's thriving sugar trade, dependent on forced labor by hundreds of thousands of enslaved Afro-Brazilians. The painting is now surrounded by artworks that add depth and context, like an 18th-century porcelain sweetmeat stand that speaks to themes of labor and luxury. In this way, curators can launch powerful conversations.

Village of Olinda, Brazil is a focus object in Gallery XIII, one of 24 new gallery spaces reinstalled across the Chazen's two buildings. Nearly a quarter of the artworks haven't been on display since at least 1997, and 16 percent are newly acquired since 2021. In addition to revealing deeply researched, newly discovered connections throughout the entire collection, the reinstallation project debuts bold new paint colors and other design elements customized for each gallery space; explanatory wall texts aimed at making the collection more engaging and accessible; and a new Bloomberg Connects digital guide that offers maps, audio artwork descriptions for low-vision visitors, self-guided tours, and exclusive audio features, including contributions from UW professors.

"From the start," says Kate Wanberg '10, exhibition and collection project manager, "the entire team recognized that if we were going to do this, we had to go big."





Village of Olinda, Brazil ***is now surrounded by artworks that add depth and context.***





CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART

Recontextualizing Thomas Ball's polarizing sculpture* The Emancipation Group *inspired the Chazen's new approach.

An Epiphany

Chazen director Amy Gilman had wanted a reinstallation since taking the helm in 2017, but she just couldn't decide on the right model. Nothing precisely fit the Chazen's collection, which has a lot of breadth but not necessarily depth. About 70 percent of artists are represented by only one work, for example, and holdings heavily favor the 19th and 20th centuries. Organized in the traditional way, this rich collection could sometimes appear thin. Additionally, museums all over the country were rethinking their collections, particularly in the wake of 2020's wave of racial reckoning. They grappled with things like statue removal and how art is acquired, exhibited, and contextualized.

Then, in 2023, two critical things happened: the landmark *re:mancipation* exhibition and the epiphany that followed.

re:mancipation began with a polarizing 1873 sculpture in the Chazen's holdings, Thomas Ball's *The Emancipation Group,* which depicts Abraham Lincoln towering benevolently over a kneeling, newly freed enslaved person. Rather than simply removing the sculpture, Gilman commissioned New York artist Sanford Biggers and the MASK Consortium to offer an interpretation. The project took two years and evolved into a 3,367-square-foot installation of 42 new, borrowed, and existing artworks that, taken together, recontextualized Ball's piece. Each new object essentially orbited the original, encouraging viewers to rethink instead of erase.

A few weeks after the exhibition closed, inspiration struck chief curator Katherine Alcauskas.

"I thought, what if we reorganized the entire collection in the spirit and style of *re:mancipation*? What if each gallery had a single focus object surrounded by thematically connected constellation objects that together told a deeper story?"

Gilman and the staff were immediately on board. Now they could pull from all areas of the collection, regardless of period or place. They could think outside every box and flip challenges into strengths.

"To me, in that moment was this incredible feeling of joy," Gilman says, "knowing that we were going to do something that I was already pretty sure had not been done."



Each new gallery space features a focus object and thematically connected constellation objects.

CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART

Over the next three years, the staff formed work groups, built mood boards, and embarked on visual mapping exercises. They dove headlong into research, enlisting campus experts and conducting community workshops, particularly around culturally sensitive holdings. And they drafted and revised 24 gallery concepts, refining right down to the precise shade of paint.

It was a big idea, and it fell to Wanberg to execute the nuts and bolts. Over the years, she'd navigated substantial changes at the Chazen, including the museum's 2011 expansion, but nothing of this scope. Staff members were used to producing two big exhibitions and three smaller exhibitions each year in about 8,000 square feet of space, but now they were tasked with the equivalent of planning 24 simultaneous exhibitions across 50,000 square feet. Wanberg worked to carry out the curators' visions while managing the deadlines for each gallery, from mood board to final reveal.

An Accident

Throughout the newly reinstalled museum are examples of unfamiliar artworks brought into the light, or of familiar artworks shown in a new light.

Take the 1831 Lady Caroline Montagu portrait, long a guest favorite. For the past 20 years, curators believed the aristocratic Lady Caroline was dressed up in costume as the character Haidée, a Greek pirate's daughter in Lord Byron's poem *Don Juan*. But during the research process, they consulted Nancy Rose Marshall, a UW professor of 19th-century art and visual culture.

"You know," Marshall replied, "I've always wondered about this costume. Are you sure she's Haidée? To me she looks more like she might be in the character of a brigand's wife."



CHAZEN MUSEUM OF ART

It turns out Marshall was right. Brigands regularly attacked aristocratic travelers in the Italian countryside but were also romanticized in popular art as folk heroes in the vein of Robin Hood. Now, as a focus object, the painting could bring in new constellation items to prompt conversations around class, costuming in portraiture, and artistic inspiration in literary references. It was one of those discoveries that leveraged university expertise, allowed for research-based change, and cast a popular holding in a new light — all things that staff hopes will continue, supported by the new model.



The Lady Caroline Montagu portrait (above) and the Renaissance cabinet now tell deeper stories.



The collection of Chinese export porcelain is as artfully arranged as it would have been in 17th-century palaces.

The curators hope the reinstallation will help launch powerful conversations about the Chazen's collection.

And then there's the two-piece walnut Renaissance cabinet, ornately carved with classical European figures. Probably built in France in the 1500s, acquired by Jewish collector Oscar Bondy in 1910, and seized by the Nazis in Vienna in 1938, it had been restituted to the Bondy family before the Chazen purchased it in 1969. For years it was housed with other furniture lining the hallway on the lowest level of the Elvehjem building. But when staff members pulled it from its glass casing, they discovered the Nazi inventory number scrawled on the back — and curator James Wehn realized they'd accidentally found the perfect focus object.

"This was an object that could do so many things," Wehn says.

Today the cabinet — shown in the round — anchors Gallery XIV, surrounded by constellation artworks that connect some of the Chazen's strongest holdings, like Wiener Werkstätte decorative art related to the Vienna Secession, German Expressionist prints, and a trove of historical medals tracing events and politics from World War I through the rise of the Nazi Party. The cabinet also bears traditional symbols of abundance and power, as do some of the German medals, including those used as Nazi propaganda. To responsibly tell this larger story of art, theft, and fascism, Wehn consulted campus experts from both Jewish and German studies.

"We want to help people understand how images can be adapted and turned into new forms of meaning," Wehn says.

For a video walk-through of the Chazen's new galleries, scan the QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/onwisc5.

A Revelation

Gilman had never been particularly attracted to the Chazen's collection of Chinese export porcelain, which used to be tucked behind glass in one of the Elvehjem building's pass-through niche spaces. They now hang prominently on the wall in Gallery XII, artfully arranged as they would have been in 17th-century palaces and surrounded by objects that add intriguing context.

"Now they are deeply fascinating to look at," Gilman says. "We've done that in several of the galleries where you can actually see things that are not typically revealed about the objects. It's been a revelation to me, and I think it will be for a lot of visitors."

Gilman hopes that these revelations continue well into the future. This is, after all, a university museum, and college campuses are ripe for experimentation. The Chazen's reinstallation project has been a teachable moment unto itself. ●

Maggie Ginsberg '97 is the writer for UW–Madison's Division of the Arts.



LIGHTS, CAMERA, BADGERS!

With his movie in progress, Professor Aaron Greer turns UW–Madison into a film set.

BY GAYLE WORLAND
PHOTOS BY TAYLOR WOLFRAM '24

If the setting in the upcoming movie *Morning Moon* looks familiar, that's because it's the real thing.

The full-length feature was shot last summer in Madison, with some of the action filmed in UW–Madison locations such as Lathrop Hall and the Office of the Registrar. In the director's chair was UW communication arts professor Aaron Greer.

Greer has more than a dozen documentary and feature films to his credit. He wrote the screenplay, is producing, and will edit *Morning Moon*.

"I've always been interested in character-driven films," he says. "I was influenced by films that came out of Europe and South America in the '60s and '70s, with real people, real places, a little less of the gloss and glamour of Hollywood."

The filming of *Morning Moon* came after a year of painstaking planning. The fictional story centers on a 22-year-old Minnesota college student named Selena who journeys to Madison — and the UW campus — in search of clues to her mother's past. Through a strange turn of events, she becomes a fixture in the lives of Avi and Nya, a longtime Madison couple on an emotional journey of their own as they try to start a family.

While union actors from Chicago won the roles of Selena, Avi, and Nya, UW students and faculty help fill out the cast. Theater student Jenny Duarte Castillo x'28, for example, is playing a key role, as is African American studies professor emerita Sandra Adell MA'86, PhD'89.

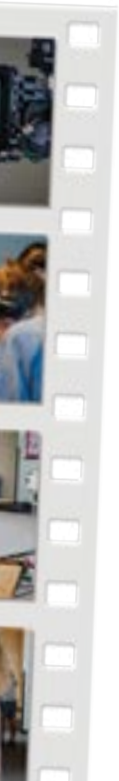
A number of alumni — now professionals in the film and video world — served on the film crew. C Kessler '24 did costumes, hair, and makeup, and Alejandro Dominguez '24 is the sound mixer. Both took a senior-year capstone filmmaking course with Greer and his UW–Madison colleague Erik







To see a behind-the-scenes video of Greer filming *Morning Moon*, scan the QR code or visit go.wisc.edu/onwisc4



Greer (at left in the top left photo) shoots* Morning Moon *on campus, with UW students, faculty, and alumni in the cast and crew.

Gunneson '89, who is the movie's assistant director and coproducer. They each credit the skills and friendships from that experience, along with other coursework, for leading them to professional opportunities after graduation.

Crew member Kyla Pollard '24 is a communication arts graduate now pursuing a master's degree in filmmaking at New York University. Greer had taught one of Pollard's favorite undergrad classes — screenwriting — and wrote her a letter of recommendation for graduate school.

"It's nice to be on set with a director who really cares," she says, "and who has a clear vision."

The Art of Filmmaking

A Milwaukee native who grew up watching the latest blockbusters, Greer did not become intrigued by the art of filmmaking itself until his college years.

"I majored in history. I was doing an honors thesis and had gotten interested in the history of the Cuban revolution," he says. "Somehow I landed on this idea that I would look at how the Cuban media changed in the early years of the revolution, and the only Cuban media I could get my hands on was the dry government newspaper — or films."

The films riveted Greer. "I'd never seen anything like them, and I started reading more about the filmmakers," he says. "That's really how I got the bug."

Since then, Greer has taught film studies and production at several universities and won multiple prizes for both films and screenplays, such as the 2016 American Black Film Festival's grand jury prize for best narrative feature for *Service to Man*.

He came to UW–Madison in 2020, and as he wrote *Morning Moon*, he knew he wanted to set some of the action on campus.

"I've been part of the group of folks lobbying for film and television tax incentives to return to the state," he says. "We encourage some of our students to try to stick around and work in Wisconsin. If we're going to have an ecosystem for that, I have to film in the state myself."

Greer also wants to demonstrate to his students that they have all the filmmaking resources they need at hand. "They're able to make really moving films with the amazing equipment that we have here at Vilas Hall," he says. "It's stuff they can put in the back of a car or minivan. You don't have to have huge trucks of equipment to make a film look good and sound good."

Funding for the film has come primarily from grants, including a Creative Arts Award Greer received from the university's Division of the Arts. He plans to edit the film while on sabbatical this fall and submit it to film festivals next year.

Beyond their paychecks, many on the film crew are earning valuable experience. For Gunneson, coordinator of the university's digital cinema production certificate, it's gratifying to see former students return to campus as professionals.

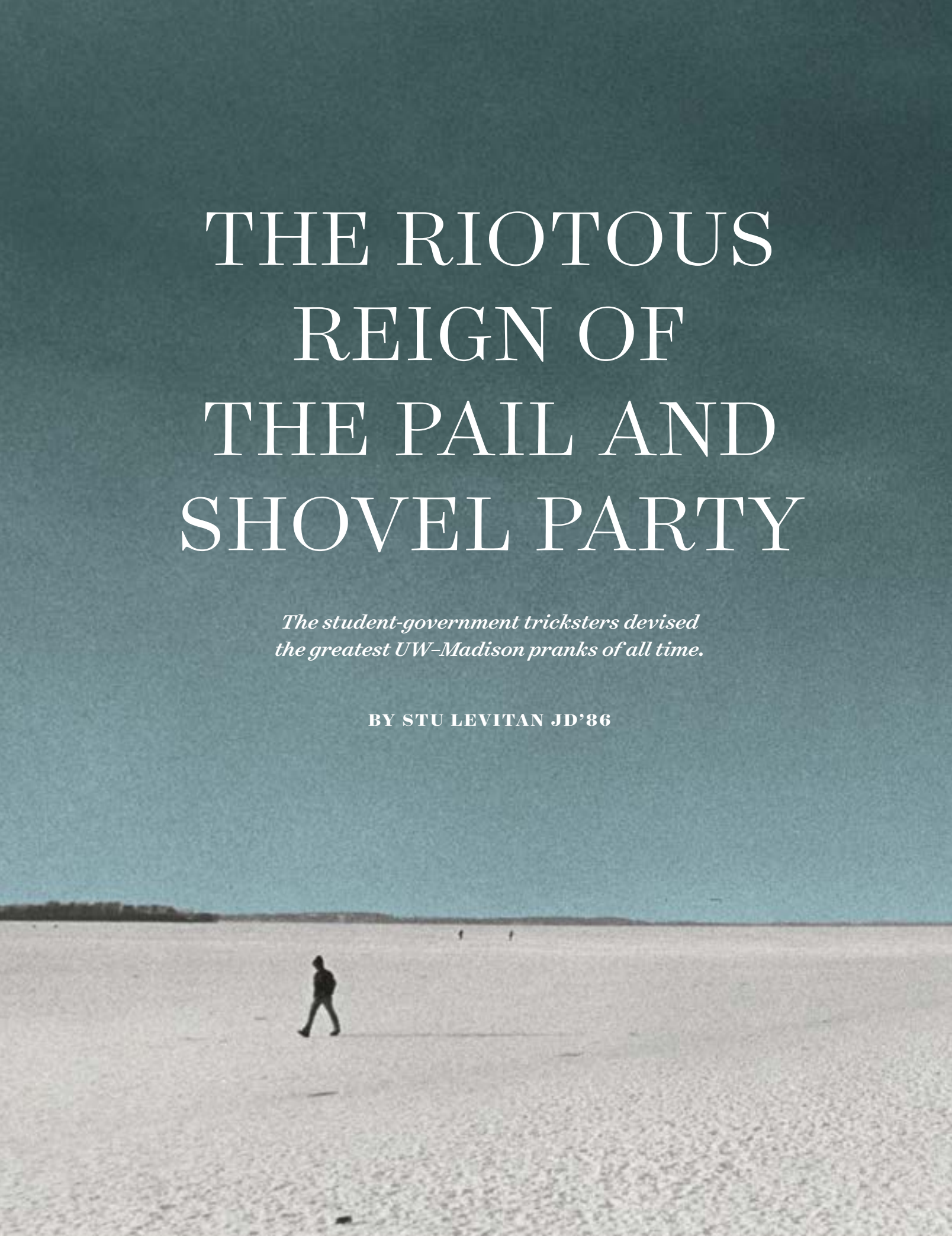
"I always tell my students that one of my favorite places on earth is a film set," he says. "Here I am, in one of my favorite places." ●

Gayle Worland is a writer with UW–Madison's Office of Strategic Communication.

THE RIOTOUS REIGN OF THE PAIL AND SHOVEL PARTY

The student-government tricksters devised the greatest UW–Madison pranks of all time.

BY STU LEVITAN JD'86





UW ARCHIVES; PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLE LAWRY

The controversial Statue of Liberty on Lake Mendota.

For two years at the end of the 1970s, clowns controlled the Wisconsin Student Association (WSA), producing legendary pranks that greatly benefited the university and city but left student government broke and in total disarray.

The time was right for the Pail and Shovel Party. Things were getting bleak in the spring of 1978, with rising economic, racial, and political anxieties. UW–Madison was just catching its breath after years of Vietnam War unrest, without the bandwidth to face any more crises. And who could take politics seriously anymore? Time to send in the clowns as a fitting end to what author Tom Wolfe dubbed "The Me Decade."

Leon Varjian x'83 had been a popular prankster at Indiana University, where he got his master's in mathematics in 1976. He enrolled in one class at the UW in 1977, just to have some fun. Jim Mallon '79 was a communication arts junior from Minnesota who appreciated Varjian's opening prank, a petition drive to rename the UW the University of New Jersey (so UW students could claim they attended a fancy East Coast school).

They teamed up for performance art on Library Mall, and when the elections for WSA executives approached in May 1978, Varjian — who earlier in the school year had been appointed to fill a vacancy in the student senate — suggested they run. Mallon, the designated presidential candidate, thought it would be just another goof. He didn't learn till later that vice presidential candidate Varjian had run for student body leadership at Indiana and that this time he would run to win — and thereby gain control of WSA's discretionary budget of about $70,000, funded primarily by student segregated fees.

They formed the absurdist Pail and Shovel Party, named after the implements they said students could use to scoop up coins after the budget was converted to pennies and dumped on Library Mall. Other prominent campaign planks were even more fanciful. (See sidebar.)

They warned students about what was in store, declaring on an early campaign flyer: "Honesty, integrity, responsibility ... Pail and Shovel doesn't believe in any of them!"

Dizzyland

Beyond the innate creativity of its leaders and members, the party had a technological advantage — Varjian's experience running an underground newspaper in Bloomington. In the era before the easy availability of computerized art and design, his printing skills made the party's campaign material stand out.

"Everything we did was a step above," Mallon says now. "We had some phenomenal resources."

The Pail and Shovel team included illustrator Jay Kennedy '81, later cartoon editor at *Esquire* magazine and editor in chief of King Features Syndicate; photographer Michael Kienitz '74, who went on to work for *Time, Life,* and *Newsweek*; and the soon-to-be-famous musician/producer Butch Vig '80, who served as music director.

"All the people involved with Pail and Shovel were very creative people doing really interesting things," Vig says. "There was an amazing energy that I really embraced."

The centerpiece to their first campaign was "Dizzyland," the centerfold of their four-page, four-color campaign newspaper. The map of the campus "after Pail and Shovel gets its hands on it" added the Lincoln Ring Toss, Carillon Zeppelin Docking Tower, and Chadbourne Ferris Wheel as campaign promises.

No wonder they won, taking a third of the near-record 4,529 votes — up from about 2,500 total votes in 1977. Losing candidates challenged the election, but Pail and Shovel prevailed, thanks to zealous representation by its kindred-spirit attorney, Edward Ben Elson JD'67, who had waged some fanciful campaigns of his own (including declaring for district attorney at Madison's Dangle Lounge strip club in 1970, ostensibly in the nude).

"He bulldozed his way through student court and was directly responsible for our success," Mallon says, noting that Elson continued to represent the party for free. "He was/is a legend."

Once elected, Mallon further elevated WSA productions by tapping the equipment and expertise of the UW Department of Theatre and Drama's lighting program, run by his very supportive professor, the nationally renowned Gilbert Hemsley.

Dial-a-Joke

Among the new administration's first, more serious initiatives: creating and funding a gay affairs program, starting a voter registration drive, and increasing support for the Student Tenant Union and Women's Counseling Service. By the following spring, the Pail and Shovel WSA also presented a series of free films, established a telephone Dial-a-Joke, provided free ice cream and watermelon during registration week, staged an Easter egg hunt on Bascom Hill, cosponsored the Mifflin Street Block Party's move to Library Mall, and auctioned the right to pie Governor Lee Dreyfus '49, MA'52, PhD'58.

At first, the *Daily Cardinal* took a supportive approach. Two months after the election, it headlined a front-page investigative report "WSA Ripoff Rumor: Unfounded." But within a year, the paper was calling them "despicable megalomaniacs" committing "unethical and possibly illegal acts."

Facing the pivotal election for the WSA student senate the first week of October 1978, Pail and Shovel published another four-page, full-color campaign brochure featuring photos and joke statements from its candidates, with Mallon's challenge "to vote in 36 of the wackiest, nuyttyest [sic], most irresponsible, self-centered, weird, self-motivated charlatans on campus."

Showing some brilliant scheduling, WSA sponsored a marijuana smoke-in at the state capitol and funded and produced a wildly successful toga party the Saturday before the elections. They also presented a four-day "Symposium on the Future" with such luminaries as Beat poet Allen Ginsberg and a Field House concert by Little Feat a few days after.

Sponsored by the Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity, the UW toga party wasn't the country's first tribute to the hit movie *Animal House,* but with a boisterous crowd of 10,000 draining more than 200 half barrels of beer in and around Lot 60, it was the first massive one, scoring national television coverage. *Animal House* and *Saturday Night Live* star John Belushi called in but wasn't patched through to the sound system.

Satisfying a coalition of freaks and Greeks, Pail and Shovel took total control and gained new national coverage by carrying all but four of the 36 open seats. The *Daily Cardinal* published its front-page nameplate in black, a newspaper symbol of mourning it had last shown during the 1970 U.S. invasion of Cambodia.

Dean of Students Paul Ginsberg '52 acknowledged Mallon and Varjian's success. "It would be a mistake to misrepresent either as clowns," he said that fall. "They are bright, have assumed a role, and know what they are doing. There's a method to their madness."

The two developed "an organic division of labor," Mallon says. The quick-witted Varjian excelled at verbal sparring and generating publicity, and he kept track of the money. Mallon's skill was recognizing great ideas and bringing them to life, with primary logistical support and project management from senate sergeant at arms Stu Baker '80.

Varjian "was one of the smartest people I have ever met," Mallon says. "He had a gut instinct on how the world was wired, and had a great, subversive instinct on how to rewire it."

The Statue of Liberty on Lake Mendota

Still, Pail and Shovel may have been lucky the election wasn't held a few weeks later. Despite Little Feat's high critical standing and widespread



UW ARCHIVES; PEXELS

popularity, the Field House concert lost $11,000, which WSA partially covered by transferring funds in a way that apparently violated its bylaws.

True to its journalistic legacy, the *Cardinal* hammered away with detailed reporting and contemptuous commentary. Early winter 1979 brought a series of bad headlines: "P and S Overspends Budget, Wastes Thousands," "P and S Pads Own Pockets," and more.

The harshest criticism came when the party spent $4,000 to build a Statue of Liberty out of papier-mâché, chicken wire, and plywood, placing it on Lake Mendota ice to make Lady Liberty appear partially submerged. The *Cardinal* revealed that the project was done without senate authorization. Some students thought it wasteful; others appreciated politicians fulfilling a campaign promise.

Despite his earlier appreciation, Ginsberg froze the WSA account in early February due to "several instances of apparent discrepancy" between what the senate authorized and what the administration spent, plus some incomplete accounting. When he determined there weren't any violations of university or state regulations and "no evidence of fraud or dishonesty," he lifted the freeze after 10 days.

Then came an act of spiteful vandalism. In the early hours of March 2, 1979, persons still unknown set the head of the Statue of Liberty ablaze. Police arrived in time to protect the torch, but the head lay in ashes on the ice.

Things got worse. Less than a week before the May election, the student senate voted to impeach Varjian. He remained in office thanks to the Pail and Shovel senators who left the meeting before the vote, preventing a quorum.

The clowns doubled down, vowing in their reelection campaign to rebuild the Statue of Liberty (done, in Styrofoam, the head even bigger than the real statue's) and reunite the Beatles to play the Rathskeller (not done). They won a four-way race with a record voter turnout.

Again, the *Daily Cardinal* nameplate went black.

1,008 Pink Flamingos

That fall, Pail and Shovel pulled off a prank that has proven one of the most enduring and significant actions ever taken by UW student government.

As their last semester in power approached, Mallon and friends were brainstorming how to top the Statue of Liberty.

"We pretty much figured we couldn't," Mallon says.

His roommate Mike McDonald '79 suggested covering Bascom Hill with a lawn ornament that symbolized the suburban background of many students — a plastic pink flamingo.

"We didn't really put much thought into it," Baker

Jim Mallon (left) brought the madcap ideas to life, while Leon Varjian excelled at generating publicity.

The Pail and Shovel Agenda: Top 10 Campaign Promises

- Buy and relocate the Statue of Liberty
- Flood Camp Randall to stage mock naval battles
- Install escalators on Bascom Hill
- Use human cannons to help students cross West Johnson Street
- Put dormitories on wheels
- Order campus clocks to run backward (so classes end before they begin)
- Turn Gordon Commons into a brewery, linked to beer taps in every dorm room
- Require food service to serve only marijuana brownies after 7 p.m.
- Issue free contraceptives with dorm sheets every week
- Replace the Wisconsin Historical Society building's flagpole with a 50-foot-high Mickey Mouse Pez dispenser



UW ARCHIVES

recalls. “We had no clue other than it was a great photo op.”

So early on September 5, 1979, the first day of classes, there suddenly appeared 1,008 pink flamingos on the hill. Varjian explained they were blown north by Hurricane David, which had recently hit Florida. They were gone within hours, appropriated by Pail and Shovel’s happy constituents.

Ginsberg was watching from the top of the hill. “Everybody, new and old alike, has some sense of trepidation” about the new school year, he recalled in his 2009 UW oral history. But as they walked amid the flock, “people smiled.”

“It seemed like a fitting stunt,” Mallon says. “And to this day, it’s had an influence.”

Indeed. More than three decades later, it inspired the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA) to create the annual Fill the Hill fundraiser that, since 2013, has raised more than $5 million through more than 30,000 individual gifts, with thousands of replica flamingos distributed as thanks.

The idea of bringing flamingos back to Bascom to spark donations arose as casually as their initial appearance. “It probably started as a joke,” says Caroline Sullivan ’12, who was then a marketing coordinator for WFAA. But soon the marketing team realized, “Wait, yes, we can actually do this.”

Sullivan, now WFAA development director for the UW College of Letters & Science, marvels that “something we thought would just be a one-time thing is now a pinnacle tradition of our university.”

Former sergeant at arms Baker wants WFAA to build on the legacy by creating a gender-neutral Frankie Flamingo mascot as Bucky Badger’s pet. “Think of all the new swag you could sell!” he enthused during a conversation on the Memorial Union Terrace.

That prank from 1979 also still reverberates throughout Madison, where the plastic pink flamingo has been the official city bird since 2009 and the Forward Madison FC professional soccer team is nicknamed the “Flamingos.”

A Wind-Powered Concert

Some good ideas didn’t pan out. A few days after the flamingos flew in, WSA sponsored the country’s first wind-powered rock concert, in James Madison Park. But the breezes that day were too gentle to generate electricity, which Madison Gas and Electric provided the old-fashioned way.

WSA got its mojo back a week later, producing a second successful toga party in front of the

BRYCE RICHTER



UW ARCHIVES

Memorial Union that caused the university to relocate an appearance by the Dalai Lama.

Acknowledging that Pail and Shovel left WSA "in total shambles," Ginsberg found that their disregard for normal student government work had a surprise benefit: it freed up his staff "to do other important things because we weren't involved with WSA."

Ginsberg, whom Varjian publicly called "Dad" — the source of his allowance — was paternalistically benevolent. "I tended not to be as critical of the party as others are," he said. "They came in at a time when people needed to smile. And they made it very clear that they were clowns. They proclaimed that before they were elected. Often you learn that only after."

Mallon never expected those two years would still be a topic of interest almost half a century later. "We were just doing what struck us as joyful in the moment," he says, "and I found out later in life that was an exceedingly rare experience."

Former Madison mayor Dave Cieslewicz '81 was new to campus during Pail and Shovel's heyday and was impressed. A political science major, he thought that Varjian and Mallon "were the most brilliant politicians at any level of government at the time because they perfectly captured the absurdity of it all." ●

Stu Levitan JD'86 is a historian, author, and radio host. This article is adapted from his book Madison: The Illustrated History Volume 2, 1932–1979 *(University of Wisconsin Press, 2026).*

Mallon and Varjian at a Pail and Shovel press conference: "We were just doing what struck us as joyful in the moment." Opposite: The pink flamingo prank has proven one of the most enduring actions ever taken by UW student government.

After Pail and Shovel

- Jim Mallon's Pail and Shovel experience helped him land engineering and production jobs at WHA-TV and the UW a few years after graduation. He went on to cofound and produce the hit science fiction comedy series ***Mystery Science Theater*** 3000 and later became a therapist near the Twin Cities.

- Stu Baker had a 40-year career in libraries and IT at Northwestern University.

- Butch Vig became one of the most important producers of alternative rock and with classmate Steve Marker '80 formed one of the leading bands in the genre, Garbage.

- Leon Varjian continued his high-profile antics around Madison for several years before returning to his native New Jersey to become a beloved high school math teacher. His sudden death from a heart ailment in 2015 caused widespread mourning.

—S. L.

BADGER TRUE-CRIME SLEUTH

With groundbreaking documentaries, podcasts, and a new class, UW–Madison alumni and students are shaping the coverage of real-life murder mysteries.

BY DOUG MOE ’79

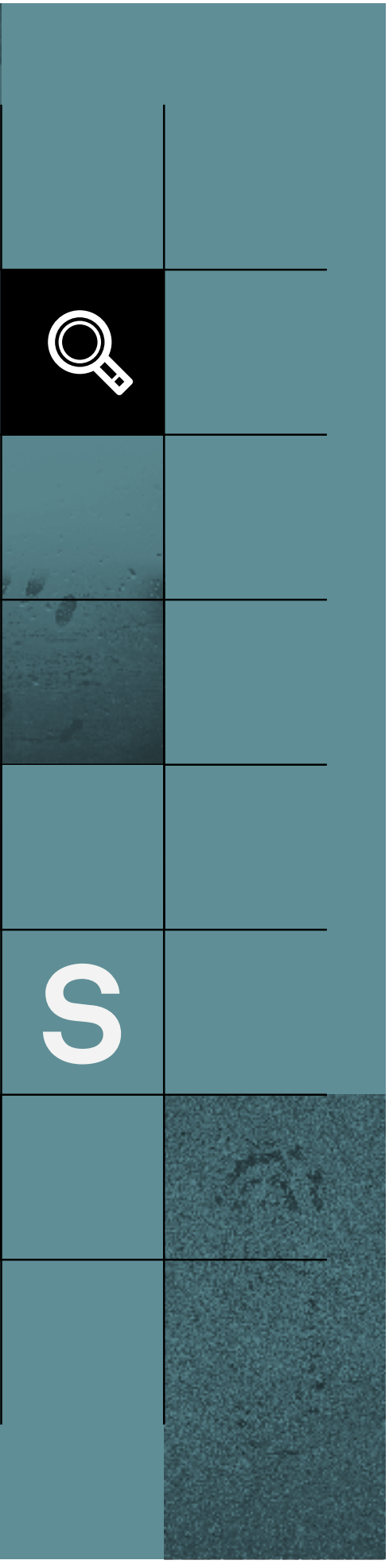


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DANIELLE LAWRY; TAYLOR WOLFRAM; PEXELS

Mari Zoerb Hansen ’99, MA’01 has a master’s degree in linguistics from UW–Madison and a passion for true-crime storytelling.

In summer 2023, while watching a two-part documentary called *The Dakota Entrapment Tapes,* she became intrigued by the regional accents on the program.

It led her to *Dakota Spotlight,* a true-crime podcast focused on cases across the upper Midwest, hosted by James Wolner.

Hansen eventually connected with Wolner, and the possibility of a collaboration came up. Was there, Wolner wondered, a Madison case that would make a good podcast?

They settled on the unsolved campus murder of UW freshman Christine Rothschild x’72 in 1968. Six episodes of *You Killed Chris: A Friend’s Fight for Justice* made up the 10th season of *Dakota Spotlight* in 2024.

The series focused on both the murder and the decades-long effort of Rothschild’s college friend, Linda Schulko ’71, MA’72, to keep the case active. *You Killed Chris* included archival audio as well as original interviews — three hours with Schulko alone — with Hansen serving as research assistant. She’s a fourth-generation Badger, and her dad, David Zoerb ’68, was a UW student at the time of Rothschild’s murder.

The *Capital Times* wrote favorably about the podcast when it dropped, and then, in June 2026, the ultimate positive review arrived.

“I am writing in regard to the 1968 homicide of Christine Rothschild,” began an email to Wolner from Truli Nielsen, special agent with the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigation.

“We have formed a team of folks, investigators, special agents, crime analysts, and prosecutors who are actively working on [this] case,” Nielsen continued. “We have listened to your *Dakota Spotlight* series and appreciate the attention you have brought to this case. I am wondering if you might be able to share my contact information with some of those whom you interviewed.”

Hansen calls it “a reminder that true crime can help solve crimes.”

One of the earliest — and still best — reminders of that is the 1988 documentary film *The Thin Blue Line,* directed by Errol Morris ’69, which is credited with helping overturn the murder conviction of a Texas death-row inmate.

Morris, an Academy Award–winner for 2003’s *The Fog of War,* is the best-known UW–Madison graduate working in the true-crime genre. But others have followed, including the documentarians Erin Lee Carr ’10 and Rachel Bozich ’14. With their productions — plus a new UW class — alumni and students are shaping the coverage of real-life murder mysteries.

TRUTH AND CRIME

The success of a 2014 12-part podcast titled *Serial* about a 1999 murder in Baltimore launched a flurry of true-crime podcasts. Some were serious-minded, and some incorporated humor, introducing the genre to the digital generation.

UW–Madison Professor Ralph Grunewald LLM'05, who has a joint appointment in the English department and the Center for Law, Society, and Justice, teaches classes on criminal justice and law and literature. He found students increasingly bringing in legal questions prompted by listening to true-crime podcasts.

Eventually, those questions inspired Grunewald to debut a course in fall 2023 titled Truth and Crime, which explores the true-crime genre and the intersection of law, narrative, and truth. The class is offered through Constellations, an interdisciplinary program in the College of Letters & Science.

In 2025, Grunewald gave students the chance to create a 10- to 15-minute true-crime podcast in lieu of writing a final paper. Some 80 students in teams of three or four worked on 23 projects. Just as Hansen was drawn to a local Madison case, some of the teams chose to examine crimes such as the 2008 murder of UW–Madison student Brittany Zimmermann '08 and the 1970 bombing of Sterling Hall.

The exercise captivated the students.

"They loved it," says Ali Mansouri PhDx'27, the teaching assistant who worked with the students on their projects. "They needed to write a report about how they approached the podcast, how they created the narrative, and who was doing what. It was very collaborative."

In his class, Grunewald makes it clear that all true crime is not created equal.

There are, for instance, wildly popular true-crime podcasts that involve comedic takes (*My Favorite Murder*) and makeup tips (*Murder, Mystery, and Makeup*).

True-crime podcasts have greatly increased the genre's ubiquity. An article on forbes.com in December 2025 noted that they are "extremely popular, considered a dominant genre in podcasting, with over 19 million regular listeners in the U.S. in 2024."

Grunewald's favorite podcast is *Criminal*. *New York* magazine called it "one of the most expansive, compassionate portraits of the lives of real people caught up in crime."

"It's what some call highbrow true crime," Grunewald says. "It's great journalism; it's background stories; it's human interest. It's not sensationalized; it's not dramatized. It's never one-sided or judgmental. There is always another level they explore."

He contrasts that with the *My Favorite Murder* podcast. An episode he refers to in class involved a case in which someone convicted of a heinous crime ended up on death row. In a textbook example of bad taste, the host says, "But unfortunately, he died of cancer before he could get fried."



The UW Police Department is still investigating the Christine Rothschild case. If you have any information to share, please call 608-264-2677.

Grunewald's students read excerpts from *In Cold Blood,* Truman Capote's famous 1966 "nonfiction novel" about a Kansas farm family's murder. The book was a critical and popular success, though Capote was later criticized for inventing scenes and dialogue. The class also watches Morris's *Thin Blue Line,* which, while drawing numerous raves, was criticized by some for employing expressionistic reenactments of events.

IN DEFENSE OF REENACTMENTS

The *Blue Line* case involved a man convicted of shooting and killing a Dallas police officer in 1976. Morris's investigation revealed his innocence, as well as the real murderer. It didn't come easily.

"An actual investigation involves a kind of obsessive personality," Morris says. "A real need to find out the truth, to the extent that it's possible to find out the truth."

Describing his work on *The Thin Blue Line,* Morris says: "I stumbled on a story that required me to see it through to the end. And as I investigated it obsessively over close to three years, I learned enough to tell me that the man who had been sentenced to death — he was within three days of being electrocuted in Texas — was completely innocent. Am I proud of the fact that I was able to investigate a case to its conclusion? I am immensely proud of it."

The man originally charged and convicted in the Dallas officer's death, Randall Dale Adams, was exonerated and released from prison after serving 12 years.



FOCAL FLAME PHOTOGRAPHY; TAYLOR WOLFRAM

In 2008, Morris published a two-part series in the *New York Times* defending the use of reenactment in documentaries, zeroing in on a famous scene in *The Thin Blue Line* in which the location of a milkshake tossed from a police car is critical to impeaching the veracity of a witness.

"I reenact this detail in my film," Morris wrote. "The milkshake toss for me is emblematic of the discrepancies between [the witness's] account and what really happened. As such, the spilled milkshake is a clue and stands at the beginning of a chain of inferences. ... How do you represent this in a movie? How do you evaluate the nature of competing and conflicting evidence? It is through reconstructing the past with reenactments."

Grunewald, who wrote a book about the role of narrative in wrongful convictions (*Narratives of Guilt and Innocence: The Power of Storytelling in Wrongful Conviction Cases*, NYU Press 2023), says, "Lawyers tell stories. Just like Morris, I stress that narratives create a certain legal reality which might not be the truth." He has his students analyze the reenactments in *The Thin Blue Line* and notes that in some instances, they offer competing versions of what may have taken place.

"With those reenactments," Grunewald says, "he shows the ambiguity of the case."

Morris is currently working on a series called *Betrayal*.

"It's about Ukraine," he says. "You might even call it a series of interlocking mystery stories, true-crime stories — what I consider to be an enormous crime perpetrated by Vladimir Putin against the Ukrainian people."

The lively film scene on the Madison campus in the late 1960s inspired Morris. "My whole interest in movies comes out of the University of Wisconsin," he told this magazine in 2009.

Left, Mari Zoerb Hansen worked on a podcast about the murder of UW student Christine Rothschild. Right, Ralph Grunewald created his class Truth and Crime when students began posing legal questions inspired by true-crime podcasts.

HOW NOT TO EXPLOIT SUBJECTS

Erin Lee Carr admires Morris's films and says, "I am, in a way, an Errol Morris protégé, even though he doesn't know me."

Morris may not, but the prolific Carr has already made a significant mark in the true-crime genre, and she says she has a two-part series coming out on Netflix about "one of the biggest criminal cases in American history," although she isn't free to divulge the subject at this time.

Carr strives to be empathetic and nonjudgmental, even in telling stories involving terrible events, such as 2019's critically acclaimed *I Love You, Now Die,* which centered on a woman convicted of involuntary manslaughter for sending text messages encouraging her boyfriend to commit suicide.

"I make films about perpetrators who are still human beings before and after they do such a thing," Carr says, "and almost more importantly to me, [films about] the survivors who have to deal with this trauma and what's going on in their lives."

She calls true crime "one of the most populist genres of documentary," but she's leery of work that "puts more violence in the world for violence's sake."

Carr has a checklist she uses to decide whether a potential project is right for her.

"I do think there's a right way to do it," she says. "People are still looking for that human, empathetic approach."

Carr has collaborated with fellow UW grad and filmmaker Rachel Bozich, whose interest in the



JAY L. CLENDENIN/LOS ANGELES TIMES VIA CONTOUR RA BY GETTY IMAGES



VERONICA SPANN

genre dates to reading crime stories in magazines when she was a teenager.

"I was the kid who used to get *People* magazine to read about the murders in there," she says. "My parents were definitely highly concerned about that. But I wanted to understand the human complexity of how someone could get to the level where they hurt someone."

Bozich double-majored in journalism and communication arts at UW–Madison, and it was taking a film editing class that helped her find her career path.

"That was probably the best decision I ever made," Bozich says. "I think there's something to the way a film makes you feel — the pacing, the tempo. There's nothing quite like it. It shaped the way I look at stories and aim to put them together."

After graduating, Bozich served as first assistant editor on 2017's *The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson*.

"It was very much a social activism film," she says — Johnson was a Black gay rights activist — "but it's framed within the murder of Marsha P. Johnson."

Bozich quickly realized that she wanted to be part of a production before the editing process. Drawn to finding a compelling story, meeting the people involved, and gaining their trust and interviewing them, she moved into producing, writing, and directing.

From left, Errol Morris directed the trailblazing documentary* The Thin Blue Line, *which helped overturn the conviction of a Texas death-row inmate. Rachel Bozich found her passion when she took a UW film editing class. Erin Lee Carr says that she considers herself a Morris protégé, even though he doesn't know her.

She was an associate producer on 2020's *Kingdom of Silence,* about the murdered *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

"It was very much a heavy political film," Bozich says, "but layered with the true-crime element."

Bozich was also writer and producer on the two seasons of *Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal*.

When the first season debuted on Netflix in February 2023, the *New York Times* noted: "The sordid, slowly unspooling saga of the Murdaugh family, moving back and forth across tragic accidents, mysterious deaths, brutal murders, and comically brazen fraud, is an unbeatable crime story."

How does she balance the desire to tell a gripping tale with being fair and not overly intrusive to the real people involved?

"True crime has become an industry," Bozich says. "But you need to remember that behind every story is a family or people seeking answers or seeking something. It's part of the filmmaker's job, or the journalist's job, to figure out what that is, and if they're helping them, or if it's exploitive.

"It can be a really fine line," Bozich continues. "But I love helping people. The ability to tell someone's story or get answers for someone — there's really nothing quite like it."

Bozich is working on a 2027 show for Netflix. The family involved had never spoken publicly, but they



DOMINIK BINDL/GETTY IMAGES

shared hours of Super 8 film she was able to digitize for them. They grew close.

It's a dynamic at odds with a perception of the genre as often manipulative. Could the high demand for true crime be an incentive to cut corners?

"It almost feels like a documentary is being churned out every other day," Bozich says. "I say this very respectfully, because these are also the people who I get jobs from. Yet something comes out and there's this immediate, 'Is it going to go viral, is it going to go on TikTok?' It's affected the industry heavily."

One effect of the proliferation of true crime is that it's making potential story subjects leery.

"Anytime you go to tell a story now," Bozich says, "you are definitely met with the fear of being exploited. I think that's why every story I work on takes years. It's not something where you're coming in for months and then leaving the family after you get what you want."

IN SEARCH OF THE DEFINITIVE TRUTH

You Killed Chris, the podcast devoted to the murder of Christine Rothschild, is not sensationalized. The facts of the case are gruesome. The banner front-page headline in the May 27, 1968, *Capital Times* read: "Co-ed Stabbed 14 Times."

Podcast host and narrator Wolner, along with research assistant Hansen, left few stones unturned in their investigation.

Schulko, Rothschild's campus friend, is convinced the murderer was a UW medical resident on law enforcement's radar at the time. A September 17, 1968, *Capital Times* headline read: "Ex-UW Surgeon Sought for Quiz in Co-ed Slaying." The man is now deceased.

The podcasters located a doctor who knew the suspect in medical school in Madison, and in episode four of the podcast he tells them: "The night she was murdered, he was on call and didn't answer that call. The next morning, he came with a bandage on his hand."

By reaching out to Wolner, the Wisconsin Department of Justice would seem to validate the podcasters' efforts in *You Killed Chris*. Yet Wolner, near the end of the last episode, still hopes for more: the definitive truth about the crime.

"When Christine Rothschild walked out of Ann Emery Hall on May 26, 1968," he notes, "she embarked on a morning walk that was never finished. In some ways it feels like the final chapter of Chris's life and death is also unfinished and incomplete, and that, despite Linda Schulko's decades-long quest to get answers, there are still things we would like to know." ●

Doug Moe '79 is a Madison-based journalist and author.

WHERE TO WATCH

Here's how to catch the podcast and documentaries related to alumni featured in this story.

You Killed Chris: A Friend's Fight for Justice
(Mari Zoerb Hansen)
Spotify, Apple Podcasts, YouTube, and the Dakota Spotlight website

I Love You, Now Die
(Erin Lee Carr)
YouTube, Apple TV, Google Play Movies, and Fandango

The Death and Life of Marsha P. Johnson
(Rachel Bozich)
Netflix

Kingdom of Silence
(Rachel Bozich)
YouTube, Amazon Prime, Hulu, and other streaming services

Murdaugh Murders: A Southern Scandal
(Rachel Bozich)
Netflix

The Thin Blue Line
(Errol Morris)
Amazon Prime, the Roku Channel, Philo, Apple TV, YouTube TV, and others



TAYLOR WOLFRAM (2)

Tagg's, You're It!

For more than 40 years, MacTaggart's Market has provided the Langdon neighborhood with groceries, necessities, and fresh-made sandwiches.

Saturday mornings are busy on the lower floor of the apartment building at 230 W. Lakelawn Place, especially when there's a home football game. Half a flight of steps down from street level, you'll find the staff at MacTaggart's Market furiously cooking up eggs, bacon, and sausage for breakfast sandwiches that will fuel students until kickoff.

Tim Taggart founded MacTaggart's in 1985 as a small grocery store to serve the student-heavy Langdon Street neighborhood. When he named the shop, he wanted to honor his Scottish heritage, so he added "Mac" to his own name. But most students prefer to drop it — and to cut his final syllable for good measure.

"Everybody calls it *Tagg's,*" says current owner Rick Schober. He and his husband, **Ken Kaiser x'91,** bought MacTaggart's in 1991, and Schober has run it ever since, the business evolving with a changing campus.

"Prior to COVID, we were mostly a grocery store with a deli counter," Schober says. "We'd do breakfast sandwiches from midnight to 3 on Fridays and Saturdays. But then COVID came and things got really weird for a while. Over the last five years or so, I'd say we're becoming mostly known as a sandwich shop with a grocery attached."

In the fall, the sandwich counter does a brisk business with its breakfast sandwiches, but Schober takes pride in the role he plays for generations of students.

"The draw is our food, and we put out a good product," he says. "But playing cards, laundry soap, paper towels, miscellaneous groceries, beer — we have everything an undergrad would need. And if we don't have it, then we'll pick it up and stock it."

JOHN ALLEN



MacTaggart's employees Theo Koehler x'30 and Oscar Gara x'29 wait behind the counter to take orders from hungry patrons. MacTaggart's has been feeding Langdon since 1985.

On Alumni

News from Home and Abroad

The Shirt off His Back

Prints of UW-themed T-shirt designs by Virgil Abloh '03 were recently auctioned by Sotheby's to support Badger scholarships.



COURTESY OF WFAA

Five years after his untimely death, famed fashion designer **Virgil Abloh '03** found one more way to give back to his alma mater. His foundation sold prints of his UW-themed T-shirt designs at auction, with the proceeds going to support scholarships.

Throughout his career, Abloh frequently credited his time at the university with shaping the systems-thinking and intellectual curiosity that informed his work across fashion, architecture, music, art, and design. Abloh transformed contemporary culture through those efforts and his eventual role as artistic director of menswear at Louis Vuitton.

In 2015, the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA) asked Abloh to design a special edition of its Red Shirt, a T-shirt that releases a new design each year as a fundraiser for scholarships. Abloh created a series of designs, and when art professor **Faisal Abdu'Allah** heard that Abloh was visiting campus in 2015, he quickly put together a plan to turn the designs into screen prints. He worked with then-student **Aaron David '16** to make sample prints to show to Abloh.

"We made two or three, and then we showed them to him," says Abdu'Allah. "He said they look incredible: 'Let's run the edition!' We made a full run, and then he came in and signed every print."

Created as part of Abloh's celebrated #OffWisconsin collaboration with WFAA, the works on paper reinterpret the university's iconic Red Shirt through Abloh's distinctive visual language.

The prints then went into storage for more than a decade. Abloh's career flourished: he made designs for Nike and IKEA, and his Off-White label saw mainstream success.

He used his increasing fame to draw attention to issues that he saw as important, including raising more than $1 million for scholarships.

But in 2019, Abloh was diagnosed with cardiac angiosarcoma, a rare and aggressive form of cancer. He died in 2021 at 41.

In 2026, the Virgil Abloh Foundation offered to have the T-shirt prints auctioned by Sotheby's USA. The auction, held in July, raised a further $35,840 for UW–Madison scholarships.

Reflecting on Abloh's contributions, Abdu'Allah said: "Virgil Abloh's presence and collaboration with our students offered them a rare opportunity to engage directly with a visionary Badger who redefined what it means to be an artist, entrepreneur, and pioneer in today's interconnected creative landscape. His legacy continues to inspire emerging artists and designers to rethink the relationship between creativity, commerce, and social impact."

JOHN ALLEN

Aaron David '16; Trent Jackson '94, EMBA'08; Virgil Abloh '03; and Faisal Abdu'Allah display screen prints of Abloh's Red Shirt designs.

19
Number of years The Red Shirt program has been raising money for scholarships.

$350K
Scholarship funds raised by The Red Shirt since the program started in 2008.



TAYLOR WOLFRAM

FILL THE HILL

Fill the Hill, the annual giving initiative that places flamingos on Bascom Hill for each gift made to the university, raised more than $854,000 from a record total of over 5,500 gifts. The October event marked the 14th time that WFAA has put the "fun" in fundraising through the beloved tradition. See "The Riotous Reign of the Pail and Shovel Party," page 44, for more on the origins of the flamingo-centric celebration.

BADGER HUDDLE AT LAMBEAU FIELD

Combine legendary Badger spirit with the revered atmosphere of Green Bay's Lambeau Field, and you've got one heck of a Huddle. The September BADGER HUDDLE preceding the Wisconsin–Notre Dame game drew some 1,000 UW fans, as well as British social media influencers Josh and Jase. Festivities included the Oneida Nation Tribal Dancers, the UW Marching Band, the Spirit Squad, and Bucky Badger.

50s–60s

A hearty salute to **James Christenson '57,** who will celebrate his 70-year anniversary of alumnihood in 2027. After earning his UW degree in engineering, Christenson served in the Navy Civil Engineer Corps as an officer, which began a 20-year career in the Navy. Throughout this period, he and his family moved nine times and averaged a 7,000-mile distance with each move. In the second half of his career, Christenson served as the director of facilities management for four universities across the country, including the University of Michigan, where he led a staff of 1,300. In addition to his travels for work, Christenson had the opportunity to see Europe with his wife and three children in the late '70s. The family toured the continent in a Volkswagen camper for 11 months and drove more than 30,000 miles. Thank you for sharing these memories, Jim.

Fans of *Ted Lasso* can spot writer and retired journalist **Bill Stokes '58** in the latest season of the television show. Stokes, who lives in Madison, appears in the series alongside legendary baseball pitcher Satchel Paige in footage from the 1953 Major League Baseball All-Star Game. When the clip was filmed, Stokes was just 21 years old and a member of the U.S. Army. He and a friend had traveled to Cincinnati for the game but didn't have tickets. Seeing this, a cameraman at Crosley Field invited him to pose as a member of a movie newsreel crew to see the field up close and meet the teams. Stokes collected signatures from the players, including Paige, and the interaction was caught on camera. Stokes still has the all-star autographs he gathered that day. Congrats on your Apple TV debut, Bill!

70s–80s

After nearly 50 years, **Harry Hertel JD'76** has closed his law practice in Eau Claire, Wisconsin. He made many connections and friendships across the state while serving as the president of the Wisconsin Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers and on the board of directors for the Wisconsin Association for Justice. Today, he's proud that two of his former partners have gone on to serve as judges and that he's been able to help people in need throughout his career. Although Hertel says he'll miss his law practice, he looks forward to spending more time with his four children, nine grandchildren, and many friends, as well as cheering on the Minnesota Wild hockey team.

Robin Stroebel '76, the CEO and owner of Interior-LOGIC, Inc., in Madison, has been named advocacy committee chair for the American Society of Interior Designers. With more than 40 years of experience in planning and design, Stroebel brings expertise in facility planning, interior design concepts, and quality assurance to the role. As chair, Stroebel shares the impact of various designs on life, health, safety, and welfare, as well as promoting the organization's strategic advocacy and legislative objectives.

Congratulations to attorney and community leader **John Hawley '79, JD'82,** who was inducted into the Green Bay Area Public School District hall of fame. The honor recognizes Hawley as an outstanding alumnus and highlights the impact he's had on communities and education. Hawley served on the Random Lake School Board for more than 20 years and worked with the Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association, where his contributions earned national recognition. He also served as president of the Wisconsin Association of School Boards. In his law career, Hawley has worked with families across Wisconsin as an assistant district attorney, a special prosecutor, a guardian ad litem, and a private practitioner, and he has served as a mentor for many young professionals. Hawley is also dedicated to expanding access to higher education through scholarships and support for university projects. Well done, John!

A big Badger high-five to mass communication researcher and professor **Jim Sernoe '86, MA'89,** who has been promoted to full professor at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. He recently celebrated his 30th anniversary at the university, and he's served as the mass communication department chair since 2004. Sernoe enjoys supporting students as an educator, academic adviser, and administrator. In his free time, he participates in community theater and contributes to the Wichita Adult Literacy Council. Sernoe is fueled by his love of education and lots of Diet Mountain Dew.

WELCOME, ALL!
The Wisconsin Alumni Association encourages diversity, inclusivity, nondiscrimination, and participation by all alumni, students, and friends of UW–Madison in its activities.

BOOK NEWS?
See page 64.

CLASS NOTES SUBMISSIONS
uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit • Class Notes, Wisconsin Alumni Association, 1848 University Avenue, Madison, WI 53726

"I was leaning against a column by the Babcock ice cream counter when she walked through the main entrance."
— Kevin Hargis '89

Researcher **Curtis Bonk MS'87, PhD'89** has been named a distinguished professor of instructional systems technology in the School of Education at Indiana University. Bonk has published 20 books and is an expert in learning and technology. His recent research examines self-directed online learning and the use of generative AI tools for writing and language learning. He also cohosts the award-winning weekly podcast *Silver Lining for Learning,* which brings teachers together to discuss some of the biggest questions in education.

Way to go **Scott Seeley '87,** of High Point, North Carolina,

X-PLANATION
An *x* preceding a degree year indicates that the person did not complete, or has not yet completed, that degree at UW–Madison.

who was named president of the traffic safety device manufacturer Shur-Tite Products. The company creates products that help keep highways, bike lanes, and pedestrian crossings safe. Seeley is also a past chair and ex officio board member of the American Traffic Safety Services Association and a board member for the American Road and Transportation Builders Association, which advocates for infrastructure investment and policy across the transportation industry.

Congratulations to **Kevin Hargis '89** and his wife, Heidi, of Lodi, Wisconsin, who recently celebrated their 35th wedding anniversary. The couple's love story started at UW–Madison when they were introduced through mutual friends in 1988. In true Badger fashion, they met for coffee at Memorial Union for their first date. "I was leaning against a column by the Babcock ice cream counter when [Heidi] walked through the main entrance," Kevin says. "I knew she was special when she said hi and smiled." Today, the Hargises have four children and decades of memories together.

Our tams are off to **Colonel Paul Olsen '89,** who earned his doctorate in public administration and policy. Olsen spent 27 years in the military working with the Army Corps of Engineers. He then pursued a career in public service at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, where he currently serves as the executive director of programs and partnerships.

Writer **Ed Pavlić '89, MA'92** has been named the 2026 Guggenheim Fellow in American Literature. The fellowship will support his ongoing work on a literary biography of James Baldwin, which is under contract with Henry Holt and Company. Pavlić's work spans genres and often explores African American life and racial dynamics. He's written 13 books



COURTESY OF KAITLYNNE ROLING

Spin Cycle

Kaitlynne Roling '20's Ultimate Frisbee skills have taken her from success to success around the country.

The first thing to know about the Ultimate Frisbee career **Kaitlynne Roling '20** has built is that it was never meant to happen.

When she arrived on campus, she intended to play rugby and then soccer. But neither team would have her.

"When I didn't get onto the UW club soccer team, I went to Frisbee tryouts," she says. "The UW has two teams, Bella Donna, which is the A-team, and Atropa, which is the B-team. Bella almost didn't take me, but there was a person I'd gone to high school with, and she said, 'She's an athlete. We should take her.' And that was it."

Roling played cutter on the UW squad — "Cutters are like receivers in football," she says. She quickly established herself in the UW's Ultimate community and helped lead Bella Donna to the Division I championship tournaments in 2016 and 2019. She was nominated for the Callahan Award, the honor for the nation's most valuable women's Ultimate player.

When Roling graduated, she saw an opportunity to continue her career as a professional athlete. She landed a spot on the roster of the Milwaukee Monarchs of the Premier Ultimate League, helping that team win the Premier Ultimate League Midwest championship in 2021 and 2022. Then she moved to Seattle and joined squads in higher-ranking leagues. In 2023, she joined the roster of Seattle Tempest of the Western Ultimate League and helped lead the team to league championships in 2023 and 2026. She also played for the coed Team USA in Beach Ultimate, and her squad placed sixth in the 2025 world championship.

Keep in mind that "professional" Ultimate is hardly lucrative, and even star players need a day job to make ends meet. "I get paid for a season," Roling says, "but it's like $50." She also works as a high school Ultimate coach — her Seattle youth team won the U.S. Open girls' championship in 2025 — and manages events for the League of Conservation Voters. Still, those are merely means to support her Frisbee playing.

"Frisbee isn't my hobby," she says. "It's my life."

JOHN ALLEN



EMILY RENS FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SPY MUSEUM

Spy Expert

Sasha Ingber '06 uncovers the world of America's secret agents.

For more than a decade, journalist **Sasha Ingber '06** has told stories of unsung American heroes and the foreign threats they fight.

As the host of *SpyCast,* the long-running weekly video podcast of the International Spy Museum in Washington, DC, Ingber conducts hour-long interviews with espionage insiders such as the chair of the House Intelligence Committee, FBI counterintelligence agents, and the former head of the CIA's Special Activities Division, which runs covert operations.

On her Substack *HUMINT,* she digs into such topics as "Putin's paramilitary 2.0" and "Loneliness, China, and AI Recruiting." Ingber also appears regularly on the History Channel show *Secrets Declassified with David Duchovny* and is at work on another docuseries called *World's Most Secret Places.*

After graduation, she hoped to pursue directing and screenwriting. Instead, she landed a job as a writer at the State Department. After Russia seized Crimea and occupied the Donbas, she was assigned to a small team tasked with debunking an onslaught of Russian disinformation.

A year later, Ingber's team was "indefinitely frozen," which she says is "diplo-speak" for being shut down. She resigned and moved onto journalism roles with Smithsonian and NPR. Then she became the sole national security correspondent for Scripps News, covering the fall of Afghanistan, wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and entering a secret Manhattan "police station" China's government used to harass its expatriates.

In 2024, she made a gutsy decision. She founded her media company *HUMINT,* used credit card points to fly to Poland, and walked across the border into Ukraine. At a secret military base, she met adults and teenagers preparing for the front. "Their level of honor and dignity made me feel like I was meeting people from our Greatest Generation," she says.

While Ingber was in Kyiv, a Russian missile attack hit the country's largest children's hospital. "People were being pulled from the rubble," she recalls. She was moved by how many first responders showed up to help, seeing "the goodness of people in that moment of darkness."

"My interviews with American intelligence officers make me appreciate the people who are earnestly trying to keep our country safe," Ingber says. "It brings me a deeper level of understanding about how our government works. It's much more nuanced than people think."

Now that we are 25 years post-9/11, she says, "This is a time when terrorism seems to be forgotten. But everybody who works in counterterrorism thinks we need to be ever vigilant of this threat."

GEORGE SPENCER

and has been published in more than 60 magazines. In addition, Pavlić is a distinguished research professor of English and African American studies at the University of Georgia. He lives in Athens, Georgia, with his family.

Founder and CEO **Beth White '89,** of Austin, Texas, recently launched the Humanity in AI Awards, which recognize human resources and IT professionals who use AI to improve employee experiences. The awards also celebrate leaders who advocate for more responsible use of the technology and create AI experiences that are human-centered. White's company, MeBeBot, is an HR technology start-up that provides access to automated employee support and communications in more than 50 countries.

90s–00s

Chicago attorney **Erin Hines '91** was named a notable woman in law by *Crain's Chicago Business,* which recognizes women who have demonstrated excellence, leadership, and mentorship throughout their legal careers. Hines is the vice-chair of emerging data privacy trends at Cozen O'Connor. She defends clients across the country and leads litigation and compliance strategies in biometric privacy, pixel-related defense, and AI-based actions. In her pro bono practice, Hines has represented clients seeking asylum status under the Violence Against Women Act and has obtained legal status for several women faced with deportation.

Kris Carey '92 has joined Compeer Financial in Naperville, Illinois, as chief human resources officer. She has more than 25 years of experience in human resources and legal functions. She previously served in several leadership positions at Constellation Brands, including as executive vice president and chief human resources

officer, and she served in a senior counsel role at McDonald's Corporation. At Compeer, Carey oversees talent management, total rewards, learning and development, organizational culture, and long-term talent sustainability.

Shout out to **Ellen Levin MS'99,** the new deputy manager of the water enterprise at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. In her role, Levin oversees water infrastructure systems and public resource management. Her team provides long-term water planning support for the region, helps coordinate policies and water protections, and has studied the effect of climate change on water. Levin's fruitful career with the commission includes a previous role as acting deputy general manager for water.

Beth Kmetz-Armitage '00 has been named director of commercial development at Michigan Central in Detroit. Her work creates opportunities for new technologies, emerging companies, and economic growth in the city and helps the organization address barriers to mobility.

Kelly Kivland '01 has joined the University of Michigan Museum of Art as the deputy director of curatorial affairs. In her new role, Kivland leads the museum's curatorial vision and exhibition program and oversees residencies and commissions. She also stewards the museum's collection and acquisition strategies. "The museum can serve as a flexible connector linking artists, students, scholars, and neighbors in conversations they wouldn't be having otherwise," she says. Kivland previously worked with the Wexner Center for the Arts, the Dia Art Foundation, and Michigan Central Art in Detroit.

Attorney **Christian Krautkramer '02** has been named group general counsel for Telix Pharmaceuticals, Limited, which develops and commercializes cancer and rare disease detection methods and treatments. Krautkramer has more than 20 years of experience working in health care and law, and he'll now lead the company's legal, compliance, intellectual property, and corporate governance teams. He first joined the company in 2023 as the group deputy general counsel. Previously, he served as the chief compliance officer and associate general counsel at PathAI and in several roles with GE HealthCare. Krautkramer lives in Whitefish Bay, Wisconsin, with his wife, Alli, and his son, Jack.

Cattle expert **Kristin Paul '02** has been appointed executive secretary and chief executive officer of the American Jersey Cattle Association and National All-Jersey, Inc. Paul began her career with the U.S. Jersey organizations in 2002 as a Western Region program assistant, working with producers and supporting program implementation on farms. She then became the director of field services and managed a nationwide team of field staff. Paul served as the export coordinator for Jersey Marketing Service, and in 2021, she was named assistant secretary of the association. She also works with dairy producers in Wisconsin and Illinois and has represented the U.S. Jersey Association across the globe. She lives in Milton, Wisconsin, with her husband and their two children.

Michelle McCready '07 has been named deputy CEO of Reach Out and Read. The national nonprofit helps families make reading part of their routines through partnering with pediatric health care professionals and by providing books to children during doctor visits. McCready is focused on expanding the organization's national impact and helping millions of children integrate reading into their daily lives from a young age. She was previously the founding executive director of the nonprofit Wisconsin Appleseed and held executive roles at Child Care Aware of America. When she's not working, McCready enjoys spending summers with her family in Wisconsin and cheering on the U.S. Women's National Soccer Team.

DEATH NOTICES • NAME, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE, AND EMAIL UPDATES
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OBITUARIES
Brief death notices for Wisconsin Alumni Association (WAA) members and friends appear in *Badger Insider,* WAA's magazine for its members. You may submit full-length obituaries for online posting at **uwalumni.com/alumni-notes/submit.**

10s–20s

Happy first wedding anniversary to **Chelsea '12** and **Justin '14 Blair** (below) of Los Angeles. The couple married in Madison at the Hamel Music Center and enjoyed a UW–Madison-style



BEECHER MEDIA

evening of merriment that included good music, great food, and lots of laughter. Although it was only 50 degrees outside, the newlyweds were so elated, they jumped into Lake Mendota after the ceremony. And there's more to celebrate: Chelsea recently launched a company called Cryptic Camera Bags. Best wishes to these Badger sweethearts!

City planner **Christine Scott Thomson MS'20** and Gregory Thomson of the San Francisco Bay Area are headed to Iceland. They plan to reconnect with friends from graduate school and to learn about Iceland's university and city planning.

Sarah Gerarden '21 (shown on next page) is staying cool as the winter facilities engineer at the McMurdo Station in



COURTESY OF DEREK HILDEBRANDT

Buckys Helping Buckys

Alumni plan a scholarship to cover tuition for the mascots each year.

In 1997, **Derek Hildebrandt '93,** a former Bucky Badger mascot, started the Greater Bucky Open because he wanted to give back to the university. Hildebrandt donates his time to organize the golfing event and related activities that raise money for the American Family Children's Hospital and has recently provided $1,000 scholarships to the students who bring Bucky Badger to life each year.

Those awards were especially critical during the COVID-19 pandemic. As recipient **Alex Nelson '23** wrote in 2020, "Thanks to your scholarship, I didn't need to put any extra financial pressure on my family, and I really can't put into words how much that means to me."

Because the time demands on the mascots leave little room for conventional part-time jobs, Hildebrandt realized that these students could use additional support. "They devote many hours a week to practices, conditioning, sporting events, and a ton of nonsporting appearances," he says. "And it's not like the students can monetize name, image, and likeness opportunities as other athletes can."

So Hildebrandt and fellow members of the Bucky Badger Mascot Alumni Association (shown above at Camp Randall Stadium) partnered with the UW Foundation to create an endowed fund with a goal of raising $2 million to establish eight endowed scholarships for the mascot team — scholarships that will cover in-state tuition (currently $12,166). The fund has raised about $90,000 so far.

Hildebrandt was thrilled that UW Athletics recognized former Bucky mascots on the field during last year's football game in celebration of Bucky's 85th birthday. He's also grateful for the department's long-standing support of the Greater Bucky Open and the Bucky mascot association.

Now a senior vice president at Pixelogic in Los Angeles, Hildebrandt enjoyed his "two glorious years" being Bucky and says, "I just wanted to give back something to the mascots." When the students graduate and attend the Greater Bucky Open, he gives each one a plaque. "They get recognized in person. So it's really just a Bucky lovefest."

Hildebrandt knows every former mascot from the past 30 years, mostly from their participation in the Greater Bucky Open. "They're all such unique, enthusiastic, energetic people," he says. "It's just a fun bunch to be around." He adds that it's nice that the Bucky alumni group gets to interact with the current students, "just so the students can see like, wow, this is a unique kind of fraternity that they're part of."

For more on the mascot scholarships, visit supportbucky.org.

NIKI DENISON



Antarctica. She first supported scientific research at the station as the construction coordinator for the carpentry shop, and she will continue to work for the program when she redeploys to the States. Prior to her time at the South Pole, Gerarden worked for Walt Disney World and contributed to Seattle's light rail system.

Bravo to **Sophia Abrams '22,** who worked as a production assistant on the HBO docuseries *Seen & Heard: The History of Black Television,* which chronicles the history of Black representation in Hollywood and how Black artists shaped the medium. For the project, she sorted through archives, tracked down rare television footage, and transcribed interviews with filmmakers. Abrams now serves as the collections research assistant for the Bronzeville Center for the Arts in Milwaukee and is wrapping up a coming-of-age film she wrote and coproduced called *Shifting Space*.

Harshet Anand '25 of Milwaukee is taking some of the stress out of apartment hunting. He recently launched the app Rentle to help college students find housing. Anand created the app after feeling overwhelmed when securing off-campus housing as a student. The app currently serves the Madison area, but Anand hopes it will someday be the go-to platform for college students across the country searching for apartments.

Like Ted Lasso, Blake McCoy MA'23 thinks you should start your day with a biscuit.



GETTY IMAGES

Hog Wild

William Harley 1907 turned a motorized bicycle into a national icon.

When three Milwaukee friends first put together a motorized bicycle, it needed a name. Since the motorbike was originally his idea, **William Harley 1907** got top billing. They called it a Harley-Davidson.

Before they cofounded what would be the world's largest motorcycle manufacturer, Harley and Arthur Davidson were next-door neighbors on 38th Street in Milwaukee, where they spent many childhood hours tinkering with bicycles and engines in the Davidson family basement.

Taking his interests to work at age 15, Harley began as a cycle-fitter and draftsman for a high-end bicycle maker, Meiselbach Manufacturing Company. Soon, he joined Davidson to work at metal-fabricator Barth Manufacturing Company.

Along with Davidson's brother Walter, a mechanic, the three combined their industrial knowledge to sell their first motorcycle in 1903. That same year, seeking more engineering know-how, Harley enrolled at the University of Wisconsin. He focused on internal combustion engines, even though the School of Engineering labs had few, if any, gas engines to study. The lone course in gas engineering was a three-fifths-credit elective.

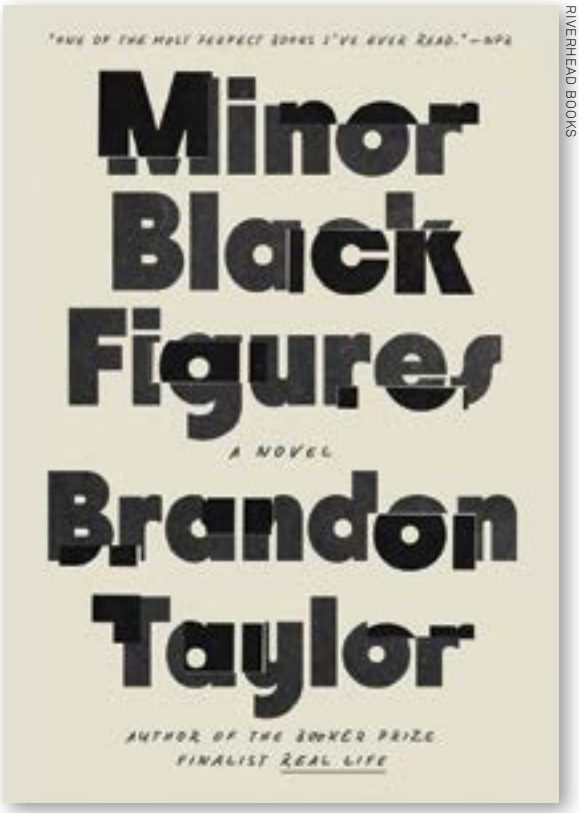
To pay for college, Harley waited tables, worked as a draftsman for a Madison architect, and created lab equipment for the Department of Psychology. As a senior, he was part of a group selected to test a new steam turbine for Chicago's Commonwealth Edison Company. He earned his mechanical engineering degree with honors, and then he returned to Milwaukee, ready to build on a design he had created as a student. This would become his patented two-cylinder, V-twin engine, capable of speeds of up to 60 miles per hour.

William Harley (right) takes a partner for a spin. The man in the sidecar is Bill Davidson, who joined the firm Harley started with Bill's brothers, Arthur and Walter. The Harley-Davidson Motor Company incorporated in 1907. The fish received no compensation.

Just three months after his graduation, the Harley-Davidson Motor Company was incorporated. Harley was chief engineer and treasurer.

An accomplished and enthusiastic motorcyclist, Harley was the company's ideas man for more than 30 years. One of his 90 patents was the 1916 "step-starter," which eliminated pedals and moved motorcycles into a new category. On the business side, he led Harley-Davidson's sales of almost 75,000 cycles to the U.S. War Department during World Wars I and II. He remained the company's chief engineer until his death in 1943.

KATE KAIL DIXON '01, MA'07



RIVERHEAD BOOKS

Taylor's latest novel is a love story set amid a New York City summer.

Blank Canvas, Big City

In *Minor Black Figures,* Brandon Taylor MS'17 paints a portrait of an artist seeking authenticity in the modern age.

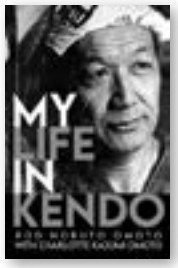
The heavy heat and heightened sense of possibility that define New York City summers create a fitting backdrop for a young painter navigating artistic and existential questions in *Minor Black Figures*, the latest novel from **Brandon Taylor MS'17.**

The book centers on Wyeth, a queer Black painter splitting his time between odd jobs in New York City's art world and the shared studio where he maintains his own artistic practice. Stymied by a creative block, Wyeth moves languidly through highbrow gallery openings, interactions with a crowded cast of studiomates, runs through Central Park, and even a romance with a former priest. All the while, he grapples with what it means to be a Black artist in contemporary America and in the internet age.

"I wanted to write about a painter coming to terms with his own political expression when the very fact of political expression can sometimes feel like a pose or a gesture," Taylor wrote in a 2025 essay on his Substack, *Sweater Weather*. But to characterize the book by that description alone would be to subject it to the kind of essentializing its protagonist abhors.

"It's a book about painting and cinema and the gaze. It's about COVID. It's about New York. It's about the fall of *Roe*. It's about protest. It's about silliness. … It's a book about all that stuff and also about nothing," Taylor writes. "To me, it's a love story."

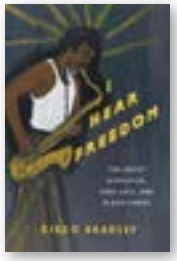
Taylor is an award-winning author whose debut novel, *Real Life,* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize. He is also a faculty member in New York University's graduate creative writing program.



My Life in Kendo

CHARLOTTE OMOTO PHD'79

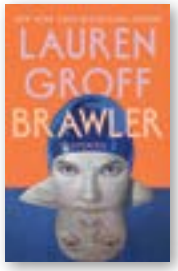
Omoto edited this memoir of her father, Rod Nobuto Omoto, and his devotion to the Japanese martial art kendo. Born in Hawaii, her father studied kendo in Japan as a young man before being drafted into the Japanese army in 1942. Kendo guided him through his service, including the aftermath of Hiroshima, and through the rest of his life as a student and advocate of kendo in the Pacific Northwest, where he eventually achieved the advanced rank of seventh dan. Charlotte Omoto is a professor emerita of biology at Washington State University.



I Hear Freedom: The Great Migration, Free Jazz, and Black Power

CISCO BRADLEY '99, MA'06, PHD'10

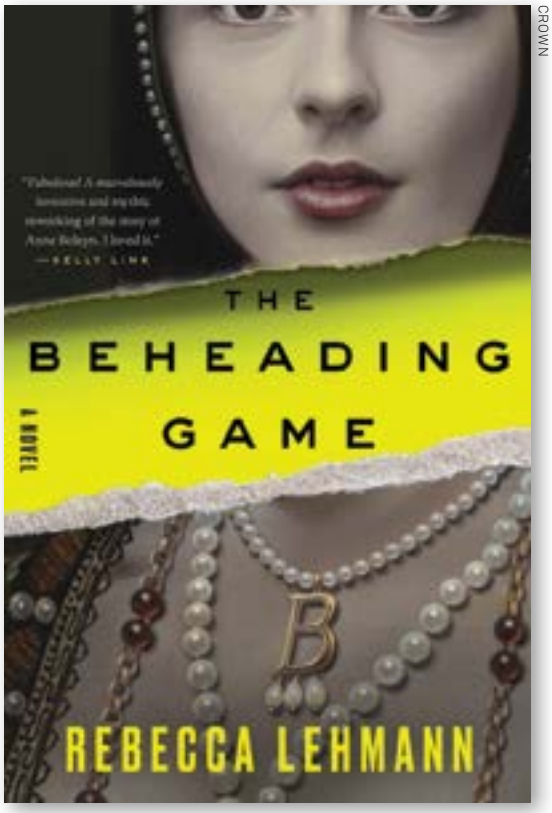
In the 1960s, musicians in Midwestern Steel Belt cities channeled a social, cultural, and political moment into free jazz, a radical new sound forged from the Black experience. In this book, Bradley traces the roots of free jazz through Southern musical traditions brought north by the Great Migration, postwar urban renewal efforts, and the politics and aesthetics of the Black Power movement. Bradley is a professor of history at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York.



Brawler

LAUREN GROFF MFA'06

In her third short-story collection, *New York Times* best-selling author Groff presents nine people confronting the internal battles that define the human experience. Spanning time, place, age, class, and adversity, the stories follow ordinary people — a high-school swimmer, a grieving mother — as they walk fine lines while contending with extraordinary circumstances.



CROWN

Lehmann's revisionist history doesn't save Boleyn, but it also doesn't stop her.

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A Queen's Revenge

Rebecca Lehmann '03 offers ill-fated Anne Boleyn a chance to change history in her debut novel, *The Beheading Game.*

In 1536, Anne Boleyn, second wife of King Henry VIII, was executed on charges of treason, incest, and adultery. In *The Beheading Game* by **Rebecca Lehmann '03,** Boleyn awakens hours after her execution with her head in her lap and one thing on her mind: revenge.

In the book, as in history, Anne falls out of favor with the king when she fails to produce a male heir, bearing only a daughter, Elizabeth. In real life, Elizabeth was eventually restored to the line of succession and became Queen Elizabeth I. But in *The Beheading Game,* Anne awakens knowing only that the king intends to wed her former lady in waiting, and that an heir produced from their union would threaten Elizabeth's claim to the throne.

Anne reattaches her head and embarks on a quest to kill King Henry before he can father another heir. Disguised as a commoner and aided by a local prostitute, she learns more in death about the realities of 16th-century London than she ever did during her life as a noblewoman and queen.

"In Lehmann's brilliant hands, ferocious, feminist Anne turns from hunted to hunter, from disdained to loved, a transformation that is pure poetry," writes V. V. Ganeshananthan, author of *Brotherless Night*. "If you have ever wanted better for Anne Boleyn, this unlikely love story is for you."

The Beheading Game was longlisted for the Crown Award for debut fiction from the Historical Writers' Association. Lehmann is an associate professor of English and gender and women's studies at Saint Mary's College in Notre Dame, Indiana.



American Fantasy
EMMA STRAUB MFA'08

When Annie boards a cruise ship full of middle-aged women and the '90-era boy band they worshiped in their youth, it's to appease her sister. But swept up in the intoxicating nostalgia of teenage fandom, Annie taps into a part of herself long buried by time, life, and divorce. Emboldened by her newfound freedom, Annie is open to every new possibility — including a band member searching for a real connection. *American Fantasy* is Straub's sixth novel.



The Irish Goodbye: Micro-Memoirs
BETH ANN FENNELLY

In her first collection of genre-defying "micro-memoirs," Fennelly introduced readers to short-form storytelling that combines the "compression of poetry with the truth-telling of nonfiction." Fennelly revisits this form in her latest collection, which intersperses flash nonfiction about life's simple moments with long-form odes to the people she's shared her life with. Fennelly was the 1998–99 Diane Middlebrook Poetry Fellow in the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing.



Banished Citizens: A History of the Mexican American Women Who Endured Repatriation
MARLA RAMÍREZ

From 1921 to 1944, nearly one million Mexicans living in the United States were deported in an act of "repatriation," though 60 percent of those removed were U.S. citizens. Ramírez draws upon oral histories and archives to illustrate the lasting effects of this forced removal on generations of ethnic Mexicans. Ramírez is an associate professor of history and Chicanx/e and Latinx/e studies at the UW.

MEGAN PROVOST '20



ALTHEA DOTZOUR

Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall

The UW's new humanities building is a "beehive of activity" for students of every major.

I arrived at Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall on the first day of the semester the way I used to show up for a 9:30 a.m. lecture when I was a UW–Madison undergrad: fresh off the bus and with seconds to spare. Fortunately, I wasn't there to attend a class but to watch current students enter the UW's new humanities building for the very first time.

Lead donors **Marv '68, JD'71** and **Jeff '72 Levy,** who named Levy Hall in honor of their late parents, imagined it as a "beehive of activity," and on opening day, buzz it did.

"This is a new building," one student announced as she gave the person on her video call a phone's-eye view of the light fixtures that drip from the ceiling into the airy central staircase.

"Has she been on our campus yet?" a friend asked. "It's nicer than any campus in Europe."

I snagged a seat in one of the hive's many comfortably furnished alcoves and communal spaces, where busy bees tapped away at laptops or enjoyed a moment of respite on the semester's hectic first day. The surrounding corridors teemed with people, freshmen and faculty united as novices navigating the new space. Over the din, calls of "Whole milk latte!" and "Strawberry-banana smoothie!" rang out from the baristas at the first floor's Hosto Café.

I didn't ask any of the students I chatted with that morning whether they'd been to campuses in Europe, but they shared equally high praise for the UW's new hub for the College of Letters & Science.

Sophia Buckholtz x'27, a senior majoring in journalism and history, watched the demolition on North Park and West Johnson Streets that made way for Levy Hall from her dorm window as a freshman and feels fortunate to have a class for her medieval studies certificate in the finished space.

High ceilings hung with tasteful light fixtures, expansive windows that provide ample natural light, and comfortably furnished common areas create an inviting atmosphere throughout the newly opened Levy Hall.

"It is really the high standard of a new building here," Buckholtz says. "It feels open and spacious and bright."

I met **Sri Iyer x'30,** a freshman intent on studying chemistry and global health, as she was waiting to attend the first class of her UW career. Already, she had decided Levy Hall would be her go-to spot for study sessions and morning coffees.

If Levy Hall's first day of school was any indication, it will be a home not just for the humanities, but for students of every academic pursuit; for the interdisciplinary interests that define a UW education; and for the opportunities to explore those interests in a place designed for collaboration.

In short, Levy Hall is as bright as its open corridors and the people who fill them.

MEGAN PROVOST '20

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Photo by Jeff Miller / UW–Madison