

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE

# Letters & Science

FALL 2022



FLOCK SONG  
*page 18*



Dr. Lauren Ritters' lab maintains a breezy aviary for European starlings (the lab's research subjects) on the roof of Birge Hall.





# Contents

DEPARTMENTS

- 02 @L&S
- 03 From the Dean
- 04 Here & Now
- 06 Asked & Answered  
PhD student Bailey Murphy  
ponders whether Wisconsin's forests  
can be managed for carbon.
- 08 Explore & Discover  
FACULTY Repatriating  
the Ancestors  
TEACHING Teaching  
Through Culture  
RESEARCH The Science of Art  
CAREERS Sweet Success  
CULTURE Uncomfortable  
Truths  
STUDENTS To Harlem,  
the Lower East  
Side and Beyond
- 30 News & Notes
- 32 Life & Work  
Former Facebook exec  
Katie Harbath ('03) now helps  
nonprofits navigate its pitfalls.
- 34 Give & Transform  
Martha and Charles Casey  
champion the people and  
programs that spark progress  
at UW-Madison.
- 36 Sift & Winnow  
Professor Emeritus  
William Cronon reflects  
on a delayed retirement  
and an impactful career.

FEATURES

18

Flock Song

In fall, songbirds make a joyful noise. UW neuroscientists are studying starlings for insights into the brain's natural motivation and reward systems.  
**BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL**

24

Policy  
Powerhouse

Approaching its 40th anniversary, the La Follette School of Public Affairs has never been in a better place to capitalize on its potential.  
**BY AARON R. CONKLIN**



PHOTO: REDUNNLEV / GETTY

Last summer, the La Follette School of Public Affairs hosted a four-day training session with staff members from both sides of the aisle in the Wisconsin Assembly.



# #WeAreLS



It's HOT today – why not go swimming with friends by the Terrace this week like these students! One of the most popular piers in Madison, Lake Mendota hosts 20,000+ visitors annually!

@UWMadisonLS June 20, 2022



Have you met our 2022-23 Dean's Ambassadors yet? 31 L&S students ready to help us build community with our students and alumni and help us meet our strategic goals. We can't wait to get started!

@UWMadisonLS July 19, 2022



A few scenes from the [Re]Connect event we hosted Thursday night for some of our alumni of color. Dean Eric Wilcots and UW Marching Band leader Corey Pompey stopped by to chat and field questions, and a great time was had by all.

@UWMadisonLS July 16, 2022



It's the ultimate backyard question: How many times should you flip your burgers on the grill? Math professor Jean-Luc Thiffeault developed a mathematical model that provides a possible answer.

@UWMadisonLS August 25, 2022

## Letters&Science

FALL 2022

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FROM THE DEAN

# Making Progress



**There is tremendous power** in the research carried out in the College of Letters & Science, where we are addressing and tackling the most important challenges facing our communities, the state, the nation, and the world. The stories in this issue illustrate the amazing variety of investigative work underway in L&S, from exploring the carbon-sequestering potential of forests in northern Wisconsin, to uncovering difficult truths about mob violence and policing in urban areas. For this, we need innovative thinking and diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Our departments are actively recruiting and retaining diverse students and faculty in order to build the pipeline of scholars dedicated to solving society's toughest problems.

My own career as an astronomer was shaped by my experience of carrying out research as an undergraduate student. I am forever grateful to the advisor who offered me the chance, as a first-year undergraduate student, to actually do science. Our new L&S STEM Scholars program is a network of research and career-based opportunities designed to encourage first- and second-year students in traditionally underrepresented groups to pursue majors in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). A group of these students engaged in high-impact opportunities this summer, working with faculty eager to share their methods and practices, as well as the excitement of discovery.

In that spirit, our faculty, with support of some amazing alumni, are providing world-class opportunities for our students. In this issue, you'll learn about a fantastic field trip to New York City, with students from the Department of African American Studies and the Center for Jewish Studies, that highlights the impact of cross-cultural exchange.

I'm committed to expanding the Wisconsin Idea through the lens of equity and inclusion. One of our feature stories highlights the La Follette School of Public Affairs, where experts in policy are training the next generation to understand and create policies that address climate change, energy use, equitable housing, and much more. Another story highlights the work of anthropology professor Sissel Schroeder and curator Liz Leith, who are collaborating with Native tribes to repatriate remains of ancestors and sacred items.

Finally, our cover story is about joy — or, more accurately, the neural pathways responsible for intrinsic reward that become activated when we gather and talk in groups. Professor of Integrative Biology Lauren Ritters studies songbirds to learn more about the rewards of social interaction. Her work resonates strongly with me after more than two years of a pandemic. Curiosity-driven research is so integrally important to deepening our understanding of ourselves, our society and the natural world around us.

Stay tuned for updates on the facility front. We have broken ground on a new building for our School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (home to the L&S departments of Computer Sciences, Statistics and the Information School). We will also break ground in 2024 on Irving and Dorothy Levy Hall, a new academic building for the college with state-of-the-art learning and community spaces. Many generous supporters are making these buildings a reality.

Thank you for all you do to keep L&S strong and growing. We couldn't do our important work without you.

On, Wisconsin!

**Eric M. Wilcots**

*Dean and Mary C. Jacoby Professor of Astronomy,  
College of Letters & Science*





## Film Festival Returns Home

**The Wisconsin Film Festival** recently returned to its roots in the Department of Communication Arts, just ahead of its 25th anniversary this spring. For one glorious week every April, the festival presents 150 films to 25,000 viewers, celebrating the best in local and global films. Supported by filmmaker Q&As, panel discussions and educational workshops for children, the festival features captivating stories from every corner of Wisconsin and far beyond. It complements the UW Cinematheque — also housed in Communication Arts — which offers free screenings year-round of restorations, rediscoveries and contemporary global cinema. “Vilas Hall is full of people who care about moving images and compelling stories that reflect and inspire the global community,” says Kelley Conway, a professor of communication arts and festival director. “With our expertise in film programming and our vibrant academic programs, we’re the ideal home for the Wisconsin Film Festival.”



1

## A Sense of Belonging

**On September 9-10**, the College of Letters & Science invited its alumni of color back to campus for a historic weekend of community-building and in-depth conversations about how to create a sense of belonging at UW-Madison. The two-day reunion featured special tours of campus, a panel discussion on thriving (rather than just surviving), a reception on Friday and, on Saturday, a lively tailgate at Union South featuring DJ Martinez White (BA, '10) and Bucky Badger. At the reception, new L&S Board of Visitors member P.J. Jayachandran (BA, '95) told the crowd, “There is no better place to be than UW-Madison at this time of year — and it’s an honor and a privilege to be part of the journey towards advising on DEI.” Provost Karl Scholz spoke about the difference between “welcoming” and “belonging,” and Dean Eric Wilcots wrapped up his remarks by urging alumni to stay involved. “We need you all on this journey,” he said.

m Festival



ILLUSTRATION: CHRISTINA KING





Left to right:  
Jonathan Bryan,  
Dean Eric Wilcots,  
Chancellor Jennifer  
Mnookin and Ahmia  
Williams-Walsh

3

## Warm Welcome

**UW-Madison's new chancellor**, Jennifer Mnookin, assumed her duties on August 4, starting her day by meeting with UW-Madison student leaders and, as the weeks rolled on, immersing herself in her new community. In September, she joined L&S Dean's Ambassadors (a group of engaged students who meet regularly with Dean Eric Wilcots to offer their perspectives and learn more about L&S) for an eye-opening tour of Lake Mendota aboard the *Limnos II*, a research vessel owned by the L&S Center for Limnology. UW's 30th chancellor is already known for her listening skills, commitment to a diverse and well-rounded community, and support for interdisciplinary scholarship.

4

## Mapping Native Routes

**Travel routes** used by the Ho-Chunk Nation wind their way through the Dejepe (Four Lakes) region, which includes Madison. Some have morphed into modern roads and walking paths while many exist only in scattered historical records and living memory.

Working with Tribal Historic Preservation Officer Bill Quackenbush, anthropology PhD student Megan Binkley is combining historical records, oral histories and archaeological data into a map of Ho-Chunk travel routes and trails throughout time. She's collaborating with Jessie Conaway, in the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, on this work, which developed into an internship with UniverCity Alliance, an L&S initiative

that links scholars with the community.

Quackenbush gave Binkley older maps that show hand-drawn segments of Ho-Chunk travel routes, and Binkley used software platforms to turn them into digital files.

"Many of these travel routes have had multiple lives," Binkley said. "I was struck by the fact that I probably walked on some of these places and had no idea of the depth of the history of them."

For some, that history is ever-present. Quackenbush's mother prefers to drive on Highway 12 because it was a former Indian trail.

"Some people enjoy reflecting on the deep heritage of an area and how our environment has changed throughout our lifetimes," Quackenbush said.



PHOTO: TIMOTHY MULHOLLAND / ALAMY

5

Number  
of new  
incoming  
first-year  
students at  
UW-Madison  
this fall —  
a record

# 8,635

'22


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# Can Wisconsin's forests be managed for carbon?

BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL





**I**n order to keep our planet livable, humans must not only stop carbon dioxide from entering the atmosphere but also remove much of the carbon that's already present, according to the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). While new technologies are springing up to do just that, scientists like Bailey Murphy are taking a hard look at an age-old solution: forests.

Murphy fell in love with forests as a child growing up in Valdez, Alaska, where her family did plenty of hiking and camping in the backcountry. But it wasn't until she worked as an undergraduate researcher in the HJ Andrews Experimental Forest in Blue River, Oregon that she got interested in the possibilities of managing forests for maximum carbon sequestration.

"I thought, we are harvesting and managing these forests, and what is the impact?" Murphy says. "How could management mitigate future climate change impacts?"

At UW-Madison, Murphy joined the Ecometeorology Lab led by Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences professor Ankur Desai and began gathering data in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest as part of the lab's intensive field campaign known as CHEESEHEAD ("Chequamegon Heterogeneous Ecosystem Energy-balance Study Enabled by a High-density Extensive Array of Detectors"). As a temperate Midwestern forest, the Chequamegon-Nicolet features a mix of coniferous and deciduous species. Carbon cycling here is different from what would be seen in a high-latitude boreal forest or a temperate rain forest in the Pacific Northwest. As Murphy points out, most of our knowledge about long-term forest carbon dynamics is drawn from old-growth forests.

"Our Wisconsin forests were largely clearcut with the arrival of European settlers," she says. "The oldest stands are just now getting to the 200-, 250-year-old mark. It is exciting to be reaching this point and be able to re-evaluate some of the things we thought we knew, and adding to what we didn't know, about carbon sequestration in these forests."

Murphy worked with other researchers (and several high-tech instruments) to gather data about forest structure and function at nine sites in the Chequamegon-Nicolet.

What they found was that the vertical structure of the forest was the most important variable in predicting its function (its ability to "suck carbon out of the air and turn it into biomass," as Murphy puts it). The more varied the structure, the better the forest performed.

"Does the forest change as you move from the ground up? Are multiple canopies and age classes present? Wisconsin forests are managed with a high degree of heterogeneity, which helps them capitalize on their resources of light, water and air," she says.

Murphy is now working on extrapolating her results. She's feeding her data, as well as climate modeling outputs, into a dynamic ecosystem model that will show whether the conclusions she's reached will hold at other sites in other temperate forests across the U.S. If so, they could possibly be used to influence policy at the state and even federal level. There's an economic angle, as well. If Wisconsin forests have the potential to perform well as carbon sinks, could private landowners be incentivized to tweak their management strategies to maximize this function?

"We are seeing carbon markets popping up everywhere," Murphy says. "This is something that the state of Wisconsin is really interested in exploring." ■





## FACULTY

# Repatriating the Ancestors

Anthropology colleagues are working with tribes to return the remains of ancestors and sacred objects.

BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL

**B**urial mounds created by Native people can be found throughout Wisconsin. Rolling softly along high points in the landscape and often shaded by ancient bur oak trees, intact burial mounds contain both ancestral remains and funerary objects. We know this because so many of Wisconsin's mounds have been desecrated, and the remains and objects inside them destroyed or removed to museums, private collectors and, yes, universities.

Professor of Anthropology Sissel Schroeder has been working with Wisconsin's tribes since 2006 to ensure repatriation of Native American ancestors from museum collections to their modern-day descendants. In 2021,

Schroeder and her colleague Liz Leith, who curates the anthropology department's collections, partnered with four federally recognized tribes, including the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, the Forest County Potawatomi Community, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, and the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, to repatriate 33 ancestors and 20 associated funerary objects from the department's collections back to southern Wisconsin. Their work was guided by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), which requires institutions that receive federal funds to report on their inventory of ancestral remains, sacred and funerary objects, and objects of cultural patrimony (which belong to the tribe as a whole, not to just one individual), and consult with tribes on repatriation of objects and remains from UW and other collections.



Native  
American  
burial mounds  
on the path  
to Picnic Point

PHOTO: JEFF MILLER

**“What’s  
important  
about the  
funerary objects  
is the meaning  
they had for past  
peoples and why  
they ended up  
in the grave.  
Native people  
may recognize  
aspects of  
these objects  
that we have no  
understanding  
of and that  
they never share  
with us.”**

SISSEL SCHROEDER



Professor of  
Anthropology  
Sissel Schroeder

But for Schroeder and Leith, these efforts extend well past NAGPRA requirements.

“We see this as a human rights issue for the tribes,” says Schroeder, who balances her repatriation work with her teaching, research and other outreach activities.

Leith, who previously served as the Collection Manager of Archaeology at the Sam Noble Museum of Natural History in Oklahoma, concurs. “We want to meet basic compliance but also build relationships and take an ethical approach that should have been followed all along,” she says.

This involves quarterly meetings with the Wisconsin Inter-Tribal Repatriation Committee (WITRC), a group of representatives from each of the federally recognized tribes (often they are tribal historians or elders). It means securing grant funding from the national NAGPRA office that helps pay for the heavy earth-moving equipment

needed to prepare a resting place for long-unburied ancestors and associated funerary objects, or to compensate for travel by tribal representatives. It means creating a schedule and organizing the events leading up to repatriation. It means Leith and Schroeder listening carefully and being attuned to not only what needs to be done to help the tribes but also what the tribes have to say and, equally important, what they don’t say.

“This is really painful, emotional work for the tribes, thinking of the many generations of their ancestors whose remains and associated funerary objects were disturbed,” Schroeder says. “What’s important about the funerary objects is the meaning they had for past peoples and why they ended up in the grave. Native people may recognize aspects of these objects that we have no understanding of and that they never share with us.”

Repatriation from the Department of Anthropology’s own collections largely pertains to remains obtained by past faculty and graduate students at the university who may have participated in, or been called to assist with, excavations undertaken before 1985. That’s when a state law in Wisconsin extended equal protection to all human burial places. Often, items were acquired through salvage operations (a site would be destroyed through, say, construction of a gravel mine, and faculty would rush to save what they could, to prevent items and remains from being destroyed and lost to future generations). But often, ancestors and objects would remain on museum shelves “in perpetuity,” untouched by researchers since being pulled from the earth.

While almost all of the ancestral remains and funerary objects at UW-Madison (in accordance with NAGPRA) have been repatriated, the department continues to manage additional archaeological material, all curated by Leith, and many are used for teaching, research, exhibition and public programming.

Repatriation work is hard and can be expensive, and without their partnership, neither Schroeder nor Leith could have achieved what they did in 2021, nor could they hope to continue doing so much in the future as they work with tribes on issues beyond NAGPRA.

“Each one of us brings a different perspective to each case,” says Leith. “But we both have the same end goal.”

“And the tribes share that end goal,” Schroeder says. “We all work together as partners.” ■



## TEACHING

# Teaching Through Culture

In Juan Egea's classes there are no glazed eyes, bored whispers or furtive Snapchatting. The popular professor of Spanish and Portuguese captures attention and holds it by using humor, vivid imagery and even a bit of role-playing. "I know when they're with me," Egea declares. "I can feel it."

INTERVIEW BY  
MARY ELLEN GABRIEL

**I** teach a large survey class, almost 200 students — Spanish 223: Introduction to Hispanic Cultures. It is one of the few large courses taught entirely in Spanish. It's a little bit of a monster, covering from medieval times to the present in Spain and Latin America.

**I sometimes think** of the class like a TV show: content, commercial, more content. We study a lot of history, and I introduce questions about cultural identity. I add actual television commercials: one for Coca-Cola in Latin America, for example. It's an awful commercial, very paternalistic, and it displays the "white savior" complex that we talk about in class. Sometimes students complain that there is too much history, but they have to learn what happened in order to understand what it means today.

**I may step into a persona**, such as Hernán Cortes, one of the conquistadors. He is one of the worst figures in history, responsible for the massacre of millions of indigenous people. Afterwards, when I am out of character, we discuss this event in history and how to think and talk about it now. Do we apply the morals of today to the 16th century? We connect to moments of trouble in our own country.

**In another course**, Spanish 361: Culture and the City, we study five cities in Spain: Toledo, Barcelona, Madrid, Seville, Bilbao. They watch one film about each city, and I introduce short stories, video, essays, images. It's a way to form a more concrete understanding of Spanish culture. We talk about tri-culturalism in medieval Toledo, where you can still see the Jewish quarters, the Moorish quarters. There is now a tourist guide for Toledo called "The Magic of Three Cultures," but back then it wasn't always so magical. We study stereotypes — Seville is sun and fun and flamenco, Barcelona is beauty and architecture. But Barcelona has a problem with over-tourism, and we talk about what that means and how the city is trying to counter it. Bilbao has the Guggenheim Museum, which everyone knows, but what is the impact of that museum on the industrial Basque community where it is located? I have them take a virtual walking tour through the heart of Madrid and ask: What does it feel like to be a foreigner visiting a city?

**In a third class**, Spanish 468: Imagine in Spain, I teach about crises in contemporary Spain — which is my current research area. Through photography, video and documentary films, we examine financial, humanitarian and health crises from the 1980s to today.

**My secret agenda** for my students: I want them to reflect on themselves, their own culture. Think about the music and images and film genres that define your country. Ask: How does this class on Spanish culture speak to me, as a young American, at this moment? ■





*The Miraculous  
Draught of  
Fishes* tapestry,  
ca. 1630

RESEARCH

## The Science of Art

Analyzing the chemical composition of an ancient tapestry, graduate student Erin Birdsall discovered her niche.

BY CATHERINE STEFFEL

**I**n 2020, chemistry graduate student Erin Birdsall received a unique opportunity — to live the life of a conservation chemist as an intern at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA). Birdsall spent the summer of 2020 working on an icon of High Renaissance art: *The Miraculous Draught of Fishes*, a reproduction (ca. 1630) of one of ten tapestries in Raphael's *Acts of the Apostles* series.

The museum acquired the 400-year-old tapestry in 2016 and received funding from a Bank of America art conservation grant to study and restore the work of art, which had suffered exposure to light and gravity during years of exhibition. Birdsall learned about the internship opportunity when Gregory Smith, a senior scientist at the IMA, visited the UW–Madison chemistry department and mentioned that the museum was on the lookout for interns.

“I’ve always been interested in art history, and when I was an undergrad at Middlebury College, I learned that you could work as a scientist in an art museum, so that career path was in the back of my mind,” Birdsall says.

*The Miraculous Draught of Fishes* depicts a story regarded as a founding moment in Christianity: Jesus tells Peter to cast his net into the water, after which Peter and his fellow apostles make a miraculous catch of fish. The original *Acts of the Apostles* tapestries were hung in the Sistine Chapel.

Birdsall helped perform state-of-the-art dye analyses on the work. As an initial step of the restoration process, dye analyses explore different tapestry samples to understand what dyes and mordants (inorganic salts that help dyes bind to fibers) were used to make a tapestry and to identify colors and fibers that might be used for contemporary repairs.

“The data will tell you if there’s iron in the dye, or aluminum, or nickel, and then you’ll get these mass spectra that are essentially fingerprints. Because dye molecules are relatively well-characterized, you could say that a blue color was created with an indigo



dye, for example,” says Birdsall. “That allows you to learn what common dyes and mordants were being used at the time the tapestry was woven.”

Birdsall used three techniques: gas chromatography mass spectrometry (GCMS), x-ray fluorescence and liquid chromatography mass spectrometry (LCMS). Each technique generates spectra that provide information about components in the dyes at specific locations on a tapestry.

Birdsall’s data helped identify dyes from several samples that were not natural to the early 1600s, suggesting previous repairs. And her comparative analyses demonstrated that equivalent results can be obtained using both GCMS and LCMS, hopefully making similar studies available to museums that might only have a GCMS system. After Birdsall finished her internship, the tapestry underwent restoration in Europe and is now actively installed in the IMA’s galleries.

After defending her PhD this spring, Birdsall accepted a postdoctoral fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution. There, she is working on a preventive conservation project with the Museum Conservation Institute and the National Museum of the American Indian.

“This postdoc will help me finish my training in the field of heritage science [also known as conservation science],” Birdsall says. “The internship at IMA really cemented what I want to do in my career.”

Funding for Birdsall’s internship was made possible through the Biotechnology Training Program (BTP), a National Institutes of Health program based in the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS). ■



The Career Closet at SuccessWorks offers professional attire for interviews, internships, jobs and networking.

CAREERS

## Sweet Success

With a founding goal of “transforming career services for all L&S students,” SuccessWorks is celebrating five years’ worth of vision, growth and impact.

BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL

**I**t took time — five years, to be exact. It took digging deep into barriers for engagement. It took a re-brand and a cool new space. It took dedicated donors, support from university leaders and a crew of committed, highly trained staff on the ground. It took a whole lot of faith. But beyond a shadow of a doubt, SuccessWorks has profoundly changed the way this university prepares its liberal arts students for life after college. In the process, it’s convincing thousands of undergraduates, many of whom may

have been too intimidated to engage with a career counselor, that planning your future can actually be a lot of fun.

### Breaking the Mold

Historically, career services for liberal arts students targeted second-semester seniors looking for help with polishing their resumés. SuccessWorks aimed to transform that tired model by encouraging students to connect from the moment they set foot on campus. “We tell them, you don’t have to have the next 20 years figured out,” says interim director Angie White. “Just the next 20 minutes.” Once they’re through the door, opportunities abound, including advisor meetings, mock interviews, alumni networking, specialized career fairs, resumé clinics, even wardrobe upgrades via a donor-sponsored “Career Closet.”

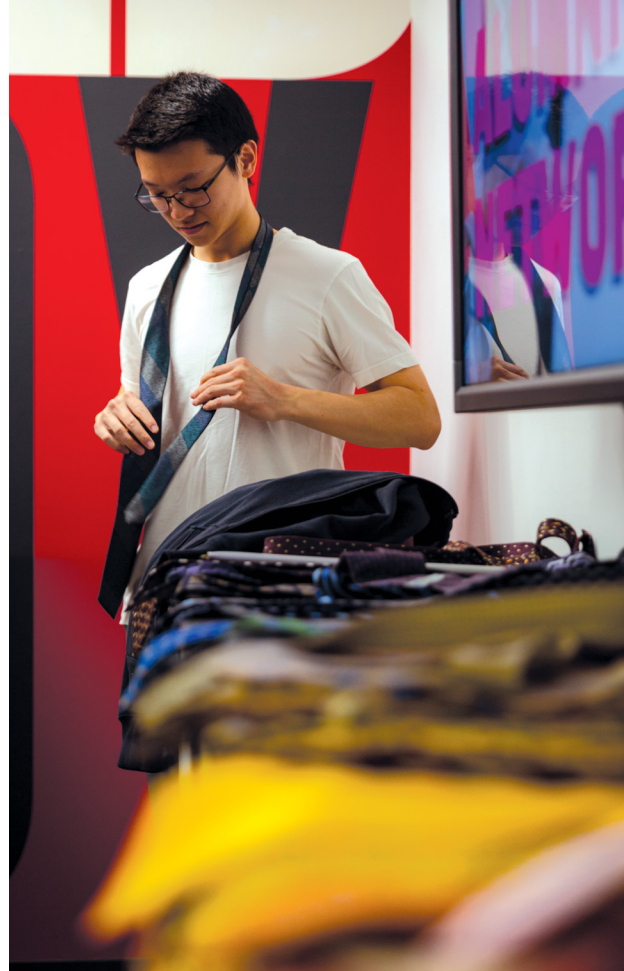
Of note: The word “career” doesn’t appear in branding taglines or the center’s name. “Our market research showed that students found the word intimidating,” White says. With a friendlier brand, SuccessWorks aimed to draw in more students who could really use the help — rather than simply “check a box” for the ultra-motivated few. Another innovation: career communities, which allow students to gravitate toward a specific area (say, government/nonprofit or tech/data analytics) and find out more. SuccessWorks now offers eight career communities.

“When I was doing this work 20 years ago, we tended to see just the students who had it figured out,” White notes. “We see a lot more students now who say, ‘I don’t have any idea what I want to do.’ We aim to make them more comfortable about seeking help with planning.”

### Activating Alumni

L&S alumni are critical to students’ success. Five years ago, alumni were knocking at SuccessWorks’ door, wanting to help, but there were few ways to plug them in. Today, any L&S student who wants to connect with an alumni mentor through an event, career course or online connection has that opportunity. New programs and opportunities meet alumni where they are, says Mike Kruse, SuccessWorks’ alumni relations director. “We connect students with mentors based on their career or industry interests, their major, or various aspects of their identities,” he says. L&S alumni, all liberal arts majors themselves, know what it’s like to have chosen a major that doesn’t offer a linear career path, White points out. They’re more than willing to share insights, expertise and contacts, and to help students learn to network and set goals.

Last year, more than 630 alumni participated in SuccessWorks’ programs — speaking in classrooms, meeting with students online or in person, offering informational interviews, and more.



PHOTOS: COLTON MANSavage





L&S student Colton Mansavage discusses his future goals with SuccessWorks' interim director Angie White.

### Engaging Employers

Thanks to SuccessWorks' intentional relationship-building with employers, students now have multiple opportunities to network at career fairs, meet recruiters, sign up for mock interviews and more. The employer relations team tracks which companies tend to hire L&S students and gets in touch to invite them to campus. "We aren't waiting around for employers to come to us," says White. In addition to helping campus run the two major career fairs in spring and fall, SuccessWorks now hosts multiple specialty career fairs, such as the Equity/Inclusion Career Fair, the Multicultural Internship Fair, the Tech, Data & Analytics Career Fair, and more. During the pandemic, the team pivoted to offer its first-ever virtual career fairs, now an ongoing option.

Students are also engaging with employers through SuccessWorks' networking events, job shadows across the country and funded internship programs. Last year, 334 employers engaged with students — compared with just four the year before SuccessWorks was launched. Even the marketing approach plays a role. "We work to convince students that spending time with employers is exciting and inspiring, not scary!" says communications director Nathan Barker.

### Classroom Connection

Three career-prep courses have been developed over the last five years, offering students a chance to earn credit while learning to define and articulate their skills and plan their path after college. Those classes — all popular



with students — offer opportunities for employers and alumni to speak on panels or directly with students. In a new twist, SuccessWorks is working directly with all L&S departments — from anthropology to Spanish & Portuguese and everything in between — to share what they know about career outcomes for their graduates. Skills sheets, developed in tandem with departments, are shared with students as a way to help them form an awareness of how the skills they're developing now can translate to a career path.

An innovation that's proved to be wildly popular with students: non-credit career prep courses developed in CANVAS, the online learning platform. "Students love this option, because they can take it on their own time," says White. The most popular, Jobs, Internships and How to Get Them, drew more than 4,500 students when it was rolled out last year. Meeting students where they are is a critical part of SuccessWorks' winning approach.

### Reaching All Students

The first year SuccessWorks opened its doors, it served around 3,000 L&S students (out of more than 14,000). Last year, as the college welcomed its largest class yet of more than 18,000 students, SuccessWorks reached 16,800 students, 25% of whom were from under-represented backgrounds, and 59% were first- and second-year students.

There's more work to do. White and her team are intentional about increasing outreach to underrepresented students, and while they're proud of serving so many students, the goal is to close the gap and serve them all. A larger mix of offerings, many of them with a virtual option (which vastly improves engagement), and targeted outreach messaging are all making a difference.

"There's not just one way to access SuccessWorks," White says. "We are adapting to what we know works for students." ■

L&S student  
Aaron Wang  
comes in for a  
study session at  
SuccessWorks.





# Uncomfortable Truths

Simon Balto's research helps us unlearn the narratives of modern policing.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN

**E**very academic researcher hopes their work will have a modern relevance. But for Simon Balto, relevance has been a double-edged sword.

The assistant professor of history studies white mobs and the history of violent and racially repressive policing in the United States — topics that have been grabbing headlines for much of the last decade.

“It’s nice to feel that the work that I do can help people make sense of what is currently happening,” says Balto, who was born in Milwaukee but was adopted and raised near La Crosse and earned both his undergraduate and graduate degrees at UW-Madison. “But these things are heavy to sit with day in and day out.”

Balto’s research brush strokes reveal a picture of our troubled history. The book he’s working on now (his second), charts the history of white mob violence in the United States, from the Reconstruction era to the 1960s — although there are contemporary echoes in the Unite the Right demonstration in Charlottesville in 2017 and the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

“White violence has been so central to so many key episodes and key processes in American history,” notes Balto. “It has been sort of surreal to watch so much of the things that I’m trying to grapple with in the book play out in real time.” Something that struck him about the January 6 attack is just how many police officers flew in from around the country to be part of the mob.

Balto found his research inspiration for his first book while living in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago in 2007.

“One of the things that I noticed is just how much policing looks different from one context to the next,” says Balto. “The police presence surrounding a spectacularly wealthy campus like Northwestern University looks different than it does in

a working-class, multiracial neighborhood like Rogers Park.”

Balto had always been interested in the life of Fred Hampton, the leader of the Illinois Black Panthers, who was killed by the FBI and Chicago police in 1969. Hampton’s pointed criticisms of racially driven policing struck a chord with him, particularly as the United States was emerging as the global leader in incarcerating its own citizens. Balto decided he wanted to understand why.

In the Chicago History Museum, perusing a roll of microfilm containing meeting minutes of the leadership of the Chicago Police Force from the early 1960s, Balto uncovered evidence of “arrest quotas.”

“They’re just talking about how, in neighborhoods of particular interest —

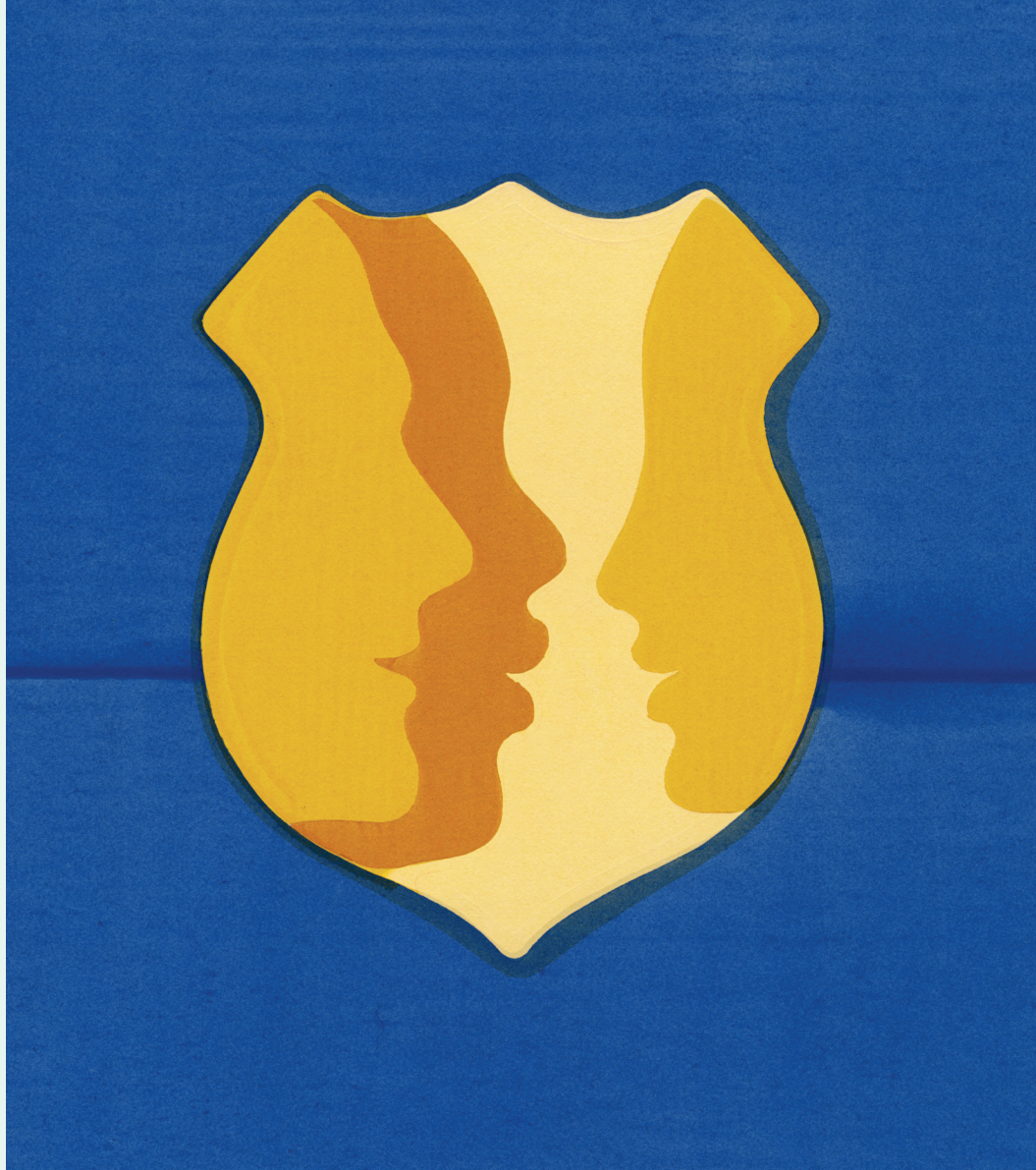
by which they invariably mean low-income, Black and Brown communities — officer efficiency would be gauged by the number of stops and arrests that they were making,” says Balto. “It’s all right there out in the open.”

Balto says his research has helped him unlearn some of the narratives we’re taught about how people are kept safe in the United States — that the police are always the good guys, and that everyone benefits equally from their protection.

Ultimately, Balto hopes his research can help drive people toward critical conversations on what safety should look like.

“It’s really animated by this question: What are we doing when it comes to protecting people and keeping people safe in a way that doesn’t reinforce inequalities and unjust hierarchies?” Balto says. ■

ILLUSTRATION: ALEX NABAUM





STUDENTS

## To Harlem, the Lower East Side and Beyond

L&S students traveled to New York City in April for an immersive exploration of African American and Jewish cultures.

BY MARLITA A. BEVENUE

**A**rriving at New York's LaGuardia Airport on a wet, chilly afternoon in early April, twelve bright-eyed students in red, white and gray University of Wisconsin sweatshirts and caps looked eager to explore the sights and sounds of the Big Apple. With some students never having flown before, this trip to New York City provided real-world cultural and historical context beyond the classroom, in a joint initiative launched by the Department of African American Studies and the Center for Jewish Studies (CJS).

Focusing on population and migration in the African American and Jewish communities of New York City, students visited Harlem and the Lower East Side, capturing the cultural significance of these neighborhoods while enhancing their knowledge of iconic buildings like the Eldridge Street Synagogue in Chinatown and the Tenement Museum, whose president, Annie Polland, is a Jewish Studies alum (BA, '95).



Tony Michels talks to students about the rich history of New York's Lower East Side.



Inside the preserved, historic tenements, students visualized the identities of Jewish, Black and Italian dwellers between the 1860s and 1930s, walking through original rooms and viewing family artifacts. “To see how immigrants lived on the Lower East Side, to actually walk through their homes and see the spaces where they slept, cooked and gathered with family and friends was just amazing and humbling,” said Zykia Brumfield, a Legal Studies major from Milwaukee who was visiting New York for the first time on this trip.

Accompanying students to New York were African American Studies professor and department chair Ethelene Whitmire and Center for Jewish Studies director Tony Michels. Nearly two years ago, it was their vision, in collaboration with several UW-Madison alumni and supporters, including Peter Weil (BA’70, JD ’74) and his wife, Judy Weil, and Michael

Berkowitz (PhD, ’89), to create a fully engaging experience that left a lasting impact on students. Edward Grossman (BA, ’70) treated students to dinner in Greenwich Village. Another night, alumni and supporters mingled with students at Melba’s, a well-known eatery in Harlem, over broasted chicken, grilled summer squash and candied yams, while Letters & Science dean Eric Wilcots joined in for an amazing evening of soul food and fun.

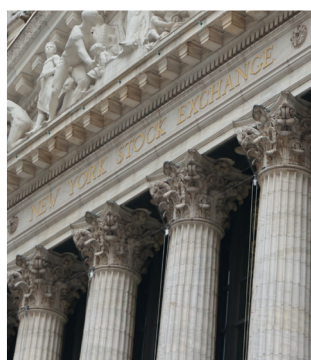
One of the standout moments from the trip for sophomore (and Jewish Studies/Political Science major) Yaakov Segal was the two-hour walking tour of Harlem. Visiting beloved landmarks like the Apollo Theater, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (where renowned poet and social activist Langston Hughes is buried) and the deeply moving statue of Harriet Tubman, Segal was especially impressed with the neighborhood’s residents and tight-knit community.

“I love that Harlem continues to be the heart of African American culture. Even with gentrification happening everywhere in a place like New York, it’s inspiring to see Harlem thriving with Black businesses, arts and culture.”

Trip organizers Michels and Whitmire considered the inaugural trip a huge success and intend to travel to major cities like Chicago and Los Angeles in addition to New York City to explore the rich history of Black and Jewish communities.

It was another wet, chilly morning for the taxi ride to LaGuardia Airport, the exact same weather that greeted the students when they arrived in New York three days earlier. But the students were closer this time, taking selfies in Times Square before leaving the city, swapping contact information with each other and vowing to keep in touch, and wishing each other well in upcoming final exams and future endeavors. ■

On their walking tour of Harlem, students marveled at iconic landmarks and enjoyed dinner at Melba’s, a popular restaurant. Owner Melba Wilson is pictured with Tony Michels.












# FLOCK SONG

In fall, songbirds make a joyful noise.  
UW neuroscientists are studying  
starlings for insights into the brain's  
natural motivation and reward systems.

BY MARY ELLEN GABRIEL





**On a cool evening in early fall**, the Memorial Union Terrace is alive with voices. The sound is ambient, swelling, punctuated with laughter. It feels good to walk through this happy hum. Taking a seat, you feel ridiculously lighthearted, your worries on hold for an hour or two, as you turn to the friend who biked here to meet you.

“So, what’s up with you?”

Humans, like songbirds, are pro-social animals. We love to gather in groups and chirp about whatever comes to mind, and there’s a biological reason that’s so: The activity triggers the natural reward system of the brain. It’s a neural process that’s been conserved for over 300 million years, since the time when birds and mammals shared a common ancestor. And while mammal brains and bird brains may look completely different from one another today, many neuroanatomical connections and neurochemicals remain the same, according to biologist Lauren Ritters. Ritters studies the neural regulation of vocal communication in songbirds and is particularly interested in how the brain’s natural motivation and reward systems respond to social stimuli. Her work with European starlings — a species that gathers in huge

groups in the fall and holds noisy confabs that sound, even to the casual listener, like animated conversations — reveals exciting new insights into the motivation to flock and the deep rewards of singing together. The research may also lead to treatments to restore positive social interactions in humans, where they’ve gone awry.

“My lab members and I are really interested in the role that reward plays in shaping communication,” Ritters says. “It became so clear to me, during the COVID-19 pandemic, how painful it is to be separated from social groups and how rewarding social interactions can be.”

For the last 20 years, the Ritters lab has received funding from the National Institute of Mental Health to study the motivation to communicate in songbirds. “By studying conserved neural pathways that regulate the motivation to communicate, we provide new information on how this can go amiss,” Ritters says.

European starlings may be considered non-native pests by many (including Wisconsin farmers), but they exhibit remarkable vocal communication skills in different social contexts. The birds live in a breezy aviary, festooned with

live plants and branches, atop Birge Hall. Ritters and her students observe their behavior year-round in both the breeding season (when the males are stridently vocal and territorial) and — with particular interest — in fall, when the birds join together in flocks and the singing takes a different form.

“We became fascinated by the song in flocks,” Ritters says. “It seemed like they were singing for no reason. There aren’t too many things that animals do for no good reason. The exception to that is playful behavior.”

With no pressure to defend nests or attract a mate, could the starlings be

Every summer, Lauren Ritters and her graduate students refurbish the aviaries on the roof of Birge Hall with fresh greenery and begin observing the starlings.



PHOTOS: PAULIUS MUSTEIKIS





singing their “flock song” simply because it feels good?

Using behaviorist Gordon Burghardt’s criteria for play, Ritters and her team set out to discover whether fall singing – which, by the way, occurs only in flocks, unlike spring song – was a playful behavior.

“Courtship song in spring, sung only by males, is more rigid and precisely sequenced,” Ritters notes. “The song that males and females are singing together in a flock in the fall is more like riffing. We say it’s a little like free-form jazz – some notes are out of order. They are a little sloppy.”

That matches with the definition of play behavior as low-stakes practice,

something that occurs in non-stressful situations, hones skills or comes in handy later in life, but for the moment, is just enjoyable. But the team needed more.

“You can’t just ask a bird if it’s having fun,” Ritters says, “and we were pretty sure that opioids were involved in what seemed like a pleasurable activity. So, we borrowed methods from psychology to ‘ask’ a bird how it’s feeling and to explore a role for opioids.”

The team administered tiny doses of fentanyl – an opioid that binds to what’s called the mu receptor in the brain and has a similar effect as the naturally occurring opioids that light up bird and human

**“We became fascinated by the song in flocks. It seemed like they were singing for no reason. There aren’t too many things that animals do for no good reason.”**

LAUREN RITERS





European starlings often form undulating flocks — called murmurations — in late fall, after gathering in social groups for weeks to sing playfully together.

PHOTO: ROLF NUSSBAUMER / ALAMY

brains when they are in a “reward state” — to the starlings. The birds responded by ramping up their singing. The team then ran a “conditioned place preference” (CPP) test to ask birds if it “feels good” to sing. They trained the birds to associate a colorful location with singing, and later, when given a choice between two locations, birds showed a strong preference for the place that they’d learned to associate with their own singing behavior. This suggests that a positive association had developed between singing and the place. The team then found that temporarily “turning off” the opioid receptors disrupted the place preference (the findings were shared in

*Scientific Reports* in 2020 and summarized in a UW news article shortly thereafter).

The experiments offered strong evidence that flock song involves intrinsic reward for birds. Whether birds’ opioids are released because of the singing or because of the flocking is still under investigation, Ritters says.

“Is there something about being in the flock that is rewarding?” she muses. “I think that’s true. It feels bad to be alone. As a human being, it felt bad to be alone during the pandemic. We wanted to be together so much that we had to introduce laws and rules to keep us from interacting. We are a social species, and

we hate to be separated. And starlings are incredibly social too, especially in fall.”

Alyse Maksimoski, a PhD student in the Ritters lab, studies flocking behavior. Right now, she’s trying to determine whether starlings experience a “joy of reunion” after a brief separation from the flock.

“I’m pursuing questions that are very much relevant to what people have gone through during the COVID-19 pandemic,” she notes.

Maksimoski is exploring the possibility that when they flock, birds’ brains, like humans’ brains, light up with dopamine, which motivates behavior and directs it toward reward. Once together, they also sing like crazy.

“The more an individual experiences social cohesion, the more motivated it is to seek out social opportunities in a gregarious setting,” Maksimoski says. “I’m studying what happens when birds have brief social separation. What do they do when they get back into the flock — do they start singing? Do they exhibit



a behavior that indicates joy? How does this relate to dopamine signaling?”

Maksimowski compares flocking and singing in a group to humans doing yoga in a class or gathering on the Terrace together. What remains for the team to prove is “directionality” — which comes first, the singing, or the opioids? The dopamine, or the flocking?

An interesting finding, Maksimoski says, is that when birds are central to the flock and singing at high rates, they are more motivated to seek out social opportunities. And some birds, even

in flocks, seem to have different spatial needs — they want to be close, but not too close, integrated but not too integrated.

“This is something we weren’t considering,” says Maksimoski. “Most birds are gregarious, it’s true. But what if the degree of social cohesion differs? What if the need for social integration is highly individualized?”

Another PhD student in the Ritters lab, Brandon Polzin, studies the role of shared neural mechanisms that underlie social behavior by examining “conserved neural structures” involved in rewarding behaviors across vertebrates.

Identifying common neural structures means researchers may extrapolate their findings more easily to humans. Polzin is also examining how glutamate, another natural neurochemical, integrates with opioid and dopamine pathways as part of what he calls “an interesting mystery.”

“In certain mental health disorders — major depressive disorder and generalized anxiety disorder — we see social communication and social motivation heavily impacted, and affiliative social behavior can lose its reward value in people with these disorders.”

Being able to identify the specific neurochemical systems and the specific regions that are involved in these pro-social interactions, he says, will help scientists understand what systems could be dysregulated and could highlight what might be possible therapeutic targets in the future.

Ritters says UW-Madison is a great, supportive environment for this work, with low barriers to collaborating and interacting across disciplines. She and her graduate students study animal behavior and neuroscience, but they meet with psychologists, mental health experts, colleagues in the psychiatry department and others to compare methods and insights. All this enables them to design better experiments, draw more nuanced conclusions, and move ever closer to an understanding of the brain’s complex systems of motivation and reward.

“I think what’s most exciting to me is that we can study this naturally occurring behavior in songbirds and maybe provide something that could help with mental illnesses in humans,” Ritters says. ■

**“I’m studying what happens when birds have brief social separation. What do they do when they get back into the flock—do they start singing? Do they exhibit a behavior that indicates joy? How does this relate to dopamine signaling?”**

ALYSE MAKSIMOSKI







# POLICY POWERHOUSE

Approaching its 40th anniversary, the La Follette School of Public Affairs has never been in a better place to capitalize on its potential.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN

**Tucked away below the crest of Observatory Hill, an old, Italianate-style house**

presents the same dignified façade as it did 167 years ago, when three university presidents (Chadbourne, Twombly and Bascom), as well as the first director of Washburn Observatory (James Watson), lived there. Inside, however, the building reverberates with visions and plans for the future. It's now the administrative home of the La Follette School of Public Affairs, a public-policy powerhouse, where leaders of one of our most forward-looking schools ponder the future with a watchful eye on the past.

The school, named to honor the legacy of legendary former Wisconsin Governor and U.S. Senator Robert M. La Follette, also known as the Father of Progressivism, aims to train future generations of leaders in the art of shaping public policy in areas such as energy, water, poverty, trade and public health. It dates its existence back to 1967, when it was called the Center for the Study of Public Policy and Administration and was attached to the Department of Political Science. It became the La Follette Institute for Public Affairs in 1983, when former Wisconsin Speaker of the Assembly Tom Loftus navigated a bipartisan law through the state legislature to create it. In 1999, it upgraded to become a full-fledged school, teaching classes in eight different buildings on the UW-Madison campus.





Former Wisconsin governor and senator Robert M. La Follette, for whom the school is named

PHOTO: HARRIS & EWING COLLECTION / LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

“It all started with the translation of evidence into the policymaking process,” says Susan Webb Yackee, the Collins-Bascom Professor of Public Affairs who has directed the school for the past ten years. “There has been a real responsibility and mission for the school to be a leader in the Wisconsin Idea, and we have really stepped up our game in the last few years.”

As it prepares to celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2023, the La Follette School of Public Affairs is having a profound impact on the campus, Wisconsin, and the world.

Student enrollment in the school’s four programs — two-year graduate training programs in public affairs and international public affairs, and undergraduate certificate programs in public policy and health policy — has more than quadrupled

**“It’s important that we share the evidence, the findings and the conclusions of our research, as well as be very transparent about how we got there.”**

**SUSAN WEBB YACKEE**

since 2019. The number of undergraduate classes taught has leapt from two to 22, with more than a thousand students expected in 2022–23. Meanwhile, the number of faculty members has doubled, and seven new staff have joined the ranks in the old house on the hill.

The stunning growth is due to careful planning, strong leadership and the Kohl Initiative, a \$10 million donation from UW–Madison alumnus and former U.S. Senator Herb Kohl. It’s designed to support students, research and outreach (see sidebar on page 29).

“Good things happen to organizations that are ready for those good things to happen,” says Yackee. “We had done the work to think about who we are, what we want to do, where our talents could be best directed in the future. You can’t have this degree of growth and success if you don’t have a really strong sense of who you are.”

“Who they are” encompasses many things. The school’s 22 faculty members are involved in researching and shaping nearly every imaginable hot-button issue at the national and international levels. Christine Durance, an economist by training, studies the causes and consequences of the nationwide opioid crisis. Menzie Chinn, who’s also a member of the Department of Economics, is an expert on trade and currency manipulation, U.S.–China relations and inflation. Tana Johnson, one of the school’s newer hires, studies the ways international organizations like the World Health Organization structure our society — and how people have increasingly come to distrust them.

“It’s important that we share the evidence, the findings and the conclusions of our research, as well as be very transparent about how we got there,” says Yackee, explaining the school’s approach to research and outreach.





Susan Webb Yackee, director of the La Follette School of Public Affairs

“In classrooms, in the media and in public meeting settings, we’re not just talking about the statistics around opioid use here in Wisconsin but also about how we collected those statistics and what they imply — and also what they don’t mean.”

The La Follette bench also includes rising stars like Manny Teodoro, an associate professor whose hiring was made possible through the Kohl Initiative. Teodoro studies water policy through an environmental justice lens, examining questions such as why so many members of the public are opting to buy bottled water from corporations instead of trusting in the public water system. In the spring, he will lead the school’s annual signature event: a full-day public forum that brings state and national experts together to discuss a central topic. Last year’s event was focused

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SUSAN WEBB YACKEE

on democracy and elections; this year’s will center on trust in government.

Outreach has always been a part of the school’s charge, but under Yackee’s extroverted style of leadership, those efforts have redoubled, coalescing around something dubbed the Main Street Agenda, a partnership between the school, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and Wisconsin Public Radio, facilitating discussion of public-policy issues in the lead-up to the November 2022 midterm elections. La Follette faculty members like Yackee and Professor of Public Policy and Political Science Mark Copelovitch have contributed regular editorials in the *Journal-Sentinel*’s Opinions page, and recently, the school conducted a statewide survey of Wisconsin voters to determine the public-policy issues that are most on their minds.

Participants from both sides of the political aisle attended a four-day workshop sponsored by the La Follette School of Public Affairs.

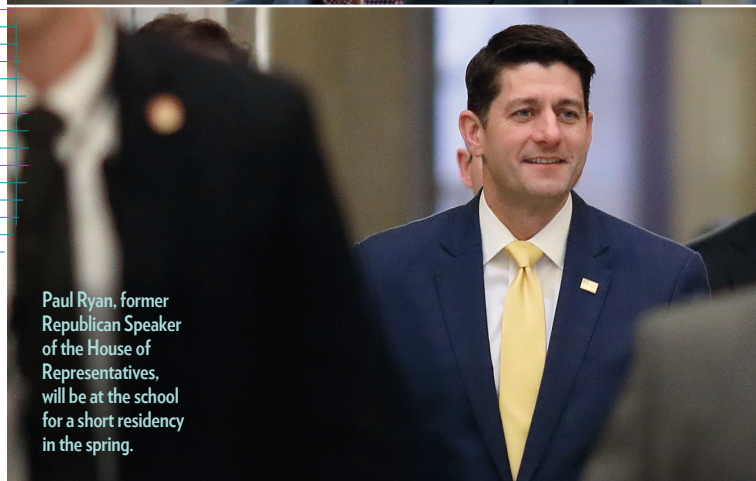


PHOTO: YANG YIN / GETTY





Nate Silver, the pollster/statistician who founded FiveThirtyEight, will serve as the annual public affairs journalist-in-residence.



Paul Ryan, former Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, will be at the school for a short residency in the spring.

PHOTOS: (TOP) COLIN MCPHERSON, (BOTTOM) WIN MCNAMEE

Greg Nemet, a professor of public policy with the La Follette School who researches energy and climate policy, is one of the school's most public faces — he contributed policy recommendations to the most recent United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report.

"One of the aspects of the school that I think Susan, more than anyone, has really championed is this idea of providing objective information in a bipartisan way," says Nemet, who frequently serves as a national media expert. "And that is really important, because the politics are so polarized."

Yackee and the La Follette School are doing their part to break down the walls of polarization. Earlier this summer, the school hosted a four-day training session

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GREG NEMET

with staff members from both sides of the aisle in the Wisconsin Assembly. Experts like Nemet and Chinn presented their research on energy policy and inflation, while other experts spoke on social policy and polling. While many of the topics might be categorized as contentious — particularly in Wisconsin's current political environment — Yackee says reviews from the participants were glowing.

This fall, the school will host Nate Silver, the pollster/statistician who founded FiveThirtyEight, as its annual public affairs journalist-in-residence; in the spring, Paul Ryan, the former Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives, will be at the school for a short residency.

Many graduate students come to the La Follette School having worked in Washington, D.C., or for a private or public nonprofit organization. Undergraduates, meanwhile, have recognized the value of adding public policy to their degree portfolio. A biology major who hopes to someday become a doctor, for instance, could benefit tremendously from learning about insurance risk and Medicare through the school's new undergraduate health policy certificate program.

Graduates often go on to law school or become public servants or public-policy experts. One recent La Follette grad works as the scheduler for U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris; another works as a meteorologist for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Others work in the offices of prominent Wisconsin politicians, have founded nonprofit organizations or landed in other levels of city and state government.

"The students that are attracted and come to the school, they're taking these ideas, they're learning statistical



techniques, how to work with data, how to graphically show information,” says Nemet. “They’re learning how to communicate and how to write, how to get ideas into policymakers’ hands. That, to me, is the Wisconsin Idea.”

Each year, Nemet asks the students in his policy analysis course to pick a public-policy topic out of a hat — such as health care, climate change or education—to research and learn about, so they can begin developing their own potential policy alternatives.

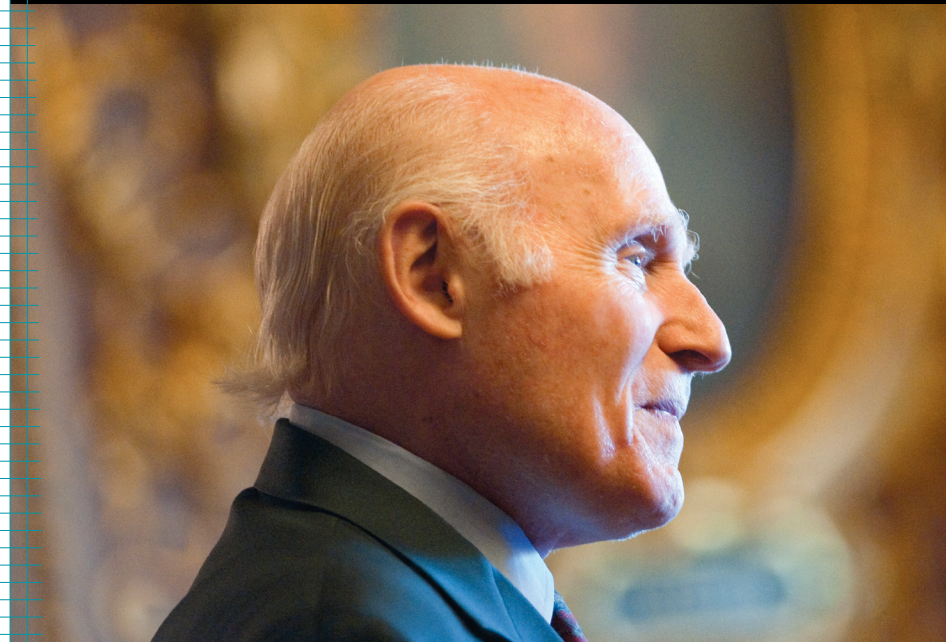
“One of the best things we teach our students is a set of structured techniques that can be used to apply to any policy problem,” he says.

Student projects often have significant real-world impact. Yackee cites a former graduate student who produced a report for the City of Milwaukee that offers policy solutions to the emerging problem of failing sewer laterals. Milwaukee’s aging housing stock has resulted in decaying laterals, and homeowners, many of whom are low-income families, were shocked to learn they are responsible for the expensive cost to replace them.

While she looks forward to growth and change, Yackee says there’s at least one thing she wants to stay constant.

“The informed and evidence-based approach of our school is a real testament to its faculty, who put in the work to generate the research and synthesize our best understanding and to translate it in the classroom and in our broader public outreach,” she says. “That is a part that I never want to change.” ■

Former U.S.  
senator from  
Wisconsin  
Herb Kohl



## PIVOTAL SUPPORT

Susan Yackee makes no bones about it: The Kohl Initiative has been “pivotal” to the transformation of the La Follette School of Public Affairs. What Yackee once thought of as a small yet successful boutique school has exploded on the strength of Sen. Herb Kohl’s seven-year, \$10 million gift. That donation has helped recruit top faculty to the school and fueled a new wave of public outreach in Wisconsin and beyond.

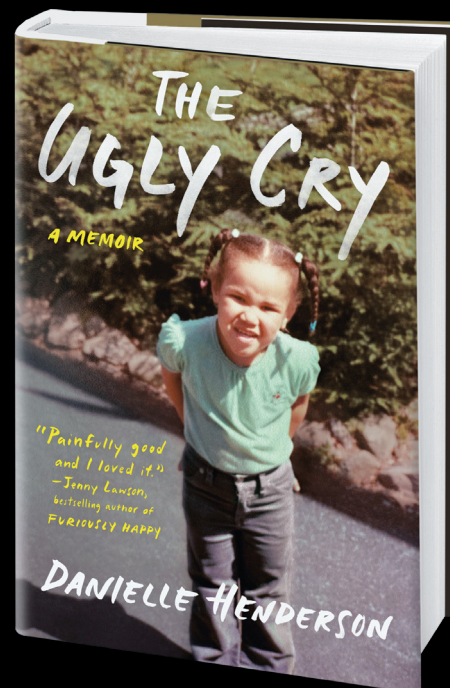
“We now have the resources to make the connections with citizens who feel differently on policy issues and to bring them together and try to find common ground,” says Yackee.

PHOTO: CHRIS MADDALONI / GETTY





Author and  
L&S alum  
Danielle  
Henderson



## Literary Success

*The Ugly Cry*, by Black TV writer Danielle Henderson (MA, Gender & Women's Studies, '13), was published by Viking last year, and recounts Henderson's victory over childhood abuse, racism and mental illness. "*The Ugly Cry* is one of those memoirs that's both funny and really sad – and in the end, uplifting," wrote *Washington Post* book reviewer Nneka McGuire. Henderson's first book, *Feminist Ryan Gosling*, was a reprisal of her wildly popular blog of the same name, and started as a way for her and her UW classmates to keep track of the feminist theorists they were studying in class.

## Serving the Nation

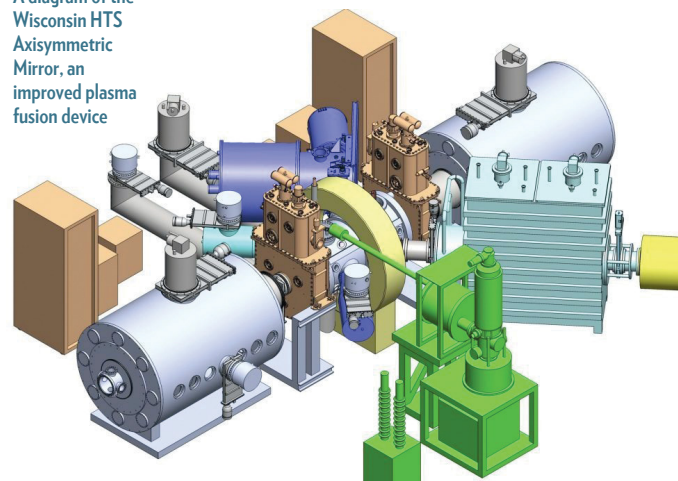
Michael C. Morgan, a University of Wisconsin–Madison professor in the Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences, was confirmed on July 14 by the U.S. Senate as assistant secretary of commerce for environmental observation and prediction. In that capacity, he will serve as deputy administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), responsible for providing agency-wide direction regarding weather, water, climate and ocean observations, as well as converting observations to predictions for environmental threats. Morgan, the Ned P. Smith Distinguished Chair of Meteorology at UW–Madison, is "honored and thrilled" by the opportunity.

## Breakthrough Physics

Fusion is how energy is generated in the sun, yet it has been tremendously challenging to harness on Earth. A fusion energy project led by physics professor Cary Forest seeks to pave the way to a comparatively low-cost fusion device that can be a net energy generator. The project landed in the spotlight at Summerfest Tech in

Milwaukee this summer where Kieran Furlong, an honorary fellow with L&S (and CEO of Realta Fusion) presented on the technology-to-market work he and Forest have been pursuing. Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation (WARF) invited Furlong to join five other partners in presenting on high-tech innovations as part of WARF Innovation Day at the June event.

A diagram of the Wisconsin HTS Axisymmetric Mirror, an improved plasma fusion device





## HONOR ROLL



**Steve Carpenter**, emeritus professor of limnology and one of the world's foremost lake ecologists, was awarded the Blue Planet Prize in June, in recognition of his 40 years of study and description of lake ecosystems.



**Preeti Chopra**, a professor of visual studies, South Asian art and architecture in the Department of Art History, is a recipient of the 2022-23 Rome Prize, awarded for work in historic preservation and conservation.



**Christy Clark Pujara** received a Woman of Distinction Leadership Award from YWCA Madison. The professor of history was lauded as "a superstar who devotes her life to speaking out against racism, uncovering this country's dismal record of abuse against nonwhite populations."



Assistant professor of geography **Jen Rose Smith** won a prestigious ACLS Fellowship for her project "Icy Matters: Race, Indigeneity, and Coloniality in Ice-Geographies."

L&S alum **Annie Polland** directs New York's Tenement Museum.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF THE TENEMENT MUSEUM

### History Comes to Life

When Annie Polland (BA, '95) began to take Jewish Studies courses in the early 1990s, she had no specific career path in mind. A native of Milwaukee, Polland was simply following her interests. Now she serves as the president of New York City's Tenement Museum, helping to bring the history of the Lower East Side to life for thousands of visitors each year. "Going to UW-Madison was the best thing that ever happened to me," says Polland, whose studies — including a Jewish Studies certificate and a double major in Hebrew and Semitic Studies and Political Science — provided the foundations for her current work. Tours at the Tenement Museum (a National Historic Site) feature the recreated apartments of actual area

residents from various ethnic groups, including Jewish families, a Puerto Rican family, a Chinese family and a Black family. In April, Polland welcomed a group of UW students and faculty to the Tenement Museum as part of a field trip (see story on p. 16).

### Blue's Your Color

Humans layer meaning onto colors, says Karen Schloss, an assistant professor of psychology. "Think of color preferences as a summary of

your experiences with that color," she says. Her work was cited in a BBC story on why blue is such a widespread color favorite (perhaps we associate it with oceans or skies) and why brown is so reviled (it's the color of rotting foods or waste). Schloss's "ecological valence theory" probes color preference as an important influence on a wide variety of human behaviors: buying cars, choosing clothes, decorating homes and designing websites, to name a few.



MORE L&S NEWS AT [LS.WISC.EDU/NEWS](https://ls.wisc.edu/news)

ILLUSTRATION: LAN ZHANG

Karen Schloss studies colors' influence on human behavior.





## Hit Refresh

Having survived crises at Facebook, Katie Harbath now helps others navigate its pitfalls.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN

**W**hen Katie Harbath (BA, Journalism '03) speaks to groups of undergraduates, there is one nugget that always makes them go hmmmm: Nearly every job she has ever had didn't exist before she had it.

"I worked 10 years at a company that didn't exist the day I graduated from UW," says Harbath. "My entire career has been coming up with new jobs."

Harbath is now the founder and CEO of Anchor Change, a consulting business and e-newsletter she launched in 2021 that helps clients in the political and nonprofit world understand social media platforms. But Harbath is perhaps better known for her previous job as the former public-policy director at Facebook, helping shape the rise of the social media giant in the political arena — and then watching its reputation suffer as a purveyor of distrust and disinformation.

As a journalism undergrad at UW, Harbath was one of the first students to dabble in the digital world in Professor of Journalism Katy Culver's Mass Media Practices class.

"She made me webmaster that year, and she always loves telling this story, because I hated it," recalls Harbath with a laugh. "I was like, 'I'm going to be a print journalist. This digital stuff, like what are you making me do all that stuff for?' And now that's been my career."

A gig handling digital roles on campaigns for the Republican National

Committee was her ticket into Facebook. The social media company had launched the concept of business "pages" in late 2007, and politicians were just beginning to use them to inform and interact with their constituencies. After the 2010 election cycle, Facebook reached out to Harbath and hired her to work with Republican politicians.

"We wanted 2016 to be known as the Facebook election," says Harbath. "We wanted it to be the place where people were getting their news and information, where candidates were directly talking to voters, all this stuff that we thought was the ideal of how these platforms would work."

2016 was indeed the Facebook election, but not, Harbath says, in the way she and her employer had intended.

Harbath points to May 9, 2016 — the day of the Philippines election and when the story broke that a former Facebook contractor had accused the company of rigging its trending topics section to suppress conservative content — as the start of Facebook's slide. With actors both foreign and local flooding the platform with misinformation, Facebook became the face of everything that was wrong

with social media. As the crises kept coming, Harbath, as one of the company's public spokespeople, bore much of the internal and external criticism.

"It's not as simple as what some people have said, that for Facebook it was safety over profit," says Harbath. "The conversations I was in were about free expression versus preventing harm. And those are much harder decisions and trade-offs."

Facebook removed Harbath from elections-related work in late 2019. A little over a year later, the January 6 attack on the Capitol happened.

PHOTO: CADE MARTIN





**“I was like, ‘I’m going to be a print journalist. This digital stuff, like what are you making me do all that stuff for?’ And now that’s been my career.”**

KATIE HARBATH

“All of a sudden, I saw the two entities that I’ve worked for my entire life, the Republican Party and Facebook, both look dramatically different from when I first started working with them,” says Harbath. She left the company in March 2021.

Launching Anchor Change has expanded her reach and cemented her brand.

She has connected with partners eager to leverage her insider insights, such as the Bipartisan Policy Center (a Washington, D.C. think tank) and the Integrity Institute.

“I’m seen as somebody reporters and policymakers can rely on,” she says.

Harbath still makes it back to Wisconsin. She’s on the board of Katy Culver’s Center for Journalism Ethics and spent last June in Eagle River at her parents’ cabin.

But it’s politics and the promise of technology and social media that fuels her soul.

“I love being in the middle of these fascinating, tough questions,” says Harbath. “There’s nowhere I’d rather be than trying to figure out this really hard stuff.” ■





## Good Chemistry

Through their careers at the university and their continued support of UW-Madison, Martha and Charles Casey champion the people and programs that spark progress.

BY KATIE VAUGHN '03

Chemistry brought Martha and Charles Casey together, and it also took them to UW-Madison, where they thrived in decades-long careers. After meeting in a lab and earning doctoral degrees in organic chemistry at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Caseys moved to Madison in 1968, when Charles accepted an assistant professorship in chemistry.



Martha also joined the department, working as a research scientist until she decided to pursue a more permanent position. Knowing her analytical skills would apply across campus, she called Irving Shain. The former chemistry chair had become the university's vice chancellor — and would go on to become chancellor — and he offered her a job in administration, initially helping out on the 1975–77 biennial budget.

“So I went to Bascom,” she says. “And I stayed for 29 years.”

Martha credits her longevity to opportunities to learn and advance, ultimately reaching the rank of assistant vice chancellor for academic planning and analysis, a position she would hold until her retirement in 2003.

“I was lucky in that I was able to take on new responsibilities,” she says. “It was not the same thing every year — actually much of the opposite.”

Among her most notable projects: working on faculty salaries — helping to achieve parity with other Big Ten and major public universities — and guiding departments through the complex process of establishing a program and creating profiles for them, providing useful facts on faculty and student trends, suggestions on how to allocate funds, and more.

Martha also played a key role in early data analysis on campus. She was part of a team that calculated graduation rates, enrollment projections and other information that would prove crucial for decision-making and planning.

“Now, computers are widespread, but when I went to Bascom, no one had done things with analyzing data,” she says. “The data was there but no one was able to turn it into policy to be used by the chancellor and the provost.”

Early on in her administration career, Martha continued to teach chemistry and publish papers, but eventually her job became too demanding. Chemistry remained in her life though, particularly through Charles, who researched and

taught in the department for 38 years, serving as chair for several of them.

“Most dinners were chemical drawings on the back of napkins,” she says.

Now, as emeriti, Martha and Charles keep their bonds to the university strong through their giving, particularly in support of units within the College of Letters & Science.

“We are impressed with UW as one of the nation's great public universities, and especially its outstanding scientific

accomplishments among the Big Ten,” Martha says. “And when I worked in data analysis, I saw again and again how central a role L&S plays in the university.”

Martha also noticed individuals making a difference, usually behind the scenes with no recognition. She set out to create a way to honor them, as she realized her team couldn't do its job without those who painstakingly maintained records.

“We were the frosting on the cake — we got to use that data.” ■

## Diverse Support

While the Caseys support a variety of causes on campus, they hold three in particular regard.

### MARTHA CASEY AWARD FOR DEDICATION TO EXCELLENCE

While academic staff outnumber faculty, their work largely goes unrecognized beyond their respective units, says Martha, who established this annual award to recognize an outstanding staff member “on the front lines of day-to-day work.” As the award application states, “The impact of their work extends beyond their unit and clearly contributes to the fulfillment of the university's mission.”

### CHARLES P. AND MARTHA L. CASEY EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD

Among several ways the couple supports the Department of Chemistry is this award given annually to highlight the research of two graduate students in organic and inorganic chemistry. “I am happy to support the current grad students with an award that recognizes their outstanding achievements,” Charles says.

### MEAD WITTER SCHOOL OF MUSIC

The Caseys support the School of Music generously, and University Opera specifically and passionately. “My avocation has always been opera,” says Martha, a lifelong aficionado. She's impressed by how much University Opera is able to accomplish, as well as the high caliber of its faculty and graduates. In addition to offering financial support, Martha sits on the school's board of visitors.





# Delayed Gratification

BY AARON R. CONKLIN



ILLUSTRATION: MARIA MEDEN

**W**illiam Cronon hadn't expected his retirement from UW-Madison to be affected by COVID-19. In fact, Cronon, the former Frederick Jackson Turner and Vilas Research Professor of History, Geography, and Environmental Studies, hadn't really been thinking about how to mark his retirement at all until the pandemic suddenly intervened and seemed to render his departure almost invisible.

Last spring, on April 30, Cronon returned to the UW-Madison campus for the first time in more than two years to participate in "Common Places: Keywords for a More Than Human World," a daylong conference organized by his former PhD students that doubled as a belated retirement fête for the legendary emeritus professor, who officially retired at the end of 2020 after nearly three decades here. It was an overdue opportunity for the faculty, staff and students whose lives he touched to reconnect with a beloved friend.

"You can read the title of the conference geographically as 'common places' or you can read it linguistically as 'commonplace' — both point at things we take for granted in this world," says Cronon. "The question I've asked throughout my career is, how do I help people stop taking the world for granted?"

"A keyword that drives me personally," Cronon says, "is 'the common good.' That phrase has immense power for me." To Cronon, land and landscape have always been embodiments of "the commons," which is a big part of why he's devoted his career to writing about them.

During his time at UW-Madison, Cronon became one of the university's most thoughtful and respected voices. His lectures on American Environmental History routinely attracted hundreds of students and auditors.

He now lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba, having married his second wife and moved there because she's a professor of Middle Eastern history at the University of Manitoba. There, he continues to work on two big research projects: the first, a sweeping macrohistory on "The Making of the American Landscape," and the second, an equally sprawling microhistory of Portage, Wisconsin.

"The two books complement each other. Both tell stories of the making of America, one on the scale of the continent, the other on the scale of a small town in Wisconsin," Cronon explains. "But they're ultimately the same stories."

Cronon's legacy at UW-Madison extends far beyond his writing and teaching. He helped found the L&S Writing Fellows program, the Undergraduate Research Scholars program and Chadbourne Residential College. He oversaw the first master plan of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve. He led the process of creating the university's first Environmental Studies major, and participated in creating the Center for Culture, History, and the Environment (CHE).

Most of all, though, Cronon is proud of the many students he mentored. More than 50 of them made the long trip to Madison from all over the country to participate in last spring's celebration — abiding proof of his ongoing impact as a teacher. ■



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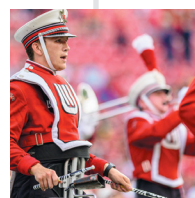
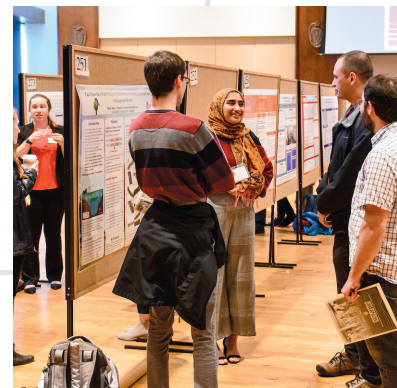
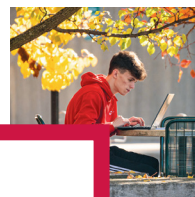
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## Last Word

September's [RE] Connect weekend for alumni of color featured tours of campus, including a First Nations Cultural Landscapes tour led by Aaron Bird Bear, UW-Madison's first director of tribal relations. Bird Bear developed the tour to bring an indigenous perspective to the stories we tell about this campus. As the group wended its way from Alumni Park to Memorial Union and up Bascom Hill, Bird Bear emphasized that UW-Madison was built on land belonging to the Ho-Chunk people, who have called the area home for more than 10,000 years. In this photo, Bird Bear is standing on Observatory Hill, a sacred burial site for the Ho-Chunk. Just off-camera to the west of him lie two effigy mounds — a bird and a two-tailed water spirit — recently listed on the National Register for Historic Places.



PHOTO: SCOTT CARTER