UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON COLLEGE OF LETTERS & SCIENCE

FALL 2026

Letters&Science

HUMAN INTEREST

INSIDE IRVING & DOROTHY LEVY HALL page 16





Laura Oberwetter works at her organ, which is a perfumer's workbench for storing raw materials like essential oils.

PHOTO: LUKAS KEAPPROTH

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BY AARON R. CONKLIN



PHOTO: ZOË LITTLEFIELD

Christiaan Hajos, Evy Dhyanchand, Austin Shearer, Brooklyn Russell, Zoë Littlefield, Callahan Miltenberger, Parker Hoeft and Lily Smith visited the West Coast this summer as part of the inaugural Creative Careers in Hollywood experience.

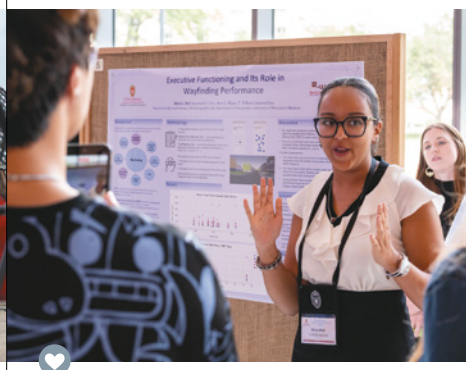
COVER ILLUSTRATION: MICHAEL KIRKHAM

#WeAreLS



Can there be too many photos from our L&S New Student Convocation earlier today? We're going to say no. Jake Piper, our photo intern, captured some really great ones.

@UWMadisonLS September 1, 2026



Last week, 32 LASER scholars wrapped up eight weeks of hands-on research at the 2026 LASER Symposium, sharing their projects with the L&S community and celebrating everything they accomplished this summer.

@UWMadisonLS August 13, 2026



A scene from this morning's press conference announcing the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physics awarded to Professor Francis Halzen, the principal investigator of NSF IceCube Neutrino Observatory, the world's largest telescope.

@UWMadisonLS October 6, 2026



Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall celebrated its grand opening.

@UWMadisonLS September 9, 2026

PHOTOS: JAKE PIPER (CONVOCATION), JAKE PIPER (LASER), ALTHEA DOTZOUR (FRANCIS HALZEN), STEVE DONOVAN (IRVING & DOROTHY LEVY HALL)

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FROM THE DEAN

Opening Doors



It's been an exciting time to serve as the Interim Dean for the College of Letters & Science. Since I started last May, the College opened the doors to Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, launched the Department of Biology and celebrated the news that Professor Francis Halzen was named a Nobel laureate in physics, to name a few spectacular moments. These accomplishments are a culmination of years and years of hard work, but they are not finish lines. They mark new beginnings, doors swinging wide open for students, faculty and staff alike to burst through and bring their ideas, talent and Badger work ethic.

I've had the opportunity to spend a lot of time in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, the building you see featured in our cover story "Human Interest" (page 16). Each time I'm there, I see students making themselves at home. They're nestled in study pods, hustling to their next lecture or just spending time together at the café. But that's not all I've seen. I've seen faculty members exchanging ideas in the hallway and bulletin boards filled with new interdisciplinary events happening across departments. In just a short time, this building is living up to its mission as a hub for activities and conversations about the human experience — in both the present and the past! What I love about the story we put together to celebrate the building's opening is that it puts people at the heart of it, right where they belong.

Beyond our cover story, there's a lot to be proud of in the pages of this magazine, including the ways that our alumni community steps up to support current students. In "Hollywood Lights" (page 26), more than 100 alumni came together in L.A. to mentor 14 students who traveled there to learn about careers in film and media. And in "Pillar of Community" (page 14), an alumna and a current student celebrate 60 years of the Center for Academic Excellence, which has been supporting life-changing student experiences across decades. I've also heard many of your thoughts, hopes and concerns about AI's impact on campus. I assure you I have been listening, and I share my insights in "Paving the Badger Way" (page 36).

This magazine remains a celebration of the L&S community and the unique value of a liberal arts and sciences education. As you read through these pages and discover outstanding alumni, faculty, staff and students, I hope you remember that we are a community, connected in our commitment to curiosity, the continual and fearless act of sifting and winnowing and the Wisconsin Idea. The education provided here is a testament to people like you who continue to support us and our mission. As technology advances and the world changes, the work we do remains the same: to train the next generation of learners and leaders who understand the value of critical thinking, problem-solving and being a force for good.

On, Wisconsin!

Kristin R. Eschenfelder
Interim Dean
College of Letters & Science



PHOTO: ELISE MAHON

This butterfly has been fitted with a tracking sticker that will help researchers understand the survival rate of monarchs.

1

Butterfly in the Sky

Fall marks the start of a magical orange migration, as millions of monarch butterflies make their way south to Mexico.

"It's all about milkweed, and we have a ton of it," says Department of Biology Biocore Instructor Seth McGee, looking out over the Biocore Prairie on the Lakeshore Nature Preserve.

He and a team of undergraduate and graduate students are carefully netting and tagging monarchs for a community-science effort called Project Monarch. Instead of using conventional paper sticker tags that are placed on healthy butterflies' wings, Project Monarch outfits these intrepid travelers with an additional antenna: a solar-powered radio tag.

With paper tags, getting meaningful data was a matter of luck, depending on someone else seeing the same tagged monarch and reporting their observation.

"The radio tags give us an unprecedented, real-time map of the pitstops and corridors monarchs use so we can better protect the habitats they rely on," McGee says.

After catching a monarch, the team weighs, measures, notes the sex of and tests the butterfly for a common fungal infection. The data helps the team assess whether the monarch is a good candidate for a radio tag.

For monarchs that qualify, McGee and his team carefully use nontoxic eyelash glue to secure the delicate radio tags to their backs. Once the glue is dry and the tags are deployed on the app, the monarchs are released to feast on milkweed nectar as they make their way south. Want to follow along? You can track the UW monarchs in the Project Monarch App.

Read more at **go.wisc.edu/LSProjectMonarch**

2

MEDIA MENTION

"Reading is an encounter with difference, with a different kind of mind, a different place, a different approach to the world."

NICK BUTTRICK,
an assistant professor of psychology, explains in *The Washington Post* why reading fiction is so good for your brain

3

In Step

If you sign up for the University of Wisconsin Marching Band's Reg Week, you're signing up for more than 20 hours of playing music and marching in the signature stop-at-the-top style. Then, at the end, there's an audition. Despite the stakes, returning members find ways to make it fun for everyone, wearing costumes and welcoming newcomers in for beloved band traditions. It's a reminder of the band's mission to create a community and spread joy through music. "I've been through [Reg Week] quite a few times, and I really enjoy getting to see all the new prospective members learning the basics of the marching style," says Braden King, a senior trombone player and rank leader. "[They show] great improvement over the course of the week, as they go from not knowing how to do any of it at all to being good enough to be members of the band."

Read more at **go.wisc.edu/LSRegWeek**



PHOTO: JAKE PIPER

PHOTO: JEFF MILLER



4

Key Figure

Across campus there are 159 pianos sprinkled in practice rooms, studios, classrooms and performance venues. Have you ever wondered who tunes them? The answer is Baoli Liu, a piano technician for the Mead Witter School of Music who won an academic staff excellence award earlier this year. He has an expert ear and a steadfast commitment to excellence, going beyond tuning to keep intricate action mechanisms in order, restore aging parts, evaluate tonal quality and make sure the school's concert grands are in tip-top shape for visiting artists and major recitals.

5

1,456

That's the number of pages students have created for *Curb*, a magazine produced as part of a School of Journalism and Mass Communication course. This year marks the publication's 25th anniversary, and the theme is "Flip," using the state coin to look beyond the version of Wisconsin we already know.



STILL THINKING ABOUT THE ROMAN EMPIRE?

Rachel Andrews studies the way the Roman Empire memorialized women in coinage.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN



The visage of Agrippina the Younger (below) appeared on 83 different Roman coins, spanning the reigns of three Roman emperors.

A few years back, vast swaths of the social media universe were captivated by a straightforward but random question women were asking the men in their lives: *How often do you think about the Roman Empire?*

For the last several years, Rachel Andrews (MA'23) has had her own answer: Basically, every single day.

Andrews, a PhD candidate in the Department of Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (CANES), found her Roman-centric research calling while working a summer internship at the Chazen Museum of Art. While cataloguing the Chazen's extensive collection of ancient Roman coinage, Andrews noticed something surprising — there were a lot of women on the coins.







"Seeing the emperors, and seeing lots of them at one time, I started to think about how they would feel when they saw women on coins," Andrews says. "What would this mean to someone who was handling them?"

Unlike the United States, the Roman Empire regularly featured powerful and important women on its currency. By the time Marcus Aurelius became emperor in 161 A.D., one in every three Roman coins featured a woman. Outside of dollar coins briefly minted to honor Susan B. Anthony and Sacagawea, the United States has rarely featured a woman on its regularly issued coinage.

One of the most ubiquitous women featured on Roman coins is Agrippina the Younger, the ruthless and ultra-connected great-granddaughter of the first Roman emperor (Augustus), sister of another emperor (Caligula) and wife to a third (Claudius). Her visage adorns a variety of gold and bronze coins, and she's the first woman to have her face on a coin during her own lifetime.

"She had trifold power that all linked back to that first emperor, which was really important in the Roman mindset," says Andrews. "She had positioned herself as an essential figure in the transfer of imperial power during the final years of the Julio-Claudian era."

Like many nations, Rome was concerned with reflecting its values on its currency — in this case, the idea that women were essential to the peaceful transfer of power within the empire. When paired with the images that appear on the reverse sides of the coins that feature Agrippina, her coins also speak to the woman's role in propagation and fecundity.

Andrews notes that eventually, Agrippina's image began to take on masculine qualities, embracing the more traditional male vision of power. It also began to be associated with popular Roman figures, first with the Roman general Germanicus and later alongside the Emperor Nero, Agrippina's son. Her visage appeared on at least three imperial coin types.

Compare that to the United States, a country that didn't place a president on a coin until 1909.

"I would say that there's a reason why the earliest American coins don't have our leaders on them, and there's folklore that George Washington was asked to be on a coin and said no," says Andrews. "There's a sort of caution: You had American colonists with King George bopping around in their pocket, and Washington didn't want his image to be alongside that sort of monarch."

Andrews is also studying coins that featured other female Roman rulers, including Julia Domna, the first empress of the Severan dynasty. Domna's coins echo those of Agrippina, in that they push her image as a figure of power. That's a theme that also extends to the Byzantine Empire, where the Empress Irene of Athens, who blinded her own son to consolidate her power, eventually upended social norms by having her image on both sides of a coin instead of only one.

"The Romans did not like having a leader's image on two sides of a coin," says Andrews. "It's a power move, and the messaging cannot really be overstated."

Given that the Julio-Claudians had 900 different types of coins minted during their nearly 100-year reign, Andrews has much more to dig into as she completes her graduate work. This includes investigating the reactions of the Romans who used the coins in daily life and re-examining the stories of the women who appeared on them through non-traditional sources. That's a lot of history to distill from small circular pieces of gold, silver and bronze.

"Although they were small, these coins were definitely mighty messengers for the Roman Empire," says Andrews. "They've been called monuments in miniature, something that would allow a Roman citizen to bring the messaging of the Empire into the home or into their own pockets." ■

PHOTOS: MOTTY / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (BUST), CLASSICAL NUMISMATIC GROUP / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS (COINS), DIETER MEYRL / GETTY (COLOSSEUM), DMITRIY MOROZ / GETTY (CAPITOLINE WOLF)

RESEARCH

Calm, Cool, Collected

Plants, eggs and flesh-eating beetles – there's a lot to love in the Department of Biology's collections.

BY ALLI WATTERS

The new Department of Biology brings together the top talent and resources from the former departments of integrative biology and botany – including their incredible collections. When you explore the sun-drenched paths of the Botany Garden and Greenhouse, the bone-filled shelves of the UW Zoological Museum and the taxonomic books at the Wisconsin State Herbarium, you're face-to-face with collections that open new doors to the study of life. "From sequencing ancient DNA to sorting modern biological informatics to documenting the biodiversity of Earth, bringing these collections together creates a hub where we can tell the biological story," says Mary Halloran ('83, PhD'94), chair and professor for the Department of Biology. ■



Peltigera evansiana

Raising the Dead

Wisconsin State Herbarium

There's a fundamental question at the center of biological research: Where is the line between dormancy and death? That's at the heart of a research project in the lab of Kate McCulloh, the Rebecca Blank Professor of Botany. Undergraduate junior Amy Dougherty started experimenting with the Herbarium's collection of thousands of lichens – some of which have been preserved for decades. She wanted to see if she could rehydrate and metabolically reactivate them, effectively bringing functionally "dead" lichen back to life. It turns out she could raise the dead, opening up a world of cutting-edge ecophysiology research.

PHOTO: JAKE PIPER



Amorphophallus titanum

A Budding Genus

Botany Garden and Greenhouse

When Big Bucky first bloomed in 2001, 30,000 people flocked to the greenhouse to see (and smell!) the giant corpse flower. After reaching maturity, the inflorescence (a cluster of flowers) blooms only once every three to seven years and is open for just a few days. Big Bucky has bloomed three times since then. After its last flower in 2012, the botanists divided it to create a second plant named Bucky Jr. It's not clear if or when either plant will bloom, but they remain a main attraction in the greenhouse.

PHOTO: WISCONSIN PUBLIC RADIO

It's a Bird, It's a Crane

UW Zoological Museum

Out of all 15 species of cranes, 10 are vulnerable or endangered. That's top of mind for the scientists at the UW Zoological Museum, who recently achieved complete representation of all 15 species in their egg collection thanks to a partnership with the International Crane Foundation. These eggs are part of a critical repository for specimens – including fossils, fluids and taxidermy – of endangered species used in research, teaching and outreach. If you see the eggs on display, they're likely not the real things. The museum has 3D scanning and printing equipment to duplicate fragile specimens, which are then painted for a realistic look.

PHOTO: UW ZOOLOGICAL MUSEUM





FRIEND OF THE COLLECTION

Fish Fry

Botany Garden and Greenhouse

Every good garden has a pond. And the Botany Garden and Greenhouse have two – one in the garden, one in the greenhouse. While the pond is a beloved spot to sit and relax for students, it's a proper home for koi, some more than 30 years old. As bottom feeders, these fish play a critical role in the nutrient cycle of their ponds. They also earn their own keep. Each year they produce hundreds of babies, known as fry, which are traded for store credit at a local pond shop that provides food and pond maintenance supplies.

PHOTO: AGUS PRIANTO / GETTY



FRIEND OF THE COLLECTION

Skeleton Crew

UW Zoological Museum

The UW Zoological Museum is full of bones, old and new, but have you ever wondered who cleans them? The answer is a crew of flesh-eating beetles who live in a secret chamber beneath Bascom Hill called the Dermestarium. People like John Stuhler ('11, MS'15), curator of mammals and birds, drop off flesh-covered skeletons to the dermestid beetles, who see the extras as a delicious snack. A few days or weeks later, depending on the size, the bones are ready for one last round of cleaning and preparation before they can be catalogued.

PHOTO: UDO SCHMIDT / WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

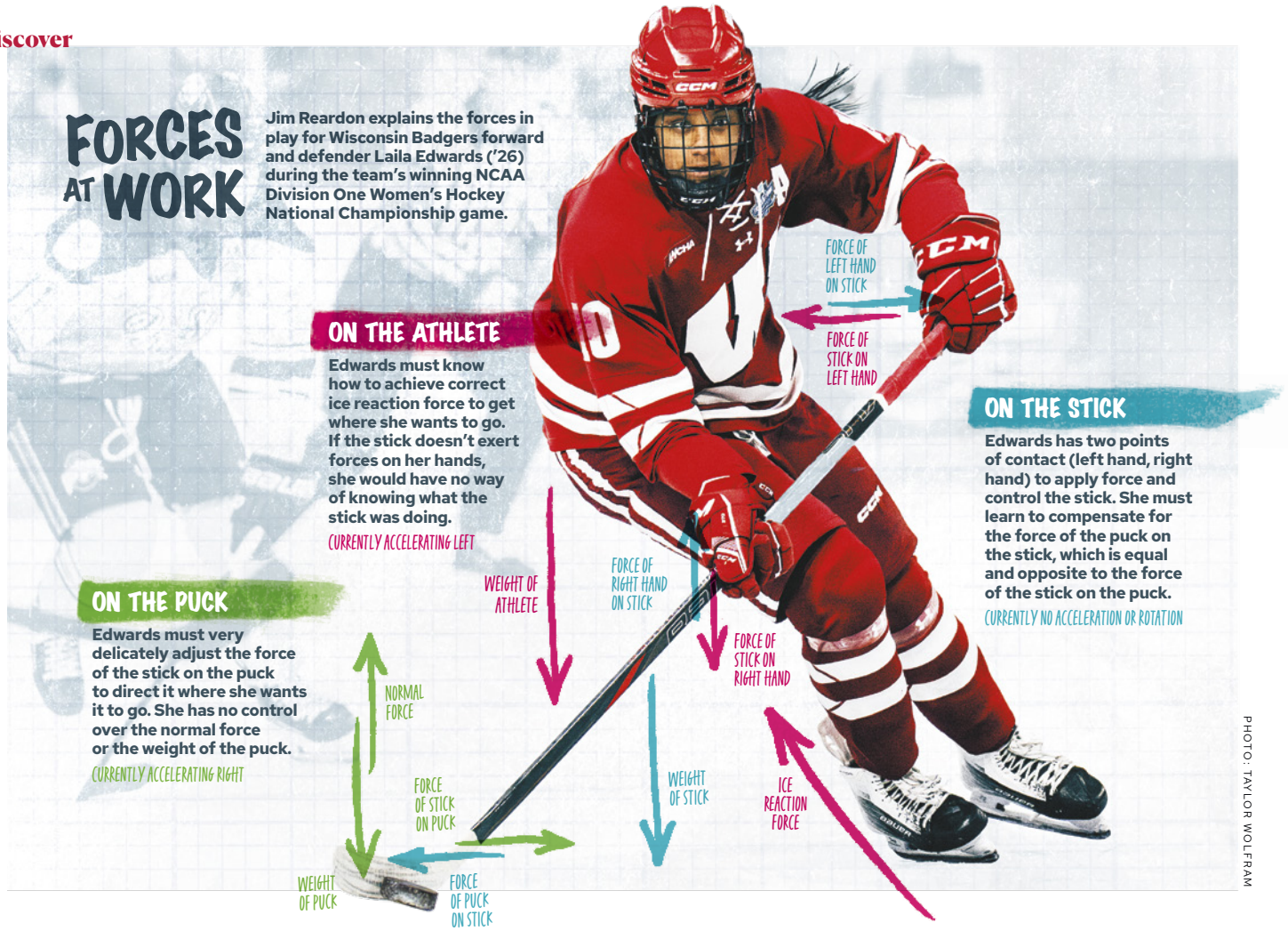


PHOTO: TAYLOR WOLFRAM

TEACHING

Game On!

Everyone is an expert in torque, even if they don't know it yet. At least, that's what Jim Reardon sets out to prove in his physics of sports course.

BY LYDIA PICOTTE

To separate Wisconsin from its identity as a sports school would be to alter its DNA entirely. Competition bleeds into every corner of campus from Camp Randall and the Kohl Center to Union South watch parties and pickup games in the parks.

Now, the director of undergraduate studies and teaching faculty for the physics department, Jim Reardon, has tapped into this interest in a new way: through science.

His course, "Physics of Sports," teaches students the principles of physics by applying them to competitive sports. Reardon developed the course in 2023 after learning about something similar being taught at the University of California, Irvine. This was the first time he built a course curriculum entirely from scratch. In his first semester teaching the course he had only four students, and one of them was auditing. Ultimately, the plasma physicist is grateful for the early low-stakes environment.

"You might be an expert tennis player, or you may watch it casually, or you may not even know of the existence of the sport," says Reardon. "I needed to make materials that stood up from all three points of view."

Since that first lecture in the spring of 2023, the class has exploded in popularity. Enrollment numbers now sit at around 300 undergraduates. Reardon's emphasis on inclusion means that it attracts everyone from dedicated physics majors to a wide variety of undergraduates looking for an interesting way to fulfill their prerequisites.

"Knowing that UW–Madison is a sporty place, I thought this course would be a success," he says. "I thought unless I messed up really badly, there would be an interest."

The nature of the course also allows for the personal interests of students and faculty to shape the curriculum. Reardon is involved with the Wisconsin Track Club and completed his graduate work at MIT, in marathon-crazed Boston. His personal affinity for running is incorporated into the coursework. When he had a teaching assistant with an interest in sailing, they worked together to create lessons on how boats sail upwind and other sailing physics topics.

Another one of Reardon's favorite lessons to teach looks at aerobic metabolism in athletes by comparing a human to a fire tornado. A fire tornado that suddenly burns 10 times brighter is comparable to an athlete who is suddenly in motion. Reardon, easily characterized by his readiness to learn from both scientists and athletes, believes that within every sport is a different lesson.

"U.S. Olympian Breezy Johnson was quoted as saying that going on a downhill ski run in the Olympics is like solving physics problems at 80 miles an hour," Reardon says. "There's clearly something we can learn by studying any elite athlete in any sport." ■

STUDENTS

Finding a Way

Understanding attention could be the key to drafting more accessible navigation systems.

BY LYDIA PICOTTE



PHOTO: JAKE PIPER

Turn left onto North Park Street. Turn right. Slight right toward Lincoln Drive, then turn left onto Lincoln Drive.

These simple, robotic instructions are generated daily by global positioning systems (GPS) around the world to help people get to where they're going. They're also the research subject for Helen Bell, a neurobiology and psychology double major who participated last summer in the Letters & Science Summer of Excellence in Research (LASER) program. Undergraduate students who are looking to work in a scientific lab on campus apply to the LASER program during their first year of studies. Because many research opportunities require students to have completed two or three years of school, LASER stands out as a unique chance to get involved early and test-drive scientific interests.

Bell spent six weeks last summer studying interactions between human brains and maps in the UW Cartography Lab with PhD students Susannah Cox and Alton Hipps (MS'26) under the advisement of Bill Limpisathian, the associate faculty director of the lab and an assistant professor in the Department of Geography. Using technology like the virtual reality headsets, the lab is working to discover how maps could be made more accessible for people with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).

"To navigate with a map, you have to take in information, remember it, relate it to the environment around you and then make decisions while you're moving, which all demand the cognitive processes that people with ADHD struggle with," Bell explains. "Our goal is to see how attention works and how we can make mapping more accessible."

Bell's research involved testing what cognitive processes have more of an impact on wayfinding. She first had study participants complete basic tasks to evaluate their visuospatial memory and cognitive flexibility. From there, she had them navigate certain paths using a VR headset, with and without maps. This allowed her to measure which of the two processes, if either, had a greater impact on people's ability to navigate.

While Bell has long been interested in studying the brain, maps and technology are a newer field for her. Despite a passing interest, she'd never thought about them in the context of research before last summer. In this way, her LASER experience was able to simultaneously play to her interests while also exposing her to novel perspectives and discoveries. LASER also introduced her to a cohort of friends who share her curious nature.

The spring semester before they're placed in labs, LASER scholars take a one-credit class together that meets once a week. They also take an additional one-credit course during their summer research stint. While equipping them with necessary skills and information, these courses build relationships that stretch beyond the summer. Bell says that those connections have played a key role in her collegiate experience. This fall, she had the opportunity to extend her time as an undergraduate research assistant in Limpisathian's lab, and the experience has affirmed her dream of becoming a pathologist.

"I've gained wisdom from mentors who have experience with research and its processes," she says. "The LASER program has not only been a wonderful resource to me, but it has also opened a plethora of other resources and has given me a head start to a career in research." ■

RECENT GRAD

Up in the Air

English alumnus Chris Houben has risen to the ranks of the U.S. Navy's most elite aviation officers.

BY KATIE VAUGHN

Chris Houben ('17) will never forget the first time he saw the Blue Angels. He was 6 years old and awestruck by the maneuvers the U.S. Navy flight demonstration squadron performed in the air.

"I thought of these guys as 10 feet tall, bulletproof, superheroes," Houben recalls.

If you'd told him then that someday he'd be one of those pilots blasting and twisting through the sky, he wouldn't have believed you. But his extraordinary drive and inspiring attitude have taken him from a service-minded kid in the Chicago suburbs to exploring the liberal arts at UW–Madison to achieving success in the Navy.

And he's just getting started.

Pre-Flight

Growing up in Geneva, Illinois, Houben found his place in Boy Scouts, where he embraced the importance of putting community first. During a 140-mile hike on a scouting trip in New Mexico, a teenage Houben sat atop a mountain and made the decision to join the military.

Back home, he marched into a recruitment office, where he learned about the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC), the program that trains students to become military officers while attending college. Participating students receive financial assistance in exchange for service during and after graduation.



"And 6-year-old me would think it was the coolest thing ever."

CHRIS HOUBEN

The Blue Angels pilots can fly as close as 18 inches from each other during their maneuvers.

PHOTO: U.S. NAVY MASS COMMUNICATION SPECIALIST 2ND CLASS JOHN T. JARRETT



Chris Houben is refining both his pilot and teaching skills during his time with the Blue Angels.

PHOTO: KATIE BODDEN

"That was a slam dunk for me," says Houben, who was thrilled to be placed in his first-choice school of UW–Madison.

Houben's time at UW was a mix of academics and military training. Through ROTC classes two days a week, summer programs and weekend service projects, he learned the importance of working as a team. And he gravitated to the English department, where classes combined literature with history and philosophy, required students to form coherent thoughts and — his favorite — encouraged passionate debates. He focused on literature, with the hope of teaching high school one day.

Another highlight for Houben was meeting his future wife, Sara Houben ('20), a history and political science major from Germantown, Wisconsin.

"We met at a cappella auditions," he says. "I was a beatboxer, and she was a singer."

As Houben's senior year approached, he embarked on the process of service selection, hoping for the chance to work with airplanes in the Navy.

"I was fortunate to be selected to be a Naval Aviator," he says. "That's where the real journey began."

Cleared for Takeoff

Houben's flight training took him from Florida to Mississippi to California as he honed his skills and narrowed his specialization. Upon joining Strike Fighter Squadron 195, the "Dambusters," he completed one deployment to Afghanistan and two to the South China Sea.

So far in his time in the Navy, Lieutenant Houben has accumulated more than 1,800 flight hours and more than 240 carrier-assisted landings. He's also earned the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal and several unit and service awards.

"I've always been inspired by challenge, to see how far I can push myself, how far I can go," he says.

Houben also got to take steps toward his dream of teaching, starting in 2024, when he moved to Virginia and began serving as an instructor pilot.

"Naval aviation is the pinnacle of what it means to teach well and effectively," he says. "You need to be able to teach in 1,000 different ways, in different learning styles. I love to see that lightbulb go off, to teach someone to do something better. It makes a difference, especially when people's lives are on the line."

Sky's the Limit

It was also while in Virginia that Houben started thinking about the Blue Angels. The highly competitive squadron is made up of only 17 officers who perform flight demonstrations to roughly 11 million spectators a year. Houben figured being selected was a long shot but that he may as well try out.

"The worst that could happen is they'd say no," he reasoned. "And 6-year-old me would think it was the coolest thing ever."

However, after an intense application process, in July 2025, Houben received the call inviting him to be one of seven new officers to join the Blue Angels for the 2026 air show season.

Houben was assigned the #3 spot, the left wing that flies on the left side of the formation, close to the lead aircraft and right wing, as they execute tight maneuvers in the sky. Throughout the Blue Angels' 45-minute demonstrations, pilots get as close as 18 inches from one plane's wing tip to another's canopy.

"There's just zero room for error," he says. "We're the only organization on planet Earth that flies so close to another plane. It's the most awe-inspiring thing I've ever seen."

But just as impressive to Houben is the squadron's commitment to always improving.

"There is no perfect demonstration," he says. "There's always some way we can improve. Blue Angels are the hallmark of not settling, of always trying to push forward. It's the culture."

Houben does not yet know where his career will take him after his time with the Blue Angels. He hopes to return to the Navy fleet and continue to refine his teaching skills. No matter what, in the future, he will continue to find ways to serve, just as he does now.

"Being part of the Blue Angels is a way to give back to the Navy that's already given so much to me," he says. ■

DIALOGUE

Pillar of Community

Past and present members of the Center for Academic Excellence muse on the program's enduring impact.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN



Alumna Miriah Albouras (left) and current student Emily Vang are separated by more than a decade, but their campus experiences have a lot in common – including and especially their time with the Center for Academic Excellence.

Sixty years ago, the Center for Academic Excellence (CAE) launched with a mission to help first-generation, low-income and rural students connect and succeed at UW–Madison. The program has gone by different names — the Five-Year Program and the Academic Advancement Program — but the life-changing formula of support and encouragement has remained the same. We sat down in CAE's current space on campus with alumna Miriah Albouras ('12), who's now a mother and academic advisor in higher education, and Emily Vang, a junior studying political science, to hear about their experiences.

MIRIAH ALBOURAS (alumna): I became involved in CAE and the Academic Advancement Program (AAP) as a freshman. I still, to this day, remember my CAE advisor, Linda McCarroll Stamm. She was a big influence in my small life at that time and even beyond that experience. She's who got me interested in advising.

EMILY VANG (current student): For the past three years of being a CAE scholar, I have been a peer mentor, which is kind of like being an older brother or sister figure for the incoming freshmen class. My first year, I had a peer mentor, too. It was nice to have a peer to talk to and be there to help and slowly transition me into college. If it were not for CAE, I don't think I would have created and obtained as many opportunities as I did, and that's in part thanks to my CAE advisor, Hernan Rodriguez ('23, MS'25). I'm always in his office, always asking questions. I like to joke that he should be tired of me at this point!

PHOTO: PAULIUS MUSTEIKIS



MA: I feel you on the always in the office thing. It was almost like I was a shark: OK, let me see if their door is open so I can ask, "Do you have a moment?" And Linda would always find time for me, and so I'd go in there, crying or talking about what was going on with me.

EV: Yes, me, too! I always thought that it was so embarrassing to sit there and basically pour my entire life story out there, but it's just so helpful. It helped that Hernan had the same major as me, to be able to talk to somebody who went through exactly what I went through. As a first-gen student and as somebody that doesn't often see themselves in my specific major, it can be hard to try and navigate it all by myself.

MA: I became pregnant with my daughter my freshman year, and I had to ask, "How am I going to do all of this?" I was really scared. But once I told Linda here at CAE, she said, "No problem, we'll figure it out." That really kept me in college — I needed that support and motivation.

EV: It's interesting to see how much support I get from CAE. I'm continuously surrounded by a community that's always looking out for me, always wanting the best for me, always supporting me in everything that I do.

MA: I'm 37, and my daughter is turning 17 and thinking about college — talk about your full-circle moments — and now that I look back at those four years of college, I think about how quickly it goes. I probably had some of the biggest life decisions and experiences during college. But that is the time to take those risks, tackle those challenges and go outside of your comfort zone, because if you do fall or fail or struggle, you have CAE to come back to. Once you're out of college and you're in the workplace, it's very different.

EV: The big thing that we tell our new students in CAE is that you get what you put into it. You can't expect to have a bunch of friends and all these opportunities if you don't put yourself out there. That's what I would tell my younger self, at least, is you have to put yourself out there. You're starting off on a brand-new foot. You have nothing to lose. But I think when you already have a community here, or when you establish one, it's easier to think, "It's OK, I am not alone." That's the biggest factor in it all. ■

HUMAN INTEREST

Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall. Yes, it's a state-of-the-art facility with all the bells and whistles to support modern teaching and learning needs. But it's also a community space where students, teachers and researchers come together. In the College of Letters & Science, when we think about this new building, we're not just reflecting on all of its shiny new features—we're celebrating the ways the people inside will examine our histories while striving for a brighter future. In honor of our new five-story hub for the humanities and the interpretive social sciences, here are five stories that celebrate the humans at the heart of it all.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN AND ALLI WATTERS

PHOTOS: ALTHEA DOTZOUR (COUCHES) AND TAYLOR WOLFRAM (ALL REMAINING PHOTOS)















PHOTO: ALTHEA DOTZOUR

STIC TOG

Collaboration can technically happen anywhere, but it's far more powerful in a building that's been expressly designed to bring people together.

For Sasha Maria Suarez, collaboration is at the heart of everything she does, though historically she's had to trek between far-flung locations like Ingraham Hall and the Humanities Building to get the job done. She's an assistant professor with joint appointments in the Department of History and the American Indian & Indigenous Studies Program. Since the move to Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, her colleagues are only a few floors — and in some cases, a few doors — away.

Suarez's work studies the experiences of Indigenous women with a special focus on the Great Lakes. Her most recent research relies on community engagement and collecting oral histories. It's always been in her plans to partner with researchers in the Department of Gender & Women's Studies, with whom she has already worked, on a project about the growing number of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Wisconsin.

"That connection can be built out more," says Suarez, who is teaching both of her classes in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall this fall. "We can conduct community-engaged, public-facing work around these issues that will be strengthened by the proximity we have to each other."

That potential collaboration also extends to events like student poster sessions and public lectures. The Program in Chicanx/e & Latinx/e Studies is celebrating its 50th anniversary this fall, and program representatives have been working with their new neighbors to include them in the festivities. There are student angles, too: One of

A GIFT FOR GENERATIONS

Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall's construction was made possible thanks to the generosity of brothers Marv ('68, JD'71) and Jeff ('72) Levy, who made a $20 million gift in honor of their late parents, Irving and Dorothy Levy. Read all about them on page 34.

HED ETHER

Suarez's graduate students is an art history major looking at artistic representation in the Midwest, including Ojibwe and Hmong art. Proximity to the Asian American Studies Program could help the project flourish.

Rachel Kuo, an assistant professor in the Department of Gender & Women's Studies, is one of the researchers with whom Suarez might one day collaborate. She's on the fifth floor, two floors above the Asian American Studies Program, Kuo's other academic home. Kuo's research focuses on the ways technology can promote or hinder political and social movements, and it's deeply rooted in the details of what it takes to get people together to accomplish goals. She's expecting the new hub to leverage that same spirit.

"It takes away a little bit of that logistical friction of collaboration," Kuo says. "People often think of humanities work as more 'individual,' and that's simply not true. There's so much that demands conversations with colleagues and peers. The importance of being able to have infrastructure and space to do that work, and to do it in proximity to each other, is significant."

Max Felker-Kantor, an associate professor in the Department of African American Studies, researches policing and race, a pair of topics that occupy the same academic wheelhouse as that of Simon Balto ('05, MA'10, PhD'15), the Mary Herman Rubinstein Professor of History. The two have collaborated and co-written articles before from a distance, but now they have the chance to see each other nearly every day.

"I can walk up a flight and pop into his office and talk," says Balto, who also has an affiliation in Felker-Kantor's department. "Since he joined us last year, he and I have already talked about putting on symposiums about the history we study."

Nearly every incoming undergraduate student will attend a lecture in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall. Here's a roundup of three courses that kicked off the inaugural fall semester.

2 LISTENING IN

AFROAMER 156

BLACK MUSIC AND AMERICAN CULTURAL HISTORY

This course is taught by award-winning lecturer Alexander Shashko ('94), who is also a voting member of the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. During the semester, he covers how Black music has shaped the social, musical and political landscape of the United States from 1950 to the present.

HISTORY 136

SPORT, RECREATION, & SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES

Often, people see sports as an escape from the "real world." But Ashley Brown, the associate professor and Allan H. Selig Chair in the History of Sport and Society who teaches this course, explains that these games can't be separated from their political, social and cultural contexts.

AMER IND/AFROAMER/ASIAN AM/CHICLA 102

INTRODUCTION TO COMPARATIVE U.S. ETHNIC, AMERICAN INDIAN, AND INDIGENOUS STUDIES

African American Studies, American Indian & Indigenous Studies, Asian American Studies and Chicanx/e & Latinx/e Studies come together in this comparative ethnic studies course. Collin Rohrbaugh, an instructor within American Indian & Indigenous Studies, teaches students how to examine race, ethnicity and indigeneity within the United States.



PHOTO: TAYLOR WOLFRAM

MAKING HISTORY

Many of the academic units in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall are a direct response to student demand. Take a trip down memory lane with us to look at the origins of these eight departments and programs.

1892

HISTORY

History has been taught on campus since UW–Madison's founding in 1848. It became an official discipline in 1892 with the creation of UW's School of Economics, Political Science, and History, reflecting growing public interest in the social sciences.

1969

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968 sparked a wave of protests on college campuses across the country, including UW–Madison. During the Black Student Strike of 1969, students from across campus fought for the creation of a Black studies department, and the department was launched that same year.

1972

AMERICAN INDIAN & INDIGENOUS STUDIES

In 1968, American Indian and Indigenous students started meeting with the chancellor to discuss how the university could better serve their community. The fact-finding mission led to multiple positive developments, including the formation of the new program in 1972.



PHOTO: JAKE PIPER

4 BALANCING THE BOOKS

Before moving into the new building, faculty members had the opportunity to share input on what their needs would be. This led to discussions on everything from cafés to color schemes and lively debates about bookshelves.

Jordan Rosenblum, the Belzer Professor of Classical Judaism and director of the Religious Studies Program, isn't one for design discussions. But when the opportunity presented itself to provide input for a building that celebrates the humanities and interpretive social sciences, he wanted to bring his thoughts to the table. That perspective included input on why books are so important to humanities scholars and how design contributes to conversation.

Q How does it feel that the university is investing in the humanities and the interpretive social sciences?

A It is rare for universities to invest in new buildings for departments like ours. Chemistry, engineering, computer sciences – they're the ones who get new buildings. And the humanities most often get to move into the old buildings. This is a strong statement of the endurance of the humanities at UW–Madison and its field of dreams: "If you build it, they will come." Plus, these are units that plan on being around for decades to come.

Q You led the charge in negotiating for more bookshelves in the faculty offices. Why was that so important to you?

A Humanities scholars have certain desires, and one of them is that we need books. Many of us in the humanities believe in the power of books and that they are a repository of human knowledge. They're material artifacts. They change the way we think about things, and they also help us to produce new books. And everyone in this new building is in some way or fashion a historian of some kind. We have magazines, books – I have comic books from the 1970s for a research project I'm working on right now – and they might be some of the last copies left, and they might not be scanned ever. We're keeping that knowledge around.

Q What excites you about the design of this building?

A There are huddle spaces, office spaces, classroom spaces, grab-a-coffee spaces and study spaces. I look at all the things that are happening in this building, and the big takeaway is that we – as scholars, students, teachers and administrators – will benefit from having conversations with each other. This building was designed for those conversations, from color scheme to ottoman choice. The design helps you see the widest diversity of conversations that will happen in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall.

1975
GENDER & WOMEN'S STUDIES
The field of women's studies began nationwide in the 1970s. When UW–Madison's program launched in 1975, it stood out amongst the rest for having autonomy and resources to be leaders in the field. The program's first office was on Brooks Street, behind where Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall now stands.

1976
CHICANX/E & LATINX/E STUDIES
This year marks 50 years of the Chicanx/e & Latinx/e Studies Program. It launched in the School of Education in 1976 after years of picketing and advocacy from students and faculty. The program moved to the College of Letters & Science in 1988, which has been its academic home since, and now offers a major and a certificate.

1988
ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES
The roots of the Asian American Studies Program can be traced to multiple grassroots efforts in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, the Pacific and Asian Women's Alliance wrote a proposal for the creation of a new program, and the Asian Coalition sent it to Chancellor Donna Shalala, who approved it.

1991
JEWISH STUDIES
The Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies was founded in 1991 with the mission of studying Jewish religion, politics, society and culture. By 1995, the center had started offering a certificate and, in 2001, a full major.

2000
RELIGIOUS STUDIES
In the 1990s, there were already a lot of course offerings related to religion. But it wasn't until 1998 that the university started offering a certificate in religious studies. The official formation of the program came with the launch of a major in 2000.

A WORD OF ADVICE

The College of Letters & Science's career advising service SuccessWorks has opened a satellite location.



PHOTO: ALTHEA DOTZOUR

"You don't need to plan the next 20 years, let's start with the next 20 minutes."

That's what SuccessWorks advisors tell their students when they sit down, nervous about what a future career might look like. They help students identify marketable skills, meet potential employers and find internships in their fields. And now, students can get access to all of this by walking just a few steps into Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall.

"Students are already really busy, so we think the way to reach more of them is to go to where students are," says Angie White, executive director for SuccessWorks. "We are the first thing you see when you walk through the front door."

The mission of the Baumann Family SuccessWorks Gateway is to be accessible for quick career assistance — no appointment needed. That way, they can support more students like Kalani Rodriguez Jimenez. She's a senior triple majoring in Chicanx/e & Latinx/e studies, legal studies, and Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian studies with plans to pursue law school after graduation. Last summer, she held an internship at a nonprofit in Costa Rica called the Center for Peace Studies researching the rights of immigrants from Nicaragua in the San José central area.

"Before getting support from the SuccessWorks Internship Fund, I was worrying about how I was going to be able to pay for the whole program and if I would need to find another job while I was out there," Rodriguez Jimenez says. "It took a lot of stress off of me, and I was able to focus on my internship experience."

Like many students, Rodriguez Jimenez found out about SuccessWorks because of events hosted in their main office above the University Book Store. The introduction led her to opportunities like career advising, resume and cover letter workshops and practice interviews.

"I hope that by having this space in Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, every L&S student will have heard of us during their time on campus," White says. ■



Laura Oberwetter has made a name for herself in the fragrance field through unique branding and familiar scents.

Get a Clue

There's a narrow path into the world of fragrance, but Laura Oberwetter has found a way to blaze her own trail and make a name for herself as a perfumer.

BY RACHEL ROBEY

While most people remember their first foraging experience for the fungi, Laura Oberwetter ('18) remembers the smell. When the tell-tale scents of spring blow in the breeze, she's taken back to that time when she was eight years old and was warned, "These aren't normal mushrooms." For young Oberwetter, who'd never even had a so-called "normal" mushroom before, the disclaimer was wholly unnecessary: The fleshy brown barnacles being offered looked like something from the deep seafloor, if not the moon.

In fact, they were *Morchella esculenta*, commonly known as morels, foraged by her friend's dad from a forest near their homes in Middleton. By accepting them—initially out of politeness and then with enthusiasm—Oberwetter was inducted into the Midwest's mushroom foraging tradition, long observed in the quiet, greening woods across Wisconsin.

For the rest of her adolescence, spring meant mushroom hunting underneath the canopies of mixed and broadleaf forests, until the smell of wood violets and decaying leaf litter conjured a Pavlovian response in her brain. Little did she know at the time that she would someday bottle it up to share with the world.

PHOTOS: LUKAS KEAPPROTH



Current scents include Dandelion Butter, Morel Map, The Point, Warm Bulb and With the Candlestick.

Fragrance Family

A couple decades later, and a few years after graduating from UW–Madison with a degree in communication arts and moving to Chicago, Oberwetter co-launched Clue Perfumery, an indie fragrance house, alongside high school friend Caleb Vanden Boom. Both grew up among morel foragers, so when the brand quietly introduced itself with just three experimental scents in November 2023, there was no question that Morel Map — a "damp, green, loamy" forest floor — must be one of them.

"Caleb and I have a lot of the same creative reference points," says Oberwetter, Clue's "nose," or lead perfumer. Each scent begins with her at the organ, an industry term for the perfumer's workbench that stores raw materials like essential oils, resinoids, synthetic aroma molecules, aldehydes and more.

"It's called the organ because they're all 'notes,'" she says, referring to the hundreds of glass vials organized in amphitheater shelving.

In Clue's fragrance lab, these essences are densely layered until Oberwetter feels she has achieved something "truthful," a process that can require anywhere from 25 to 60 different notes working in concert.

"A really fun part of the formulation process for me is when we finally have something that smells good," she says. "What can we add to make it smell real?"

"I just refused to believe that it was impossible to get into, even though that's what everyone was saying."

LAURA OBERWETTER

Day to day, this is what she's working on, tinkering away with alchemical-looking apparatus in the backrooms of Clue's brand-new Logan Square storefront. With the shop (hopefully) opening this year, it will fully bring Oberwetter's fragrances to life, all the way down to the floor plan: Viewed from above, the store's layout will mimic the signature skeleton keyhole silhouette of Clue's perfume bottles. The shape draws you further into the space as it tapers back, with stops along the way at displays introducing the fragrances as individuals.

Heart Notes

Clue's visual world building is primarily Vanden Boom's purview. He's an independently successful graphic designer who's worked with pop culture darlings like Clairo, Apple TV's "Severance" and others. He develops unique visual expressions for each fragrance, pushing back against the homogeneous marketing treatment — Slow-motion running! Untouched wilderness! Woman on a horse! — that most mass-market perfumes end up with.

"So much in the fragrance space is about the exotic, traveling to remote places and experiencing things outside yourself," he says. "We're interested in exploring our own mythology."

Immersive, thematic and ultra-specific, each of Clue's five fragrances — Morel Map, The Point, With the Candlestick, Warm Bulb and Dandelion Butter — comes to you as an uncanny reminder of what Vanden Boom calls a "shared place of memory." You've probably already smelled The Point, ocean waves crashing against sand in late summer, and Dandelion Butter, too, their sap-filled stems crushed against cracks in hot concrete. They're simple pleasures, entire biomes, distilled into a 30 mL bottle.

Since launching, that fastidious attention to detail has enabled Clue to succeed in a way that might almost seem, but definitely isn't, effortless. Already, their perfumes have been accepted and embraced by the real authorities: the "niche fragrance heads" holding forth on forums like Basenotes, Fragrantica and r/indieperfume. In 2024, Warm Bulb was named an artisan finalist for the Art and Olfaction Awards, and, in 2026, Dandelion Butter was named the people's choice in the artisan category.

And in early summer of 2026, another auspice: Actress and singer Zendaya was photographed perusing Clue's fragrances at Stéle, a cult-favorite artisanal perfume boutique in New York City.

It's worth noting that this has all been achieved without even a hint of outside investment or paid marketing. And in Oberwetter's case, without the years-long formal training most perfumers undergo.

"I just refused to believe that it was impossible to get into, even though that's what everyone was saying," she says.

Accord

As it happens, there are no perfume schools in the U.S. A traditional path to perfumery would be to get a bachelor's degree in chemistry, save up another $50,000, then apply for a spot at a notoriously competitive French or Swiss perfumery school. After that, land an apprenticeship at one of the top four food and fragrance houses dominating the global industry. Then, after a few more years of benchwork, and assuming the master perfumer you're studying under recommends you for it, you might finally call yourself a perfumer.

Against this, Oberwetter's path — a degree in communication arts and two certificates in business and entrepreneurship — was unusual. Just don't call it a disadvantage.

"Would it have been better for me to study chemistry?" she asks. "Maybe, but I think the media and art criticism skills I learned in communication arts are better for the work."

In lieu of training in Europe, Oberwetter spent years buying perfume samples, studying and writing about them as an amateur, collecting her notes in a spreadsheet and haunting the same forums that would later praise her work as a perfumer. When the pandemic hit, she took remote classes from The Institute for Art and Olfaction in Los Angeles, thus cobbling together whatever instruction she could find.

"We're obsessed with folk art and the against-all-odds beauty of places like the Midwestern grottoes, where somebody had a vision, regardless of their skill," she says. "That does feel like it's home for me. Because I'm naive, and I don't know what I'm doing."

By this, she means she's following her creative instincts, allowing herself to be drawn again and again to the "weird wonder" of Wisconsin without being waylaid by market research. "We'll never make 'sexy beach,'" Oberwetter promises. "What we know is Cave of the Mounds." ■



Laura Oberwetter spent years studying and writing about perfume before becoming a lead perfumer.

HOLLYWOOD LIGHTS

The inaugural Creative Careers in Hollywood experience opened entertainment industry doors to a set of 14 students—and produced the experience of a lifetime.

BY AARON R. CONKLIN

LIKE EVERYONE ELSE IN THE ROOM, Evy Dhyanchand couldn't believe what she was experiencing.

There she was, in the cozy Santa Monica studio of award-winning film composer James Newton Howard, an artist whose accomplishments include the musical scores of triple-A movies like *The Hunger Games* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*. He was playing the scores on his keyboard while sharing his composition process.

"I was starstruck the entire time we talked to him, but it was fascinating to see his process," says Dhyanchand, a junior from Lancaster, Wisconsin, studying communication arts and music composition. "We had the chance to hear him explain the film composition process, from the conception of his own thematic ideas to the final discussions with the director."

The afternoon in Howard's studio was just one of a long list of jaw-dropping moments Dhyanchand and the 13 other students who were part of the inaugural Creative Careers in Hollywood (CCIH) program got to experience last summer. Conceived and constructed by Derek Johnson (MA'04, PhD'09), professor and chair of the Department of Communication Arts, and Jamie Prey ('12), the department's alumni relations officer, CCIH brought the students to Tinseltown for three activity-packed weeks in June. After years of gestating as an idea, the program took the pair about 12 months to put together.

"I thought it could be valuable for our students to help connect them with alumni and other working professionals in the industry and give them a better understanding of how Hollywood works and what L.A. is like," explains Johnson. "Because if they're thinking about trying to make a career there someday, it's going to be easier if they've actually encountered the place before."

Several other institutions have created similar trips for students, but other institutions don't have the engaged and expansive network of Hollywood-based alumni that UW–Madison's Department of Communication Arts has. For instance, Prey was able to leverage the fact that film composer Howard's agent is L&S grad Sam Schwartz ('72), which led to that impromptu studio session. On the second day of the program, the students attended a reception with a whopping 100 communication arts alumni and friends currently working in the entertainment industry in Hollywood.



PHOTO: ZOË LITTLEFIELD



Students on the Creative Careers in Hollywood experience relax in the studio of legendary film composer James Newton Howard, listening to him play from the scores of *The Hunger Games* and *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

The CCIH experience kicked off with a pitch panel. Each of the students was paired with an alumni mentor and expected to develop a pitch for a television show by the time the program was over. Zoë Littlefield, a current sophomore majoring in English and sociology, was paired with communication arts alumna Nikki Schiefelbein. Schiefelbein had worked her way up from being a showrunner assistant for "One Tree Hill" to becoming part of the show's writing staff for six of its nine seasons, a gig she parlayed into bigger success, writing for shows like "The Umbrella Academy" and "The Ranch."

Looking back on her own early-career experience, Schiefelbein recognizes that she wasted years trying to figure out her path in Hollywood. She believes the CCIH program could save the students from at least some of that inefficient anguish.

"For me it was really a goal to cut through some of that," she says. "You don't have to know exactly what you want to do when you come out here, but just to have an idea and to have the resource group of alumni saying, 'Hey, yeah, maybe try that,' or 'Here's a job opening if you're interested in this.' We're more than just a network the students can tap into. We're genuinely rooting for them. The students have cheerleaders in us. I think CCIH made that clear."

Littlefield took immediate advantage, turning two of her connections with alumni members into summer internships. Her panel pitch was for a show she dubbed "Crack Heads," an "Abbott Elementary" meets *Waiting for Guffman* workplace mockumentary about a dysfunctional ballet company performing *The Nutcracker*. Schiefelbein and the rest of the panel loved it, encouraging her budding interest in screenwriting.

"It was really this wonderful snapshot of all Hollywood has to offer," Littlefield says of her time with CCIH. "That helped me not only get excited about the industry but also narrow down what I actually want to do."

Carson Klamert, a junior majoring in communication arts and zoology, was paired with mentor Rachel Bozich ('14), a documentary filmmaker who's done work with Netflix, Amazon Prime and HBO Max. Bozich gave Klamert keen advice on pitching, building and



Austin Shearer, Carson Klamert and Christiaan Hajos prep for some mock podcasting on the set of "Will & Rusty's Playdate."

maintaining long-lasting connections in the industry. Better still, she also brought him on set for one of the documentaries she was filming.

"I don't want it to sound cliché, but that was seriously a life-changing experience for me," Klamert says. "The mentors were very nice and open to building a connection beyond the program and not just treating it as 'I gotta talk to this kid for three weeks.' They actually cared about our futures and our success."

Thanks to Eric Bergman ('90), the students got to do hands-on work with a loop group at Warner Bros. Studio, recording post-production background dialogue to be used for a television scene. They did a table read with alumnus Brent Crowe ('97), a production manager with 20th Television Animation and one of the producers of "Family Guy." Film director Sean Hanish ('90) had the students pretend to be actors, re-blocking scenes from the movie *Moneyball*, in order to teach them how directors get good performances from talent.

"Some of the things that worked really well were the instances where our alumni and other industry professionals didn't just talk to or with the students, but did stuff with them," says Johnson. "Moments like that got the students to not just hear how these things work, but to actually do it and participate in it themselves."

After hearing about the full scope of the students' potential career interests, one of the alums who spoke to the group described them as a "mini studio," spanning the gamut of career possibilities required to take an entertainment project from start to finish. And in a sense, they behaved that way. The 14 students spent most of their unprogrammed time working as a group, helping each other hone their panel pitches. On the trip's final day, they visited the Universal Studios amusement park and never left each others' sides.

"I thought about that mini studio idea a lot when I saw them working together, because they were always there to support one another," says Johnson. "I think the strongest network they found might be the 14 of them." ■

Hear directly from students about their experience at **go.wisc.edu/LSHollywoodLights**.

PHOTOS: JAMIE PREY (JAMES NEWTON HOWARD) AND ZOË LITTLEFIELD (ALL REMAINING PHOTOS)





RIGHT: Colleagues celebrated Francis Halzen at the Wisconsin IceCube Particle Astrophysics Center (WIPAC), complete with a cake featuring the Nobel Prize medal.

LEFT: As thousands more joined online, some 400 lucky individuals were able to join the fireside chat in Memorial Union.

PHOTOS: ALTHEA DOTZOUR

A Nobel Celebration

In a historic moment, Francis Halzen was named UW–Madison's newest Nobel laureate, and thousands of people have shown up to honor his achievement.

Francis Halzen started with what some considered a novel and impossible idea — installing a powerful telescope under miles of Antarctic ice to look for invisible space particles. Decades later, that idea earned Halzen the 2026 Nobel Prize in Physics.

This is a tribute to his work as the principal investigator of the NSF IceCube Neutrino Observatory, a research facility that has provided critical information about the functioning of the universe. 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.

"It is difficult to imagine that we could have pulled this off anywhere but at UW–Madison with its unique research infrastructure," says Halzen, who is the Gregory Breit Professor and Vilas Research Professor of Physics. "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."

And the community showed up to celebrate Halzen in a big way. He was traveling for a science festival in Italy when the news was announced, and he returned to campus to a celebration thrown by his colleagues, complete with a Nobel Prize medal cake. He also packed the house for a fireside chat that drew 400 audience members to Memorial Union and thousands more online. Babcock Dairy even launched a new ice cream flavor, Nobel Neutrino.

"You don't learn anything when you keep discovering things you understand," Halzen says about the type of research he hopes to do next. "[I want to discover] some completely off-the-wall surprise."

Halzen becomes the 23rd researcher with UW–Madison ties to win the Nobel Prize. The most recent UW-adjacent winner was economist Claudia Goldin, a former UW–Madison economics professor who won the prize in 2023. The last active UW faculty member to win a Nobel Prize was Howard Temin, a molecular biologist who received the honor in 1975.

Read more about this award at **go.wisc.edu/LSFrancisHalzenNobel**.



Tara Mulder, an assistant professor in the Department of Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies (CANES), has been awarded a 2026 ACLS Fellowship by the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS). The fellowship supports outstanding scholarship in the humanities and social sciences.



Assistant Professor of Physics **Matthew Otten** was selected for an NSF CAREER Award. The five-year award will support Otten and his group's research on achieving practical quantum advantage for electronic structure on early-fault-tolerant-quantum (EFTQ) devices.



Professor of Chemistry **Judith Burstyn** won the American Chemical Society's 2027 ACS-Dreyfus Award for Encouraging Women into Careers in the Chemical Sciences. The award recognizes significant accomplishments by individuals who have stimulated or fostered the interest of women in chemistry.

Unexpected Treasure

The discovery was buried upside-down and had been used as paving stones on a major Roman thoroughfare. But the excavation team led by Nicholas Cahill, a professor of Greek and Roman art and archaeology, realized it was something more significant: a massive marble statue of a male figure from the Lydian Empire, estimated to be nearly 2,500 years old.

"It is very rare to find such monumental sculptures of this period anywhere in the Mediterranean, and this exceptionally well-preserved, unique monument casts important new light on the major arts of Lydia and on the Lydians' ties to their own past," says Cahill in *The Harvard Gazette*.

Cahill was the field director of the Harvard-Cornell Sardis Expedition in what is now the Republic of Türkiye. His team carefully excavated the statue, which had been broken into two pieces, and spent the summer documenting and exploring the surface for traces of paint. Once they're done, the statue will become part of a collection displayed in the archaeological museum in Manisa.

On Another Planet

Earlier this year, researchers with the Wisconsin Center for Origins Research (WiCOR) catalogued something unique: their very first mega-Earth. The discovery was part of WiCOR's ongoing efforts to characterize the nature of the thousands of exoplanets discovered by NASA satellites. Max Kroft (MS'25), a graduate student working with Assistant Professor of Astronomy Thomas Beatty, discovered GJ 523b, which was classified as a mega-Earth due to its massive size.

"People have been using the phrase mega-Earth for more than a decade, but we've never had a planet that let us say concretely what one is," says Beatty. "GJ 523b finally does."

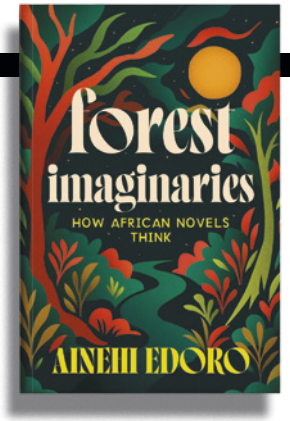
The planet is nearly 170 million years old and more than 2.5 times the size of Earth. It's an unusual planet that's mostly dense rock and has a massive core. Studying it could shed new light on the ways planets are formed.

Read more at **go.wisc.edu/LSMegaEarth**.



Archaeologists estimate the statue would have stood taller than 7 feet.

PHOTO: HARVARD-CORNELL SARDIS EXPEDITION



Into the Woods

Ainehi Edoro-Glines, a Mellon-Morgridge Professor in the Humanities, has always been fascinated by the forest — so much so that she chose to make it the subject of her first book. *Forest Imaginaries: How African Novels Think* is her love letter to African novelists, exploring the ways they have used the forest in their work to examine how the forest organizes the world and asks questions about societal power structures. Deploying works such as *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, the 1952 experimental fantasy novel written by Nigerian author Amos Tutuola, and *Things Fall Apart*, the famous 1958 novel by Chinua Achebe, Edoro-Glines argues that, for African writers, the forest is a place that marks the limits of the world as we know it and a place of chaos and critical self-discovery.

"We can enter and come back out, enter and come back out," says Edoro-Glines, who teaches in the English and African cultural studies departments. "And when we develop a relationship with that space, we can find radically new knowledge to reimagine our world. From a storytelling perspective, it is essentially a kind of laboratory where a storyteller can break down a world and show us ways that we can rebuild it."

Read more at **go.wisc.edu/LSIntotheWoods**.

MORE L&S NEWS AT
LS.WISC.EDU/NEWS

Restoring Life

For alumnus Quilen Blackwell, history is more than a record of the past. It's a blueprint for building economic opportunity, restoring neighborhoods and helping young people imagine what comes next.

BY SCOTT A. CARTER



There is history in Chicago's South Side soil. There are stories of migration and industry, of neighborhoods built by people who came north looking for work and opportunity. It is also the history of young people who grew up amid disinvestment and violence, and who now sow seeds in that same ground to grow something new.

For Quilen Blackwell ('06), this history shapes Southside Blooms. The Chicago-based social enterprise he founded grows flowers on vacant urban lots, trains young people in floristry and farming, and uses urban agriculture to connect them to their communities and to African American history.

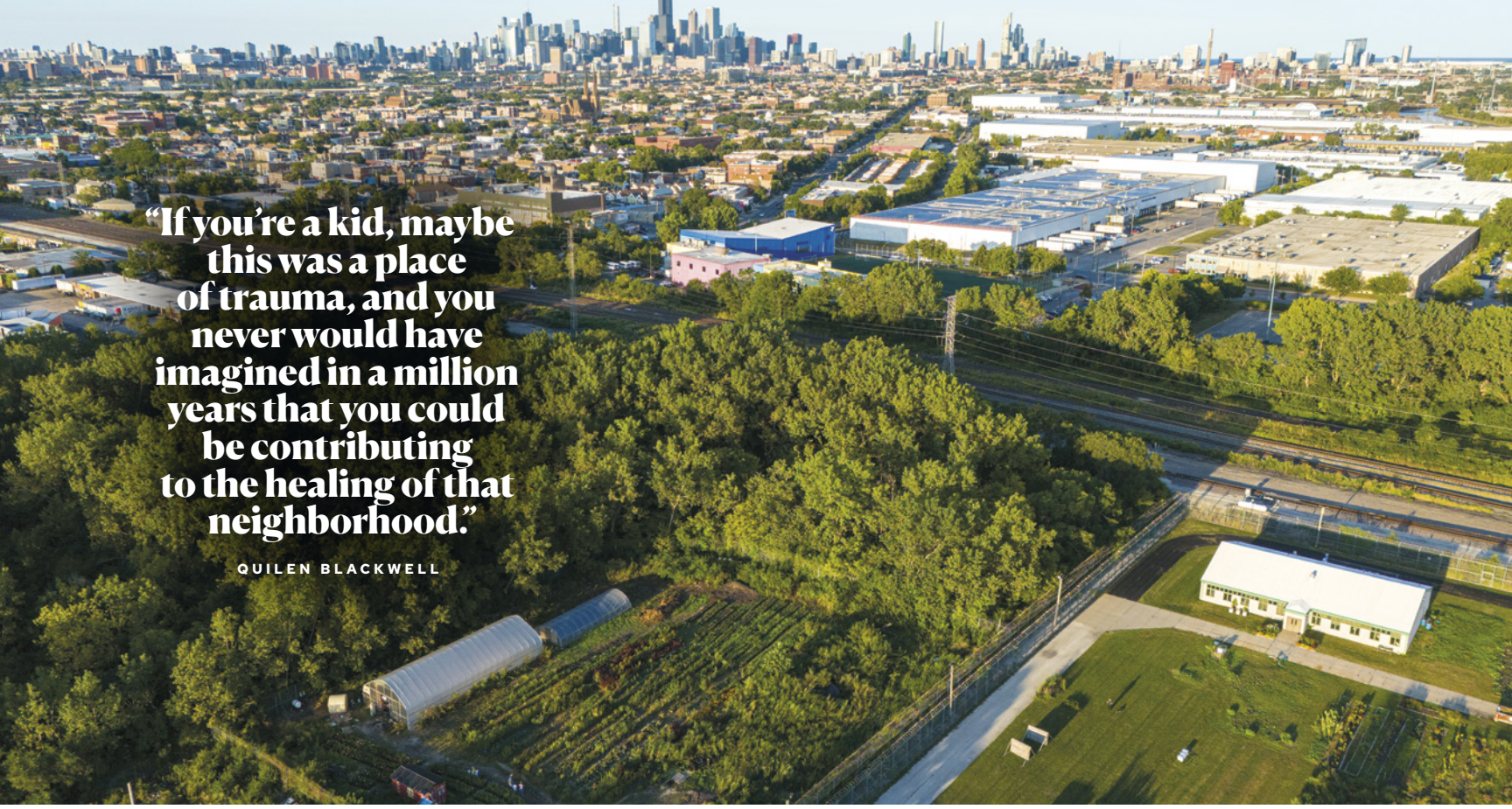
"History is a very underrated tool, even in business," says Blackwell.

Ask him how he arrived at this work, and the story quickly shifts to the people who came before him. He points to Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver, whose work at the Tuskegee Institute at the turn of the 20th century linked education, agriculture and economic opportunity. He also looks to Jane Addams, whose Hull House began as a settlement in 1889 serving Chicago's immigrant communities and grew into a model for social work, as well as the Black activists who challenged Eastman Kodak to integrate in the 1960s.

Blackwell first encountered some of these histories as an undergraduate student at UW–Madison. He arrived planning to study business, but an advisor encouraged him to pursue his passion. He switched to history and eventually wrote an honors thesis on Black labor activists' efforts to integrate Eastman Kodak and bring African Americans into the company's workforce.

The thesis left him thinking about the relationship between business and community power. That question

PHOTOS: LUKAS KEAPPROTH



Southside Blooms operates six flower farms in the Chicago area, including this one at the Cook County Jail in the South Lawndale neighborhood on the city’s southwest side.

deepened after graduation, when he joined the Peace Corps in Thailand and worked with farmers on an organic fertilizer cooperative and with high school students on community projects.

Living in an agricultural community, he began to see the connection between land, natural resources and economic well-being.

“There is something to this connection between the earth and the provision and well-being of communities and people,” Blackwell remembers thinking.

He carried that idea to Chicago. While attending ministry school, he began tutoring at a high school in Englewood and building relationships with students and their families. He also began thinking about his own family’s history: His mother’s family came from Arkansas, where they farmed and sharecropped; his father’s family migrated from Baltimore to Milwaukee. In Englewood, he started thinking about the people who had not had the opportunity to leave.

“We do tell the story of migration and that kind of thing, but we don’t really tell the story of the people who were left behind,” he says.

In 2014, Blackwell and his wife, Hannah Bonham Blackwell, founded Chicago Eco House, using urban agriculture and entrepreneurship as tools for building opportunity on Chicago’s South Side. Southside Blooms grew from that work, first as a network of urban flower farms and eventually as Eco House’s in-house floral business. To Blackwell, the approach echoes the historical models he had studied: Start small with what you have, build with the community and let economic opportunity become a means of social change.

“You can really just start small with what you’ve got,” he says.

Today, Southside Blooms operates six farm sites and two flower shops in Chicago as well as a pilot farm in Gary, Indiana. Its workforce development program gives young people ages 16 to 25 training in floristry and farming. And through its Roots2Blooms history storytelling project, the organization also teaches African American history through flowers and takes young people to historical sites in the United States and Africa.

For Blackwell, who was named the 2025 CNN Hero of the Year, the work is about expanding what young people can imagine for themselves. One participant told him, “I didn’t know flowers could take me this far.”

For others, the change is closer to home. Some young people now work on blocks where they once experienced violence and trauma. They plant sunflowers. Bees and birds return. Neighbors stop to admire the flowers.

“You’re literally restoring life,” Blackwell says. “If you’re a kid, maybe this was a place of trauma, and you never would have imagined in a million years that you could be contributing to the healing of that neighborhood.”

For Blackwell, history is not simply a record of what people before him accomplished. It is a reminder that they made choices that changed lives beyond their own.

“I was inspired by all those biographies I was reading,” he says. “And at some point, I thought, ‘You know what? I’m going to lay it down. I’m going to live for something bigger than myself.’”

That is the work Blackwell is doing now, using what he learned from the past to create new possibilities for the people and neighborhoods around him. ■



Marv Levy (left), Eric M. Wilcots (center) and Jeff Levy (right) celebrate the ribbon cutting for Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall.

PHOTO: JAKE PIPER

Building on a Legacy

After years of dreaming of a new building to house eight academic units and countless classes full of students, Marv and Jeff Levy now get to walk through the doors of Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall.

BY ALLI WATTERS

Brothers Marv ('68, JD'71) and Jeff ('72) Levy remember standing at the corner of Park and Johnson streets five years ago, drafting a vision for a building that, at the time, felt like a distant dream. They had just signed up to be the lead donors for Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, and they had a big task ahead of them in soliciting state support. But as they stood there with Interim Chancellor Eric M. Wilcots, who was then serving as Dean of the College of Letters & Science, the brothers imagined what this building could mean for teaching, learning and research for generations to come. They were excited to get to work.

"Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall is an opportunity for the University of Wisconsin–Madison to reach for the stars of higher education," says Marv. "Our hope is that this building will create the conditions for unexpected encounters, challenging questions and lifelong memories," adds Jeff.

The view from Park and Johnson has changed quite a bit since that conversation. A sun-soaked, art-filled, state-of-the-art building now stands there, and it is positively bursting with campus life. Students are everywhere, from the classroom to the café to the quiet study corners. Faculty members from the humanities and the interpretive social sciences finally have a new academic home, and they're using it to ask the big questions, collaborate across departments and share their knowledge with the next generation.

"In Marv and Jeff, we are so fortunate to have philanthropists who are committed to the excellence of this institution," says Wilcots. "Their impact will be felt across Wisconsin and the world for generations to come."

Marv and Jeff — as well as their late brother Phillip Levy ('64) — are L&S graduates, and they remember taking transformative courses in the original humanities building. They recall incredible lectures and walking away with a broader view of the world. They also remember that there was water dripping from the ceiling, even then. But what stands out most to Jeff is a course he took on U.S. history. On what he thought would be an average day of class, Francis Gary Powers walked in, the American pilot at the center of the 1960 U-2 incident, who was shot down while flying a secret CIA spying mission over the Soviet Union.

"It was one of those moments that made history feel immediate and real," says Jeff. "It reminded me that history is not only about dates and events, but about people, choices and consequences."

Because of Marv and Jeff, and the donation they made in their parents' names, students will continue to have encounters like these in a building designed to fit their needs and stand the test of time.

"Our hope is that by honoring our family legacy of charitable giving with this gift, we can offer to future generations some of the opportunities that UW–Madison has provided us," Marv says. ■



PHOTO: MARV AND JEFF LEVY

The Levy family (from left to right): Jeff, Irving, Dorothy, Marv and Phil

Meet the Parents

You'll notice that Marv and Jeff Levy's names aren't the ones featured prominently on the walls. It's Irving & Dorothy Levy Hall, after all. But who were Irving and Dorothy?

Irving grew up in North Minneapolis in a community that cared for each other during the hard times. He lost his father when he was 15, but he found guidance from his sister and brother-in-law, Edith and Lewis Phillips. Lewis had an entrepreneurial spirit and sold everything from magazines in Manitowoc to liquor after the repeal of Prohibition to home appliances from National Presto Industries, a company he acquired to preserve jobs in Eau Claire that still operates today. Irving's first venture was buying large bags of popcorn and nuts to package and sell to fans at University of Minnesota football games. By 1933, Irving moved to Wisconsin and joined his brother-in-law's thriving Phillips Distributing Corporation. He started out selling supplies and sundries to restaurants and bars but worked his way up to management and eventually acquired multiple Wisconsin branches of the business.

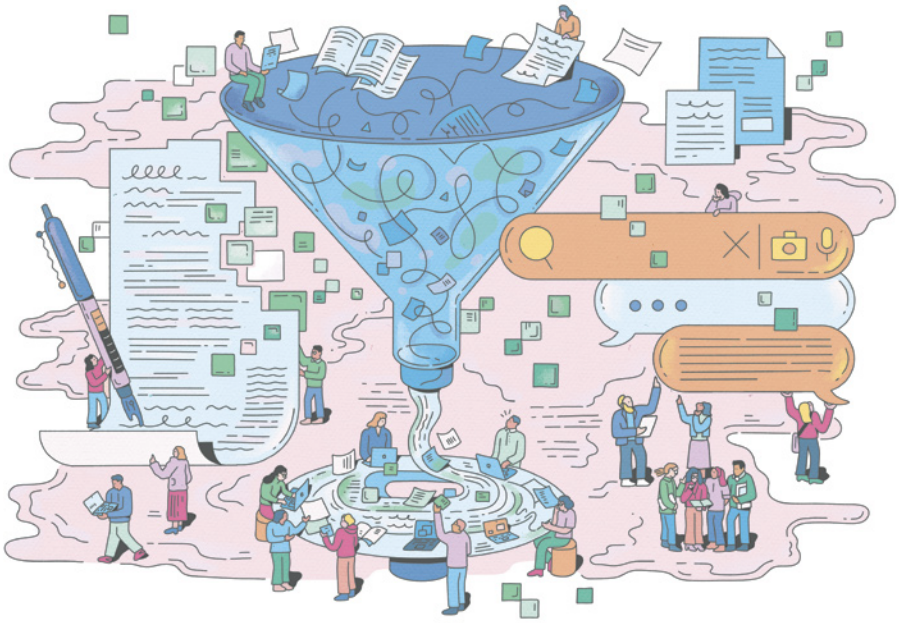
Dorothy was a carpenter's daughter in Iowa. Her father worked in window and door factories until he started his own business buying and processing cattle. Business boomed after World War I, but the stock market crash forced the family to rebuild. Another painful hardship was the family's tragically unsuccessful attempt to rescue relatives from the Holocaust. When Irving and Dorothy married in 1941, they brought together two families who had been shaped by the immigrant experience and the challenges of the Great Depression.

Irving served as a U.S. Army officer in the South Pacific in World War II before returning to Phillips Distributing. Phillip, Marv, Jeff and Marc (who passed away in infancy) were all born in La Crosse. Dorothy managed the household and developed a well-known bridal registry for Phillips. She also was a passionate volunteer in the community. Together the couple founded the Irving and Dorothy Levy Family Foundation in 1958. They said that after witnessing the generosity of neighbors during the Depression, they wanted to do their part to give back. This philanthropic spirit has carried on through their sons.

"We learned by observing our parents' involvement in local charities and causes," Marv says.

Paving the Badger Way

BY KRISTIN R. ESCHENFELDER



I've been on a listening tour these last several months. I stepped into the role of Interim Dean for the College of Letters & Science in May at a dynamic time for educators. Our community is humming with curiosity and concern about how artificial intelligence is changing teaching, learning, research and day-to-day campus life. This is evidenced by the fact that when I sent out a survey asking for insight on the subject, I received more than 200 responses from L&S alumni with graduation years ranging from the '50s to the 2020s.

This show of passion and care for the future of a liberal arts and sciences education was both moving and informative, as I also serve as the co-chair for UW–Madison's AI Readiness and Competency working group. Our goal is to come up with campus-wide principles identifying how UW–Madison should move forward in a world with AI. We are also charged with drafting common knowledge and skill goals — statements about what we want everyone to understand about this technology. The work is ongoing, but we're guided by principles that reflect the inherent curiosity, humility, integrity, tenacity, civility, complexity and connective nature of our community. In other words, we're approaching AI the Badger Way.

What I heard in your responses is that there is significant concern about the impact of AI on teaching and learning. I want to assure you that instructors have been adapting their pedagogical techniques with each rollout of new AI tools. Some instructors have returned to time-tested practices like the blue book to evaluate their students' knowledge — I'm told orders were up last semester! At the same time, we also have professors who are using AI in transformative ways that enhance the classroom experience. I checked in with the AI Teaching Fellows and the Center for AI and Uncertainty Fellows, and I learned that one professor used the tools to create pedagogical games while another converted lecture notes into a fully accessible format. Faculty are also integrating AI into their courses as a subject of inquiry and debate. For example, there's an English class in which students explore how AI affects the creative processes of human writing and a history class that explores the long view of AI and its underlying ideas from 1650 to the present. Faculty are meeting regularly in departments and workshops to discuss their discoveries, problem-solve against disruptions and exchange ideas. For many of them, the goal is to empower students to be able to use these tools in ways that enhance their expertise, not replace it.



Kristin R. Eschenfelder is the Interim Dean for the College of Letters & Science and a professor of information science at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Students have been adapting, too. In talking with leaders at the Writing Center, housed within our Department of English, I've learned there's been an increase in engagement from students who seem to have a renewed interest in working with humans. The center doesn't have policies around use — instead they adapt to instructors' parameters and meet students where they are, whether they're starting with a blank document or a generated rough draft. With help from their advisors, students work to write, edit and rewrite, developing ideas and finding their own authentic voices. Students appreciate developing their critical thinking through this process.

Right now, we are paving the Badger Way. To do that, we need to nurture curiosity, encouraging professors to be experimental in the ways that they embrace or restrict AI in their classrooms. We must remember humility — that there will be successes and failures, and we can learn from both. And then there's complexity, and the reality that while there is opportunity, there is also genuine concern about AI's societal impact. We will not be passive consumers of these tools, and we will continue to train our students to fearlessly sift and winnow — that is, to be brave in their pursuit of knowledge. It's embracing these qualities that will push us, and society, forward. Perhaps the best way to sum up the spirit of how we will continue is with one of your thoughtful survey responses: "L&S needs to do what it has always done — teach us how to adapt." I assure you, that is exactly our plan. ■

ILLUSTRATION: KATHLEEN FU







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Last Word

High in the ivy-covered Carillon Tower sit 56 bells that ring across campus. But did you know there's also a musician who climbs toward the top for each and every chime? Lyle Anderson ('68, MM'77), who is an alumnus of the language sciences program and the Mead Witter School of Music, was the longtime university carillonneur. Though he officially retired a decade ago, he still performs for campus as a carillonneur emeritus. The process is completely analogue, meaning there's no electricity or computers involved. There's a practice instrument on the lower level so that, graciously, he can warm up without everyone in the vicinity hearing. "It's a very sensitive instrument," Anderson says. "It has a whole range from very loud to very soft."

PHOTO: JAKE PIPER

