

UNIVERCITY ALLIANCE
ANNUAL REPORT **2025**



Cover: Photo courtesy of City of Appleton

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Photo by Travel Wisconsin



About UniverCity Alliance

Creating Better Places Together

UniverCity Alliance is a network of people across the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the state of Wisconsin who are inspired to improve local governments and foster innovation in communities of all sizes. UniverCity Alliance was created 10 years ago with the goal of making UW–Madison more accessible and responsive to Wisconsin communities. We are excited to celebrate a decade of creating better places together! Today, UniverCity has worked with dozens of local governments, honed its partnership program with Wisconsin communities, and brought the Wisconsin Idea to life through a two-way exchange of knowledge.

The 2025 annual report features partnerships with the Cities of Appleton and Waupaca; the Villages of Mount Pleasant and DeForest; and Chippewa, Iowa, and Jackson Counties. UniverCity continues to facilitate projects with the City of Madison and Dane County and appreciates the ongoing relationships.

UniverCity Alliance works with and for local governments of all sizes to build strong, thriving, and sustainable communities. To advance sustainability, UniverCity frames local projects through the lens of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Throughout this report, SDG icons will align these sustainability goals with projects in Wisconsin.

This report provides an overview of the work of hundreds of students, faculty, staff, and local government leaders. For more information on project goals, research methods, findings, and recommendations, download the final reports from individual community pages located on UniverCity's website [univercity.wisc.edu/univercity-year-communities].

2024–25 UniverCity Alliance Advisory Board Cochairs



"Our students provide useful service to communities and in return receive mentorship and find role models in local government officials and public servants in Wisconsin. The program prepares students for both careers and active citizenship, where they respond to community priorities with effective action."

—Lori DiPrete Brown
Distinguished Teaching Faculty, School of Human Ecology



"UniverCity Alliance's partnership program is a practical, positive way to put the Wisconsin Idea in action in all our communities, a welcome alternative to destructively partisan politics."

—Joel Rogers
Noam Chomsky Professor of Law, Public Affairs, and Sociology, Director of High Road Strategy Center



"The goal is to empower students with transformative experiences and real world skills and to create outcomes where communities get excited when they see the UW–Madison crest come to town. UniverCity does that!"

—Paul Robbins
Dean, Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies



L-R: Robbins, DiPrete Brown, Rogers, Gavin Luter, former managing director, UniverCity Alliance (UCA), Megan McBride, managing director, UCA, Abigail Becker, senior associate for communications and outreach, UCA.

UniverCity Alliance across Wisconsin

August 2024–August 2025

UW–Madison State Tour: Chippewa Valley

Wednesday, Aug. 14, 2024

Capping off a year of celebrating UW–Madison's 175th anniversary, UniverCity partnered with Eau Claire County to highlight efforts to protect Lake Altoona and the entire Eau Claire River watershed against erosion, sediment, and blue-green algae blooms.

Chancellor Mnookin Visits Green County

Monday, Sept. 16, 2024

Green County shared the impacts of a three-year UniverCity Alliance partnership with UW–Madison Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin during a visit to the county. The chancellor met with New Glarus officials and community partners at a new inclusive playground and with the Green County Healthy Community Coalition.

Monroe County Community Visit

Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024, and
Wednesday, Nov. 6, 2024

Students in Patti Coffey's Psychology 601: Issues in Prisoner Reentry visited Monroe County to observe drug treatment court, watch a graduation ceremony, interview staff and participants, and evaluate the county's program across three priority standards.

Jackson County Community Visit

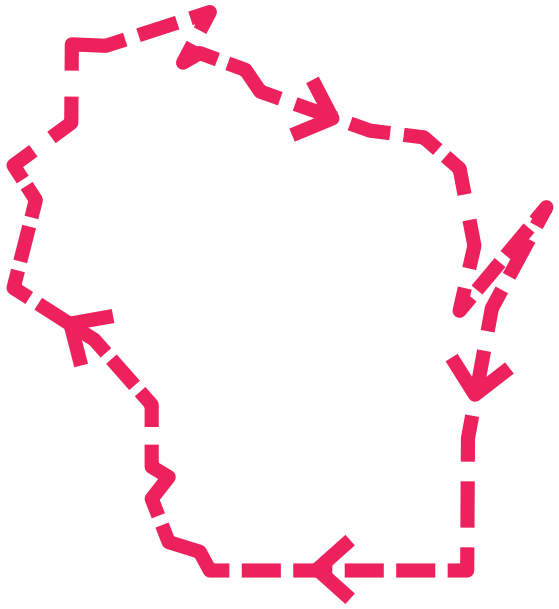
Thursday, Oct. 17, 2024

Students in School of Journalism and Mass Communication Professor Doug McLeod's Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages class traveled to the villages of Taylor and Melrose in Jackson County. The students met with local leaders and toured the communities to inform their creative messaging projects. Later in the semester, they visited the Village of DeForest in Dane County.

Local History Conference

Thursday, Oct. 17 and Friday, Oct. 18, 2024

Megan McBride presented at the 2024 Wisconsin Local History Conference to share about past UniverCity projects focused on local history and history preservation and how communities can partner with UniverCity to explore their own local history and preservation needs. Kathy Kean, president of the Shorewood Historical Society, and Kacie Lucchini Butcher, a public historian and director of the Rebecca M. Blank Center for Campus History at UW–Madison, copresented to share their experiences working on UniverCity projects in the Village of Shorewood and the City of River Falls.



Municipal Finance 101

Monday, Oct. 21, 2024

UniverCity Alliance hosted a webinar with Ehlers, an industry-leading municipal advisory firm, on the ins and outs of municipal finance.

Spring 2025 Legislative Visits

UniverCity Alliance participated in legislative visits with Eau Claire, Jackson, Iowa, and St. Croix counties to boost awareness of funding for UniverCity Alliance in the state budget proposal.





Above left: Children play on the new inclusive Candy Cane Park in New Glarus after a ribboncutting ceremony on September 19, 2024. Photo courtesy of New Glarus Cares; Above right: On the University of Wisconsin–Madison State Tour, UniverCity Alliance celebrated partnership with Eau Claire County, showcased efforts to protect Lake Altoona and the entire Eau Claire River Watershed against erosion, sediment, and blue green algae blooms, and celebrated 175 years of the university with the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association. Photo by Gavin Luter





Left: Chancellor Mnookin, second from left, poses for a photo at Candy Cane Park in New Glarus during a visit to Green County. Photo by Abigail Becker; Right: School of Journalism and Mass Communication students meet with Village of DeForest staff members on a community branding and marketing project. Photo by Megan McBride

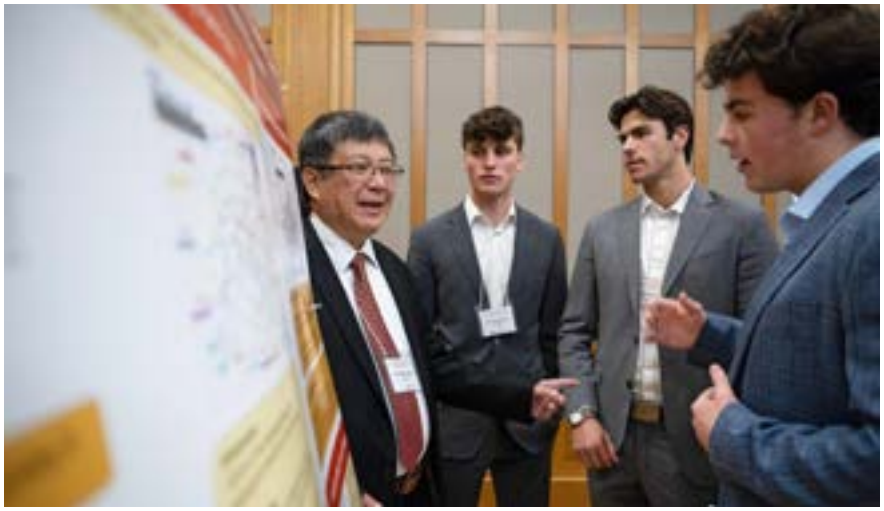
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Additionally, UniverCity Alliance attended and presented at seven local government conferences to learn from Wisconsin municipal and county officials and share how partnering with UW–Madison yields mutual benefits.

- Wisconsin Counties Association Conference | September 23–24, 2024
- Local History and Historic Preservation Conference | October 16–18, 2024
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities Conference | October 23–25, 2024
- Wisconsin City/County Management Association Women's Leadership Conference | December 5–6, 2024
- Wisconsin Counties Association Conference | February 25–26, 2025
- Wisconsin City/County Management Association | February 27–28, 2025
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities Spring Conference | April 28–29, 2025

UniverCity Alliance on Campus

UniverCity Alliance supports a growing network of interdisciplinary leaders based at UW–Madison who are inspired to improve local governments and foster innovation in communities of all sizes. To build this network, UniverCity meets with campus departments, leads the Urban Futures Community of Practice, participates in campuswide conferences, and connects with students.



Left: Professor Yongheng Deng talks with Wisconsin School of Business student John Rolfes, right, as his teammates listen during the Sustainable Development Project Poster Session on December 11, 2024 at the Madison Municipal Building. Photo by Paul L. Newby, II / UW–Madison Wisconsin School of Business (2); Lower Left: Former UniverCity managing director Gavin Luter, left, shakes hands with Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin at the 2024 UniverCity Alliance Celebration. Photo by Hedi Lamarr Rudd; Below: UniverCity Alliance hosted two meet-and-greet events to connect with faculty and instructors interested in applying their work to communities of all sizes. Photo courtesy of UniverCity Alliance







The Make Your Madison @ the Public Service Fair event drew representatives from multiple City of Madison agencies who spoke to students about opportunities to engage in local government. Photo courtesy of the Morgridge Center for Public Service



City of Madison Deputy Mayor for Housing and Sustainability Christie Baumel presents to students at the Sustainable Development Project Poster Session on December 11, 2024 at the Madison Municipal Building.

Make Your Madison @ the Public Service Fair

Monday, Sept. 9, 2024

UniverCity and the City of Madison collaborated with the the Morgridge Center's Public Service Fair to connect students with city staff and local elected officials.

Graduate Student Community Engagement Opportunities Mixer

Wednesday, Oct. 9, 2024

UniverCity connected with graduate students interested in learning more about community engagement resources available on campus.

UniverCity Alliance Meet-and-Greet Events

Wednesday, Oct. 23, 2024 and
Friday, Oct. 24, 2024

UniverCity Alliance hosted two meet-and-greet events to connect with new faculty, instructors, and staff interested in applying their work to communities of all sizes.

City of Madison + UW–Madison Sustainable Development Project Poster Presentation

Wednesday, Dec. 11, 2024

For the fourth consecutive year, Real Estate 420/720 has partnered with the City of Madison to provide a learning experience connected to sustainability with support from UniverCity Alliance.

Responsible Community Engagement for Federal and National Grant Proposals

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

As more federal grants emphasize broader impacts and community partnerships, UniverCity Alliance collaborated with other community-engaged units to host a daylong workshop focused on best practices for developing respectful and mutually beneficial partnerships. The supporting units included the Center for Urban Population Health, Community Relations, Collective for Research Impact and Social Partnerships, the Morgridge Center for Public Service, the Morgridge Institute for Research, and Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute.

UniverCity Alliance Celebration

Friday, Sept. 13, 2024

UniverCity's campus and community partners gathered together during the second annual celebration. Chancellor Mnookin kicked off the celebration with encouraging remarks about impacts across the state from partnerships with UniverCity Alliance. Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology Associate Professor Jessica Hua and former UniverCity Alliance scholar Sam Kaufmann also shared remarks. The program also welcomed the 2024 UniverCity Alliance Scholars.

Sustainability Symposium

Wednesday, Oct. 23

Former managing director Gavin Luter shared about UniverCity Alliance's work related to sustainability during a flash talk.

UW–Madison Division of Extension Expo

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2024

UniverCity Alliance participated in the UW–Madison Division of Extension's Expo at the 2025 All Colleague Conference. The event showcased Extension's creativity, UW–Madison resources, and potential collaborators for an audience of Extension staff and faculty from around the state.

Welcome to Your Urban Future Course

Spring 2024

Now in its fifth year, Urban and Regional Planning 215: Welcome to Your Urban Future enrolled 144 students. The course was created by UniverCity Alliance in partnership with the Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture.

Wisconsin Idea Conference

Monday, April 7, 2025

At the second annual Wisconsin Idea Conference, UniverCity organized a mixer focused on community development, participated in a panel about sharing stories about the impact of community-university partnerships, and helped organize a session highlighting local policies connected to UW–Madison programs.

Government, International Affairs, and Nonprofit Career Resource Fair

Monday, April 7, 2025

UniverCity Alliance shared opportunities with students at this comprehensive resource fair hosted by SuccessWorks.

Meet the UniverCity Alliance Scholars

UniverCity Scholars gain skills, confidence partnering with Wisconsin local governments

By Abigail Becker

During the Fall 2024 semester, nine UCA scholars worked with five communities around Wisconsin on individual projects, ranging from tackling AI policy to increasing language accessibility and exploring sustainability initiatives.

These undergraduate and graduate students formed connections with their community partners and navigated evolving projects, gaining professional skills that will benefit them in their future careers.

"You have to be comfortable not knowing a lot at the beginning," said junior Miguel Garcia, who is majoring in biology. "You're here to listen to the community and learn from the community."

Garcia worked with the City of Waupaca to research how to expand city services to support residents whose first language is not English. He interviewed 11 community members and developed pamphlets outlining resources in the community.

"This community really exemplifies the community I came from. My parents were immigrants, and I was the main one translating," Garcia said. "For me to see a community of a lot of people who don't speak Spanish or other languages really hit home."

This is the second cohort of students that UniverCity has brought together through the UCA Scholars program. Through this program, UniverCity is able



Several UniverCity Alliance Scholars listen to speakers during the 2024 UniverCity Alliance Celebration. Photo by Hedi LaMarr Rudd

to convene a group of committed students excited by working with Wisconsin communities to work on individual projects with local government partners.

Upon completion of the project, the students received $1,500 scholarships that were generously provided by the Division of Continuing Studies and UW alumni John Holton, Pat Thiele, Colleen Goggins, John Nelson, Bill and Karen Monfre, John Bauman, Jane Mandula, and Curt Fuszard, and others.

In partnership with UniverCity's community partners, the scholars' work resulted in the following:

- **Research evaluating affordable housing in the City of Black River Falls**
- **AI use policy and a user guide for Iowa County employees**
- **Outline of legal barriers to shared services for Iowa County**
- **Analysis of existing needs assessments to guide community engagement programming for the UW–Madison and UW South Madison Partnership**
- **Research and recommendations on sustainability best practices for the Village of DeForest**
- **Resources for expanding City of Waupaca services to native Spanish speakers**

For the second iteration of the UCA Scholars Program, students received additional professional development and mentorship. Amy Gangl, director of undergraduate studies for the Department of Political Science, and Emmeline Prattke, an advisor at SuccessWorks, met individually with students and fostered engagement and reflection through a new Canvas course.

Gangl said it was inspiring to get to know the scholars over the semester and watch them hone skills like report writing, professional communication, collaboration, and networking.

"These projects give students hands-on experience that you just can't get in a classroom," Gangl said. "They're learning how to apply what they've studied to help real people in their community, and they also push students out of their comfort zones. They get to work with diverse groups, solve actual problems, and leave their mark on the community."

Prattke said she saw the students "learn how to navigate the ambiguity of the professional world with confidence and independence as they applied the skills and knowledge from their degree program in a new environment.

"Partnering with experts and professionals outside of the university system allows students to benefit from a more diverse range of perspectives, and to see the tangible impact their work can have within a community," Prattke said.

Confidence Boost

Working with a community partner over a semester provides students unique learning experiences and the opportunities to enhance their academic careers and build professional skills that will benefit them in the future.

For third-year Information School PhD candidate Yaxuan Yin, the UCA Scholars program created the opportunity to learn from a new audience: government employees. Yin integrates human-computer interaction, statistics, and geography to solve complex social computing challenges.

"Overall this project gave me a different perspective to understand specifically how local government employees perceive AI," Yin said. "Interviewing government employees trained my qualitative skills and how to navigate research questions from interviews."

Nate Dancer, a junior majoring in landscape and urban studies and human geography, said he now has a better understanding of commitment to



UniverCity Alliance Scholars celebrating during an event on September 13, 2024 in Memorial Union. Photo by Hedi LaMarr Rudd



Amelia Alvarez



Nate Dancer



Julia Fechner



Miguel Garcia



Mandeep Kaleka

community service and increased confidence in his research abilities.

"Working with [UW South Madison Partnership] over the course of the semester enhanced my communication skills greatly while also giving me the platform to apply technical skills I have been learning throughout my collegiate career thus far," Dancer said. "I can draw from this experience to understand and relate to the real-world impacts that major projects may have on community members."

Sophomore Amelia Alvarez, who is majoring in political science, researched affordable housing in the City of Black River Falls for her UCA Scholars project. She said the experience enhanced her understanding of how to manage and execute these types of projects.

"This project has sparked a newfound interest in research for me," Alvarez said. "It's not something I initially envisioned pursuing, but after spending the past semester collecting and analyzing data, I've come to truly appreciate the progress and impact that initiatives like this can generate."

Carolyn Shumaker, a senior majoring in landscape and urban studies, geography, and environmental studies, said she was nervous at the beginning of the semester about the prospect of applying for jobs. But her work with the Village of DeForest on environmental sustainability has given her more confidence.

"This experience has really made me feel a lot more capable as an applicant," said Shumaker, noting that the experience and her final project are included on her resume.


Mauz Salem


Carolyn Shumaker


Yaxuan Yin


Samto Wongso

Awards and Recognition

Innovation Planning Grants

In partnership with UniverCity Alliance, the City of Waterloo in Jefferson County and the Town of Irving in Jackson County received innovation planning grants through the State of Wisconsin's Department of Revenue. Both communities plan to explore opportunities for transferring or consolidated emergency services with the intent to maximize cost savings while providing high-quality service delivery for residents.

Brittingham Wisconsin Trust

UniverCity Alliance received $7,000 to support the Ho-Chunk Nation Traveling Exhibit. In partnership with the Ho-Chunk Nation and UniverCity Alliance, the Village of Waunakee and Waunakee Public Library are creating a traveling museum exhibit focused on the Ho-Chunk Nation and its true history and culture.

Day of the Badger 2025

For the third year in a row, UniverCity Alliance participated in Day of the Badger, an annual celebration hosted by the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association. It's a spirited day of giving that unites alumni, friends, and students to strengthen the university, generate pride as a Badger community, and raise funds for work happening across UW–Madison. In 2025, UniverCity Alliance secured a $20,000 participation match from four donors to support ongoing initiatives.

2025–27 State Budget

Governor Tony Evers allocated $600,000 for UniverCity Alliance over the biennium in his budget proposal. UniverCity Alliance appreciated the support from the governor's office.

University Place

PBS Wisconsin's virtual lecture hall series [go.wisc.edu/pbs-univercity] showcased UniverCity Alliance's partnership with the Village of Waunakee and featured Gavin Luter, former managing director, and Village of Waunakee administrator Todd Schmidt.

Eau Claire *Leader-Telegram*

UniverCity's community partners in Eau Claire County published a joint op-ed in the Eau Claire Leader-Telegram documenting impact of the partnership. They wrote that harnessing the resources and expertise at UW–Madison allowed the county to consider new strategies to protect lake health and address sustainable energy use. "This partnership also provided a unique opportunity to prioritize these projects, leverage the curiosity and imagination of students, and share our local expertise and knowledge with UW–Madison."

EPIC-N Faculty of the Year

Commending her longstanding commitment to community-engaged scholarship, the Educational Partnerships for Innovation in Communities – Network (EPIC-N) awarded Andrea Hicks the 2025 Faculty of the Year award for her work with UniverCity Alliance. Hicks — the Nelson Institute's Hanson Family Fellow in Sustainability, director of sustainability education and research in the UW–Madison Office of Sustainability and associate professor in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering – has collaborated with seven Wisconsin communities through UniverCity Alliance since 2017.

Sustainable Development Goals

Local to Global Connection

To advance sustainability in communities across the state, UniverCity Alliance frames local projects through the lens of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Created with input from communities around the globe, SDGs represent the things that matter to communities — food, education, health care, a prosperous economy, and a clean and healthy environment.

UniverCity Alliance centers its work across Wisconsin on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. By incorporating the SDGs into its projects, UniverCity Alliance joins cities and universities across the globe in linking the goals to priorities of local governments.

Sustainable Development for Local Government Badge

UniverCity Alliance launched a new digital badge that will allow users to take their knowledge of sustainability and local governments to the next level. Digital badges provide non-credit, professional development opportunities and highlight specific skills, achievements, and interests. UniverCity Alliance's Sustainable Development for Local Government badge course provides knowledge about Wisconsin local governments, a framework on how to actualize sustainable development used by countries around the world, and sustainable development for the municipal scale.



UniverCity Alliance Amplifies the Wisconsin Idea: 2016–25



2,992
students

453
projects

9
partner institutions

*data collected from 2016–25

18 Counties

20 Cities, villages, towns, and groups

Adams County
Brown County
Chippewa County
City of Appleton
City of Madison
City of Marinette
City of Milton
City of Monona
City of River Falls
City of Stoughton
City of Waupaca
City of Wausau
City of Wisconsin Rapids
Columbia County
Dane County
Eau Claire County
Green County
Iowa County
Jackson County
Koshkonong Creek Collaborative
La Crosse County
Marathon County
Milwaukee County
Outagamie County
Pepin County
Polk County
Racine County
St. Croix County
Town of Germantown
Village of Cottage Grove
Village of DeForest
Village of Egg Harbor
Village of Marshall
Village of Mount Pleasant
Village of Shorewood
Village of Waunakee
Whitewater Unified School District
Wood County

UniverCity Alliance is partnering with Dane, Monroe, Racine, Sheboygan, Trempealeau Counties, the City of Madison, and WI Land + Water during the 2025–26 academic year.

By the Numbers: UniverCity 2024–25



22
faculty, instructional staff, and researchers

36
community project leads

197
students

47
projects

15
courses

7
UW–Madison schools and colleges

Also engaged: Badger Consulting student group, Masters of Business Analytics Consulting Practicum, and UniverCity Alliance's Scholars Program, internships, and Dane County Policy Analysis partnership.



CHIPPEWA CO.

A scenic view at Pine Point County Park. Photo courtesy of Chippewa County



CHIPPEWA COUNTY

SDGs: 9

1 **Evaluating Chippewa County's Information Technology (IT) Help Desk Processes** | *David McHugh*

Library and Information Studies 620: Field Project in Library and Information Agencies

A group of students conducted in-depth research into areas of Chippewa County's IT department, including ticket management, system categorization, and staff training with the goal of addressing efficiency and effectiveness. They ultimately recommended five strategic solutions that address current challenges and potential future developments.

2 **Analyzing Chippewa County's Information Technology (IT) Staffing** | *Jay Page*

Masters of Business Analytics Consulting Practicum Independent Research

Following a comprehensive evaluation of information technology operations within Chippewa County and its neighboring counties, a Wisconsin School of Business graduate student recommended a phased implementation plan for balancing workloads and improving efficiencies within the county's IT department. This report includes an analysis of existing department processes and compares these with staffing levels and workload in other Wisconsin counties of similar size.



APPLETON

A view of the City of Appleton's skyline. Photo courtesy of City of Appleton



CITY OF APPLETON

SDGs: 11

1 Conducting an Indirect Cost Analysis for the City of Appleton | *Jay Page*

Masters of Business Analytics Consulting Practicum Independent Research

Internal service functions in local governments such as information technology, human resources, and finance are critical to the provision of high-quality, transparent, and fiscally responsible services for residents. Demand for these services varies for each municipal department based on factors such as the size of the department, scope of responsibilities, and the quantity and complexity of the department's technology and equipment needs. A Wisconsin School of Business graduate student conducted an indirect cost analysis for the City of Appleton to help evaluate these expenses. The final deliverable for this project was an editable spreadsheet that the city can utilize and easily update to inform future budgets and resource planning.



MADISON

A new articulated electric bus takes a test drive on the hairpin turns up Observatory Drive at the University of Wisconsin–Madison on July 17, 2024.
Photo by Althea Dotzour / UW–Madison



CITY OF MADISON

SDGs: 4, 8, 11, 16



1 Documenting Madison Metro Transit Standard Operating Procedures

UniverCity Alliance Internship: Independent Student Research

A UniverCity intern with a background in industrial systems engineering assisted Metro Transit's Operations Department to document standard operating procedures in a way that could be shared throughout the entire organization. The final report includes five new procedures addressing accidents, lost bicycles, compliance, and safety.

2 Evaluating and Synthesizing Community Plans for South Madison | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

Two students analyzed existing needs assessments to guide community engagement programming for the UW South Madison Partnership.

3 Exploring Policy Interventions to Inform Madison's Economic Development Plan

UniverCity Alliance Internship: Independent Student Research

As the City of Madison creates the next chapter of its 10-year economic development strategy, a UniverCity intern explored potential policies Madison could adopt to sustain its growth and ensure all community members benefit. Recommendations included improving usability of websites that provide resources to small businesses, creating a mentorship program, and creating coworking spaces for local government employees.

4 Evaluating Local Challenges and Opportunities to Inform Madison's Economic Development Plan

UniverCity Alliance Internship: Independent Student Research

Continuing work on Madison's economic development plan, a second UniverCity intern evaluated key economic indicators in Madison, looking at how they have changed in recent years and how they compare to other cities. The project identified the challenges and opportunities of Madison's economic development strategy, considering priorities like keeping local dollars in the local economy, creating affordable housing, and building lively public spaces.

5 Designing a New Madison Police Department Records Retention Policy

UniverCity Alliance Internship: Independent Student Research

To address a change in the Madison Police Department's records retention policy, a graduate student designed a process to decide which records to keep and which to discard in a way that is compliant with the new policy.

UW–Madison Students Bring Fresh Perspectives to City Priorities

From economic development to public transit and records management, UW–Madison students are getting hands-on experience during internships with the City of Madison.

By Abigail Becker

As the City of Madison creates the next chapter of its economic development strategy, University of Wisconsin–Madison graduate student Caroline Corona is helping draft the 10-year plan that will focus on enhancing quality of life for all people in the city.

Corona is a second-year master's student studying public affairs at the La Follette School of Public Affairs. She pursued graduate studies with the desire to focus on local government, which is what made the internship opportunity with Madison appealing.

"I've been mostly in the nonprofit sector before, so it's cool to be on the government side," Corona said. "It's been really helpful to learn more about what's going on right here in Madison where I live. Getting to be engaged directly in the community here has been a really great opportunity."

Corona aims to evaluate key economic indicators in Madison, looking at how they have changed in recent years and how they compare to other cities. The project will identify the challenges and opportunities of Madison's economic development strategy keeping in mind priorities like keeping local dollars in the local economy, creating affordable housing, and building lively public spaces.

Because of the university's location in Madison making it an anchor institution, UniverCity values the ongoing relationship with the city and strives to be responsive to strategic priorities and emerging needs.

"This ongoing partnership allows UniverCity to stay plugged into local issues, gives the City of Madison additional resources, and provides students with unique learning opportunities connected to their community," UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride said.

Performance excellence specialist Kara Kratowicz said the connections made through these projects create mutual lasting benefits for Madison and beyond.

"Capacity building supports provided by UniverCity Alliance partnerships afford City of Madison staff time to meet project goals in a timely and innovative manner," Kratowicz said. "Involving students and faculty in our projects increases public awareness of what local governments do for communities and adds fresh perspectives that might not otherwise be considered, enlivening the Wisconsin Idea."



Caroline Corona



Landon Prokopinski



John Douglas



Aman Jain

In addition to Corona's project, UniverCity matched several other Madison-focused projects during the 2024–25 academic year.

Landon Prokopinski, a political science major who will graduate in fall 2025, also addressed Madison's economic development strategy. He researched economic wellness indicators across about a dozen cities on factors like employment, income, and wealth. Then, Prokopinski combed through policies in these cities to identify new ideas for Madison.

"I love making policies to try to make the world a better place," said Prokopinski, who also received certificates in public policy and history. "I love the Madison area, and so I thought I could really bring these two loves together and do something for my career and the community at large."

Prokopinski said the hands-on experience allowed him to put the theories and ideas he learned in classes into practice. It also prompted him to think more about the change that can be levied at units of governments closer to individuals like cities. He plans to pursue a policy-focused career in Washington, D.C.

John Douglas, a fall 2024 graduate who majored in industrial and systems engineering and statistics, used his academic background to support Metro Transit. Metro's operations department aimed to document standard operating procedures in a way that could be shared throughout the entire organization.

Douglas said industrial and systems engineering can be very broad, which was helpful during this internship because of the wide variety of processes Metro oversees.

"There are so many outlets to hone your skill set, because they do everything from safety and compliance to optimizing human flow, and scheduling," said Douglas, who plans to pursue a master's degree focused on statistics and machine-learning models at Cambridge.

Like Corona and Prokopinski, Douglas said a valuable aspect of the experience was learning more about a particular aspect of Madison's local government.

"I never really rode the bus before I got to Madison as a student, and learning about the operations side of things was really interesting to see," Douglas said. "It was very eye opening to see the back end of the system and meet the supervisors and see what they do day-to-day.

A fourth student, Aman Jain, worked on a records management project for the Madison Police Department (MPD). After a change in the records retention policy, the MPD was in need of an intern to design a process to decide which records to keep and which to discard in a way that is in compliance with the new policy.

Jain, who graduated in May with a master's degree in information science, said he had previous experience working for corporate clients but was curious about the perspective of local government.

"The project was something that I thought would be very interesting and could help me brush up and hone my skills," said Jain, who received his undergraduate degree in computer science in Mumbai, India. "As an international student, I had not thought that I would get such an opportunity to work closely with the government."

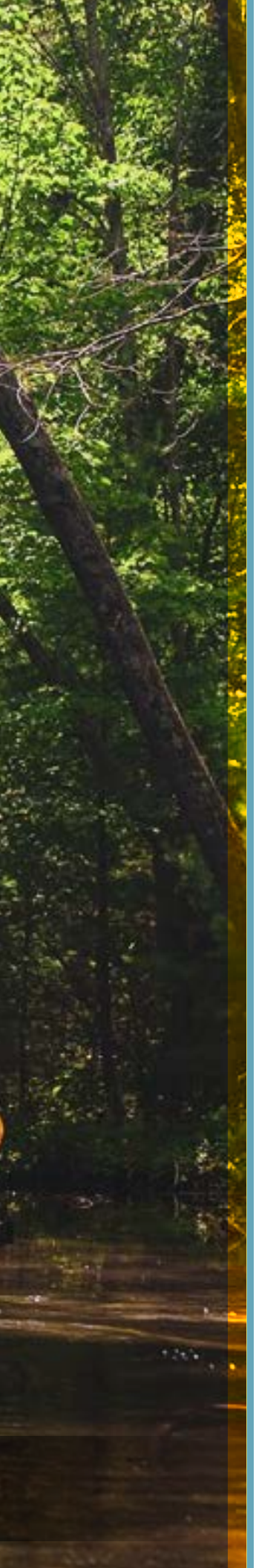
"I have been enjoying the process. I feel like I'm working with my own coworkers. It doesn't feel like I'm just a temporary project intern. The experience has been amazing."

Internships were financially supported by the Kemper K. Knapp Bequest.



WAUPACA

Outdoor recreation is a highlight in the City of Waupaca. Courtesy of Travel Wisconsin



CITY OF WAUPACA

SDGs: 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 15



1 **Evaluating Green Technologies in City of Waupaca Operations | *Andrea Hicks***

Civil and Environmental Engineering 421: Environmental Sustainability Engineering
As the City of Waupaca considers implementing sustainable technologies, civil and environmental engineering students evaluated the environment, economic, and social benefits and consequences of using solar street lighting and electric lawn mowers.

2 **Envisioning a River Restoration along the Crystal River in Waupaca | *Arlyne Johnson and Nathan Schulfer***

Environmental Studies 972: Conservation Planning
Waupaca aims to enhance recreational opportunities along the Crystal River and promote sustainable use while preserving the area's natural beauty. The conservation plan that the students created evaluates the river's current conditions, identifies existing threats, and outlines effective strategies with an action plan. Central to the plan was a focus on improving the health of the river, supporting recreation activities, and addressing the quality of life of Waupaca's residents.

3 **Story Mapping to Envision the Future of the Felt Mill Dam | *Ed Boswell***

Environmental Studies 978: Environmental Conservation Tools Modules
Incorporating recommendations, maps, and other materials provided by students who completed a conservation plan and engineering designs related to the possible removal of the Felt Mill Dam, students created a story map to help city leaders envision the impacts if the dam were removed and possibilities for the riverfront.

4 **Evaluating Feasibility and Benefits of Removing the Felt Mill Dam | *Jan Kucher, Kim Gonzalez, Derek Hungness***

Civil and Environmental Engineering 578: Senior Capstone Design
A recent survey of residents in the City of Waupaca revealed a strong desire to see improvements to Cary Pond, a reservoir held back by the Felt Mill Dam. Engineering students provided a comprehensive assessment of options for the site to recommend strategies and outline the potential ecological and recreational benefits associated with the removal of the dam and restoration of the adjacent Crystal River.

5 Strengthening City Services for a Growing Spanish-Speaking Population in Waupaca | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

As the City of Waupaca's Spanish-speaking and multilingual communities grow, the city was seeking recommendations for how it can ensure equitable access to city services for all residents. Informed by interviews with stakeholders from the city, school district, local businesses, and other external organizations and experts, this report provides recommendations for outreach, resource development, and staff training to help the city achieve its goals.

6 Promoting Language Accessibility and Social Connections with Spanish-Speaking Residents | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

To support the City of Waupaca's efforts to provide equitable services for all, including its growing Spanish-speaking population, this presentation recommended strategies for improving language accessibility, empowering and engaging Latino youth, and fostering positive relationships between Latino residents and local police officers.

7 Designing an Integrated and Accessible Waupaca River Walk | *Eric Schuchardt*

Landscape Architecture 611: Senior Capstone in Landscape Architecture

As a key asset to Waupaca's downtown, the city was seeking conceptual plans for an attractive, accessible, and cost-effective Waupaca River Walk that promotes connection and community recreation. This year-long capstone project provides the city with recommendations, action steps, and visualizations for developing an attractive River Walk that enhances and connects existing riverfront assets and amenities.

8 Waupaca Energy and Transportation Sustainability Plan | *Kim Wahl*

Environmental Studies 600: Environmental Studies Capstone

While the City of Waupaca has taken many steps to promote environmental sustainability within its own operations and the broader community, it does not currently have a formal plan to help guide these efforts. This plan provides concrete strategies and action steps to help the city effectively plan and budget for sustainability initiatives.

9 Developing a Continuity of Governance Plan | *Angela Kita*

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

This report provides recommendations to help the City of Waupaca proactively plan for emergency management strategies and ensure the continued provision of essential city services during major emergencies or disasters.



Leaves begin to show off their fall colors around Mirror Lake in the City of Waupaca. Courtesy of the City of Waupaca

10 Maximizing Economic Development through Waupaca Recreation Center Expansion | *John Surdyk and Aaron Thielen*

Management and Human Resources 746/747: Impact Consulting for Arts and Cultural Organizations

Students through the Bolz Center for Arts Administration conducted a needs assessment and literature review to recommend strategies for the City of Waupaca to support local economic development needs and opportunities through the expansion of its recreation center. This included exploring ways to integrate spaces supporting career exploration, development, remote work, and coworking to help the city serve its residents, including business leaders, remote workers, creative professionals, civic organizations, and underrepresented community members.

11 Evaluating Feasibility and Benefits of Removing the Light Plant Dam | *Jan Kucher, Kim Gonzalez, Derek Hungness*

Civil and Environmental Engineering 578: Senior Capstone Design

Engineering students evaluated three scenarios for dam removal that included controlled dewatering with mechanical demolition, incremental notching, and removal of the full structure during low flow conditions. These options considered how each scenario would enhance the habitat for aquatic wildlife, minimize negative effects downstream such as bank erosion and decreased water quality, provide new opportunities for future land use, and restore the riverbed to its natural state.



Paddlers enjoying many of the Waupaca area waterways. Courtesy of Travel Wisconsin



A local dam and its aging infrastructure is creating a risk for flooding. Courtesy of Civil and Environmental Engineering Capstone

Nelson Institute Graduate Students Focus on Waupaca's Crystal River

The conservation plan addressed improving the health of the river, supporting recreation activities, and addressing the quality of life of Waupaca's residents.

By Abigail Becker

The Crystal River in the City of Waupaca is a valuable natural resource enjoyed by paddlers seeking adventurous and relaxing outings on the water as well as anglers fishing for trout. But a section of the river is considered impaired by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

Graduate students in the Nelson Institute's environmental conservation MS program were tasked with assisting Waupaca meet the community's goal of enhancing recreational opportunities along the Crystal River and promoting sustainable use while preserving the area's natural beauty.

Aaron Jenson, city administrator for Waupaca during the partnership, said the project was a good fit for the students because it prompted questions on a range of issues like conservation, engineering specifics, budget impacts, and property ownership. He said he was impressed with the students' work and the value the partnership with Univer-City Alliance has brought to Waupaca.

"Ultimately, it's preparing future staff to deal with things that we know are going to come up, but there's also things that came out of it that we can do right now," he said, specifically mentioning directing some funding into river maintenance and invasive species control. "The partnership has allowed us to look at the things that we wish we could get to but never are able to."

The conservation plan that the students created evaluates the river's current conditions, identifies existing threats, and outlines effective strategies with an action plan.

"Our plan mostly focused on long-term strategies that would create better working conditions for the city to continue its restoration of the Crystal River," student Induja Gandhiprasad said.

Central to the plan was a focus on improving the health of the river, supporting recreation activities, and addressing the quality of life of Waupaca's residents. Xia Lowery, who also worked on the plan, emphasized that the plan includes strategies that "not only benefit the river but also the community." These include a river health awareness initiative and an ordinance to define boundaries for riparian habitats.

In addition to learning technical concepts like conservation standards, the students said they learned how to tackle a large project in a short amount of time with multiple team members and narrow in on a community partner's needs.

Jake Mikic credited his group with deftly navigating group dynamics, balancing accountability, cooperation, and leadership. Though the project was challenging, Ellie Sovcik said what made it valuable was the knowledge that a community partner will use their final report.

"We actually want Waupaca to be able to use this," Sovcik said. "I trust that this work is actually going somewhere compared to a normal academic project. I really appreciate the real world application."

Read an extended version of this story at go.wisc.edu/conservation



Student volunteers wash off dirt from kale leaves as part of The People's Farm student organization at the F.H. King garden at the University of Wisconsin–Madison on October 1, 2023. Photo by Bryce Richter / UW–Madison



DANE COUNTY

SDGs: 11, 15, 17



1 Evaluating the Feasibility of Implementing a Pay for Success Financing Model in Dane County Services | *Amy Gangl*

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

Building off of a previous UniverCity report on public-private partnerships that finance social services through performance-based contracts, an intern gathered a list of criteria for existing programs that would be most successful with the Pay for Success and Social Impact Bond financing models and investigated areas of application. This report suggests programs for the application of Social Impact bonds, specifically with seniors and rural residents.

2 Understanding Community Needs and Interest in Creating a Winter Communal Gardening Program | *Amy Gangl*

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

A UniverCity intern assessed community gardens throughout Dane County and how to increase engagement in the gardens throughout the whole year. The project also addressed where there are gaps in community garden locations and who participates. This work involved creating and distributing a survey to gather data on garden use and analyzing that data to inform policy recommendations.

3 Analyzing Water Recreation Use Among Dane County Residents | *Amy Gangl*

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

This project expanded on previous work surveying Dane County residents on their water recreation use by analyzing the results to determine how people use water recreation resources and how their experience is affected by factors like algae and water levels.

Dane County Policy Analysis Internships Provide Career-Ready Experiences for UW–Madison Students

During the 2024–25 academic year, three students addressed policy analysis needs of Dane County through internships facilitated by UniverCity Alliance and the Department of Political Science.

By Abigail Becker

University of Wisconsin–Madison students continue to gain hands-on policy experiences through an ongoing collaboration between UniverCity Alliance, the Department of Political Science, and Dane County government.

During the 2024–25 academic year, three students addressed policy analysis needs of Dane County through an internship experience that provided opportunities to practice research skills, give presentations to local government committees, and learn more about their community.

Amy Gangl, director of undergraduate studies in the Department of Political Science, said opportunities like these Dane County projects that provide students with applied experiences are important for their professional development.

"These projects give students hands-on experience that you just can't get in a classroom," Gangl said. "Learning to apply research and skills to on-the-ground policy problems will be so beneficial to these students as they graduate and begin their careers."

The Dane County Board of Supervisors partnered with UniverCity [go.wisc.edu/univercity-danecounty] from 2017–19, and starting in 2022, UniverCity has supported the county by pairing a couple of students each semester to work on policy analysis projects. During the 2024–25 academic year, students assessed financing models, evaluated access to community gardens, and continued work on water recreation.

"We are grateful for our ongoing partnership with Dane County. Continuing to plug students into real-world projects that benefit our community partners is what UniverCity is all about," UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride said.

Sustainability and program evaluation coordinator Lisa MacKinnon said the Office of the Dane County Board enjoys working with the UniverCity Alliance students and values their contributions to the office's work and to the Dane County community.

"County Board staff and, at times, individual County Board Supervisors collaborate with multidisciplinary UW faculty, students, and community stakeholders, strengthening our connections to the community we serve," MacKinnon said. "The students often bring fresh energy and emerging policy discussions from their studies."

In return, MacKinnon said, the students receive mentoring in government process and policy development, and gain insights into "how the sausage gets made," while honing research, writing, and presentation skills on a diverse range of policy topics.



Surya Sethi

The student interns work with the County Board Office staff to gather data and conduct analysis on issues of interest to the County Board for potential future policy action or budget investment, diving deep into topics that are important to the Dane County community. For example, Surya Sethi, a sophomore majoring in political science and international studies, spent two semesters assessing community gardens throughout the county and evaluating how to increase engagement in the gardens throughout the whole year.

"Not only are community gardens a great way to increase

access to food, but it's also a great thing to do to create bonds with the people that live around you," Sethi said.

Sethi's project started with evaluating how to maintain community engagement in communal gardens during the winter. Expanding into a second semester of work, her project also addressed where there are gaps in community garden locations and who participates in the gardens. This work involved creating and distributing a survey to gather data on garden use and any barriers to access and analyzing that data to inform policy recommendations.

Sethi said the experience strengthened her research and analysis skills, which will benefit her as she pursues a job in government after graduation.

"Getting this experience of working in a local government is really great and in line with what I want to do," Sethi said. "You're directly working on projects that the local government is in the process of pursuing and that's been really cool to be involved in."



Brody Seaton

Brody Seaton, a sophomore majoring in political science and economics, is expanding work completed by UW–Madison students in spring 2023 [go.wisc.edu/water-recreation] addressing water recreation use in Dane County. That project involved surveying county residents about how they use the county's waterways.

For Seaton's project, he analyzed the survey results and compared them to a study from 2012 to determine how people in Dane County use water recreation resources and how their experience is affected by factors like algae and water levels.

While Seaton gained technical expertise in data analysis and visualization, as well as confidence in these new skills, he also learned how much people care about their community's resources.

"A really cool takeaway that I've gotten from this is that people are really interested and invested in improving their city and their county," Seaton said.



Ava Singh

Ava Singh, a sophomore double majoring in political science and information science, also built on a previous Dane County policy analysis project on Social Impact Bonds, which are public-private partnerships that finance social services through performance-based contracts.

Singh, who is also pursuing certificates in international development and education, gathered a list of criteria for existing programs that would be most suitable for this financial model and investigated areas of application. She presented her results to the Dane County Executive Committee on February 6, 2025.

"It's more pressure working with a community partner. They're relying on me to do a good job," Singh said. "It was very motivating to know that the research I was doing was needed, and it was valuable."

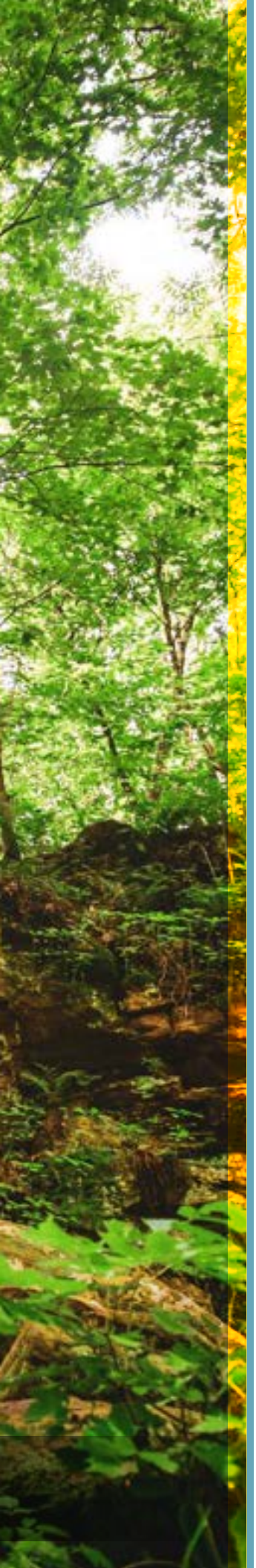
Singh appreciated gaining experiences in professional communication, presenting to committees, and writing case briefs.

"It just helped my academic life so much, because it made me feel so useful," Singh said. "It was really fulfilling, and it was a really good collaborative experience with Dane County."



IOWA CO.

Friends walk down the Stephens' Falls Hiking Trail at Governor Dodge State Park. Courtesy of Travel Wisconsin



IOWA COUNTY

SDGs: 8, 9, 11



1 Investigating Opportunities to Share Services and Improve Efficiency in Iowa County | *Ross Milton*

Independent Student Research

Shared services have become more common in Wisconsin due to the variety of benefits these collaborations can offer for cost savings, expanded staff and resource capacity, and innovation through knowledge sharing. This report provided a list of suggested shared services for the county and evaluated the feasibility and benefits of each to recommend the three opportunities for shared services that would be most advantageous for Iowa County's unique assets and challenges.

2 Developing an AI Policy for Iowa County Employees | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

As the use of artificial intelligence (AI) becomes more widespread across all sectors, including local government, Iowa County sought to develop policy guidance for its employees. This report includes a Generative AI Use Policy and a User Guide to empower county employees to utilize generative AI in ways that safeguard data privacy, security, and accuracy.

3 Exploring Highway Equipment Shared Services in Iowa County

Badger Consulting

Badger Consulting students conducted a financial analysis to assess the best options for Iowa County to share highway equipment and services with other nearby county governments. The recommendations provided are informed by the financial analysis as well as robust stakeholder engagement with surrounding counties.

4 Researching Barriers to Shared Services Among Wisconsin Counties | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

There are a variety of legal barriers and ambiguities impacting Wisconsin counties' ability to share services. This report explores common barriers to shared services identified by Wisconsin county officials and experts, recommends solutions, and highlights examples of successful collaboration happening throughout the state.



Emily Canales



Lily Peterson

Partnering with Wisconsin Communities Motivates Consulting Students

Badger Consulting students have completed projects with Iowa County, the Village of DeForest, Sheboygan County, and the Whitewater Unified School District.

By Abigail Becker

As University of Wisconsin–Madison seniors Emily Canales and Lily Peterson prepared to graduate and begin their careers in consulting, they are bringing with them the skills they learned by working with Iowa County.

Canales and Peterson connected with Iowa County through UniverCity Alliance, a cross-campus initiative that connects Wisconsin local governments with university resources, and their student-run consulting group called Badger Consulting. While Badger Consulting had primarily worked with small businesses through the Wisconsin Small Business Development Center at UW–Madison, the student organization expanded to work with more types of clients as student interest in the consulting organization grew.

“When I heard about the UniverCity project, I was really excited, because I do have an interest in local government and public policy,” said Canales, who graduated in May 2025 with majors in in supply chain management and information systems and a certificate in French. “Being able to work hands-on with Iowa County was really exciting.”

Iowa County is partnering with UniverCity Alliance to study the feasibility of consolidating services within the county and regionally with other counties and local governments with the goals of saving taxpayer dollars, improving service delivery, and unlocking innovation. The

Badger Consulting students were tasked with exploring Iowa County's highway equipment costs and possible opportunities for optimizing utilization and revenue.

To manage such a large project, Peterson said it was necessary to split up the topic into "more manageable modules." The group decided to address three main categories in their final report: a financial analysis, operational strategy, and stakeholder engagement.

"We laid a really great foundation for them to go forward and continue finding a solution for sharing the highway equipment," said Peterson, who also graduated in May with majors in supply chain operations and risk management and a certificate in consulting. "It definitely was a great learning experience to be able to see this big, huge problem and split it up more manageably … rather than trying to come up with a half-baked solution that you're not totally confident in."

The students presented their final results to Iowa County staff and the Iowa County Board in person, which provided another learning experience for the students especially when virtual meetings are common.

Canales said interacting in person helped the group solidify their relationship with Iowa County and gain buy-in on their project.

"At first when we realized that we were expected to go in person and present, it was a little intimidating and scary, but I think it also helped us lock in how important and impactful this project was for the community and for the leaders of Iowa County," Canales said. "It motivated us more to really put our absolute best foot forward and do the best we could for this project and for this community."

Both Canales and Peterson will be working for the Boston Consulting Group, with Canales in the Denver office and Peterson in Minneapolis.

"This has really excited me to work with communities and their local elected officials and to help communities serve their populations better," Canales said. "This experience has piqued my interest in that and is something that I'd like to pursue when I go to Boston Consulting."

In addition to the project with Iowa County, UniverCity has matched three other projects with Badger Consulting. These have included a project on a new child care center for the Whitewater Unified School District, an IT project with the Village of DeForest, and a project with Sheboygan County addressing foster care home recruitment.

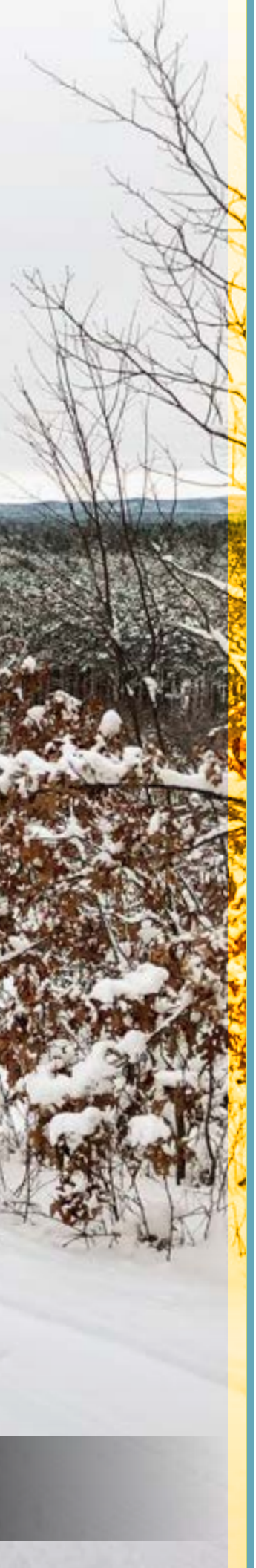
UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride said the Badger Consulting students bring enthusiasm and excitement to these local government projects, and they receive practical experiences that will benefit them after they leave UW–Madison.

"By connecting students with our partners, we hope they are better prepared when they start their careers and inspired to apply their skills to Wisconsin communities," McBride said. "At the same time, we know UniverCity's partners are benefitting from the fresh eyes that students can bring to local issues."



JACKSON CO.

Jackson County is home to the Black River State Forest, miles of ATV trails, campgrounds, local lakes and parks. Photo courtesy of Wisconsin DNR



JACKSON COUNTY

SDGs: 8, 11



1 **Fostering Community Identity in the Village of Melrose |** *Doug McLeod*

Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages

Through a promotional campaign centered around the phrase "it takes a village," journalism students created a brand proposal; materials like merchandise, postcards, pamphlets; events; and collaborations with small businesses to create a strong sense of community identity in Melrose.

2 **Recommending Promotion and Marketing Strategies for the Village of Taylor |** *Doug McLeod*

Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages

To boost awareness of the Village of Taylor as a great place to visit and live, journalism students developed proposals for merchandise, events, and social media. The campaign's goal is to draw tourists and recruit new permanent residents to "live and travel the true Wisconsin way."

3 **Evaluating Affordable Housing Needs in the City of Black River Falls |** *Amy Gangl, Ken Genskow, Edna Ely-Ledesma*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research and Urban and Regional Planning 999: Independent Professional Planning Project

In anticipation of the closing of a Tax Increment District (TID) which will provide funding to support affordable housing initiatives, the city worked with students over two semesters to analyze the community's current and future affordable housing needs. This report provides recommendations based on an analysis of population trends, economic factors, and local housing data to help guide the city's priorities and resource allocation for affordable housing development.

4 **Developing a Strategic Plan for Jackson County |** *Carey McAndrews*

Urban and Regional Planning 721: Methods of Planning Analysis

Informed by staff surveys, a community profile, and a workshop with Jackson County staff, urban and regional planning graduate students developed a strategic plan for Jackson County. The plan included updated mission, vision, and values statements and identified key strategy areas to help inform how the county prioritizes and coordinates its efforts.

5 **Planning a Biking Network and Future Bike Infrastructure in Jackson County |** *David McHugh*

Library and Information Studies 620: Field Project in Library and Information Agencies
A team of graduate students gathered and organized data on current cycling activities in Jackson County through consultations with local cyclists and surveys distributed on social media platforms to understand insights into cyclists' habits, preferences, and challenges. Their analysis informed recommendations that include establishing partnerships with local universities and professional organizations to advance cycling-related marketing and outreach efforts; planning and developing new long-distance routes through GIS mapping and terrain analysis; and enhancing digital resources by developing interactive trail maps and a mobile app to better serve cyclists' needs.



With just over 500 residents, the Village of Melrose in Jackson County offers recreational activities, business opportunities, and governmental services to its residents. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

School of Journalism Class Moves Wisconsin Forward Together with UniverCity Alliance

Touring two villages in Jackson County helped journalism students better understand the communities and their long-term goals.

By Beth Shoop

The Wisconsin Idea, the concept of connecting the university to the state as a way of moving forward together, is the cornerstone of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication (SJMC)'s mission. The school holds true to this idea through project-based courses like J445: Creative Campaign Messages and its partnership with UniverCity Alliance.

UniverCity Alliance is the perfect partner for J445, taught by Evjue Centennial Professor Doug McLeod. The organization's strong connection to the Wisconsin Idea creates a common goal between McLeod, his students and UniverCity Alliance, to improve the state together.

"As faculty, researchers and students at the University of Wisconsin, we want to take the knowledge that we're gaining and building, and go out into the state of Wisconsin and share that knowledge in ways that will help our community," McLeod said. "That's the epitome of the UniverCity Alliance."

Each semester, students venture out of Madison to work

with a different real-life client through UniverCity Alliance. Currently, students are working on creating civic pride and boosting morale through marketing and promotional content for the Villages of Taylor, Melrose and DeForest. Having students work with UniverCity Alliance and the villages creates value for all parties involved.

"I'm constantly amazed at how much cool stuff goes on on this campus, and I'm constantly amazed at how few people outside of this campus get to really feel those benefits or those positive impacts," former UniverCity Alliance managing director Gavin Luter said. "I feel like we are at the forefront of making the university useful, practical and tangible to people outside of the university."



Students in Evjue Centennial Professor Doug McLeod's J445: Creative Campaign Messages class traveled to the villages of Taylor and Melrose in Jackson County to develop creative messaging campaigns for the communities. Photo by Abigail Becker

Students have the opportunity to learn about communities they rarely interact with and gain valuable experiences and knowledge from the people they communicate with. In turn, the villages benefit from a new, outside perspective from students and content they can use to promote their community.

"I'm just so grateful that Doug continues to do the work with us," Luter said. "There's nothing in this contract that requires him to do real world community based work, and he chooses to do it because he knows that that's the right way to actually teach."

UniverCity Alliance acts as a strong backbone of support for J445. The organization connects McLeod and his students with the villages that are interested in introducing new campaign messages. From there, McLeod meets the clients to learn about their goals for the future of their community.

For students to truly understand the villages they are working with, UniverCity Alliance arranges transportation and lunches for McLeod's class to visit the locations, take photos and meet with locals to hear their perspectives and experiences living in the community. Students use their experience to enhance their campaign messages by gaining a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoint of the community locals.

"I know [the clients] enjoy the opportunity to work with our students, engage in some fascinating conversations about their town and get to share what they like about their town with a group of outsiders," McLeod said. "They're generally, I would say, incredibly impressed with the work that our students can do in six weeks."

There is a lack of trust between the state and the university. The idea of the university being disconnected from the challenges of the rest of the state is being tackled by the Wisconsin Idea that UniverCity Alliance and McLeod value greatly.

"We're really at the forefront of rebuilding trust between UW–Madison and the rest of the state," Luter said. "Universities are so used to being experts at everything. When we show up and we say, 'what do you need help with?' it puts us in a little bit more of a humble position to take requests and respond to requests."

The excursion to the villages was a great learning opportunity for SJMC senior Caroline Kivlehan.

"It was very eye-opening to speak with the local government," Kivlehan said. "We all met at the Town Hall in Melrose, and it was really cool to speak with them about their town, why they love the town that they live in, and how they want to make it better for the people that live in it."

McLeod understands working with real clients can be a difficult challenge for students to tackle, but it prepares them to take on the real world outside of the SJMC. If McLeod gave students "softball challenges," they would not be as well equipped in the future.

McLeod's mission of making the course challenging and beneficial shines through to his students.

"[This course gives] real, hands-on experience that I can speak to in job interviews while also feeling like I'm helping someone at the same time," Kivlehan said. "It's cool to extend classroom skills to a real world setting. It's really fun, yet challenging, too."



DEFOREST

Fireman's Park in DeForest is a community park featuring a playground, sports facilities, picnic and grilling areas, and a splash pad. Photo courtesy of the Village of DeForest



VILLAGE OF DEFOREST

SDGs: 8, 9, 11, 13, 15



1 Planning for Phosphorus Reduction and Sustainable Development | *Ken Genskow*

Urban and Regional Planning 999: Independent Professional Planning Project

To address environmental sustainability, the Village of DeForest collaborated with a graduate student who developed a framework to determine varied levels of protection of natural areas that allows for a variety of development. The goal of the project was to protect surface water quality by reducing the phosphorus load entering the Yahara River from untreated stormwater runoff and to reduce the impacts of stormwater flooding on infrastructure and the natural environment.

2 Exploring Sustainability Best Practices for the Village of DeForest | *Amy Gangl*

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program: Independent Student Research

Two UniverCity Alliance Scholars developed and distributed a community survey to gain feedback from residents on their priorities for environmental sustainability. This input informed the final report, which recommends actions and potential funding sources to support environmental sustainability initiatives related to energy, waste, wetland protection, and flood and climate resilience.

3 Promoting Belonging Through Community Branding and Marketing | *Doug McLeod*

Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages

School of Journalism and Mass Communication students created flyers, social media templates, event proposals, and merchandise designs to support the Village of DeForest's goals of bringing the community together and promoting the village to prospective residents. The students recommended showcasing DeForest's parks and trails as a draw to the community.

4 Creating an Environmental Sustainability Action Plan | *Angela Kita*

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

Building on recommendations from prior UniverCity Alliance projects, students developed a sustainability action plan that identified short and long term actions the village can take to advance community goals for waste reduction, energy use, and community engagement around environmental sustainability topics.



The Village of DeForest has steadily grown in population and household size over the last two decades.
Photo courtesy of the Village of DeForest

5 Designing Morrisonville Road to Support Anticipated Growth | *Jan Kucher, Kim Gonzalez, Derek Hungness*

Civil and Environmental Engineering 578: Senior Capstone Design

Engineering students developed three design plans to enhance Morrisonville Road in the Village of DeForest to support anticipated growth while maintaining environmental sustainability and traffic efficiency. Rethinking this thoroughfare is necessary as the village is planning infrastructure improvements for a 160-acre site that will include mixed-use development and conservation spaces.

6 Creating a Staff Growth Plan for Best Service Delivery | *Angela Kita*

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

To ensure the village continues to provide high quality service delivery without overburdening staff as the organization grows, students developed a staff growth plan to help community leaders effectively plan and budget for future staffing needs.

7 Understanding Costs and Future Impacts of Multi-Year Forecasting for Financial Planning | *Jay Page and Natalie Norton*

General Business 790: Capstone Consulting Practicum

As a growing community, the Village of DeForest wanted a way to easily conduct financial forecasting and see how new projects and services would impact the organization's budget. Masters of business analytics students developed a tool for the Village of DeForest to adjust variables and easily see impacts to the mill rate for future projects.

8 Developing a Road Map for Future Technological Improvements | *Angela Kita*

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering
Informed by interviews with staff and an assessment of existing technology use and needs for the village, students recommended software and strategies to improve public usability of the municipal website, streamline processes to alleviate administrative burden for staff, and enhance data integration across village services and departments.

9 Exploring Creation of an IT Services Consortium for Shared IT Management Services

Badger Consulting
As local government technology needs become more complex and costly to maintain, the village wanted to explore the feasibility of sharing IT management services with other communities. Badger Consulting students conducted interviews with other municipalities, used financial modeling, and evaluated existing models to recommend strategies and next steps for the village to implement an IT Services Consortium.

10 Planning for Future Facilities Growth | *Ken Genskow and Edna Ely-Ledesma*

Urban and Regional Planning 999: Independent Professional Planning Project
Based on population projections for the Village of DeForest, an Urban and Regional Planning graduate student conducted a needs assessment of current public facilities and identified needs for new or expanded village facilities to optimize operations and continue to provide high quality services for residents. This report will help the village plan and budget for these major projects.

11 Exploring Best Practices for Rural Land Acquisition | *Jeremy Beach*

Agricultural and Applied Economics 500: Senior Capstone Experience
As the Village of DeForest continues to grow in population, the village will need to explore opportunities for acquiring additional land to support the needs of its residents. Since the village is largely surrounded by agricultural uses, capstone students in agriculture and applied economics identified best practices for rural land acquisition to help the village proactively build connections with land owners and meaningfully engage with them in conversations about future land use that meet shared goals and promote conservation of the Yahara watershed.

12 Scaling the DeForest Dragon Art Fair | *John Surdyk and Aaron Thielen*

Management and Human Resources 746/747: Impact Consulting for Arts and Cultural Organizations
The Dragon Art Fair is a long-standing and beloved event in DeForest, which was recently turned over to the village to plan and host in the future. Students in the Bolz Center for Arts Administration worked with the village to develop strategies for scaling the DeForest Dragon Art Fair over time in ways that are sustainable and remain true to the event's mission to support local artists, love of the arts, and opportunities to bring art to the Village of DeForest.

Village of DeForest Engages UW–Madison Students on Scaling the Dragon Art Fair

The 21st annual Dragon Art Fair in the Village of DeForest saw record attendance and incorporated recommendations from UW–Madison graduate students.

By Abigail Becker

Artists, musicians, vendors, and community members filled Fireman's Park in the Village of DeForest on June 7, marking the 21st anniversary of the event and the first time the fair was organized and hosted by village staff.

Started by Merry Poast and Julie Wills in 2014, the pair created a community tradition and cultivated a loyal following of attendees and returning vendors. Ahead of this year's event, village staff partnered with University of Wisconsin–Madison graduate students through UniverCity Alliance [univercity.wisc.edu] to consider strategies to boost community engagement, deploy efficient marketing strategies, and streamline vendor management.

"We took over a couple significantly large events this year, with the Dragon Art Fair being one of them," recreation and community enrichment director Reese O'Malley said. "There was an interest from the village in understanding, one, the economic impact of those events and then, two, how can we improve those events and what are ways that we can streamline them."

Through the UniverCity Alliance partnership, DeForest staff connected with four students – Eliana Wasserman, GG Christensen, Sydney Prather, and Sam Weeks – pursuing masters' degrees in arts and creative enterprise leadership through the Bolz Center for Arts Administration [business.wisc.edu/centers/bolz].

They worked with O'Malley and community events coordinator Tricia Kleinsteiber over the spring 2025 semester to connect with community residents in focus groups, lead surveys, and conduct field research. DeForest incorporated several recommendations from the students into the event, including an improved map of the fair grounds and a children's area that featured interactive art activities like free face painting, spin art bike creations, and rock painting.

"Overall, the event went great!" O'Malley said. "I believe the Kids Zone was a big hit and definitely something we would look to bring back. This year we had over 6,000 visitors, which to our numbers is record attendance!"



Over 140 artists showcased their work at the art fair. Photo by Megan McBride

Over 140 artists came from all over Wisconsin, as well as Illinois and Minnesota to showcase their work. The fair also featured live entertainment, including performances by local musicians Prairie Strummers and Prairie Flowers and a cultural performance by Dhia Ua Ke that Kleinsteiber said brought unique energy and diversity to the event.

Several other recommendations for the Dragon Art Fair like expanding the vendor base, implementing paid advertising and marketing strategies, and using a vendor management software program could be implemented in future years.

O'Malley said this work also aligns with goals outlined in the Village of DeForest's strategic plan, including streamlining technologies to make the village more efficient and provide better service to the community. Hopefully, the recommendations for the Dragon Art Fair can be transferred to other events, like the community Fourth of July celebration, O'Malley said.

Kleinsteiber said it was beneficial to have the students as an outside entity evaluate the event and offer insight.

"It's nice having a group that hadn't even heard of the event before doing this project," Kleinsteiber said. "They had unbiased opinions because they were learning about the event for the first time."

UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride, who enjoyed the event, said the art fair was lively, well-attended, and a fun way to experience the DeForest community.

"With our UniverCity Alliance partnerships, we want to make sure that local government leaders are receiving practical recommendations that can be implemented all while UW–Madison students receive career-ready experiences," McBride. "This is exactly what we saw happen with DeForest and the Bolz Center students!"



The 21st DeForest Dragon Art Fair saw record attendance. Photo by Alex Goldstein

Practicing the Wisconsin Idea

The Bolz Center's one-year master's degree program in arts and creative enterprise leadership [business.wisc.edu/graduate/masters/arts-leadership] trains students to build careers in arts administration or social sector leadership. John Surdyk, director of the Initiative for Studies in Transformational Entrepreneurship, said their goal is to "empower our students to become leaders who can foster community vibrancy through their involvement in arts and community organizations."

Providing students with on-the-ground learning experiences is critical to accomplishing that mission.

"When our Bolz students step out of our Impact Consulting classroom and into communities across Wisconsin where UniverCity Alliance is working, they get hands-on experience that simply can't be replicated with traditional readings and instruction," Surdyk said.

For example, the DeForest project encouraged students to practice community engagement skills and apply marketing, data collection, and event management tools to the project. They also needed to learn how to apply their individual skills to the group project, collaborate, and work efficiently with busy local government professionals.

"This sort of experiential learning and community engagement directly supports the university's mission and commitment to the Wisconsin Idea, putting the idea into practice," Surdyk said.

Prather, one of the students working on the project, felt the benefits of getting off campus and connecting her academic work with the surrounding community.

"As UW students, we hear about the Wisconsin Idea through our coursework and time on campus, but as current students or alumni, it can be easy to forget that we are now stewards of that idea," Prather said.

"This becomes clear when we step out of the classroom and into the community," she continued. "We can steward the resources we are afforded through our education to build a brighter future for Wisconsin and beyond, and I hope students take every opportunity they can to become more deeply involved with the communities around us."

Prather said the experience with DeForest allowed their group to connect to the community and to their own abilities. They each discovered how they could apply their skills to the project and where they could continue to grow professionally.

"I knew my time at the Bolz Center and the time spent completing this project was monumental but to see tangible evidence of the work our group had done, see the smiling faces of the DeForest staff, and see a community come together to support artists really encapsulated what all this work has been for," Prather said about attending the Dragon Art Fair. "It made me excited for other students in the UniverCity Alliance program to see the impact of their work and begin to view themselves as community leaders."



MOUNT PLEASANT

Mount Pleasant applied to UniverCity for the years 2023–26 to address facility expansion, equipment funding, cost of service estimates, a park master plan, and compost site improvements. Photo courtesy of the Village of Mount Pleasant



VILLAGE OF MOUNT PLEASANT

SDGs: 8, 11, 15



1 **Developing an Equipment Replacement Fund Plan |** *Jay Page*

Masters of Business Analytics Consulting Practicum Independent Research

To help the Village of Mount Pleasant effectively plan and budget for the replacement of equipment across departments, this report provides an equipment replacement schedule for years 2025 through 2040.

2 **Designing a Master Plan for Biex-Ramcke Park |** *Eric Schuchardt*

Landscape Architecture 611: Senior Capstone in Landscape Architecture

The village's Park and Open Space Plan recommended developing a park on a parcel of village-owned land. To support the village's planning and redevelopment efforts, a landscape architecture student developed a master plan that embraces the site's location along the Pike River Pathway and includes a mix of amenities, pathway connections, and green space.

3 **Creating a Conservation Plan for a Multi-Use Site in Mount Pleasant |** *Arlyne Johnson and Nathan Schulfer*

Environmental Studies 972: Conservation Planning

Environmental conservation planning students developed a plan for a 70-acre site in the Village of Mount Pleasant. They proposed several strategies that include creating a native prairie landscape to establish pollinator habitat, prevent erosion, and provide space for recreation and cultural activities; removing invasive species, developing partnerships, and strengthening community engagement and outreach.

4 **Understanding the Financial Impacts of New Development |** *Jay Page and Natalie Norton*

Masters of Business Analytics Consulting Practicum Independent Research

While the village has a good understanding of hard costs associated with new development, it wanted assistance quantifying the soft costs resulting from increased population and demand for municipal services. Through a consulting practicum experience, masters of business analytics students conducted a budget analysis and financial modeling to create a tool the village can use each year to capture the estimated increase in municipal service costs based on new developments.

Partnership with Mount Pleasant Provides Nelson Institute Graduate Students Applied Experiences

Anthony Beyer, director of public works for Mount Pleasant, said the students' project pushes the village in the "right direction."

By Abigail Becker

In Mount Pleasant, a 70-acre site that includes the village's compost site and land leased to a radio-controlled model aircraft club presents opportunities to restore wetlands and forests and create a native prairie landscape.

Graduate students in the Nelson Institute's environmental conservation MS program developed a conservation plan for the Mount Pleasant site through their coursework.

The students partnering with Mount Pleasant appreciated that the project provided a practical experience of working with a community before their program ends in August. Two of these students, Lauren Schmelzer and Jenasea Hameister recently graduated with their undergraduate degrees. A third, Anthony Leikip, is switching careers from firefighting to environmental conservation and said the hands-on experience was informative.

"It gave all of us the experience to work on a restoration plan and have that real world experience," Hameister said.

Anthony Beyer, director of public works for Mount Pleasant, reinforced this perspective and emphasized the importance of the academic and professional connection.

"This experience allows them to focus on real world problems. As a government entity, it's important we promote that," Beyer said.

The students were tasked with developing a conservation plan for the area that includes the Mount Pleasant Compost Facility and the Racine Radio Control Flying and Social Club flight field. Community Development Director Samuel Schultz said the students were able to "dial in" to this property and think strategically about its uses.

"They were taking the village's high range goals and drilling into detail about specific areas and what we can do with them," Schultz said.



Hoods Creek flows through the northwest corner of the site that the students evaluated. Photo by Lauren Schmelzer

The site presents a number of factors for the students to consider, such as that a large portion of the site is within a floodplain and the site includes forested wetlands, wet meadows, forage grassland, lowland shrubs, crop-rotated lands, and some developed high- and low-intensity areas.

"There's no rubric for the world," Schmelzer said. "You create what you think works best, and our plan was what we could imagine would work best in a short-term, like five-year plan."

Schmelzer said their plan envisions three main habitat areas: forest, wetlands, and prairie and included sustainability goals that the village can strive to achieve. She said there's an opportunity in the future for the village to consider installing trails or interactive walk-through learning stations.

They proposed several strategies that include creating a native prairie landscape to establish pollinator habitat, prevent erosion, and provide space for recreation and cultural activities; removing invasive species, developing partnerships, and strengthening community engagement and outreach.

"Their report will get the ball rolling on this site," Beyer said. "That will ultimately protect this property and work with the existing features we have. It pushes the village in the right direction."

Read an extended version of this story at go.wisc.edu/conservation

Thank You

Thank you to representatives from our partner communities and the University of Wisconsin–Madison who were essential to the success of these partnerships and projects.

Staff and community members from the Cities of Appleton, Madison, and Waupaca; the Villages of DeForest and Mount Pleasant; and Chippewa, Dane, Iowa, and Jackson Counties provided resources, advice, and feedback that were essential to UniverCity's success. Thank you for sharing your knowledge and wisdom.

On campus, faculty, staff, researchers, and extension specialists embodied the Wisconsin Idea by incorporating community priorities into their courses and research programs. They helped address local challenges in collaboration with local government leaders, community members, and students. Their innovative work continues to impact the Universities of Wisconsin, Wisconsin, and the world.

To our donors, thank you for your generosity. When you support UniverCity Alliance, you are strengthening communities across Wisconsin and investing in UW–Madison students — the Wisconsin Idea in action.

Thank you, all!

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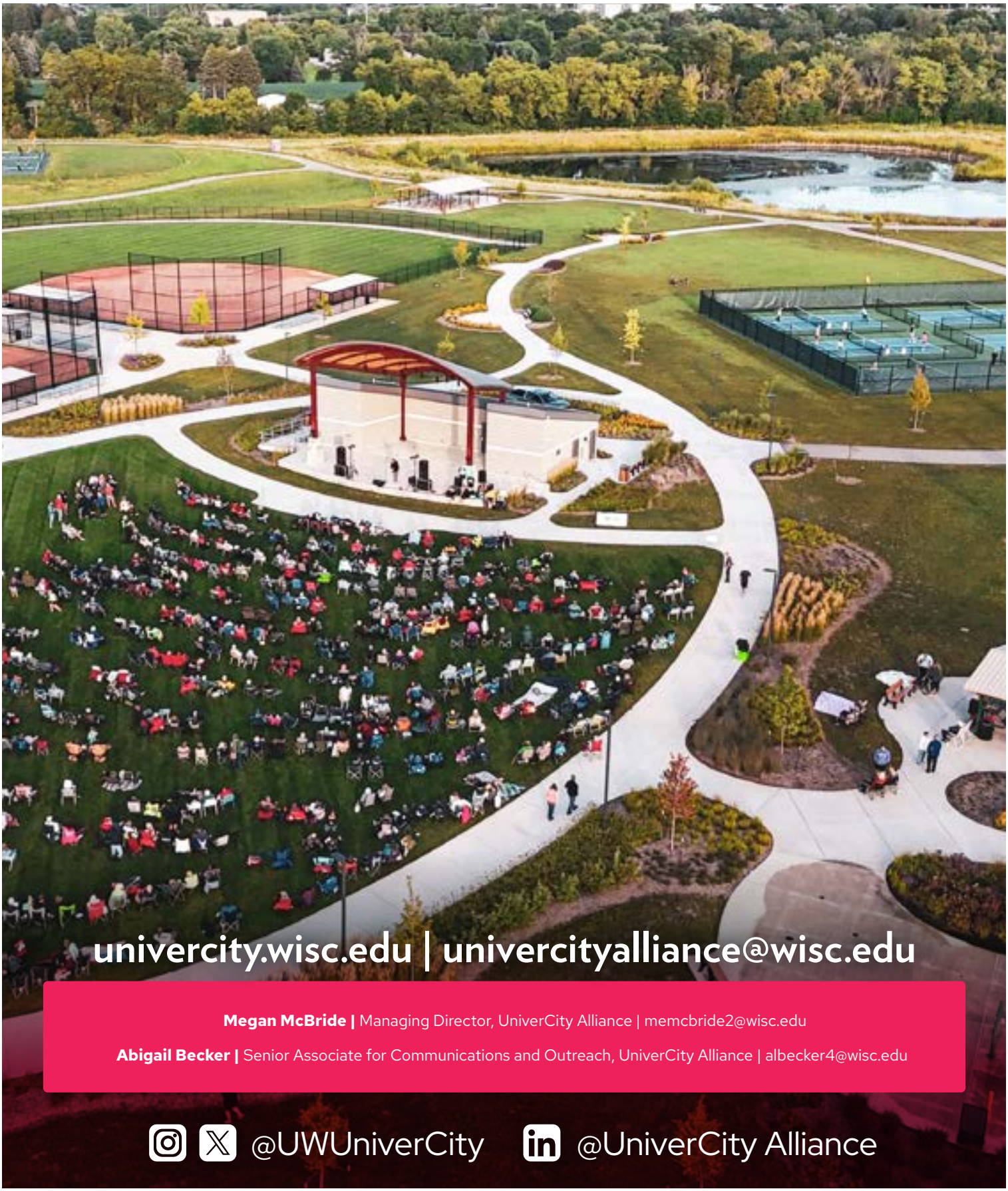
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Back cover: Aerial view features the Campus Park Bandshell. Photo courtesy of the Village of Mount Pleasant



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