



UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE

ANNUAL REPORT 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT UNIVERCITY ALLIANCE	2
UNIVERCITY ACROSS WISCONSIN	4
UNIVERCITY ON CAMPUS	6
MEET THE UNIVERCITY ALLIANCE SCHOLARS	8
FROM CAMPUS TO COMMUNITY	12
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS	13
UNIVERCITY ALLIANCE AND THE WISCONSIN IDEA	14
BY THE NUMBERS	15
CITY OF BEAVER DAM	16
CITY OF MADISON	18
DANE COUNTY	22
JEFFERSON COUNTY	24
MONROE COUNTY	28
SHEBOYGAN COUNTY	32
TOWN OF IRVING	36
TREMPEALEAU COUNTY	38
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	40



About UniverCity Alliance

Creating Better Places Together

UniverCity Alliance is inspired by communities across Wisconsin and aims to support local efforts by connecting leaders to resources at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. With the goal of making the university more accessible and responsive to Wisconsin communities, UniverCity Alliance forms partnerships with local governments, listens to community-identified priorities, and leverages university resources to create tangible outcomes. Today, UniverCity Alliance has partnered with dozens of local governments and brought the Wisconsin Idea to life through a two-way exchange of knowledge.

Throughout 2025 and 2026, UniverCity Alliance partnered with the Cities of Beaver Dam and Madison; Dane, Jefferson, Monroe, Sheboygan, and Trempealeau Counties; and the Town of Irving. These partnerships have addressed topics ranging from human resources and community gardens to emergency medical services, foster care, and public health.

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](https://university.wisc.edu/university-year-communities) (university.wisc.edu/university-year-communities).

UniverCity Alliance Advisory Board Cochairs



“UniverCity Alliance’s partnership program is a concrete way to put the Wisconsin Idea in action in all our communities — a curative for 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: UniverCity Alliance staff and leadership: Abigail Becker, Paul Robbins, Megan McBride, and Joel Rogers.

UniverCity Alliance across Wisconsin

August 2025–August 2026

UniverCity Alliance brings the Wisconsin Idea to life by connecting campus resources to local government leaders across the state. By visiting partners in person and arranging site visits for students, UniverCity Alliance emphasizes the importance of local expertise and showcasing communities across Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Land Information Association (WLIA) Fall Conference

UniverCity Alliance was invited to present to municipal and county land information professionals during WLIA's Fall Conference. The session highlighted examples of past community projects involving GIS and mapping and outlined how local governments partner with the program.

Jefferson County EMS Working Group

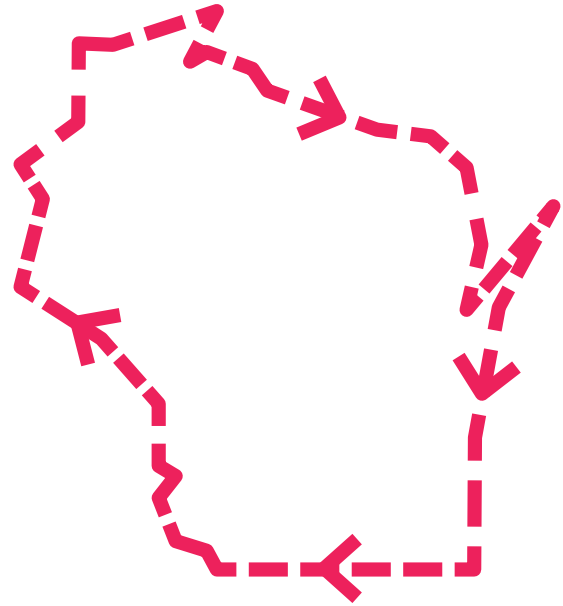
UniverCity Alliance attended and provided monthly updates during the Jefferson County EMS Working Group meetings to maintain consistent communication, understand the working group's ongoing priorities, help manage data collection needs, and provide updates on course matches and projects.

Sheboygan County

UniverCity Alliance visited Sheboygan County several times with two UW–Madison classes: Educational Policy Studies 580 and Journalism 445. With Naomi Mae W., educational policy studies students toured Rocky Knoll Health Care Center and observed inter-generational programming activities to inform a new curriculum for the center. Professor Doug McLeod's journalism students met with county foster care staff to inform their creative campaign messages and materials to support the staff's goals of recruiting and retaining more foster care parents.

Monroe County

Students in Patti Coffey's Psychology 626: Issues in Prisoner Reentry class evaluated Monroe County's drug court program. They interviewed court team staff, current participants, and graduated participants.



During a site visit, they collected information through courtroom observations, program documents, and quantitative data received from treatment court reports.

Spark Learning Community Visits City of Madison

A group of first-year University of Wisconsin–Madison students living in the Spark Learning Community received a crash course in local government during a visit to the Madison Municipal Building. They heard from Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, ald. MGR Govindarajan, performance excellence specialist Kara Kratowicz, city attorney Mike Haas, and community engagement strategist Lorissa Bañuelos.

Badgers on Tap

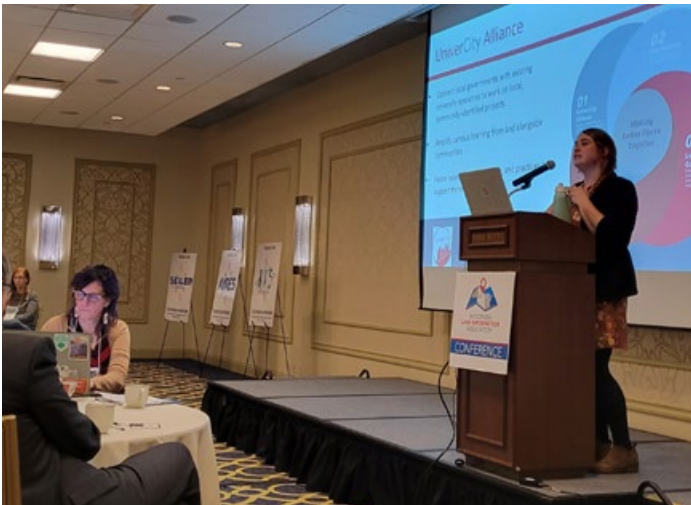
In partnership with Badger Talks, UniverCity Alliance hosted a local-government-themed trivia night at Lone Girl Brewing in Waunakee to share information about local government, community-university partnerships, and UniverCity Alliance's impact in Waunakee and beyond during UniverCity's 10th anniversary year.



L-R: Jerry Deschane, Megan McBride, Kylie West, Kristin Runge, and Abigail Becker pose for a photo at a Badgers on Tap event. Photo courtesy of Badger Talks



Students and faculty on a site visit in Sheboygan County during the fall semester. Photo by Sophie Woolridge



UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride presents at a Wisconsin Land Information Association conference. Photo by Monique Hassman



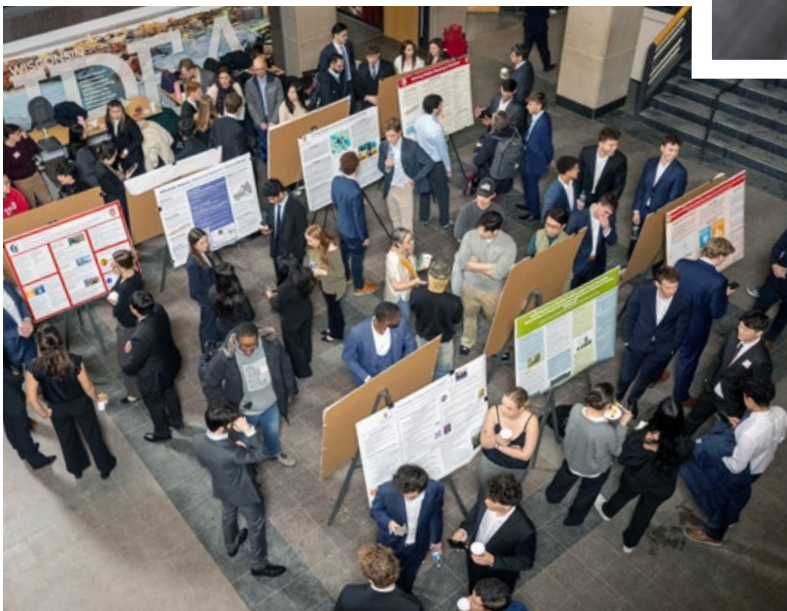
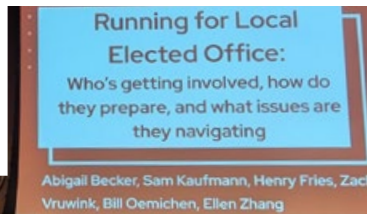
Madison Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway, center in blue, poses for a photo with students who visited the Madison Municipal Building on Feb. 5. Photo by Abigail Becker

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

- Wisconsin City/County Manager Association Summer Conference | June 26–27, 2025
- Wisconsin Counties Association Annual Conference | Sep. 22–23, 2025
- League of Wisconsin Municipalities Fall Conference | Oct. 8–9, 2025
- Wisconsin Counties Association Legislative Conference | Feb. 10–11, 2026
- Wisconsin City/County Manager Association | Feb. 26–27, 2026
- Healthy Communities Summit | April 23–24, 2026

UniverCity Alliance on Campus

UniverCity Alliance connects with leaders on the UW–Madison campus who are inspired by applying their expertise to Wisconsin local governments and fostering innovation in communities of all sizes. To build a network of people committed to this work, UniverCity Alliance meets with campus departments, leads the Urban Futures Community of Practice, participates in campuswide conferences, and connects with students.



Office of Admissions and Recruitment

Annual Retreat | August 13, 2025

UniverCity Alliance's session at this office's annual retreat highlighted how community-based projects enrich student learning and is a compelling reason for students interested in making a difference in communities to consider UW–Madison.

UniverCity Alliance's 10th Anniversary

Celebration | September 18, 2025

UniverCity Alliance celebrated a decade of fostering strong community-university partnerships at a special event that welcomed community and campus partners.

RISE-EARTH Faculty Welcome Lunch

October 3, 2025

UniverCity Alliance presented to new faculty hired through the RISE-EARTH initiative about opportunities to collaborate.

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

December 9, 2025

Now in its fifth year, Real Estate 420/720 partnered with the City of Madison to bring students community-based challenges to address during their course. They analyzed how the city's existing plans align with the growth, equity, and sustainability principles through the lens of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Board of Regents Panel | February 5, 2026

UniverCity Alliance Scholar Maggie Claussen shared her experiences working with the City of Beaver Dam during a panel with the Board of Regents Education Committee. Read more about the UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program on page 8.

CommUnity Conference | April 27, 2026

UniverCity Alliance convened a panel focused on who is running for local elected office, how they prepare to serve their constituents, and what issues are they navigating. Panelists included League of Wisconsin Municipalities chief operating officer Zach Vruwink, Waunakee village trustee Sam Kaufmann, Dane County board supervisor Henry Fries, Madison alder Ellen Zhang, and UW–Madison Division of Extension's local government law educator Bill Oemichen.

Make Your Madison @ the Public

Service Fair | September 4, 2025

UniverCity Alliance and the City of Madison collaborated with the Morgridge Center's Public Service Fair to connect students with city staff and opportunities in Madison.

Water Partnership Workshop

September 11, 2025

UniverCity Alliance served on the planning committee and as a cofacilitator for a workshop hosted by Water@UW–Madison and Wisconsin Sea Grant. The event connected community groups with interdisciplinary experts through facilitated conversations to foster connections and community-driven research projects.

Local Government Eat and Greet

October 24, 2025

In partnership with the La Follette School of Public Affairs, UniverCity Alliance participated in a Local Government Eat and Greet networking event that featured UniverCity Alliance partners, including Judd Blau from the Village of DeForest, Inga Cushman from the Village of Cottage Grove, and Michael Luckey from Jefferson County.

Welcome to Your Urban Future Course

Spring 2026

Now in its sixth year, Urban and Regional Planning 215: Welcome to Your Urban Future enrolled 122 students. The course was created by UniverCity Alliance in partnership with the Department of Planning and Landscape Architecture. Instructor Nathan Larson invited UniverCity Alliance staff to present about local government partnerships.

Wisconsin Idea Conference | March 2, 2026

During a panel that featured Vernon County conservationist David Hettenbach, UniverCity Alliance staff shared how the program's model is evolving to offer community partners a rolling application and opportunities to work on rapid response projects. UniverCity Alliance also participated in a panel about communicating impact through storytelling.

Badger Talks Collaborations | May 2026

Badger Talks Presents — a monthly, themed program — showcased several UniverCity Alliance partnerships and projects. Community partners and UW–Madison instructors shared how they are supporting mountain biking trails, intergenerational programming, and alternative courts in communities across Wisconsin through partnerships with UniverCity Alliance.

Meet the UniverCity Alliance Scholars

Local government projects prepare UniverCity Alliance Scholars for future careers

By Abigail Becker

Developing a greater understanding of how neighborhood dynamics affect communities. Strengthening time management skills. Distilling a range of opinions and applying them to a final deliverable.

These are just a few examples of the professional skills that UniverCity Alliance Scholars gained during the fall semester by partnering with Wisconsin local governments on individual projects, ranging from mapping EMS resources to creating public access trail designs and optimizing county facility space.

Lexi Golding, a junior majoring in political science, said her experience working with the City of Beaver

Dam on a human resources project has prepared her for her future career.

“I learned valuable skills in communication, professionalism, and collaboration. Through the project, I realized how passion and dedication can significantly enhance the work experience, making it both meaningful and rewarding,” said Golding, who worked on the project with fellow scholar Maggie Claussen. “The opportunity to drive a project based in local government helped build a great foundation for my future career in both public service and organizational management.”



UniverCity Alliance Scholars attend UCA 10th Anniversary Celebration. Photo by Hedi LaMarr Rudd

Golding and seven other students made up the 2025 UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program, which completed its third year. This program convenes committed undergraduate and graduate students with a range of skills and interests to work on individual projects with local government partners.

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

The 2025 cohort completed the following projects in collaboration with these Wisconsin communities:

- **Updating position descriptions to align with a job factor analysis and salary schedule updates in the City of Beaver Dam**
- **Mapping EMS demand and resources for the Town of Irving, Town of Melrose, and Village of Melrose**
- **Designing a survey to engage residents and stakeholders about an eco-friendly mountain biking area in the Village of DeForest**
- **Creating orientation and onboarding materials for new Village of DeForest trustees**
- **Optimizing Sheboygan County facility space use to meet current and future staffing needs**
- **Developing initial concept plans and identifying strategic design elements for Amsterdam Dunes public access trails in Sheboygan County**
- **Inventorying and developing a guide for local resources for the UW South Madison Partnership**

“Because of the wide variety of needs that local governments address in their communities, UniverCity Alliance is able to offer a range of unique projects that align with students from diverse academic disciplines,” UniverCity Alliance managing director Megan McBride said. “This allows us to introduce

local government to students majoring in political science and planning and landscape architecture, for example, but also in environmental studies, information science, biology, journalism, and human ecology.”

Producing ‘useful and actionable’ work

Madeline Green, a senior studying political science, journalism, and criminal justice, said she learned just how “complex and thoughtful local government work truly is.”

“I gained a deeper appreciation for the amount of research, collaboration, and decision making that goes into serving a community,” said Green, who worked with the Village of DeForest on creating materials for new local elected officials.

Green, who plans to pursue a legal career, said the experience expanded her professional network and strengthened her time management skills.

“Additionally, collaborating with a variety of individuals and learning about an unfamiliar topic, then applying that knowledge directly to my work, was extremely valuable,” Green said. “This experience showed me how to adapt, communicate effectively for my needs as a student, and approach new challenges with confidence.”

Rachael Shields, who is pursuing a PhD in design studies through the School of Human Ecology, aims to be a professor in Wisconsin after she completes her degree. Shields said learning more about these local government projects provided insight into the types of projects she could pursue that incorporate meaningful community involvement.

“I learned the value of creating deliverables that are quick, easily editable, and easy to understand,” Shields said. “While many university projects unfold over multiple years, focusing on a clearly defined and specific problem can produce work that is useful and actionable within a much shorter timeframe.”



UniverCity Alliance Scholars celebrating during an event on September 18, 2025 in the Pyle Center. Photos by Hedi LaMarr Rudd (3)



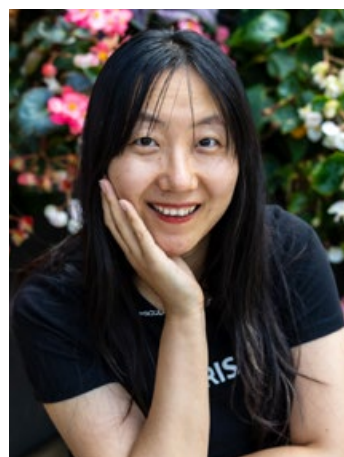
Maggie Claussen



Lexi Golding



Madeline Green



Shu Sun

For Megan Dorsey, a senior majoring in landscape and urban studies, understanding how resources are communicated and shared within a community provided greater insight into neighborhood dynamics and relationships.

Dorsey worked with the UW South Madison Partnership on a local resource guide. She said she learned the importance of truly getting to know her

community partner in order to create a tool that can be implemented.

“Being able to understand the needs and interests of the community is essential to produce a useful deliverable,” Dorsey said. “This experience is very rewarding because I was able to create a project that will be useful to many residents in the South Madison area.”



Rachael Shields



Jordyn Czyzewski



Megan Dorsey



Lola Lee

From Campus to Community

Getting students off campus and into Wisconsin communities creates stronger projects for local government partners and builds a deeper appreciation for local communities. Site visits also show community partners that UW–Madison is willing to show up and learn from them. In Fall 2025, UniverCity Alliance supported 10 in-person visits with community partners. These trips included communities as close as the Village of DeForest, a 20-minute drive from campus, to partners in Monroe and Sheboygan Counties, which are hours away. UniverCity Alliance provides support, as needed, to arrange transportation, create itineraries, and provide food for meetings between students and community partners.

Here are highlights from students who visited the Village of DeForest, Sheboygan County, and Monroe County.



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.

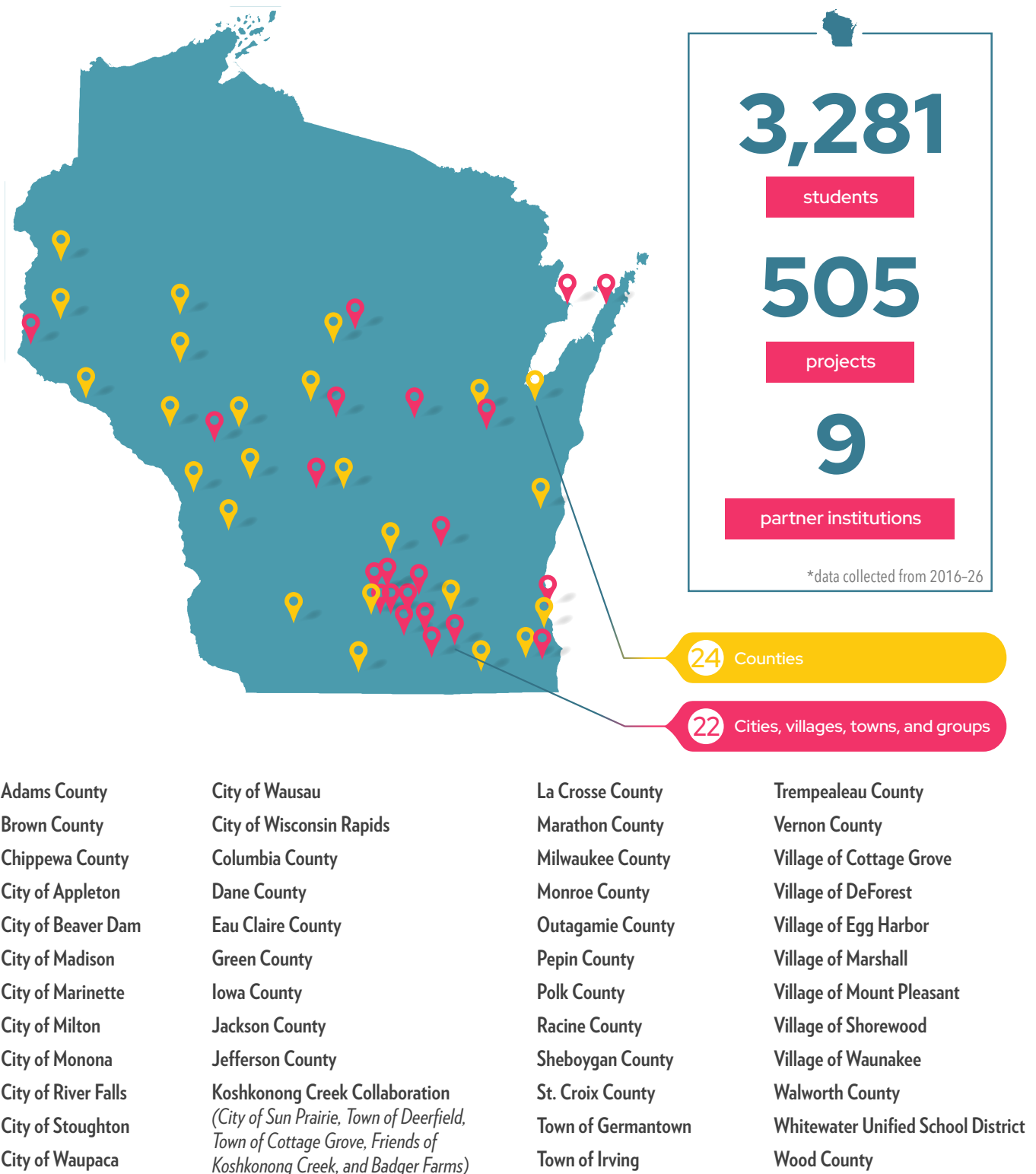
UniverCity Alliance centers its work across Wisconsin on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. By incorporating the SDGs into its projects, UniverCity Alliance joins cities and universities across the globe in linking the goals to priorities of local governments.

Sustainable Development for Local Government Badge

Last year, UniverCity Alliance launched a 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: 2016–26



UniverCity Alliance also completed projects with the City of Waupaca (2), Village of DeForest (8), Iowa County (1), Vernon County (3), and Walworth County (1). The partnerships with DeForest, Iowa County, and Waupaca were featured in a previous report. Partnerships with Vernon County and Walworth County will be featured in a future report. Six projects in Monroe County featured in this report were completed during the 2024–25 academic year.

By the Numbers: UniverCity 2025–26



Also engaged: Badger Consulting and Wisconsin Consulting Club student groups, Optional Practical Training (OPT) student experiences, UniverCity Alliance’s Scholars Program, internships, and Dane County Policy Analysis partnership



Aerial view of the water tower and downtown Beaver Dam. Photo courtesy of Beaver Dam



CITY OF BEAVER DAM

SDGs: 11



As one of UniverCity Alliance’s rapid-response partners, the City of Beaver Dam partnered with UniverCity Alliance to update the city’s position descriptions to align with new standards. The city had recently conducted a job factor analysis and amended its pay schedule to facilitate efficient, fair, and transparent hiring and compensation practices but lacked capacity to complete the final step. Partnering with UniverCity through a rapid-response project allows the community to move this important work forward while providing an invaluable opportunity for students to learn about city government functions.

“I learned valuable skills in communication, professionalism, and collaboration. Through the project, I realized how passion and dedication can significantly enhance the work experience, making it both meaningful and rewarding,” said Lexi Golding, a UniverCity Alliance Scholar who worked on the project with fellow scholar Maggie Claussen. “The opportunity to drive a project based in local government helped build a great foundation for my future career in both public service and organizational management.”

1 **Updating Position Descriptions to Align with Job Factor Analysis and Salary Schedule Updates | Amy Gangl**

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program

To support the City of Beaver Dam’s efforts in updating its position descriptions, two UniverCity Alliance Scholars audited existing job materials, visited the city to understand workflow challenges, created targeted surveys, and drafted 76 job descriptions.



MADISON

Student volunteers harvest a variety of vegetables, including the peppers pictured here, as part of The People's Farm student organization at the F.H. King garden at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison

CITY OF MADISON

SDGs: 2, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16



In the spring 2026 semester alone, eight City of Madison departments partnered with UniverCity Alliance to address a range of topics including urban agriculture, voting, digital accessibility, mentorship programs, and more.

At a total of nine, this is the largest number of projects the city has worked on in a single semester in the history of the partnership between UniverCity and the City of Madison.

“Strong interest from city staff in the City’s partnership with UniverCity Alliance is evident in the number and breadth of Madison projects UW students are supporting this semester,” Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway said. “I am pleased with city staff’s ability to find good projects for students to lead and students’ ability to provide quality work products back to the city. Our community benefits when the Wisconsin Idea comes to life in this way.”

1 **Optimizing the Monona Terrace Audio Video (AV) Department Staffing and Budgeting for Hourly Stagehands | Jay Page**

Master of Business Analytics Professional Experience

A team of master of business analytics students worked with Monona Terrace, analyzing staffing and budget data over the last five years to identify trends and support data-driven decision-making on staffing. Students created a rolling budget forecast tool and recommended policy and staffing changes to help the organization more accurately forecast for staffing needs.

2 **Planning for Urban Agricultural Uses on City-Owned Lots | Jeremy Beach**

Agricultural and Applied Economics 500: Senior Capstone Experience

Students studying agriculture and applied economics analyzed 14 sites for their compatibility with community gardening, permaculture, and market farming with the goal of helping the City of Madison address food insecurity by exploring urban agriculture opportunities on underutilized city land. The students concluded that urban agriculture can be a viable strategy for addressing food insecurity and recommended four sites for community garden expansion and two sites each for community garden creation, market farming, and permaculture.



Pedestrians leave a Richard Dilley Tax Center community tax event held at the UW-Madison South Madison Partnership (UWSMP) building on South Park Street in Madison. Photo by Bryce Richter / UW-Madison

3 **Developing a New Hire Mentorship Program for Madison Metro Transit | Tanya Hubanks**

Management and Human Resources 776: Strategic Human Resource Management Capstone

Madison Metro Transit experiences a significant level of turnover in its public transit operators and was interested in exploring the feasibility and ideal design for a mentorship program that could support improved retention. A team of strategic human resource management students developed a framework and materials that incorporate evidence-based best practices.

4 **Recommending Strategies to Address Language Access Needs in Madison | Angela Kita**

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

To support the City of Madison's ongoing update of its Language Access Plan, students analyzed language access call data over the last five years to identify primary and emerging needs. Based on their findings, they developed data presentation and narrative recommendations for inclusion in the city's updated Language Access Plan and accompanying educational materials.

5 **Developing Effective Communication and Implementation Strategies for Madison's Language Access Plan | Angela Kita**

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

In an effort to improve accessibility and readability of the City of Madison's Language Access Plan, students reviewed examples from other communities to recommend

plans and amendments for Madison's plan. Suggested improvements included areas where plain language, data presentations, explicit notices, and more concise language would make the plan more user-friendly and promote city goals for the plan.

6 Collecting Election Data to Assess Election Day Operations and Wait Times | Sinan Tas and Terry Mann

Industrial Systems Engineering 450: Industrial Engineering Design II

Industrial systems engineering students conducted a time study of several polling places during the City of Madison's April election. By conducting a systems analysis, they identified pain points, root causes, and opportunities for cost-effective, proactive solutions to optimize election-day processes for streamlined operations and positive voter experiences.

7 Identifying Barriers to the Voucher Program | Chris Timmins

Real Estate 435: Fair Housing Studies

As the City of Madison's Community Development Authority evolves and expands to meet the affordable housing needs of residents, the city wants to better understand the challenges and experiences of existing voucher holders and landlords. To support this, students developed potential resident satisfaction survey questions to support future outreach efforts.

8 Designing Resident Outreach Strategies to Improve Recycling Understanding and Reduce Error Rates

Internship

Despite providing a wide variety of recycling education and outreach materials, the citywide recycling error rate remains fairly consistent, which has both environmental and financial consequences for the community. To better understand how residents currently access recycling information and how they would like to receive it in the future, the Madison Streets Division worked with a student intern to develop a community survey and questionnaire to be distributed over the summer.

9 Improving Digital Accessibility and Communications

Internship

Two student interns worked with the City of Madison's Information Technology Department, evaluating existing digital communications materials and updating templates to improve compliance with digital accessibility requirements and best practices.

10 Inventorying and Developing Guides for Local Resources | Amy Gangl

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program

To meet the needs of residents accessing the UW South Madison Partnership, a UniverCity Alliance Scholar created resource and housing guides in multiple languages. This project laid the groundwork for future print and digital versions of this guide.



UW-Madison students John Hansen, far right, and Annie Heybl, second from right, pose for a photo with two Dane County Board supervisors. Photo courtesy of Dane County

DANE COUNTY

SDGs: 3, 9, 11



Since 2022, UniverCity Alliance has supported Dane County by pairing a couple of students each semester to work on policy analysis projects. Four students — Annie Heybl, John Hansen, Ned Eggert, and Tara McKillop — gained practical experience researching topics identified by the county. In the 2025–26 academic year, these topics included interventions for opioid harm reduction, local policy options related to large data centers, supportive housing and sustainable service financing for unhoused residents, and support for youth mental health.

“I’ve become a better student and professional in a way that, in a classroom, you can’t really have,” Hansen said. “I just loved the opportunity, and I would highly recommend it. It’s a lot of work, but it’s certainly worth it, both in a personal and professional sense.”

1 Assessing Policy Intervention Best Practices for Opioid Harm Reduction | Amy Gangl

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

Dane County's current opioid prevention efforts have two identified gaps: the absence of a coordinated navigation and linkage-to-care system and significant barriers to treatment access that people experiencing homelessness face. In this report, a policy analysis intern researched case studies, addressed how similar initiatives could be implemented in Dane County, and offered recommendations to strengthen continuation of care in Dane County and to improve coordination and outreach efforts with the goal of providing stable and long-term recovery support for residents.

2 Assessing Local Policy Options Related to Large Data Centers in Wisconsin | Amy Gangl

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

To inform a newly created Dane County Advisory Committee on Data Centers, a policy analysis intern researched hyperscale data centers, including state laws in Wisconsin, economic impacts, electricity and water usage, and additional environmental concerns. The report offered six policy recommendations for Dane County to consider as this issue continues to play out across Wisconsin.

3 Assessing Supportive Housing and Sustainable Service Financing for Unhoused Residents in Dane County | Amy Gangl

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

A student intern partnered with Dane County to research supportive housing and sustainable service financing for unhoused residents in the county. After inventorying existing practices in Dane County and evaluating evidence-based best practices and examples from other communities, the student provided recommendations for reliable, long-term service funding strategies that support permanent housing outcomes.

4 Researching and Assessing Local Government Approaches to Stabilizing Youth Individually and Their Surrounding Support Environments | Amy Gangl

Dane County Policy Analysis Program

Youth mental health needs are complex and often extend beyond clinical treatment, requiring coordinated supports related to resources like family stabilization, case management, educational support, and access to basic needs. A student intern explored evidence-based best practices in Dane County and other communities that the county can build upon for more coordinated and comprehensive interventions.



Jefferson County comprises 16 towns served by 13 different Emergency Medical Service (EMS) agencies, including the Fort Atkinson Fire Department.
Photo courtesy of the Fort Atkinson Fire Department (3)



JEFFERSON COUNTY

SDGs: 3, 11



Jefferson County administrator Michael Luckey said the challenges that EMS is facing in his community are a reflection of statewide trends.

“Communities throughout the state of Wisconsin are facing the challenge of providing emergency medical services in an environment with growing costs, declining volunteerism, diminishing reimbursement rates, constrained budgets, and an aging population,” Luckey said.

In Jefferson County, an EMS Working Group came together to discuss strategies for creating a more resilient EMS system and prepare for the continued challenges of the next decade. Their work stemmed from a study that identified ways for the county to “enhance services to its residents by examining efficiencies within, and additional financial support for, the municipal EMS providers.”

The partnership with UniverCity Alliance supported this work by “connecting us with researchers at the University of Wisconsin who can dedicate the time and energy needed to get us a fuller picture of the problem and its solutions,” Luckey said.

1 Exploring Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Models for Jefferson County | Liz Bush

Master of Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

To better understand effective strategies to transition Jefferson County’s emergency medical services to a county-supported system, graduate public health students recommend implementing a dedicated service director/coordinator role, securing licensing to better position the county for funding opportunities, and increasing employee recruitment and retention.

2 **Visualizing Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Call Data in Jefferson County | Jay Page**

Master of Business Analytics Professional Experience

A graduate business analytics student analyzed EMS incidents that occurred in 2024 and created data dashboards that show incident concentration, highest incident month, when these situations occur, and how they are split between municipalities.

3 **Exploring Opportunities and Challenges for a Countywide EMS Billing System | Badger Consulting**

With the goal of streamlining EMS billing across all cities, a group of consulting students researched three options: a central billing authority, a standardized ePCR platform, and a regional billing vendor.

4 **Exploring the Feasibility and Other Examples of a Countywide Unified Funding System, with No Individual/Town Contracts | Angela Kita**

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

Interdisciplinary engineering students evaluated the costs and benefits of introducing a countywide EMS levy and moving away from individual township contracts. To support local decision makers, students created a decision matrix that analyzes factors such as financial sustainability, administrative burden, and service equity that helped quantify the potential benefits of shifting toward a county funding model.



Watertown Fire Department conducts a informational walk through with local families. Photo courtesy of Watertown Fire Department



Jefferson County aims to understand how to transition the county from no county involvement to a county-supported EMS system.

5 **Creating a Scenario Analysis Tool to Evaluate Various Funding Formulas for Distribution of a Countywide Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Levy | Jay Page**

Master of Business Analytics Professional Experience

For their senior capstone, master of business analytics students developed a scenario analysis tool using EMS call volumes, service contracts, budget allocations, and population data. The tool enables the Jefferson County EMS Working Group to evaluate alternative funding formulas for distributing a countywide EMS levy.

6 **Identifying Countywide Systems Efficiencies and Opportunities for Cost Savings | Sinan Tas and Terry Mann**

Industrial Systems Engineering 450: Industrial Engineering Design

Industrial Systems Engineering students used a systems approach to identify opportunities for increased operational efficiencies and coordination between the 12 Emergency Medical Services (EMS) providers in Jefferson County. Students recommended interventions such as a roving paramedic position and shared secondary ambulances as strategies to save costs while maintaining response times and expanding 24/7 paramedic-level care to all county residents.



MONROE CO.

McMullen Memorial County Park and nearby forest spans over 1,000 acres including 81 campsites, hiking trails, and 50 acres of Lake Wazeda. Photo courtesy of Monroe County



MONROE COUNTY

SDGs: 3, 16



Through a partnership with UniverCity Alliance, students in Patti Coffey's Psychology 601: Issues in Prisoner Reentry class learned firsthand the transformative power behind specialized court programs. Drug courts are designed to rehabilitate high-risk and high-need individuals, and they combine legal supervision, rehabilitation services, and resources to address social needs.

The students observed Monroe County's drug treatment court, watched a graduation ceremony, interviewed staff and participants, and evaluated the program across three priority standards. Ultimately, the students created a report that incorporated qualitative interviews, quantitative data, and a review of program documents that will help Monroe County share progress with elected officials, apply for grants, and determine potential changes to make to the drug court program.

"Our goal is to comply with the Treatment Court Best Practice of completing an outside evaluation, at a minimum of every five years," Tara Nichols, the justice programs manager in Monroe County said. "We were able to meet that goal by partnering with UniverCity."

1 **Evaluating Monroe County's Drug Court Program, Part One | Patti Coffey**

Psychology 626: Issues in Prisoner Reentry

To support Monroe County in complying with best practices of completing an outside evaluation at a minimum of every five years, psychology students assessed the county's drug court program across three priority areas outlined in the All Rise Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards. This involved observing court and a graduation, interviewing staff and participants, and evaluating the program across three priority standards. The students created a report that incorporated qualitative interviews, quantitative data, and a review of program documents that will help Monroe County share progress with elected officials, apply for grants, and determine potential changes to make to the drug court program.



Monroe County's historic courthouse, located in Sparta, was built in 1896. Photo courtesy of Monroe County

2 **Evaluating Monroe County's Drug Court Program, Part Two |** *Patti Coffey*

Psychology 626: Issues in Prisoner Reentry

A second group of psychology students analyzed Monroe County's drug court program across an additional two priority standards as outlined in the All Rise Adult Treatment Court Best Practice Standards. They interviewed court team staff, current participants, and graduates. During a site visit, they collected information through courtroom observations, program documents, and quantitative data received from treatment court reports.

3 **Promoting Harm Reduction Responses for Opioid Use in Monroe County |** *Liz Bush*

Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Monroe County's 2023–26 Community Health Improvement Plan highlights a recent sharp increase in opioid-related overdoses. Public health graduate students proposed an evidence-based communication campaign to reduce stigma toward people who use drugs and support the implementation of proven harm reduction strategies that combine community assessment, relationship building, and health care provider engagement.

4 **Expanding AODA Treatment and Intervention Strategies in Monroe County | Liz Bush**

Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Monroe County faces high rates of deaths related to opioid use. After studying the issue, a group of public health graduate students identified three interventions: mapping residential treatment centers throughout Wisconsin, adopting community-based strategies, and implementing school-based prevention programs.

5 **Improving Pretrial Programs in Monroe County | Liz Bush**

Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

A pretrial program in Monroe County monitors repeat offenders and refers them to therapy programs through bond monitoring. To reduce recidivism, public health graduate students recommended building and using an extensive referral system and establishing a collaborative behavioral contract.

6 **Assessing Environmental Health in Monroe County | Liz Bush**

Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Responding to community concerns around multiple cases of childhood leukemia in Monroe County, public health graduate students created a logic model to understand the problem and identify focus areas that are important to the community, including a general lack of environmental surveillance. The group recommends developing a system for risk assessment, using Wisconsin public data sources, and examining environmental hazard maps to identify, research, and intervene on current and future environmental hazards.

7 **Fostering Understanding and Support for Evidence-Based Harm Reduction Strategies | Angela Kita**

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

A group of interdisciplinary engineering students expanded research conducted by public health graduate students to better understand barriers to implementing harm reduction initiatives in Monroe County. After surveying community policymakers and local law enforcement, they recommended comprehensive community education and awareness campaigns addressing mental health stigmas.



SHEBOYGAN CO.

The sun sets over the Sheboygan Marsh State Wildlife Area. Photo courtesy of Sheboygan County

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY

SDGs: 3, 4, 8, 10, 11, 15, 16



Thousands of children enter Wisconsin’s foster care system each year, and the need for foster homes is great. There are just over 20 licensed foster homes in Sheboygan County, but 93 children needed out-of-home-care in the county in 2024, according to the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

To continue the effort of recruiting and retaining foster care parents, Sheboygan County Foster Care (SCFC) partnered with two classes — Journalism 463: Digital Media Strategies taught by teaching faculty Debra Pierce and Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages taught by Professor Doug McLeod.

Rebecca Zak, the alternate care supervisor for Sheboygan County Health and Human Services, said their agency struggles with mobilizing residents to make the step to be a foster parent and combating misconceptions about foster care.

“Our hope is to dispel the myths and generalizations that are often seen and heard about the Child Protection System and foster care, and to replace them with understanding, compassion, and a deeper appreciation for the complexity and importance of this work,” Zak said.

1 **Recommending Best Practices for Secure Detention of Youth |** *Patti Coffey*

Psychology 626: Issues in Prison Re-Entry

Psychology students examined Sheboygan County’s juvenile justice system, focusing on the interactions between intake, community-based case management, and secure custody functions. Their report evaluates how effectively these components operate individually and as a system and identifies strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improved outcomes for youth and the community.

2 **Planning for Implementation of a Family Treatment Court |** *Liz Bush*

Master of Public Health 780: Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Sheboygan County is interested in creating a family treatment court to help address the needs of families separated because of parental and caregiver substance use. Graduate public health students researched recommendations for implementing a family treatment court and a curated list of potential funding opportunities for starting and maintaining the program.

3 Developing Creative Messaging and Outreach Materials to Support Foster Home Recruitment | Doug McLeod

Journalism 445: Creative Campaign Messages

Sheboygan County Foster Care's goals are to encourage more families in Sheboygan County to open their homes to foster care and to reunite children with their biological families. To support this mission, journalism students created a suite of creative campaign materials, including print advertisements, videos, pamphlets, contact cards, yard signs, merchandise, one-pagers, and table banners.

4 Recommending Website and Social Media Strategies to Help Recruit Foster Parents | Debra Pierce

Journalism 463: Digital Media Strategies

Journalism students completed in-depth research to inform media and creative strategies to support Sheboygan County Foster Care in their goal of recruiting and retaining foster care parents. Divided into three teams, the student groups created content strategy, brand messaging, and digital strategy implementation plans.

5 Creating Intergenerational Programming Curriculum and Evaluation Materials | Naomi Mae W.

Education Policy Studies 580: Participatory and Community-Based Research and Evaluation

Rocky Knoll Care Center brings together older adults and children in a unique model that benefits both generations. Educational policy students created comprehensive, evidence-based intergenerational curriculum materials to support care center staff and build bonds between residents and children.

6 Optimizing County Facility Space Use to Meet Current and Future Staffing Needs | Amy Gangl

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program

Growth within Sheboygan County Health and Human Services has exceeded available workspace, leading to shared offices, reduced privacy for confidential work, and teams split across multiple facilities. This separation creates communication challenges and makes on-site work less appealing for some staff. This study assesses how county facilities are currently used and identifies practical strategies, including six space-planning options, to accommodate projected staffing growth while improving efficiency and collaboration.

7 Identifying Strategic Design Elements for Amsterdam Dunes Public Access Trails | Amy Gangl

UniverCity Alliance Scholars Program

A landscape architecture student analyzed the Amsterdam Dunes property to identify suitable areas for boardwalk and trail connections that minimize disturbance to wetlands and sensitive habitats and enhance public access and scenic experiences at the site.



Assistant Professor of Educational Policy Studies Dr. Naomi Mae W. connects with a resident at Rocky Knoll Care Center. Photo by Abigail Becker



Sheboygan County planning and conservation director Aaron Brault walks through the Amsterdam Dunes property in Sheboygan County. Photo by Shu Sun

8 **Designing a Bridge and Observation Tower for the Amsterdam Dunes Trail Access Project | Jan Kucher, Derek Hungness, Kim Gonzalez**

Civil and Environmental Engineering 578: Senior Capstone Design

Sheboygan County is reimagining the Amsterdam Dunes Preservation Area and plans to add an observation deck attached to an existing silo, among other improvements. Engineering students designed three plans to adapt the silo as an observation deck. The plans include options for minimal structural modifications, structural reinforcement, and a self-supported ring observation deck.

9 **Creating PR Strategies for Rocky Knoll Health Care Center's Centennial Celebration | Debra Pierce**

Journalism 464: PR Strategies

Three groups of journalism students created PR strategy plans for Rocky Knoll Health Care Center ahead of the facility's 100th anniversary celebration. The students created corporate narratives and brand stories; analyzed competitors, social media, and influencer marketing; drafted media relations strategies and plans; and wrote community impact reports.

10 **Communicating the Workforce Benefits and Private Partnership Opportunities for Expanding Onsite Childcare Services at Rocky Knoll**

Wisconsin Consulting Club

A team of students in the Wisconsin Consulting Club researched childcare needs in Sheboygan County, operational needs of Growing Generations, and models for public-private partnerships to support sustainable childcare services. They developed an impact statement and slide deck to support future outreach to prospective private business partners about investment opportunities and workforce benefits of expanded childcare capacity at the Rocky Knoll location.

11 **Designing Public Access Trails for Amsterdam Dunes | Eric Schuchardt**

Landscape Architecture 610/611: Landscape Architecture Seminar

Over the course of two semesters, landscape architecture students created a 6.65-mile trail system design that emphasizes restoration, observation, education, and recreation and celebrates the ecological, geological, and cultural heritage that makes Amsterdam Dunes a regional attraction. The trail system includes a mix of easy, moderate, and difficult trails and incorporates features like an outdoor classroom and a raptor release station.



IRVING

The Town of Irving, shown here, in Jefferson County currently depends on Black River Falls EMS. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia Commons

An aerial photograph of a winding road through a forested area, with a red vertical stripe running down the left side of the page.

TOWN OF IRVING

SDGs: 3 

As Wisconsin faces an EMS workforce shortage, the Towns of Irving and Melrose and the Village of Melrose are facing greater costs for their current provider, an aging population, and an increasing trend in emergency calls.

Max Hart, who has served on the Jackson County Board of Supervisors since 2016, has been involved in investigating the best option for these three municipalities located in Jackson County. Hart also serves his community as an emergency medical responder (EMR). EMRs provide immediate lifesaving interventions, like airway management, bleeding control, and injury stabilization, while waiting for additional EMS resources to arrive.

“I really enjoy it. I have a passion for it,” Hart said. “I enjoy helping people on what could be the worst day of their lives.”

After conducting a cost-benefit analysis, La Follette School of Public Affairs students recommended that these three municipalities keep Black River Falls EMS as their current provider because the benefits, like having the shortest response time, still outperform the costs of switching.

1 **Studying the Costs and Benefits of Available Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Providers** | *Morgan Edwards*

Public Affairs 881: Cost-Benefit Analysis

Black River Falls EMS, the current provider for three municipalities, implemented a new \$25-per-capita fee for 2025, prompting the Towns of Irving and Melrose and the Village of Melrose to consider alternative providers. This report considers three alternative EMS providers, in addition to Black River Falls, within about 30 miles of the municipalities: Gundersen Tri-State, Sparta Ambulance, and Badgerland EMS.

2 **Inventorying Grants and Other Resources to Support EMS in the Towns of Irving and Melrose, Village of Melrose** | *Angela Kita*

Interdisciplinary Engineering 303: Applied Leadership Competencies in Engineering

As the Town of Irving considers options for funding emergency medical services, interdisciplinary engineering students researched additional funding sources and explored how other small, rural Wisconsin municipalities are addressing EMS in their communities.

3 **Cleaning and Analyzing Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Data** | *Jay Page*

Master of Business Analytics Professional Experience

A graduate business analytics student focused on evaluating the financial and operational sustainability of EMS in the Towns of Irving and Melrose and the Village of Melrose with the goal of conducting a comprehensive analysis of EMS budgets, staffing levels, cost structures, and provider rates across Jackson County. This project also identified key cost drivers and assessed opportunities for greater financial efficiency or improved service delivery.



TREMPEALEAU CO.

A group of hikers take a selfie at Perrot State Park. Photo courtesy of Trempealeau County



TREMPEALEAU COUNTY

SDGs: 8



To advance goals addressing economic development, tourism, and quality of life, Trempealeau County partnered with UniverCity Alliance to explore and expand outdoor recreation opportunities.

UW–Madison students worked closely with the county’s Land Records Department to analyze available land and map out potential routes for hiking and trail development. Their work exploring routing options helped lay the groundwork for future planning efforts, Trempealeau County administrator Rebecca Glewen said.

Glewen said students brought energy, curiosity, and a genuine interest in supporting Trempealeau County,

“Partnering with UniverCity Alliance provided access to fresh perspectives, technical analysis, and additional capacity to help us begin identifying and evaluating potential trail and hiking opportunities,” Glewen said. “The partnership not only advanced our work but also created a meaningful exchange where students could apply their learning in a real-world setting.”

1 **Creating an App to Help Visitors Connect with Local Outdoor Recreation Amenities and Businesses** | Leah Ujda

Computer Sciences 620: Computer Sciences Capstone

Computer science students developed an app designed to connect residents and visitors with outdoor recreation amenities and businesses in Trempealeau County. In addition to highlighting local assets, such as parks, hiking trails, ATV routes, and boat launches, it integrated AI to provide customized routes between selected locations using alternative modes of transportation, like biking, walking, and using ATVs.

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 Beaver Dam and Madison; Dane, Jefferson, Monroe, Sheboygan, and Trempealeau Counties; and the Town of Irving provided resources, advice, and feedback 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, the state of 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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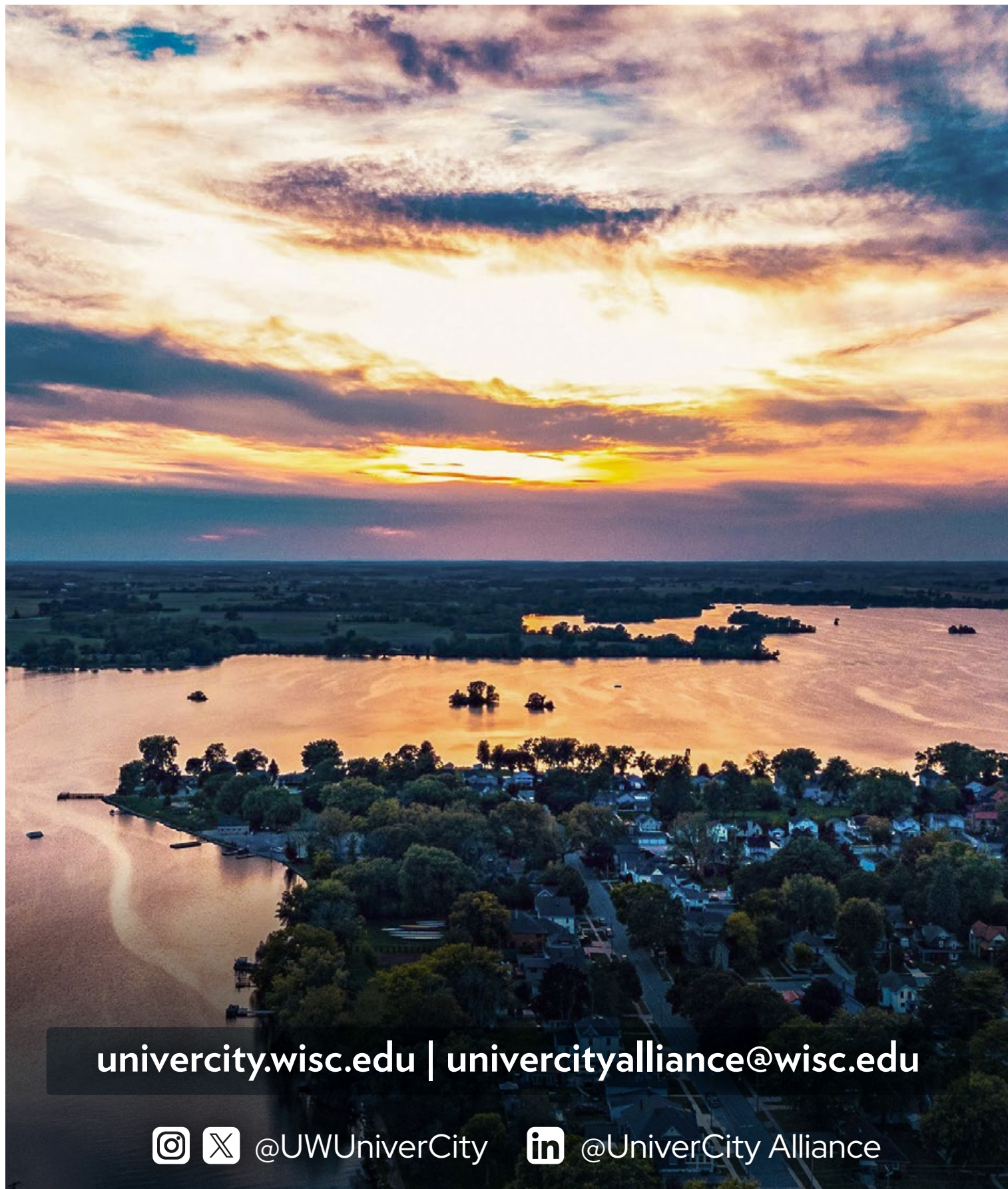
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Back cover: Beaver Dam Lake at sunset overlooking Tahoe Park.
Photo courtesy of Beaver Dam

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