



Information School
SCHOOL OF COMPUTER, DATA & INFORMATION SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

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Jottings



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*The iSchool Library (photo by
Sandhya Hota)*

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iSchool Director Alan Rubel

From the Director's Chair: Reflecting on our impact and evolution

As I write this, UW is headed into Spring Break, and a few weeks later the 2023-2024 academic year will wind down. In the past two Spring Jottings, I've had a long list of new iSchool developments to share. I'm pleased that this year brings even more.

Most recently, we were thrilled to welcome Vice Provost and Dean of Libraries Erla Heyns to our faculty as the first-ever Professor of Practice in the iSchool and in the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences. The addition of Dr. Heyns comes alongside a newly expanded partnership with UW-Madison Libraries. This closer relationship, which you can read more about in this issue of *Jottings*, will help enable the transition next year to our new home in the CDIS building and its library, the CDIS Commons.

Many of you already know Bronwen Masemann, who was our collections librarian and iSchool teaching faculty for over 10 years. Bronwen is bringing her expertise back by joining us as iSchool Laboratory Library Collections Project Coordinator. In this role she is managing the move of the iSchool Library collections. This includes (among many other things) the meticulous transfer of archival documents from the iSchool Library to a new climate-controlled space, helping ensure their long-term preservation. It is fantastic that she can take on this challenge; her professional experience and deep knowledge of our collection will be invaluable. We also welcome Jeff Nyhoff, who joins us this semester as Teaching Faculty. Jeff will apply his decades of experience to lead the instruction of Introduction to Computing, a course that explores topics such as cybersecurity and artificial intelligence from an interdisciplinary perspective, as well as other classes in our growing undergraduate major. Welcome Jeff, and welcome back Bronwen!

Finally — as the stories in this issue highlight — our students, faculty, staff, and alumni continue to do amazing work with impact well beyond the university. For instance, Assistant Professor Ian Hutchins and his colleagues in the Metascience Research Lab are using big data to reveal inequities in the academic research enterprise. Meng Qu, an alum of our MA program, is charting new frontiers in library services by incorporating technology in inventive ways. And our graduate students are contributing to cutting-edge research across campus, including at the renowned Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center.

Jottings can only report so much, and the iSchool community's impact on the university, the state, and beyond is expanding and deepening across many domains. We are continuing to grow and diversify, and I am excited about our future of new collaborations, closer connections, creative scholarship, preparing new generations of information professionals and community members, and all manner of learning and research at the intersection of information, technology, and society.

I couldn't be happier to be part of the iSchool, and I hope you enjoy this edition of *Jottings*.

On, Wisconsin!

Alan Rubel
Professor and Director
Information School

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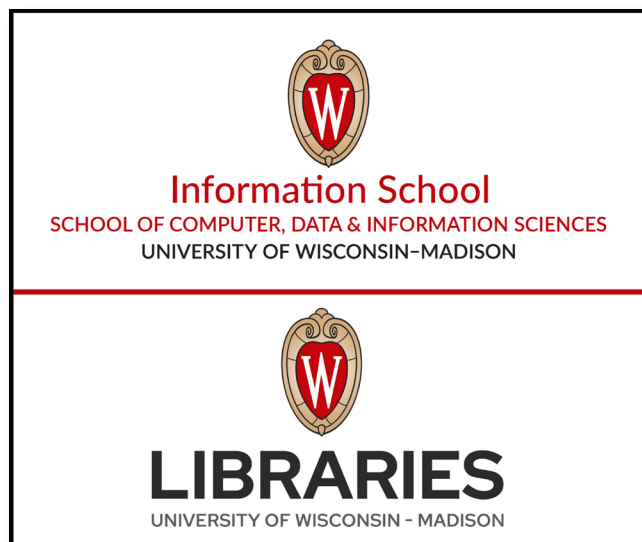
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iSchool and UW-Madison Libraries expand partnership with new CDIS building on the horizon



The Information School (iSchool) and UW-Madison Libraries will collaborate more closely than ever to prepare the next generation of information professionals and shape the future of the university's dynamic library ecosystem.

The partnership's expansion comes as the iSchool prepares to occupy a new home in the pathbreaking \$260 million School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) building which will open in 2025. It was recently announced that the building will be named Morgridge Hall in honor of the transformational UW-Madison donors John and Tashia Morgridge. There are two primary facets of the newly invigorated alliance:

- Dean of Libraries joins iSchool faculty:** Erla P. Heyns, Dean and Vice Provost of Libraries at UW-Madison, will serve as a Professor of Practice at the iSchool. Heyns is the first leader of UW-Madison Libraries to ever hold a faculty appointment at the iSchool, and she is the first Professor of Practice to be appointed within CDIS. Her wealth of experience will enrich the academic environment, closing the gap between library administration and education. Before coming to Madison in fall 2023, Heyns had served as associate professor and associate dean for learning at Purdue University Libraries and School of Information Studies since 2016. She has also held roles at Cornell University as the director of the Flower/Sprecher Veterinary Library and the coordinator for the engineering, math and physical sciences libraries, and at Indiana University as the head of the university's Health, Physical Education and Recreation Library.
- Transition to the CDIS commons:** The iSchool is working directly with UW-Madison Libraries on multiple aspects of the transition to the new Morgridge Hall building. First, UW-Madison Libraries will assist the search for a director of the CDIS Commons, a cutting-edge collaborative space in the new building, envisioned as a "library of the future." Carrie Kruse, Director of College Library, User Experience, and Library Spaces, will play a pivotal role in the search. Additionally, UW Libraries will help facilitate a seamless transition for staff, services, and materials from the current iSchool Library to the new space. That process will include careful relocation of historical documents, which serve as important primary source material for researchers, from the iSchool Library to a climate-controlled office, ensuring proper preservation.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dean Heyns to our faculty," said iSchool Professor and Director Alan Rubel. "Our strengthened partnership with UW-Madison Libraries will be invaluable as we transition to Morgridge Hall, and we look forward to collaborations that will benefit iSchool students, faculty, and staff—and the wider UW-Madison community—far into the future."

The iSchool will sustain its partnership with UW-Madison Libraries even after Morgridge Hall opens. One long-term goal for all parties is to ensure outstanding, accessible library services for students and faculty throughout the UW-Madison community. Another related goal is to create greater cohesion of services across more than 30 campus libraries.

"I am delighted to be working with the iSchool to foster a unified library community on our campus," Heyns said. "By bringing together the iSchool's strengths in education and research with UW-Libraries' experience and expertise in successfully founding and operating libraries, this partnership will empower students and researchers to make the most of these cherished spaces."

UW-Libraries and the iSchool have worked closely together in the past, but the new developments represent a substantially deepened commitment for the two institutions to work together. The partnership exemplifies efforts underway across CDIS to build cross-campus collaborations for the good of the university, the state of Wisconsin, and beyond.

Research Spotlight

Science-of-science researchers at the iSchool expose imbalances in biomedical research



iSchool Assistant Professor Ian Hutchins (left) and PhD student Salsabil Arabi (photos courtesy of Hutchins and Arabi)

Assistant Professor Ian Hutchins and PhD student Salsabil Arabi are researchers researching research. Yes, you read that right.

Hutchins and Arabi, members of the Metascience Research Lab at the iSchool, are engaged in the “science of science,” using large datasets and machine learning to reveal trends and expose inequities in the complex landscape of academic research. Hutchins and Arabi’s newest study challenges traditional notions of success in academia by scrutinizing how the impact of scientific publications is measured and why some exceptional work remains virtually “invisible,” as Hutchins said.

The story of their latest research begins more than a decade before Hutchins became an iSchool faculty member, when he was a biomedical researcher at the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Impact factors as gatekeepers

As a neuroscientist at NIH, Hutchins noticed that in the biomedical realm, decisions about hiring and promotion often came down to which candidates had published in so-called “high-impact journals” such as *Science*, *Cell*, or *The New England Journal of Medicine*. These

journals are set apart by a high “impact factor,” a single number measuring how often an average paper from that journal is cited during a two-year period.

Impact factors can vary widely. To offer a few examples, *Science* boasts an impact factor of 47.7 and *Nature Immunology* has a 25.6, while the impact factor of *Annals of Medicine* is 4.4. Hutchins and colleagues consider any journal with an impact factor over 15 to be a “high-impact” journal.

When institutions hire tenure-track faculty and research scientists in biomedicine, impact factors loom large, Hutchins said: “They narrow it down from a long list of candidates to a shorter one by looking only at people who have published in a journal with an impact factor above a certain number.” As a result, otherwise qualified candidates for roles as research scientists and tenure-track faculty members are overlooked solely because their work has not been published in a few extremely selective academic journals. This raises larger questions about the role of journal impact factors in assessing research and the people who do it.

“I think that the value of research is really multifaceted,” Hutchins said. “There are many things that an article can do to advance the

frontier of science,” he added, even without being published in a journal with a high impact factor. For instance, a study may end up leading to a new patent for a medical technology that directly benefits human health – but impact factors don’t capture outcomes like patents.

Trailblazing research often overlooked

In a preprint paper currently under peer review, Hutchins and Arabi, along with iSchool Assistant Professor Chaoqun Ni, show just how few biomedical researchers have ever published an article in a high-impact journal, and just how many studies published in other outlets do end up making a real impact.

The research team finds that about half of biomedical researchers have never published in a journal with an impact factor above 15. In addition, they conclude the vast majority of papers that end up being widely cited are published *outside* high-impact-factor outlets. By implication, many scientists with highly influential work never publish in high impact-factor journals, and they may thus be denied access to professional opportunities on the basis of a single journal metric. These results confirmed what the researchers had suspected.

“Many researchers in the biomedical community feel that they are unfairly judged in research assessment; that they do not receive enough credit given the influence on the research community of their published work,” Hutchins, Arabi and Ni write. “We find strong empirical evidence that this is the case.”

And as Arabi told Science magazine, for early career researchers like herself, “this matters to us more than to senior researchers. There should be [a] better way to evaluate scientists.”

Improving the practice of science

The end goal for practitioners of the science of science is the development of tools and policies that have the potential to improve and accelerate research.

“Even if it’s not broadly recognized by the scientific community, a paper may still inform later clinical research, which then moves the needle on human health” – Ian Hutchins

In the case of their latest project, Hutchins and Arabi’s work challenges the disproportionate influence of the impact factor in shaping biomedical scientists’ career trajectories. They argue that looking ahead, decision-makers in biomedicine should weigh article-level metrics, such as number of citations or likelihood of stimulating future innovation or patents, more heavily alongside journal-level metrics like the impact factor.

“Even if it’s not broadly recognized by the scientific community, a paper may still inform later clinical research, which then moves the needle on human health,” Hutchins said. “I want those measures to also be visible so that people have multiple ways to have their research recognized,” he said.

When asked why they decided to pursue science-of-science research in the first place, Hutchins and Arabi both pointed to the direct effects their work could have on real policies. “I saw it as a way of improving legacy decision systems by analyzing decision-making structures and finding ways to improve upon them,” Hutchins said.

Arabi added, “The questions we address go directly to policy decisions and funding decisions.”

“The questions we address go directly to policy decisions and funding decisions.” – Salsabil Arabi

Moving forward, the researchers hope their work will prompt biomedical institutions like universities and hospital systems to reconsider how much weight they give journal impact factors in hiring and promotion policies. A broader goal of Hutchins and Arabi’s work, though, is to help create a more equitable research enterprise — one that values scientists’ work holistically, rather than leaning so heavily on a single indicator like the impact factor.

'Lead from where you are': 2024 Power Up conference inspires attendees



Lucia Gonzalez, renowned children's book author and library director, delivers the opening keynote at Power Up 2024 at the Pyle Center on the UW-Madison campus. Photo by Thomas Jilk

On March 21 and 22, a group of over 150 youth services library professionals from around the country convened in Madison for the highly anticipated 2024 Power Up: A Leadership Conference for Youth Services Managers and Staff. About a third of the attendees came from within the state of Wisconsin, while the rest made the journey from 25 states around the country to attend.

The Power Up conference—which takes place every two years and is run by the iSchool's Continuing Education team—brings together youth services professionals for an engaging two days of workshops, keynotes and networking, offering new ideas and best practices for participants to take back to their home libraries. Power Up equips participants with leadership skills, even if they don't hold formal management roles. The 2024 edition did not disappoint, punctuated by two compelling keynotes and packed with insightful sessions and fruitful conversations.

'Starving for stories'

The conference kicked off with a rousing keynote by Lucia Gonzalez, an acclaimed children's book author and former director of the North Miami Public Library. Gonzalez made a passionate case for the unique role and impact of youth librarians. "Children's librarians have a history, a body of work, research, special skills and special resources," she said. Gonzalez recounted the first time she visited a library in the United States — the North Miami Public Library — after arriving from Cuba as a young girl. Decades later, she became the director of that very

same library, helping transform it from an underfunded and understaffed operation that was less than welcoming for children into a family-friendly gathering space for the local community.



Lucia Gonzalez engages the audience in her opening keynote. Photo by Thomas Jilk

"Children are starving for stories," Gonzalez said, "And being a librarian is about sharing the oral traditions and stories of the people you serve, including children." She inspired the audience of youth services librarians to "lead from where you are," no matter their role within a library.

"Lucia was such a great speaker and is so passionate about what she does," one attendee said. "You can tell she makes the perfect children's librarian."

The Power Up experience

Following Gonzalez's keynote, attendees dispersed to dozens of sessions over two days, exploring trends and best practices in youth librarianship. They also gathered at a Thursday evening reception at Madison Public Library's Central Library, getting behind-the-scenes tours from staff members and enjoying views of downtown Madison.



Power Up 2024 attendees gather at Madison Public Library's Central Library on March 21, 2024. Photos by Thomas Jilk

Attendees, asked anonymously for their thoughts about Power Up 2024, said the conference was both inspiring and useful, offering practical takeaways to apply in their libraries.

"This was my first professional conference while working in libraries, and I had such a positive experience," one participant said. "Every session that I attended allowed me to learn something new."

Another said, "I traveled quite a ways for this conference and it took most of the travel and training budget for our rural library, and I still think it was absolutely worth every penny and every minute of my time. This is the first time I've attended a conference where every session was either inspirational or practical (or both), and I have several concrete things I plan to do with what I learned."

Youth, technology, and learning

To close the conference, Dr. Mimi Ito, a leading researcher of children's use of technology in learning, offered a thought-provoking exploration of the popular connected learning framework, for which she is a leading advocate. Ito, the director of the Connected Learning Lab at University of California-Irvine, described connected learning as "a kind of learning that occurs when a young person is pursuing something they're genuinely interested in and passionate about, with supportive peers and mentors," Ito said. As an example, she highlighted how a young person interested in video games can be supported by a teacher or a librarian who encourages them to pursue that passion by considering game design as a future career.

"I believe that all young people deserve to have the experience of connected learning, and that connected learning is the kind of learning that makes young people understand who they are and how to make their way forward in the world."

Reflecting on the changing norms around technology for children in the age of smartphones and social media, Ito talked about the "power struggle" now occurring between young people and adults. "Technology is giving young people access to new sorts of tools and new sorts of information, which can be scary to the older generation," Ito said. "But we're also seeing disruption of the gatekeeping that historically grown-ups have been able to perform with new technologies."



Dr. Mimi Ito gives the closing keynote on connected learning at Power Up 2024. Photo by Thomas Jilk

Through insightful and inspiring keynotes and interactive workshops, Power Up 2024 delivered an enriching experience for youth services library professionals from around the country. As they return to their home libraries, participants will be energized to shape more connected, impactful learning experiences for the young people in their communities. And they'll be excited to Power Up again in 2026.

The human side of technology: Why UW-Madison students are gravitating to the Information Science major



The Information Science table at a Your UW Day event in March 2023 (photo credit: Sandhya Hota)

New technologies have fundamentally altered how people create and consume information. Although the fallout from these seismic shifts is still ongoing, it is clear nonetheless that the information age is propelling society toward prosperity in some ways and instability in others.

Take two prominent examples. First, social media platforms: they make useful information accessible for millions of people globally, but they also harm young people’s mental health and contribute to what the U.S. Surgeon General has called an “epidemic of loneliness.” Second, generative artificial intelligence (AI): it is revolutionizing communication and enhancing human productivity. Yet today’s AI, like the humans that created it, can perpetuate harmful biases against marginalized groups, based on information embedded in lines of code.

These examples raise pressing questions about the evolving relationships between information, technology, and society: How are emerging technologies transforming processes of information creation and exchange? What effects are such changes having on people and societies? And how can we ensure powerful new technologies ultimately serve the public good?

Students across the UW–Madison campus are curious about these questions, and the Information Science (iSci) major is helping them discover answers. In just its second full year as an undergraduate program, the iSci major has drawn over 240 students with relevant subject matter, a flexible and interdisciplinary approach, and the ability to pair with a wide variety of other majors.

“Many undergraduates today are deeply interested in how information technologies impact our individual and collective lives,” said Kristin Eschenfelder, Academic Associate Dean for Computer, Data & Information Sciences. “The Information Science program gives students a unique angle of inquiry, a lens

through which they can study how technology and data are changing the world—and how they can be harnessed to improve it.”

Information science, explained (by students)

What, exactly, is information science? Three students, all at different levels of the program, gave answers from their perspective.

“It’s about exploring how information is created and digested,” said Madeline Meyer x’25, an iSci major in her first semester at UW-Madison. Meyer added, “It’s about looking at ethical and societal concerns and thinking about how to use information and technology in unique ways to produce real solutions.”

Put another way, information science is “the study of the ways technology and society interact,” according to Damien Klein x’24, a double major in Information Science and Data Science. Echoing Klein, Lauren LeVoor x’26 said, information science “looks at how society is being impacted by new technologies.”

Together, the students’ answers point toward a broad definition: information science studies the dynamic and complex interplay between people, information, and technology. Established in 2022, the iSci major at UW-Madison has gained popularity among experienced undergraduates and incoming freshmen alike. Stacy Harnett, the program’s Academic Advising Manager, said that’s because “as a student, you can customize your path based on your own interests.”

LeVoor, for example, is on the more technical side of the program. She is a double major in iSci and Computer Sciences and was a contestant in the first-ever MadPrompts generative AI competition last fall. She hopes to pursue a career in AI after graduation, and she said the iSci program helps her consider “the ethical side” of these technologies and the importance of “making sure AI is safe.”

Meyer, meanwhile, approaches iSci from a different perspective. She has a keen interest in sustainable business practices as one of the leaders of the Ethical and Responsible Business Network, a student organization based on the idea that “sustainability and profitability go hand in hand.” Meyer hopes to harness her iSci education to put technology to work in environmentally responsible ways. As a sustainability intern for Zoe’s Pizzeria, she conducted research on (and helped implement) environmentally responsible strategies like using all-electric delivery vehicles and investing in a fully electric pizza oven.



Information Science majors (from left to right) Lauren LeVair, Madeline Meyer, and Damien Klein (photos courtesy of the students)

Klein said he chose iSci because of a passion for “equitable information access and algorithmic transparency.” In his career, he hopes to prevent and mitigate biases in algorithms that determine if people are eligible, for example, for bank loans. Klein will be applying his skills as a business analyst at Capital One after graduation this spring.

Three students, three unique paths. This reflects how the pervasiveness of technology across society, in sectors from business and government to finance and philanthropy, allows iSci students to pursue careers with their individual passions top-of-mind.

“The major has helped me understand how important it is to look closely at the societal impacts of technology. After all, it’s having an effect on real people.” - Lauren LeVair

Flexible and interdisciplinary

The BA/BS degree in Information Science is flexible and adaptable, requiring 30 credit hours from a broad range of courses based in departments across campus, from Computer Sciences and Statistics to History of Science and Communication Arts. It is compatible with almost any other major or certificate that undergraduates can pursue. As a result, the major is expanding access to technology and data-focused education to a broader and more diverse group of UW-Madison students than ever.

At the heart of the iSci program is the core major curriculum, and among these courses, the students recommended a few that stood out to them:

- LeVair particularly enjoyed **LIS 407, Data Storytelling with Visualization** with iSchool Associate Professor Emilee Rader. She said it taught her to create compelling visualizations, “so that people can understand the data you’re showing and the message you’re communicating.”
- Meyer is currently fascinated by **LIS 500, Code & Power**, taught by Distinguished Teaching Faculty member Dorothea Salo. “This course builds the critical thinking necessary for analyzing and critiquing emerging and existing technologies,” she said, “especially concerning their biases and potential harms.”
- Klein appreciated **LIS 461, Data and Algorithms: Ethics and Policy**. He said the course helped open his eyes to “the human, sociological aspect of the rapid technological development that we’ve been going through.”

The majority of iSci majors are double majors or pursuing certificates, reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of information science itself. And as the iSci major accumulates alumni, a growing cohort of Badgers will be working across the state, the country, and beyond, at the intersection of technology and humanity. They will be equipped with what Klein called “the ethical foundations” to “ensure that we create responsible technologies that operate for the good of the people.”

LeVair agreed: “The major has helped me understand how important it is to look closely at the societal impacts of technology. After all, it’s having an effect on real people.”

Student Spotlight

MS Information student Rahil Virani contributes to UW-Madison Alzheimer's research



Rahil Virani, a student in the iSchool's MS Information Program (photo credit: Virani)

Data skills can open unexpected doors. Rahil Virani MSx'25 knows this firsthand.

Before coming to Madison, Virani was a software developer tackling coding projects while living in Mumbai, India, a city of 20 million residents. In his role as a software devel-

oper for ITdeation Technologies, he began to develop a keen interest in data and its central role in computing, while at the same time growing weary of what he called “the big city vibe.”

When Virani began to search for graduate programs in data analytics, he considered quality, affordability, and location, and UW-Madison stood out to him on all three criteria.

“UW-Madison was highly ranked and affordable, and I had heard that it's also a beautiful and peaceful place to live,” Virani said. After considering various programs to further his data-centric education, the MS Information—with its Data Analytics concentration—seemed to Virani like “a perfect fit.”

During his fall 2023 semester, Virani secured a role as a Research Data Coordinator with the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center (ADRC) at the School of Medicine and Public Health (SMPH). He now applies his data-savviness to impactful research that aims to combat a disease currently afflicting nearly 7 million Americans over age 65, including more than 120,000 Wisconsinites.

Through the MS program, Virani is not only expanding his data analysis skillset; he is getting hands-on experience with ADRC, managing the databases underlying one of the largest medical research collaborations in the United States.

Securing the role

At the beginning of the fall semester, Virani told Brendan Casey, iSchool director of experiential learning, about his interest in gaining hands-on experience while completing his coursework. Casey connected with Michael Collins, the Senior Director of Research Computing at SMPH, who had expressed interest in hiring iSchool students to help manage the ADRC databases.

When he first applied for the role with ADRC, Virani thought his chances of getting the job were slim to none. “But then I was called up for an interview,” he said. The fact that he was concurrently in the MS program, in addition to his prior experience in data management and web development, impressed the ADRC team.

“They wanted someone who understands data, who can identify errors or gaps in the data,” Virani said. “I felt like after two interviews, it just clicked.” Additionally, Virani's software engineering experience was a plus, as many of the data management tasks at ADRC require proficiency with coding languages like Python and R.

Virani also noted that a class he took in fall 2023, LIS 875: Information Processing and Retrieval, was instrumental in helping him gain a deeper understanding of what he called “strategic programming”, an approach he defined as “the application of programming skills in a thoughtful and purposeful manner, including considerations of data analytics, design, and the user experience.” Lessons from the course, taught by iSchool Associate Professor Rick Wash, have served Virani well in his current role at ADRC.

A 'privilege' to work with the data

The Wisconsin ADRC, founded in 2009, is one of about 40 federally funded Alzheimer's research centers around the country, all working toward a common goal of effective prevention and treatment of Alzheimer's by 2025. Currently, there is no cure and few effective



Rahil Virani at the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Disease Research Center, based in the School of Medicine and Public Health (photo credit: Rahil Virani).

treatments for Alzheimer's, and recent attempts to develop drugs that effectively slow cognitive decline have faltered. The Wisconsin ADRC recently received a \$150 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to lead a nationwide research effort investigating the neurobiology of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias.

At the ADRC, Virani works with data from a cohort of more than 17,000 people, the largest group of research participants in the country. This involves working with two primary databases, Virani explained. The first, known as CoRRIE, contains basic patient information, such as phone numbers and addresses. The second, REDCap, includes a vast amount of information related to patient visits, including numerous biomarkers like MRI scans, cognitive and memory tests, and a range of other data points.

Virani's role, first and foremost, is to "clean" this crucial data. That means using code to find potential errors made by a team of student volunteers, who assist researchers in identifying candidates for early-onset Alzheimer's. With such a large group of subjects, the data

inevitably gets a bit messy, so Virani's goal is to make sure the information in both databases (CoRRIE and REDCap) are consistent with one another. This data cleaning lays the essential foundation for analysis and future insights.

"The more data we have, the more there is to clean," Virani said. "People forget that the cleaning part is extremely important. If you don't clean the data, the analysis makes no sense." Reflecting on the broader purpose of ADRC, he added, "This role gives me the privilege to work with very large and unique datasets that have a real impact, and that is an opportunity I would not have had otherwise."

The ADRC data allow scientists to reveal new discoveries about Alzheimer's disease and ultimately unlock benefits for public health. Today, one in three seniors die with Alzheimer's or dementia, and millions more struggle with the telltale symptoms of memory loss, disorientation and even hallucination. Virani and his team are the stewards of data that may hold the key to detecting Alzheimer's early, preventing it, or stopping it in its tracks.

Student Spotlight

Katie Kijak blends UX Design and Interior Design



Katie Kijak

To Katie Kijak x'24, interior design and user experience (UX) design have the same goal: creating spaces that work for the people who use them.

Before enrolling at UW-Madison, Kijak—a current student pursuing the iSchool's Capstone Certificate

in UX Design—honed her skills in the interior design industry, helping create innovative workspaces for both Lerdahl Workplace Interiors and Sentry, a leading business insurance company. At Sentry, Kijak found herself collaborating with the in-house user experience (UX) team on a project designing a research lab.

"I was really interested in how the team approached problem-solving and design by putting the user first," she said. This experience opened her eyes to the wider world of user experience — and the importance of user-centered design in both physical and digital spaces. Kijak decided to pursue further education in UX design, and when she learned about UW-Madison's program, she was sold. "I really liked the length of the program and the chance to learn from industry leaders," Kijak said. She began the iSchool's UX program in fall 2023.

Lessons in UX design

The flexible UX program can be completed entirely online in one year, and it enables students to accommodate work and life commitments while building essential skills to advance as a UX professional. To obtain the Capstone Certificate, students like Kijak pass through a sequence of three courses, sharpening essential skills like data analysis and digital design. They then complete a capstone project to build the foundations of a personal portfolio, a critical asset in the growing UX job market.

As she continues in the program, Kijak has already learned several valuable lessons, including:

- **The value of insights from diverse perspectives:** With a different guest speaker in her courses each week, she has appreciated chances to learn from current UX professionals about creative projects and industry trends. "That's valuable

because I am new to it, so it was good to hear other peoples' stories, what kinds of challenges they're seeing, and how [UX] has evolved over time," Kijak said.

- **The balance between functionality and aesthetics:** Kijak said this balance is key to both interior design and UX design. She had seen trade-offs between attractiveness and practicality in her previous roles, but the UX capstone certificate has made clear that the same rule applies in digital spaces. Kijak enjoys that in UX design especially, it's critical to "advocate for the user," because in the end, "you're trying to make things accessible."
- **The critical importance of up-front research.** Before designing a workspace, or a website, Kijak said, design teams need to gather information up front to determine who will be using their end product and what those users' needs are. According to Kijak, the UX certificate program has emphasized and clarified this lesson: "Take a little bit more time on the front end, gather all your data, synthesize it, evaluate it, and then start your design," Kijak said

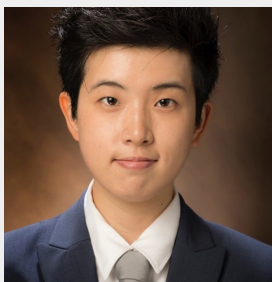
Future plans

After finishing the capstone certificate, Kijak hopes to merge her experiences in interior design and UX design. While her program will not conclude for several months, she's already considering how to combine her two overlapping skill sets. "There's a lot of parallels with interior design and digital design," she said. "My ultimate goal, I think, would be to merge the two," she said.

Overall, Kijak's journey reflects a passion for design and openness to learning. It foreshadows a future of bridge-building between her expertise in interior design and the principles and methods of UX design that the iSchool's UX capstone certificate program instills.

Alumni Spotlight

Meng Qu and the future of libraries



Meng Qu, an alum of the iSchool's MA Library & Information Studies program (photo courtesy of Qu).

Years before the COVID-19 pandemic made virtual learning mainstream, Meng Qu '18 suspected online education was poised to grow rapidly. Equipped with a degree in Instructional Technology, Qu was curious about where future innovations in digital learning would

take root. One answer, she found, was the library. As a result, she decided to pursue an advanced degree in library and information studies.

Qu first heard from a friend that UW-Madison's MA Library & Information Studies program was one of the best in the country. In addition, she recalls her friend touting the Information School (iSchool) as a "friendly environment, filled with good people."

Ultimately, that environment helped launch Qu's career as a web services librarian for Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, and a pioneer at the intersection of libraries and technology.

Fond memories

In the iSchool's MA program, Qu's interdisciplinary coursework focused on topics like information architecture (LIS 646), data management and information retrieval (LIS 711), and user experience (UX) design (LIS 611). She fondly noted several iSchool faculty and staff members who made a real impact on her academic journey:

- **Kristin Eschenfelder**, former iSchool director and current associate dean for the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS). According to Qu, Eschenfelder "really helped [me] enlarge my knowledge about websites" and "always made students' benefits her priority."

- **Dorothea Salo**, iSchool distinguished teaching faculty member. Qu referred to Salo as a "mentor" who was "extremely knowledgeable about computer programming and coding skills."
- **Tanya Hendricks Cobb**, MA graduate program manager. Qu called Cobb a "great student manager" who was able to help answer "all kinds of questions."

In the six years since her graduation, Qu has led several professional projects—from publishing scholarly research to creating artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots—which she called "a direct result of the knowledge and skills I acquired during my career at the iSchool."

Innovative projects

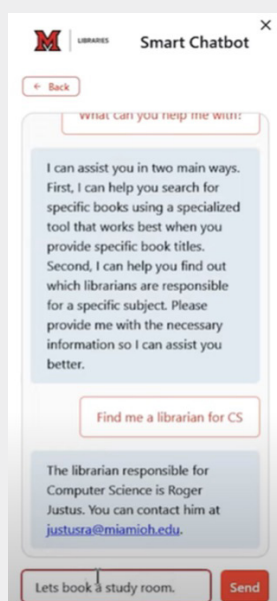
In 2018, following graduation, Qu accepted a role as web services librarian for Miami University. One of her first tasks was to lead the redesign of the libraries' website, a project in which she employed many of the skills she learned at the iSchool.

"I definitely used what I had learned in information architecture courses," Qu said. She noted that UX research skills, especially in analyzing patrons' needs, were also invaluable for the redesign. "We did surveys, interviews, and even eye tracking, and we measured mouse clicks, scroll distance, and more," Qu added. The results informed a successful revamp of the library website, designed with its users in mind.

In addition, Qu was lead author of a recent research paper published in the journal *Education and Information Technologies* that developed a new method to "monitor space utilization and analyze visitor patterns in academic libraries." By leveraging wi-fi connection data, Qu and colleagues created a novel tool to provide both real-time crowd-level information for potential visitors and a comprehensive "visitor analysis dashboard" for librarians, delivering a cost-effective solution using readily available wi-fi data.

Finally, Qu led the creation of an AI-powered library services chatbot for academic libraries, equipped with OpenAI's GPT-4 model. The chatbot can help patrons find specific books or research articles, make room reservations, or identify the best librarian to answer subject-based questions (for example, you can ask the chatbot to "find me a librarian in Computer Sciences," as in the image below). Qu said the chatbot is designed to "provide enhanced support in answering online questions from library patrons."

The chatbot was unveiled in a video demonstration in December, but it has not yet been released for public use.



A library services chatbot developed by Meng Qu and colleagues at Miami University. This image (courtesy of Qu) is from a video demonstration of the chatbot's use cases.

Qu envisions the chatbot being used as a smart research assistant. "You can ask, for example, 'can you recommend some materials about machine learning?' And it can answer." That's because the chatbot has the EBSCO Discovery API, a tool embedded in code that allows patrons to access EBSCO's vast research database by asking the chatbot using natural language.

The future of libraries

Emerging technologies like AI are transforming work, and libraries are no exception.

"When I was young, I would go to the library and see a repository of books," Qu said. "But in the digital age, not every library needs to constantly enlarge its physical repository. Now, we can digitize almost everything. We digitize textbooks, we digitize images, we put metadata into images, and we make images more quickly retrievable."

She continued, "With the growth of AI and machine learning, I think we will be able to give library patrons a more personalized experience and faster research assistance with technologies like our chatbot."

By integrating library services with cutting-edge technology, Qu is helping to shape the future of libraries.

"With the growth of AI and machine learning, I think we will be able to give library patrons a more personalized experience and faster research assistance." - Meng Qu

Alumni Updates

James Dast MA'68 retired after 38 years of volunteer work for the Friends of the UW-Madison Libraries Book Sale, including 15 years as manager of the sale. In 1996, he retired as Conservator of the General Library System (now UW-Madison Libraries).

Robin Katzin MA'78 has retired after 28 years as Hebrew Librarian and School Librarian at Hillel Torah North Suburban Day School in Skokie, Illinois.

Patrick Losinski MA'83 is CEO of Columbus Metropolitan Library, which in 2024 will host the Public Library Association Conference for the first time. The event will draw 6,000-8,000 librarians from around North America April 3-5, 2024. Losinski invites iSchool students, faculty and alumni to attend.

Anne Moser MA'87, senior special librarian with the Wisconsin Water Library at UW-Madison, received the 2023 Wisconsin Library Association President's Volunteer Award. The honor was given to Moser for her significant outreach activities as a librarian as well as an educator, especially around a focus on science, technology, math, and art.

Madeline Cohen MA'92 is now Library Relations Director for Bloomberg Industry Group in Arlington, VA. Cohen previously worked as the Associate Director of the Westminster Law Library at the University of Denver Sturm College of Law from 2018 until May of 2023.

Madeline Cohen MA'92 became the Library Relations Director for Bloomberg Industry Group. She fosters and enhances relationships between Bloomberg Law and information professionals in law firms, law schools, government organizations, and corporations.

Laura Olsen MA'93 was appointed to serve a second term as the public member on the State Bar of Wisconsin's Communications Committee. She currently serves as Manager of Research Training and Engagement at Quarles & Brady, LLP, in Madison.

Nicole Isaacs MA'20 has started a role as Public Services Librarian at MERIT Library for the School of Education at UW-Madison.

Jordan Sprunger MA'20 was recently hired as Genealogy and Local History Librarian at the Brighton District Library in Brighton, MI.

Easter DeGangi MA'10 has been honored with the 2023 Virginia Library Association (VLA) Advocacy Award for her work leading the VLA Book Resume Project, which gave library workers a way to prepare for and share resources to defend intellectual freedom. Easter is currently Library Manager at the Newport News Public Library in Newport News, VA.

Amanda Kramer MA'10 was promoted to Assistant Director of Research and Technology at the Loyola Notre Dame Library in Baltimore, MD.

Katy Webb MA'11 has been hired as the Betty Drees Johnson Dean of the Library and Learning Technologies at Stetson University's duPont-Ball Library in DeLand, FL.

Tien-I Tsai PhD'13 was elected to be the next chair of SIG-USE of the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) and will assume the role for the 2024-2025 term.

Harvey Long MA'16 has earned tenure and was officially promoted to associate professor of library services at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro, NC.

Molly Rach MA'17 was promoted to a full-time Library Assistant position with the U.S. Courts Library-8th Circuit Court of Appeals after working part-time for the court system since 2019.

Jamie White MA'17 now serves as Adult Services Librarian at the South Hill Pierce County Library in Puyallup, WA.

Kelli Miller MA'18 recently accepted a role as Collaborative Consultant for Winding Rivers Library System in western Wisconsin.

Katie Scott MA'22 was selected for the American Librarian Association (ALA) Emerging Leaders Program, where she is working as part of a team of librarians from around the country with the Intellectual Freedom Round Table (IFRT) and Office for Intellectual Freedom (OIF) to research censorship and related challenges in libraries. The research will lead to a consolidated resource guide to support librarians and a poster presentation at this summer's ALA Annual Conference.

Bridget McMahon MA'23 recently accepted a role as Records and Information Analyst at Madison Gas & Electric.

In Memoriam

With great sadness, we share that **Dr. Ciaran Trace**, assistant professor in the iSchool from 2005-2009, passed away earlier this year. Her innovative teaching and research explored the history of the information professions and the intersection of archives with emerging technologies. Dr. Trace advocated for the important work of archivists and records professionals, inspiring students to pursue those professions and consistently empowering those around her with opportunities to build skills, gain valuable experience, and foster professional connections in the classroom and beyond.

Dr. Trace was a beloved instructor and mentor for countless students and alumni and a dedicated researcher whose work illuminated how information impacts people's lives. She will be missed by all who were fortunate enough to know her.



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