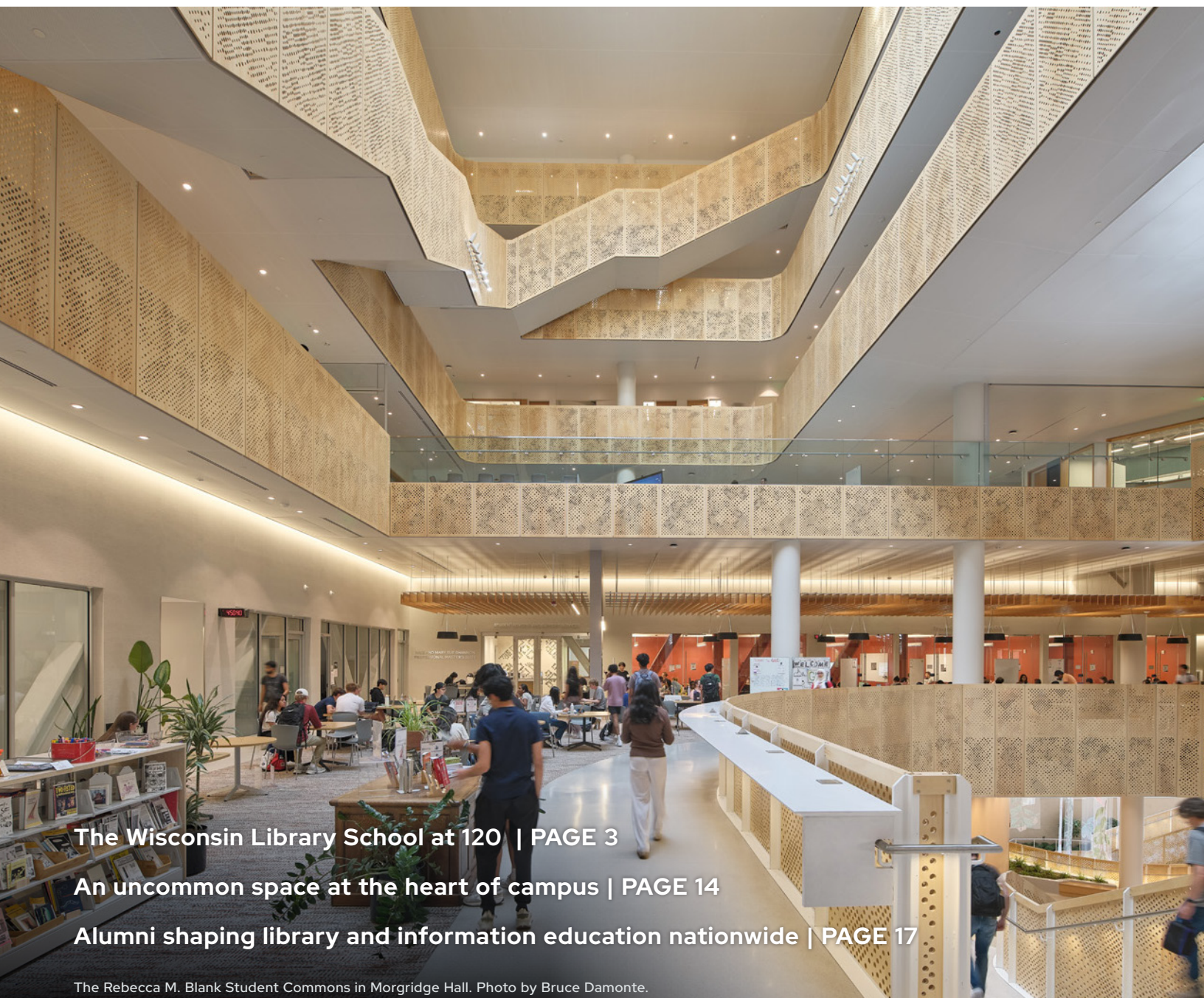




SPRING 2026

Jottings



The Wisconsin Library School at 120 | PAGE 3

An uncommon space at the heart of campus | PAGE 14

Alumni shaping library and information education nationwide | PAGE 17

The Rebecca M. Blank Student Commons in Morgridge Hall. Photo by Bruce Damonte.

CONTENTS

2 FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

7 ISCHOOL TO JOIN NEW COLLEGE OF COMPUTING
AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AT UW-MADISON

8 METASCIENCE RESEARCH LAB ON THE FUTURE
OF SCIENCE AND DISCOVERY

12 AROUND THE ISCHOOL

23 ALUMNI UPDATES



iSchool Director Greg Downey

From the Director's Chair:

120 years ago, the Wisconsin Library School opened its doors, one of the first programs of its kind in the country. The field it helped build has transformed enormously since then, and our department has followed suit. Yet our guiding values – information access, academic and intellectual freedom, and public service – have never wavered. We celebrate our legacy this semester with pride and a clear sense that the work ahead is just as vital as the work that came before.

On that note, this issue of Jottings reflects an Information School in motion. Our Metascience Research Lab is asking foundational questions about how scientific knowledge is produced and evaluated. Our new postdoctoral colleague Serena Guo is reimagining how physical spaces and technologies can converge to foster human connection. And our community of alumni continues to shape library and information education, from California to Rhode Island.

Another story I've watched unfold over the past academic year is the new era of our beloved iSchool Laboratory Library: the Rebecca Blank Student Commons in Morgridge Hall. In this issue, you'll hear from student staff members about how the Commons has served as a next-generation training ground for future librarians and a new hub at the heart of the UW–Madison campus. You'll also dive deeper into our rich history, learning from scholars of our historical collections about the personalities and traditions that built and defined our community over more than a century.

In addition, there is big news at the institutional level: the Board of Regents in December approved a proposal to establish a new College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence at UW–Madison. The reorganization places all three units of the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) – the iSchool, as well as Computer Sciences and Statistics – in a newly created, standalone college, set to launch this summer. This step will enable us to build on our exciting growth over the past few years and amplify the work we do by forging new collaborations across campus and beyond.

As always, this newsletter is a glimpse, not the full picture. But even a glimpse shows clearly that the impact our students, faculty, staff, and alumni are making is nothing short of extraordinary.

Take care, and stay in touch!

Greg Downey

Director, Evjue-Bascom Professor
Information School
University of Wisconsin–Madison

Jottings is the alumni and
friends newsletter
of The Information School
600 N. Park Street
Madison, WI 53706

iSchool.wisc.edu

Contact the iSchool, send news for
Jottings, or learn about making a gift:
alumni@ischool.wisc.edu

Design: Media Solutions

iSchool Director:
Professor Greg Downey

Jottings Editor: Thomas Jilk

 UW–Madison
Information School

 University of Wisconsin–
Madison Information School
(iSchool)

 @UWMadiSchool

 @UWMadiSchool

The Wisconsin Library School at 120: Rediscovering a history of leadership and impact

Drawing on rich historical collections, a team of scholars is preserving the legacy of the people, places, and practices that built today's Information School.



During their field work in 1915, four Wisconsin Library School students pose outside the post office at Ladysmith, Wisconsin, where they were promoting a library day with a public reception. (UW-Madison School of Library and Information Studies Digital Collection)

"A librarian should be bigger than the day's work and its routine," wrote Mary Emogene Hazeltine, the first head of the Wisconsin Library School, in 1922. Librarians should have "a vision of the field as a whole, but while working towards the plans of the future," she said. With her forward-looking focus on impact, service, and problem-solving, Hazeltine set the tone for more than a century of library and information professionals to train in Madison at one of the first – and finest – library schools in the country.

As new technologies reshaped how information circulates, the Wisconsin Library School, established in 1906, became the School of Library and Information Studies in 1981 and the Information School in 2017. But through waves of change, one constant was the deep commitment among faculty, staff, and students to preserve and study the School's own rich history.

The department's recent move to Morgridge Hall created a rare moment to take stock of its materials at scale. Over the past two years, a team led by Collections Project Coordinator Bronwen Masemann has reviewed, cataloged, and stabilized tens of thousands of items, nearly 60,000 volumes in total, formerly housed in the iSchool Library. Much of this work has focused on core research materials that remain vital to scholars, practitioners, and the public. But alongside

those materials sits a distinct historical collection, including thousands of early annual reports and newsletters that shaped the Wisconsin Library School's earliest teaching and research. Together, these bodies of material form one of the most comprehensive collections of library and information science resources in the country.

The team has worked with documentation illuminating the School's early culture, including letters from Hazeltine bound into volumes, student assignments and reminiscences, photo albums, scrapbooks, and correspondences that trace the School's roots, reach, and networks of connection. These sources reveal a community marked by confidence, ambition, and a belief in the problem-solving power of information, alongside unavoidable evidence of the biases of the era.



L to R: Bronwen Masemann, Greer Christensen-Gibbons, and Maria Hellenbrand

To explore what this rediscovery has surfaced – and how it continues to shape teaching, research, and service at today's iSchool – we spoke with Masemann, iSchool Librarian Greer Christensen-Gibbons MA'24, and Library & Information Studies student Maria Hellenbrand MA x'27. In the conversation that follows, they recount a sweeping and intimate history with global reach and profound, enduring impact across the state of Wisconsin.

What drew each of you to this project?

Bronwen Masemann

I actually started working on this historical research when I began working as a cataloger at the iSchool in 2012 and started digging into the historical annual reports collection. I knew that this was a nationally or perhaps internationally important collection based on my background in book history and library

history, but it's been really exciting to work with Greer and with Maria and other students to establish exactly what the scope of the collection is.

Greer Christensen-Gibbons

I was finishing up my last semester in the MA program in 2024 when Megan and Bronwen reached out to me saying they were starting this project and looking for a cataloger. This project sounded really exciting and a once-in-a-lifetime career opportunity, especially for a first-time librarian.

Maria Hellenbrand

I'm a fairly recent add-on to this project. I joined this semester as a project assistant, and the draw was personal, as a library school student and as a Dane County native, to learn about the reach of the iSchool in Madison and beyond.

What has surprised you most as you've dug into the collections?

Bronwen Masemann

I continue to be surprised by the richness of the collection, including the people, the stories, and the early libraries. I've also really enjoyed looking at the international aspect of the historical library reports.

Maria Hellenbrand

Recently, Bronwen and I were looking through older records, and it occurred to me that there were no archival studies in the early 20th century. That's something that evolved later, in the 60s and 70s. As someone interested in archival studies, it opened a new question for me, which was how and why did archival studies actually start?

Based on your research, what values or themes defined the Wisconsin Library School's early culture?

Bronwen Masemann

A theme that emerges from the letters and the early annual reports is a lot of confidence in the students' and librarians' ability to solve problems. They believed that if you have enough information and you reach out to the right people, you can solve problems of management or even social problems.

Early graduates very quickly took on positions of great responsibility at libraries around the state and country, and

their expectation that they were going to be in positions of responsibility is related to their confidence and problem-solving abilities.

Greer Christensen-Gibbons

I find myself frequently marveling at how much effort our predecessors had to put in to continue to gather and preserve all these materials, including a lot of original correspondence. It struck me that at the core of this effort was deep determination and consistent communication, which remain extremely valuable in our field.

Bronwen, what did you learn about the school's global reach?

Bronwen Masemann

I can give you a few examples here. There were students who came from the Philippines in 1920; we found some very rare material from libraries in the Philippines from around that date. We had an early alum go on to become one of the most prominent people in the field of library science in China. There were also students from Norway and Denmark, and there were early connections between Wisconsin and Canadian libraries.

At the same time, it's important to recognize that some of this international work unfolded within the colonialist attitudes of the period. While our own collections don't include correspondence with the students from the Philippines, broader historical research on UW's ties to the Philippines in the early 20th century shows how educational exchanges were often shaped by assumptions that are difficult to read today. That context matters here too. The School's global reach was real, but it existed within the power structures and limitations of its time.

What about impact across Wisconsin itself?

Bronwen Moseman

The system of field placement meant that every student, every year, for two months, left Madison to travel to libraries large and small throughout the state. Sometimes the job of the practicum students was to go to a small town or village and start a completely new library. Our graduates laid much of the foundation for the library ecosystem that exists in Wisconsin today. And of course, the practicum program continues to thrive in today's iSchool.

In our research, we also found that instructors often traveled throughout the state by train, sending information and letters back to Madison, asking for resources they could share with libraries. It was a very clear example of the Wisconsin Idea in action.



Mary Emogene Hazeltine, the first head of the Wisconsin Library School, which she led from 1906-1938 (UW-Madison School of Library and Information Studies Digital Collection)

It was also fascinating to see how work got done quickly and effectively in the pre-digital age using a variety of communication technologies including the postal, telegraph and rail systems alongside strong professional and personal networks. Because the field placements in this period occurred between January and March, there are extremely consistent complaints about how cold it is, making me admire the work of these students even more!

From the collections, which figures or personalities stand out to you?

Bronwen Masemann

We couldn't talk about the history of our library school without talking about its first leader, Mary Hazeltine, who shaped the Wisconsin Library School's earliest decades. The library school was her entire life. She had students over to her house on Sunday afternoons for mending parties and readings of plays and poetry, and she took the students on a fall picnic every year. I admire her dedication to maintaining networks of connection and relationships with students and alumni throughout her entire career.

Greer Christensen-Gibbons

We frequently say Hazeltine had the "bibliographic urge," a compulsion to collect and organize information, which I relate to. It has also been funny to find references to her in other people's correspondence, perhaps suggesting that her level of energy and dedication could be too much for some people at times.

Bronwen Masemann

The other person I'd mention is Mary Frances Carpenter, the first librarian of the Wisconsin Library School Library. We didn't know about her role at all until starting this research, and it's been exciting to uncover her life story as we handle

and catalog the results of her early collecting work. She was an early graduate of Smith College, and after eleven years in Madison, she went to Hawaii in 1917 on a temporary assignment to catalog government documents at the State Library. It seems from her letters to Hazeltine that she had to deal with significant health issues throughout her life, and after leaving Hawaii she was always seeking out jobs that allowed her to live in a warm climate while fulfilling her passion for cataloging and organization.

Overall, I like thinking about these young women, including Carpenter and the students doing their field work, who faced a lot of constraints during that period but managed to build lives for themselves that were extremely independent and adventurous.

Maria, tell us about the historic collection of postcards you've been exploring.

Maria Hellenbrand

There is a collection of about 2,000 postcards that show correspondence over the years between alumni and colleagues back to the iSchool. All the postcards document images of libraries across the country and abroad. I'm also an art history master's student, so I was immediately drawn to its visual nature and the documentation of different architectural styles.

One that stood out to me was from the 1950s in Mexico. It's a very modern block library, but the facades are all mosaics in the pre-Hispanic style. The style looks back through history, but in a very modern way.

How have other students played a role in this work?

Bronwen Masemann

We've directly impacted over 300 iSchool students during the course of the project, whether that's through employment or practicums or classroom visits or hands-on projects. It has enabled students to participate in conference opportunities, including a group that went to a national conference in Denver last fall to present results of a digital humanities approach to studying the library annual reports. Maria is also coming with us to another national conference in June to present on this work.

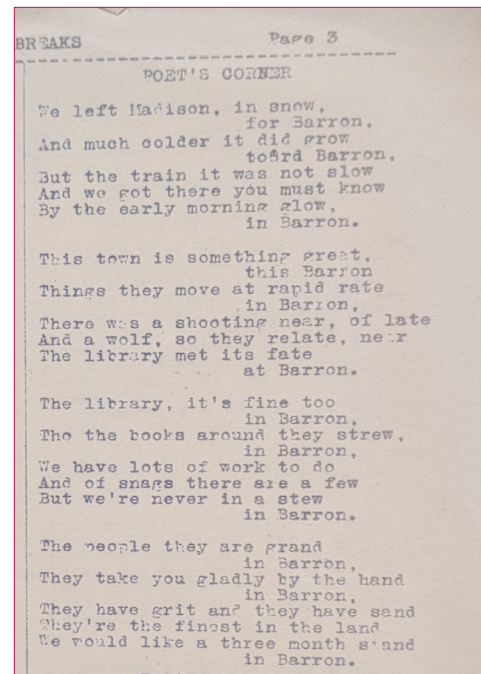
Greer Christensen-Gibbons

Cataloging is often a very granular, slow process, but on this project, we've had to move fast and think creatively. The students have been able to figure out ways to streamline processes and offer fresh ideas that I've really appreciated.

What do you want alumni to take away from all of this?

Bronwen Masemann

A lot of what the iSchool stands for now – hands-on learning, interdisciplinary problem-solving, a commitment to service – was there at the very beginning. We're not discovering something new. We're rediscovering something that was always true.



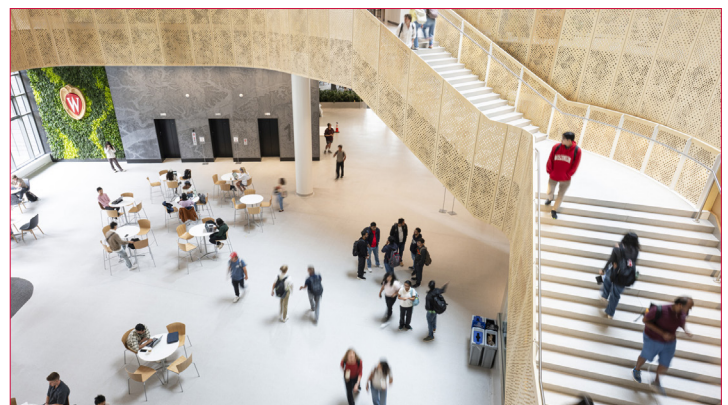
A poem in "Outbreaks," a short-lived student newspaper by the WLS class of 1916. The poem describes doing field work at the Barron Public Library in Barron, WI. (UW Archives, Series 7/20/3 18N5, Box 5)

Information School to join new College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence at UW–Madison

The Information School will soon join the College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence (CAI), the first new academic division on the UW–Madison campus in over 40 years. In December, a proposal from the University of Wisconsin–Madison to reorganize the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) into a standalone college was approved by the UW Board of Regents. Subsequently, the iSchool, along with the Statistics and Computer Sciences departments, officially voted to join the college. The operating start of CAI is expected to be July 1, 2026.

"This is an exciting moment for the iSchool and the entire university," said Greg Downey, Evjue-Bascom Professor and Director of the iSchool. "Over the past decade as this collaboration has developed, the school has doubled the size of our faculty and staff, expanded all of our graduate programs, and started an innovative new undergraduate major that already enrolls 500 students. This new college gives us an opportunity to build something that is technically rigorous and deeply human at the same time.

It opens up new avenues of exploration and collaboration for our students, faculty, and staff, and it gives our important work and mission a new level of prominence on the UW–Madison campus."



Students walk through the lobby area of Morgridge Hall. The new building is currently home to the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS), which will soon be reorganized into the College of Computing and Artificial Intelligence (CAI). Photo: Bryce Richter / UW–Madison

The creation of CAI builds on decades of investment in scholarship, research and teaching and the university's strengths in computer, data, library and information sciences and statistics. The proposal grew out of the continuing success of CDIS, which was created within the College of Letters & Science (L&S) in 2019 and saw rapid enrollment growth through the last 5 years.

"This is about more than simply building a new academic unit," says Chancellor Jennifer Mnookin. "We will be shaping a future where UW-Madison leads in innovation while advancing knowledge for the common good. We want to prepare students for a world where computing and technology intersect with every profession and discipline, from patient care to teaching, biomedical research to the humanities."

Computer sciences professor Remzi Arpacı-Dusseau, who has led CDIS since last year, credits L&S with the success CDIS has achieved since its formation and says it will be important that CAI carry forward the same values, including intellectual curiosity, interdisciplinarity, a human-centered focus, access for undergraduates across the university and impactful cross-

campus partnerships.

"Artificial intelligence and computing are transforming every discipline, from veterinary medicine to political science, and we see the formation of a college as an important step toward serving as a campuswide resource while also meeting the needs of our students and the state of Wisconsin," says Arpacı-Dusseau. "The future workforce will be defined by those who can integrate computing and AI fluently into every discipline."

Every major industry in the state, from agriculture to manufacturing and health care, is expected to be shaped by AI in the coming decade. The new college will help inform how society benefits from AI and reckons with its challenges and provide talent pipelines, research partnerships and statewide outreach to help Wisconsin lead in transformation.

A newly launched website, cai.wisc.edu, is expected to serve as a primary source of information for CAI. Stay tuned for more updates on this developing story in the coming months.

Professor Kristin Eschenfelder, former iSchool director, to serve as interim dean of College of Letters & Science

Kristin Eschenfelder will serve as the interim dean of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's largest academic unit, the College of Letters & Science (L&S), effective on May 17, 2026.



Former iSchool Director Kristin Eschenfelder will assume the role of interim dean of the College of Letters & Science.

Eschenfelder, who has been on campus since she joined the Information School faculty in 2000, has served as the L&S academic associate dean and associate director for the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) since it launched in 2019.

"The iSchool hired me as an assistant professor, and I've been fortunate to grow as a researcher and leader in this department," Eschenfelder said. "I'm deeply grateful

to the faculty, staff, and students whose energy and collaborative spirit have carried us into this exciting new era. I'll always hold fond memories of Lake Mendota views from Helen C. White Hall – and the occasional Bald Eagle sightings just outside our windows."

As director of the iSchool, Eschenfelder spearheaded stewardship efforts that helped secure a \$5 million endowment and established systematic stewardship for annual giving and scholarship use. She also planned and directed major departmental relocations into newly opened Morgridge Hall.

As associate director of CDIS, Eschenfelder has been an advocate for creating flexible, interdisciplinary pathways for undergraduates and developing student supports such as Morgridge Hall's Rebecca M. Blank Student Commons and Phill and Liz Gross Learning Center. Her vision involves integrating the human and ethical aspects of technology, computing and data into the curriculum, thereby ensuring that students across diverse fields – from the humanities to the social sciences – can gain both functional and critical literacies.

"UW-Madison is fortunate to have an experienced leader like Kristin to step into this important role," said Provost and Executive Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs John Zumbunnen. "Her background as an educator, a two-time department chair and an academic associate dean will be an asset to UW-Madison's largest academic unit during a critical time."

Metascience Research Lab asks big questions about the future of science and discovery

Chaoqun Ni and Ian Hutchins are developing data-driven tools to understand and improve the way science moves forward in the age of AI.

Associate Professor Chaoqun Ni and Assistant Professor Ian Hutchins came to UW–Madison in summer 2020, at a time when COVID-19 put scientific research firmly in the public spotlight. But science had been in Ni and Hutchins’s spotlight for years already, as the two researchers separately began asking similar data-centric questions about “how scientists behave, how they can do

The lab’s work offers both a data-driven view into the machinery of modern scholarship and a valuable resource for science policy makers determining how to fund projects, create new standards and regulations, and establish priorities for scientific research. Their work embodies the iSchool’s commitment to harnessing the power of data and technology not as ends in themselves, but as tools for investigating and improving society.

Two paths converge

Ni and Hutchins joined the iSchool after independently beginning to follow threads that would eventually lead them into the same emerging field. For Ni, the shift began in her doctoral training at Indiana University Bloomington, when she realized that using cutting-edge data science, “there is way more that I can do and more I can ask from the bibliometric data than what a lot of traditional bibliometricians can do,” she said. “The wave of big data slowly drove me into large-scale, data-based projects,” Ni said.

Meanwhile, Hutchins’s path was shaped by early encounters with the political and policy decisions around research funding. He was in the Neuroscience Training Program at UW–Madison, where he watched federal restrictions on embryonic stem cell research ripple through labs around him. “I became aware of science policy as this powerful force affecting everybody’s lives, and I wanted to help influence that in a positive direction,” he said. That realization eventually led him to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on a team dedicated to using data to guide scientific decision making.

By the time Ni and Hutchins joined the iSchool, their research had begun to converge on big, thorny questions, such as how to make science more equitable and efficient, how to measure the impact of research, and how to predict the next world-changing scientific discovery.



Information School PhD candidate Xiang Zheng practices a job talk at a Metascience Research Lab meeting in Morgridge Hall, to an audience including Ian Hutchins (left, plaid) and Chaoqun Ni (center). Photo by Thomas Jilk.

better, and how funding can be better allocated,” Ni said.

Today, as co-principal investigators in the Information School’s Metascience Research Lab, Ni and Hutchins, along with their PhD students, are pushing frontiers in a field known as “science of science.” Often using massive data sets and machine learning methods, the group is exploring novel approaches for predicting scientific breakthroughs, identifying AI-generated text in academic research, and bolstering research integrity through AI-powered citation verification.

How to see a breakthrough coming

In a yearslong project in collaboration with NIH, Hutchins and PhD student Salsabil Arabi are pursuing what the team calls “an elusive goal”: identifying the conditions that create new scientific breakthroughs. The effort could “accelerate the pace of discovery and improve the efficiency of research investments,” the researchers wrote in a recent preprint paper building on nearly a decade of work.

Using AI-driven methods to track “how fields grow, split, and converge over time,” they traced how subfields of science emerge and interact, sometimes slowly, sometimes in sudden bursts. Looking retrospectively at areas where breakthroughs occurred, Hutchins explained, “We can see these groups of papers cohering into subfields and splitting off into different topic areas that seem to be working toward different goals,” until something causes them to converge.

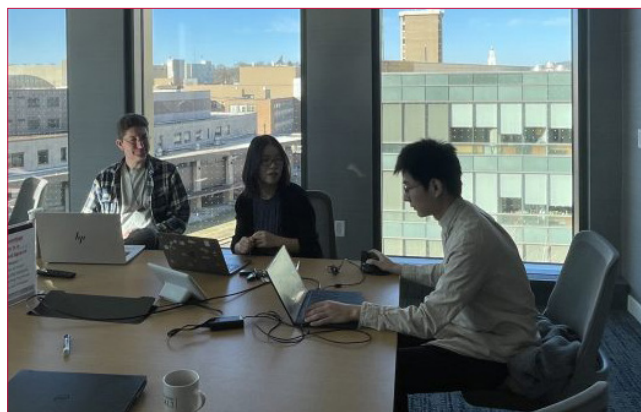
The CRISPR gene-editing revolution in the early 2010s offers an example, as long-standing gene-editing approaches came together with a new, more effective technology, opening new doors for applications of well-known biological principles. Then, Hutchins said, “You have this explosion in gene-editing research, and you can see that through the dynamics of these topic clusters when you trace them over time.”

The goal is to help institutions understand where transformative work is happening and how to support it. As the researchers write, “Our findings illustrate how a better understanding of the scientific process may lead to greater scientific returns.”

A new tool to check citation accuracy

While Hutchins’s work maps the evolution of ideas, Ni’s recent projects address the challenge of scientific integrity. Ni and PhD student Xiang Zheng helped create a first-of-its-kind AI-powered tool, BibAgent, designed to verify whether in-text citations in a draft of an academic paper accurately reflect what the cited paper actually says, a task both critical to research integrity and nearly impossible to do manually at scale.

The problem of researchers citing sources unrelated to the content of their papers turned out to be more widespread than Ni initially thought. “I started from a research-integrity angle and realized how bad it is,” she said. But actually determining



Ian Hutchins, Chaoqun Ni, and Xiang Zheng at a Metascience Research Lab meeting in Morgridge Hall. Photo by Thomas Jilk.

the scale of the problem was complicated by paywalls, inconsistent metadata, and even “citation cartels,” where authors can buy citations to inflate their impact.

BibAgent uses multimodal AI models to compare citation claims against the content of the cited paper, even when only abstracts or metadata are available. It is driving toward citation fidelity at scale, making peer-review processes more effective. Early tests of BibAgent show exceptional accuracy when full text is accessible, and the tool has drawn immediate interest, Ni said. “Every time I talk to people about this tool, they say, ‘I want to use it. I want to pay money.’”

‘Fully embedded’: AI in science

The Metascience Research Lab also has a firsthand view of how AI is transforming science, both through their empirical analysis and their day-to-day work. In a recent study, Ni and co-authors used statistical models to estimate the proportion of AI-generated sentences in academic papers before and after the release of ChatGPT. They found AI use increased across the board, but especially among scholars from non-English-speaking countries and lower-resourced institutions.

This shows that for many researchers, AI tools offer a way to overcome long-standing language barriers, Ni said. “Speaking English is one thing, but writing is something else entirely,” she said. “With large language models, this may no longer be a problem for many of those scientists.”

However, both Ni and Hutchins emphasize the importance of responsible use, for researchers and students alike. Whether the goal is forecasting the next scientific breakthrough or

ensuring equitable access to research tools, the same principle applies: AI is only as valuable as the understanding behind it.

That makes it more vital than ever for students and researchers to understand and justify the AI-related choices they make, Ni said. Hutchins takes a similar view: "AI is another tool in the toolbox. The important thing is that we understand what the code is doing," he said.

In other words, AI is just one of the forces shaping modern scholarship. By studying the data underlying the vast scientific enterprise, the Metascience Research Lab is painting a clearer picture of how science actually works, and how to improve it for the future.

Physical space as interface: Serena Guo reimagines how people interact with their environments—and each other

Serena Guo knows technology can help people connect with one another.

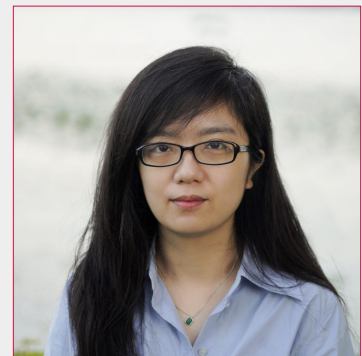
That may sound counterintuitive in a world where computers, whether on desks or in pockets, dominate our attention and often serve to discourage social interaction. But Guo believes that thoughtfully designed technologies can do just the opposite, sparking human connections that never would have happened otherwise. And her research is bearing that out.

By harnessing a unique interdisciplinary background across architecture, social psychology and robotics, Guo has led creative projects that leverage technology, including custom-designed robots, to encourage social interaction rather than prevent it. "I treat our living environment, and space in general, as an interface," Guo explained. Her arrival at the Information School and CDIS reflects UW–Madison's place as an emerging

national leader in human-centered research at the nexus of design, technology and society.

From Architecture to Algorithms

Guo's path to the Information School was deliberately multidisciplinary. After earning her bachelor's in architectural design from the University of Hong Kong, she spent two years designing spaces in a rural village. She then pursued a professional architecture degree at Columbia, worked at a VR



Serena Guo joined the iSchool as Research Associate and Lecturer in fall 2025

startup in New York, and completed her PhD in Information Science at Cornell with a minor in social psychology.

"Interdisciplinary research helps bring in different expertise, and as designers we act as sort of cooks in the kitchen, trying to bring the ingredients together," Guo said. Throughout her journey, one theme has remained constant: the blending of the digital and the physical through spatial experience. Her approach, known as "research through design," uses design itself as a vehicle to produce knowledge. Rather than analyzing current situations, "I imagine the possible futures of our world," she explained. "We use this method to envision how technology can work in the future and how people might react to it."

Guo said she was drawn to UW–Madison specifically for the Information School's position "at the intersection of information design and society" and its commitment to human-centered and ethically grounded practice that allows her to pursue both technical depth and social impact.

Human connection in a screen-centric world

Walk through any airport terminal, campus building or library, and you'll see people hunched over phones, absorbed in the digital world. Guo noticed this pattern and wondered if, instead, technology could be made to subtly encourage the human-to-human connections people often avoid.

One of her recent projects, MirrorBot, emerged from a simple question: What if we could see strangers' faces without sitting right across from them? Could that help expand the realm of opportunity for small, yet potentially meaningful, social interactions—even if just a glance or a smile? The custom-designed robot, developed with collaborators at Cornell, uses mirrors and screens to reflect the images of strangers across a room to each other, creating unexpected visual connections. When deployed at Cornell, people took

pictures, made faces, and engaged with it in ways both delightful and destructive, providing valuable lessons about how we respond to technologies that disrupt our spatial routines. Guo is exploring opportunities to deploy similar interventions on the UW–Madison campus.

Another creative project Guo led, SocialStools, earned an honorable mention for best paper at a major human-computer interaction conference and took a similar approach to MirrorBot. The installation turned people into part of a physical interface, using light and music that changed as strangers moved closer or oriented toward or away from each other.

"There's strong value in connecting with strangers, even just a smile or just a wave," Guo said. "They lighten up your day and create a sense of belonging in the world and also in a community."

Guo's work adds a new element to the iSchool's broad research portfolio: creative exploration into ways the physical and virtual worlds can converge, creating something greater than the sum of its technological parts. "I think technology is more of a method, not the final goal," she said. "Theoretically, we want to help create an ideal world, and technology can help us achieve that."

Building the future

Guo is already making her mark on campus through both teaching and research. She is the instructor for LIS 613 (User Experience Design 3), a graduate course where students engage in hands-on activities and semester-long projects, learning how to conduct user studies and translate findings into design decisions. "I really like learning-by-doing as a teaching methodology," she said.

She's also collaborating with the Computer Sciences Department's People and Robots Laboratory, led by Professor Bilge Mutlu, participating in weekly lab meetings and discussions with PhD students. This kind of cross-departmental collaboration makes UW–

Madison fertile ground for innovative research.

Her advice to students and researchers reflects the background she brings to the iSchool: "Build the world that you want to live in for the future. Think deeply about what types of experience you value."

Guo's work exemplifies the Information School's commitment to research and education that addresses real human needs at the intersection of technology and society. The premise is increasingly urgent. In our rush toward digital futures, we risk losing something essential about human experience: our embodied,

social nature as humans. Her research suggests we don't have to choose between technological progress and human connection. With thoughtful design, we can have both. The future she's building is one where technology helps the spaces we inhabit become active participants in bringing us together rather than keeping us apart.

Around the iSchool

Joining The Conversation. On the popular academic news site The Conversation, Professor Rebekah Willett co-authored a widely read analysis of the global "6-7" trend, offering insight into how children use digital culture to build power and community. Professor Emilee Rader published a timely piece on how mobile phone location data is collected and sold, explaining why "once you give an app permission to collect location data, you no longer have control over how the data is used and shared."

Future librarians meeting legislators. Earlier this semester, MA Library & Information Studies students joined the Wisconsin Library Association at the State Capitol, hearing from Governor Tony Evers and State Superintendent Jill Underly before meeting with legislative staff to learn firsthand about library advocacy and relationship-building.

Representing at the WLA Conference. The iSchool was strongly represented at this year's Wisconsin Library Association conference, with keynotes from alumna Rachel Williams and Teaching Faculty Cassy Leepore.

Celebrating usability. Students, faculty, staff, and industry partners gathered for a full day of human-centered design exploration at first-ever World Usability Day Celebration at

Morgridge Hall. "When we put humans at the center of our design and development processes, we can create solutions that genuinely meet needs," said UX Professor of Practice Leah Ujda MA'07, who organized the event.



iSchool students, faculty, and staff gathered at the WLA's annual conference.

Talking AI at CultureCon. Professor and Director Greg Downey will explore "Histories and Futures of AI in the Workplace" at CultureCon's AI Summit 2026, tracing the deep roots of automation and highlighting the hidden human labor embedded in today's AI systems.

Upcoming opportunities for lifelong learning

The iSchool's Continuing Education team is proud to offer a variety of opportunities for library and information professionals looking to expand their knowledge and skills. Below are some upcoming conferences and online courses that we hope our alumni and friends will consider attending.

CONFERENCES

Back in Circulation: A Conference for Managers and Staff in Access and Circulation Services

- Oct. 5-6, 2026 | Madison, WI | The Pyle Center

Join circulation and access services professionals from across the country at Back in Circulation, the iSchool's long-running conference returning to Madison this fall. This year, the keynote speaker is Bobbi Newman, founder of ThriveLib, a virtual conference dedicated to advancing the well-being of library staff and fostering honest conversations about work, care, and sustainability.

Upgrade: Enhancing Library Services with Technology

- November 12-13, 2026 | Virtual

Upgrade brings library professionals together to explore how emerging technologies—from AI to cybersecurity—can strengthen services, expand digital access, and support evolving community needs.

ONLINE COURSES

The Next Chapter: Programs And Services For Older Adults

- May 25 – June 21

Basics of Cataloging

- June 1 – July 26

Library Space Design for Flexibility and Functionality

- June 8 – July 19

Basics of Archives

- June 22 – August 16

Graphic Design for Librarians

- July 6 – August 2

Get Involved

Whether you're looking to enhance your expertise, engage with peers, or contribute to discussions shaping the future of library services, the UW-Madison iSchool provides opportunities for professional growth. We invite our alumni to register for conferences and courses that interest them. Register for conferences and courses at ischool.wisc.edu/continuing-education or get in touch by emailing ce-info@ischool.wisc.edu.

An uncommon space at the heart of campus

Students across the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences power the Rebecca M. Blank Student Commons, a hub of learning and collaboration in Morgridge Hall.

"Walk in and look up," says Gabrielle Czeremuga x'27, a Computer Sciences (CS) and Information Science double major. That's where you'll find her, on shift as an information circulation student assistant in the Rebecca M. Blank Student Commons, a thriving student hub anchoring the second floor of Morgridge Hall.

From the desk, Czeremuga said, "I see math on the whiteboards, chemistry, biology, diagrams of buildings" – signs of students from all over campus converging and connecting.

After just one semester, the Commons, also affectionately known as "The Blank Space," has emerged as a wildly popular study spot and an epicenter of student collaboration, within and beyond the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS).

"There's a space for student org leaders, there's a space for undergraduates, there's a master's student lounge, there are study rooms," Czeremuga added. "Students have been at the center of this place since the beginning."

Student-focused, student-powered

The Commons was designed to spark interdisciplinary collaboration and empower students to succeed at UW–Madison. Commons Director Rebecca Millerjohn



The Rebecca M. Blank Student Commons, also known as The Blank Space, is located on the second floor of Morgridge Hall and includes an information and reference desk, library staff and services, and ample collaboration space for students. Photo: Bruce Damonte.

MA'16 and librarians Patrick Leeport and Savannah Carr oversee the space, which features a full-service information and reference desk and a browsable library collection of relevant print and digital reference materials.

Adjacent to the library, the student organization lounge offers lockers and event space for more than 40 CDIS student clubs, and the undergraduate and master's student lounges provide ample room to eat lunch, unwind, or lock in and study with views overlooking the lively thoroughfares of central campus.

More than 25 students currently work at the Commons, powering day-to-day operations and assisting students, staff, and visitors with a wide range of questions. A few of them – students in the Information School's MA Library & Information Studies program – work as reference managers: student librarians-in-training providing resources and professional information-seeking assistance. During open hours, there is always at least one reference manager on duty at the Commons.

The rest of the student staff, mostly undergraduates across CDIS programs, serve as information circulation assistants, often answering questions like "how do I print?" and "where is my classroom?" and "where is my advisor's office from here?" (Answer: adjacent to the Commons, also on the second floor.)

In Morgridge Hall's first semester, answering this litany of questions naturally involved "a lot of figuring things out on the spot, responding to questions we may not yet know the answers to ourselves," said Zahabiyah Boty x'27, a CS major who works as an information circulation assistant in the Commons. During fall's Count Week, when all university libraries tally up the number of questions they are asked, Commons staff answered 713 questions. That was the second-most on campus, behind only Memorial Library.

A highlight of the opening semester for many students was November's Long Night Against Procrastination, hosted in the Commons and throughout the building. More than 500 people attended the event, which invited students to come together and not only accomplish their academic goals, but also watch movies, pet service dogs, eat snacks and enjoy each other's company. The night culminated in a group scream, with students gathering in Morgridge Hall's outdoor courtyard and unleashing a collective, cathartic scream to purge any remaining stress from their systems.

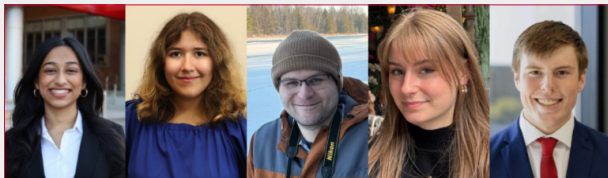
"Everyone was talking to each other," Czeremuga said of the event. "It reminded me that not only is the Commons a place for people to collaborate on homework, but to just have a social night together as well," Czeremuga said.

Viktoria Sakman x'26, a Commons information circulation assistant majoring in CS and Data Science, agreed, adding, "I like that the Commons gives a chance for CDIS students to really have an open area to interact," she said. "In the old buildings, like the previous CS building, there weren't as many areas like that," she noted.

In addition, though, "There's a common theme of motivation I see," said Garrett Lenzendorf x'27, another Commons staff member studying Information Systems with a Data Science Certificate.

Preparing future library leaders

That energy extends to future librarians studying in the Information School (iSchool) and working as reference managers in the Commons. With the move from Helen C. White Hall to Morgridge Hall, the iSchool's long tradition of training generations of library leaders has entered an exciting new chapter. And for Library & Information Studies students like Todd Rose MAx'26, the Commons offers an ideal training ground for future careers across the library and information professions – a bridge between theory and practice.



L to R: Commons student staff members Zahabiyah Boty, Viktoria Sakman, Todd Rose, Gabrielle Czeremuga, and Garrett Lenzendorf.

Rose, who hopes to work in public libraries after graduation, is also completing a practicum at Middleton Public Library this spring. He said working in the Commons has given him a chance to serve "a little bit of everybody," just as he would in a public library. After all, it's not just students making use of the Commons; CDIS faculty and staff, and members of the wider campus community, are frequent visitors as well.



Exuding lots of relaxed energy, therapy dog Louie from Dogs on Call soaks up pets from numerous students during the Long Night Against Procrastination event. Photo by Jeff Miller / UW-Madison.

"Some people are coming in looking for a particular book, some have questions about room reservations, and some are just coming to ask about the building because it's so new," Rose said. Either way, it gives him a chance to "help somebody get going in the right direction, which is always rewarding." At the desk, Rose and his colleagues are champions of information access, a guiding and fundamental principle for librarians worldwide.

Ask the student staff to give you their pitches for the Commons, and the answers revolve around versatility and community.

"There's so much you can explore within the Commons," said Boty. "It's a great place to study, but also to meet other people ... There's so much great variety, the views from Morgridge Hall are fantastic, and the café downstairs is nice, too."

For Lenzendorf, the Commons "really has everything. If you want a study room, a quiet space, or to look out onto the landscapes of Madison from the terraces on the 7th floor – it has anything you'd want in a place to study or meet up with others."

That's because the space is "designed for everyone, not just CDIS majors," Czeremuga emphasized.

Together, their answers point to the same truth: the Commons has quickly become a hub at the heart of campus, offering every student a place to learn, grow, and belong.

Welcoming the first CDIS Student Ambassadors

Our new student ambassador program welcomes prospective students at Visit Bucky events by offering tours of Morgridge Hall and a glimpse into student life at UW–Madison.

The School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS) is home to the top-ranked departments of Computer Sciences, Statistics, and the Information School, offering the university's two largest majors: Computer Sciences and Data Science. With over 6,300 students enrolled, our student ambassadors serve as guides for prospective students, families, and visitors. At Visit Bucky events, they share insights about day-to-day life in CDIS, give tours of our state-of-the-art home, Morgridge Hall, explain how the school's programs connect across majors, and offer insight into finding community.



Camber Walvoort, Taylor Wilmot, and Lia Fitzpatrick participate in a panel at a Visit Bucky event, answering questions and sharing their experiences with a prospective family. Photo: Rachel Robey.

Finding community

Lia Fitzpatrick, from Boston, enjoys a learning environment where taking educational risks feels possible with the support of her peers and professors. With coursework spanning computer sciences, data science, geospatial data science, and environmental studies, she finds this support invaluable: "The friends I've made, and my professors have created a supportive learning environment where I feel confident to take risks and learn new things."

Carol Oh, an information science and political science major from Portage, WI, had a similar experience. Faculty, advisors, and librarians were easy to

approach, she said, and that made a large campus feel much smaller. For Taylor Wilmot, from Kenosha, WI, who studies computer sciences, data science, and information science, that sense of connection shapes day-to-day life: "It's inspiring to be surrounded by peers and faculty who are passionate about technology, genuinely kind, and eager to collaborate."

From interdisciplinary learning to entrepreneurship

Almost half of our students pursue a second or even third major, and that interdisciplinary spirit goes hand in hand with an entrepreneurial culture, reflected by our student ambassadors. Zhenya Ratushko, a data science and environmental studies major from Rochester, MN, balances her coursework with work as a data analyst intern. For Rahaditya (Adit) Raisuli, from Malaysia, a data science major with certificates across computer science, mathematics, and education, some of the most meaningful learning happens through collaborative events like MadHacks.

The mix of academics and entrepreneurship also resonates with Hriday Thakkar, from the United Arab Emirates, who studies computer science, mathematics, and actuarial science. Through advisory boards and student leadership roles, he works directly with faculty and campus leaders.

Camber Walvoort from Oostburg, WI, studies information science and consumer behavior and marketplace studies, blending interests in data, people, and business. She is active on campus, with leadership roles at Rotaract-UW, the Wisconsin Union, and SOAR. "My favorite part of being a CDIS student is taking classes in Morgridge Hall ... and the wonderful professors who care so much for their students."



C-M Daeley, undergraduate academic advisor, right, and Plia Xiong, academic advising manager, welcomes prospective families to the Visit Bucky tour. Photo: Rachel Robey.

Catching up with alumni shaping the future of library and information education

Meet four alumni putting the Information School's commitment to public service and community impact into practice.

Nationwide, Information School (iSchool) alumni are shaping the future of education in librarianship and information science through values instilled in them at UW–Madison. While their work environments vary widely, from technology-focused institutions to top-tier law schools and public research universities, each has followed a career path rooted in a commitment to service and impact that the iSchool is well-known for fostering in its graduates.

Whether working in STEM data librarianship in California or law librarianship at Penn, whether offering legal guidance for Montana libraries or conducting research in Rhode Island, our alumni are shaping the future of information education across the country. Their stories offer a glimpse into the ways iSchool alumni are advancing their fields, strengthening the communities they serve, and carrying the Wisconsin Idea forward.

Championing open science and data access

As the Biology & Biological Engineering Librarian at California Institute of Technology (Caltech) in



Kristin Briney, Biology & Biological Engineering Librarian at Caltech

Pasadena, CA, Kristin Briney MA'13 works at the heart of scientific discovery, helping researchers manage data, teach effectively, and make their work accessible to the public. With a PhD in Chemistry from UW–Madison, Briney brings

a deeper scientific knowledge to her work than most librarians. Her current role “balances my interest in data work, my background as a scientist, and my love of helping and teaching young scientists,” she explained.

“It’s very important for scientific research to be accessible to everyone,” she added, a principle she learned at the iSchool that guides her instruction and her writing, including three books on data management and privacy. Her most recent book, *The Data Management Workbook*, provides structured yet flexible exercises to empower researchers across disciplines to tailor data-management plans to the needs of their research workflows. The fundamental principles of data access and management that Briney passionately defends remain staples of the iSchool’s MA program curriculum.

Briney also credits her experience in the iSchool’s practicum program with giving her the instructional grounding in STEM courses she still draws on today. “I now develop and teach many different types of classes, so having the skills to jump into new instructional areas has been really valuable,” she said. In addition, she has continued to keep in touch with iSchool faculty including former advisor Dorothea Salo, with whom she collaborated on a line of research called *Data Doubles*, focused on student perspectives of privacy issues around library participation in learning analytics initiatives.

Along with Briney’s work at the heart of scientific research, other alumni are applying their iSchool training to very different corners of the information world, including the changing landscape of legal education.

Helping a law library navigate a time of upheaval

At the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, Andrew Lang MA'15 leads a team of research and instruction librarians, teaches across multiple degree



Andrew Lang, Head of Reference and Student Services, Biddle Law Library at University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School

programs, and supports law school faculty scholarship. His path in law librarianship took him from Georgetown Law to Penn and placed him in the middle of a period of rapid staff turnover and the disruptions of 2020 – an experience that demanded steady leadership.

When the dust of the pandemic had settled, “We actually grew our staff, expanded our instructional offerings, and emerged in a stronger position than before,” Lang said. He traces his confidence as an instructor to his time as a TA for Professors Greg Downey and Rebekah Willett. Mentorship from faculty focused on legal issues, such as Professors Alan Rubel and Anuj Desai, continues to shape his understanding of how information, technology, and the law intersect. “The stimulating academic environment and the iSchool’s administrative support both played a huge role in preparing me for my subsequent work in academic law libraries,” he reflected.

Lang’s service extends beyond Penn’s campus: he also co-organized the award-winning “Project 20/20” virtual programming series to support the professional development of law librarians during the pandemic. Over nine months, “We hosted three virtual events every month: a lecture-style program, a professional development workshop, and a social networking event,” he explained. “Organizing and coordinating these events was a heavy lift, but the initiative proved popular and we received a 2022 Award for Excellence in Community Engagement from the American Association of Law Libraries. It was a great excuse to connect and

collaborate with colleagues across the profession during an extremely isolating period.”

Lang offered some practical advice to current iSchool students, speaking from his own experience: “Early in your career, it’s a good idea to think strategically about your long-term goals and the kinds of skills and experiences you will need to achieve them,” he advised, “even if you don’t know exactly where you want to end up. This is a useful exercise because it makes it easier to recognize important opportunities when they appear.”

While Lang’s path shows how iSchool mentorship and instructional grounding translate into law library leadership, other graduates are carrying those same values into community-oriented roles serving patrons across a range of information centers.

Strengthening Montana’s information ecosystem

Like Lang, Kris Goss MA'23 blends libraries and the law to support students, libraries, and communities. As Director of the Library Learning Hub at Helena College in Helena, MT, Goss and his team “strive to remove obstacles or barriers that prevent students and faculty from completing their work,” in programs that range from nursing to welding to aviation maintenance.



Kris Goss, Director of the Library Learning Hub, Helena College

As an attorney, Goss also provides legal guidance to libraries through a library-focused law practice and the Montana Library Assistance Helpline, a role that provides representation to libraries, answers to operational questions, and “allows for development and

delivery of library law training sessions at conferences and virtual events around Montana,” Goss added. “Our hope is that these services help Montana’s library leaders operate with confidence of compliance with evolving patron needs, best practices, laws, regulations, and court

decisions.” Additionally, Goss was appointed in 2025 to the Montana State Library Commission, which he said, “presents a unique chance to further empower Montana’s libraries as they serve and support patrons and communities.”

Goss’s work, whether advising library leaders or helping students navigate their first research assignments, reflects a belief that libraries should meet people where they are to best help them make progress. In serving the citizens of Montana, Goss explained, “I try to bring the Wisconsin Idea to my work each day. If we are not using our training, experiences, and skills to serve or improve our communities, then what was the reason we chose this profession and this university? We have to find ways to be of service.”

As a remote student in the MA program, Goss recalled, “I had to try new ways to collaborate ... Each of those methods was a valuable learning experience. Thankfully, fellow students and the faculty were supportive and kind leaders who demonstrated and practiced the best way to be helpful.” He added, “Beyond the nurturing atmosphere of the iSchool, the content of each course taught me important lessons in librarianship and leadership that I rely on each day. Specifically, objectivity and empathy are themes from my time in the iSchool that remain critical to my work today.”

The same commitment to equity and access behind Goss’s work in Big Sky Country also shapes the careers of alumni advancing research and teaching in library and information science programs on the east coast.

Investigating how libraries support children’s learning

After completing her PhD at the iSchool under the guidance of her faculty adviser Professor Rebekah Willett, Jacqueline Kociubuk PhD’25 landed a role as assistant professor at the University of Rhode Island (URI) Graduate School of Library and Information Studies. She studies how public libraries function as informal learning spaces for children and families, with a focus on equity of access. Kociubuk brings her sharp research focus into the classroom as coordinator of the

Information Equity, Diverse Communities, & Critical Librarianship track for URI graduate students.

Kociubuk credits the iSchool’s faculty, including Willett and others, with shaping her as a researcher. “Because the faculty at the iSchool have expertise in such a wide array of research areas, methods, and theories, I feel that I was able to develop myself as an interdisciplinary scholar,” she said.

Kociubuk is now serving as a co-investigator on a National Science Foundation-funded project exploring how “tinker-telling play” – an educational approach combining



Jacqueline Kociubuk, Assistant Professor, University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Library and Information Studies

hands-on exploration with storytelling – can help libraries and museums deepen computational thinking experiences for young children. The work underscores how libraries can spark curiosity and expand opportunities for kids and families. “I find it deeply rewarding to continue to pursue research that can help better the world around us” Kociubuk said.

As for her guidance for current students, she advised, “Seek out advice and mentorship from scholars that you admire and respect throughout your field of study. There is a wealth of knowledge out there to learn from, and many people are eager to support students and early-career professionals by sharing their insights!” Finally, she added, “Continue to ask questions and stay curious about the world around you. Research is hard work, so it’s helpful if you can find it rewarding or pursue areas you’re passionate about.”

Christian Willis MS'25 secures the systems behind everyday life

iSchool alumnus Christian Willis shares how human-centered cybersecurity led him to Walmart Global Tech – and why Arkansas BBQ is worth the hype (but he'll always be a Badger).

When millions of people purchase from a Walmart or Sam's Club each day, whether scanning items at self-checkout, paying at the register, or shopping online, few pause to consider the vast security systems behind the scenes keeping their information safe. Cybersecurity experts work to ensure that the systems customers rely on are not only fast and efficient, but secure. Among them is Christian Willis, MS'25, a self-described "proud iSchool alumnus," whose career in cybersecurity now spans a global stage.



Willis stood in front of Walmart's iconic Spark at Walmart Global Tech's Orientation Week, July 2025.

From the iSchool to Walmart Global Tech

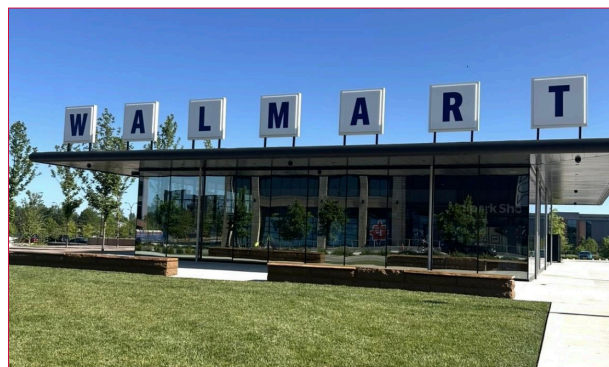
After graduating from the Information School (iSchool) with a Master of Science in Information, Willis joined Walmart Global Tech in Bentonville, Arkansas, as a Risk Expert in the Information Security Division. His role is to identify weaknesses in complex systems, assess risk, and drive fixes before security vulnerabilities can be exploited by bad actors.

It's work that requires both technical depth and the ability to see the broader, human-centered picture. In his day-to-day, Willis leverages AI-powered and enterprise-wide security tools, analyzes data, and translates technical findings into insights that help software engineers and other security teams understand impacts on users and business operations.

The scale of those impacts is enormous. As well as their online presence, Walmart and Sam's Club together operate in 19 countries, with a staggering 270 million customers and members visiting almost 11,000 stores each week. In the high-traffic retail technology industry, cybersecurity directly affects people's trust and safety. "It is our responsibility to protect consumer privacy and uphold Walmart's mission to serve customers," Willis explained.

A human-centered approach to cybersecurity

Willis credits much of the preparation for his role to the iSchool's human-centered approach to cybersecurity. Rather than focusing solely on the technical aspects, the program emphasized the importance of understanding human factors in cybersecurity, through coursework on human-centered information security, information



Opened in early 2025, Walmart's state-of-the-art "Home Office" campus spans over 400 acres. The Welcome Center, open to the public, is modeled after Sam Walton's first store.

risk management, cyberpsychology, and data privacy: “The interdisciplinary focus of cybersecurity and human factors gave me the skills to have a more future-focused way of thinking about security to better safeguard information. The iSchool prepared me to understand not just how systems work, but how people interact with them, and how security decisions affect communities.”



Sam Walton Hall at Walmart’s Home Office features a two-story auditorium, learning and collaboration spaces, and art installations and historical artifacts, including Sam Walton’s first aircraft, a 1946 ERCO Coupe.

As a graduate student, Willis took on leadership roles in student organizations, including as co-president of TEDxUWMadison, VP of Design Interactive, lead organizer for the iSchool Cybersecurity Club, and iSchool MS orientation leader. With the iSchool’s support, Willis had also secured an information security internship at Kohl’s Headquarters in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.



The Walmart Museum and, to the right, Sam Walton’s first store. Willis notes, “Bentonville is beautiful, and it’s a super-friendly community. If you are ever Downtown, everyone likes to get ice-cream at the Spark Café beside the Walmart Museum.”

This drive paid off: Willis secured his full-time position at Walmart Global Tech immediately after graduation, launching his career at a Fortune #1 company.

But just as important was the sense of belonging and support Willis found along the way. “The University of Wisconsin–Madison gave me everything,” he reflected. “I couldn’t be more grateful to call the Badgers my family and alma mater.”

Opening doors for future talent

Willis is committed to supporting the next generation of information professionals. As a Walmart Campus Ambassador, he works closely with the early talent team to help recruit students for both internship and full-time opportunities and continues to have a close relationship with the iSchool by serving on the Alumni Board.

For Willis, it’s not all work, though: “Arkansas is known for its BBQ, and Wright’s Barbecue is one of my favorite spots. Arkansas is also heavy in Razorback culture, so it’s great to attend football and basketball games on weekends,” he says. “But fortunately, I will always be a Badger.”

Two iSchool alumni inducted into Wisconsin Library Hall of Fame



Marge Loch-Wouters and Michael Gelhausen

Two out of the three inductees into the Wisconsin Library Hall of Fame in 2025 are Information School alumni: Marge Loch-Wouters MA'76 and Michael Gelhausen

MA'76. The Wisconsin Library Hall of Fame inducts individuals who have made exceptional contributions to the improvement of library services across Wisconsin.

Marge Loch-Wouters was chosen "in recognition of her nearly 50 years of leadership, innovation, and unwavering dedication to youth services and librarianship in Wisconsin and beyond."

Michael Gelhausen "built a legacy of strengthening libraries from the ground up—literally and figuratively—through visionary facility projects, technological innovation, legislative advocacy, and organizational leadership," according to WLA.

The induction of Marge Loch-Wouters and Michael Gelhausen into the Wisconsin Library Hall of Fame underscores the Information School's commitment to, and long history of, training library and information leaders who make an impact across the state and far beyond.



Cars pass by Morgridge Hall, home to the School of Computer, Data & Information Sciences (CDIS), at dusk on a winter night at the University of Wisconsin–Madison on Jan. 30, 2026. (Photo by Taylor Wolfram / UW–Madison)

Alumni updates

Kathleen McCook PhD'80 was honored with a series of essays about her research and advocacy, in the Public Library Quarterly ("In Service of Equity"), for which **Sarah Pritchard MA'77** wrote the foreword. Both Pritchard and McCook participated in a webinar in February 2026 with all contributing authors, sponsored by ALA's Library History Round Table.

Robin Rice MA'91 has co-authored a paper in the International Journal of Digital Curation, "A Country-level Case Study: On the Evolution of UK Institutional Research Data Services." Rice serves as Data Librarian & Head of Research Data Support at University of Edinburgh.

Mike Thomas MA'91 has retired after 34 years as an Adult Services Librarian, 28 with the Neenah Public Library.

Kris Stacy-Bates MA'97 has been promoted to Professor at Iowa State University, where she serves as a Research Services Librarian in the ISU Library.

Stacy Schultz MA'02 is now a Reading Specialist in the School District of Janesville.

Rebekah Irwin MA'03 was appointed Dean of the Library at Middlebury College in Vermont, after serving in the role of Director and Curator, Special Collections and Archives since 2011.

Deborah Copperud MA'07 launched Read Minnesota Books (readminnesotabooks.com), a podcast and newsletter that features author interviews, publishing news, and book recommendations from the North Star State.

Jillian Aschliman MA'12 was elected as Vice President of the Iowa Library Association. She will assume the role of President in 2027.

Kendra Bouda MA'13 joined the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) Nomenclature Committee for a two-year term beginning October 1, 2025. The committee reviews proposed terminology and integrates new terms into Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging—a "structured and controlled list of object terms organized in a classification system to provide a basis for indexing and cataloging collections of human-made objects."

Joe Orman MA'22 was elected as Chair of the Alliance for Academic Internal Medicine (AAIM) Clerkship Directors in Internal Medicine (CDIM) Clerkship Administrator's (CA) Advisory Council. The CDIM CA Advisory Council Chair acts as a non-voting member of the AAIM Governance Board and liaises between Clerkship Administrators and AAIM at large, providing guidance on academic medicine in Internal Medicine nationally.

Austin Lin MS'23 was hired as a Product Designer at ActionTec Electronics.

Alia Jones MA'25 was elected to the Board of Directors for the Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC) in April 2025 and started service in Summer 2025. She will serve on this board until Summer 2028.

Vijayram Patel MS'25 was hired as a Software Engineer at Amazon.

Victoria Stewart MA'25 is now the head university archivist at University of Wisconsin-Stout.



Fall *Jottings* will be digital

The fall issues of *Jottings* are digital and delivered to your inbox. Make sure your email is up to date so you don't miss the next issue! Visit uwalumni.com/update-info to update your email address.



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

Information School
Morgridge Hall
1205 University Ave
Madison, WI 53706

Nonprofit
Organization
U.S. Postage

PAID
UMS



Please consider giving back to the Information School. Your support will provide needed scholarships, enhance the student experience, and enable cutting-edge research.

Learn more at: Supportuw.org/giveto/ischool

