This year's list of Nobel Prize winners includes a UWM connection.

Alexander “Leggy” Arnold, an associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry at UWM, did his master’s and doctoral research under Bernard “Ben” Feringa, who shared the Nobel Prize in chemistry with Jean-Pierre Sauvage and Fraser Stoddart. The scientists were honored for their work in developing the first nanomotors, molecule-size devices capable of human-controlled movement.

From 1996 to 2002, Arnold worked under Feringa at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He received his master’s degree in 1998 and his doctorate in 2002. He discussed his time with Feringa, as well as his current work at UWM and the Milwaukee Institute of Drug Discovery.

How did you initially connect with Dr. Feringa?

I first went to the Rheinisch-Westfälische Technische Hochschule Aachen [in Germany], and I started studying chemistry. During that time, I got interested in studying abroad, more specifically in the Netherlands, where I met Ben Feringa.

It was an eye-opening moment for me. For the first time I could actually approach a professor directly without an appointment, which was not the case in Germany at that time. Feringa is a professor who can motivate and inspire students in his research.

During that time, I was very fortunate to develop a molecular catalyst that enabled full stereocontrol for a particular conjugated addition reaction for the first time. It was a great moment. When I realized it, I went to Feringa’s office, and he got really excited about this discovery. Everyone is his group is really energetic, which was very much because of Ben Feringa.

What was your reaction when you learned he had won the Nobel Prize?

Continued on page 13
Seeking solutions to the hard problems

By Greg Walz-Chojnacki, University Relations

When Scott Graham talks about a “wicked problem,” he isn’t expressing exasperation. It’s merely a recognition that the solution requires collaboration between professionals who don’t ordinarily work together on the same problem.

In a recent paper, Graham and his colleagues describe their use of “systems ethnography and qualitative modeling” (SEQM) to approach the problem of people suffering from both cancer and obesity. The causes and treatments of each condition are difficult enough, but when they are combined, the problem becomes exponentially harder – or, wicked.

To tackle it, Graham, who specializes in technical communications, turned to SEQM, which was developed to tackle urgent and complex problems in national security work.

“It was invented for work on nuclear weapons, military defense-type projects,” Graham said. “If there’s a new kind of threat, you have to bring all sorts of people together to work on that. While most of what they do is classified, from what we can tell it seems to be working for them.”

So Graham brought it to bear on treatment and prevention efforts for those who have a high risk of developing obesity and cancer.

“In Milwaukee there’s this huge problem of cancer and obesity overlapping and intersecting, and it’s especially bad for impoverished communities,” he said. “It requires so many people to work on this together from so many areas of the community, so I wanted to see what I could do to bring people together on this problem.”

It’s a classic case of a “wicked problem,” and one perfectly suited as a test of SEQM in the healthcare arena.

Continued on page 13
Reproductive health is primary: Grad advocates for women's health

By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science

Emily Kane-Lee found the perfect marriage of her Communications and Women’s Studies double majors: she communicates about women.

Specifically, she talks about their reproductive health.

Kane-Lee is the Director of Education and Communications for the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals in Washington, D.C. She is responsible for not only sharing the message of the ARHP through newsletters, social media, and other avenues, but also creating materials that educate health care professionals about women’s sexual and reproductive health.

Her goal, and the goal of the ARHP, is to educate health care professionals about women’s sexual and reproductive health to the point where it’s included in primary care.

“You’re a whole person. When you go in because you have the flu, you’re not just a uterus going in to get some antibiotics,” Kane-Lee said. “We’re looking at how primary care is practiced in this country, and we’re trying to integrate sexual and reproductive health into that primary care. It shouldn’t be so marginalized and segregated in our health care system.”

This job is only the latest role in which Kane-Lee has been an advocate for women. During her time at UWM, she helped to found Vox, or Voices for Planned Parenthood, on campus. She graduated in 2003 and joined the Peace Corps for a stint in Kenya where she taught HIV prevention in a rural high school and helped young women navigate life growing up in a male-dominated society where girls and women are often marginalized and oppressed because of their gender.

After her stint, Kane-Lee returned to the U.S. and settled in D.C. She earned a Master’s degree in communications from Johns Hopkins University and held a series of posts advocating for women and LGBT community members before finding herself at ARHP. She also sits on the board of the Reproductive Health Access Project, which is aimed at integrating sexual and reproductive health into primary care.

“My work has straddled two different departments: education and communications. I love wearing those two hats, because they’re different day-to-day, but they intersect in really interesting ways,” Kane-Lee said. “My current job is running professional continuing education for physicians, residents, nurses, and pharmacists and making sure they know how to take care of their patients. Then the communications arm is getting the word out about what they’re doing.”

That can be a challenge simply because they’re doing so much. Members of ARHP are encouraging health care providers to think about everything with one eye toward reproductive health. If a woman is seeking treatment for a migraine, for example, her doctor should know how her headaches may be tied to her menstrual cycle. A woman with epilepsy should be counseled about her birth control options, since anti-seizure medication can interfere with some forms of contraception and may have a negative impact on fetuses during pregnancy.

Continued on page 12
Caffeine fix may come with memory boost
By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science

Psychology professor Ira Driscoll’s latest research is good news for coffee-lovers.

Driscoll is the lead author on a new study recently published in *The Journals of Gerontology, Series A: Biological Sciences and Medical Sciences* which suggests that caffeine consumption is associated with reduced risk of developing dementia or cognitive impairment in older women.

“We chose to study this subject based on a number of reports suggesting that caffeine intake is correlated with better health outcomes, and given that caffeine is also an easily modifiable dietary factor,” Driscoll said.

The study drew from participants in the Women’s Health Initiative Memory Study who self-reported their caffeine intake. Participants were followed for 10 years. Over time, women who consumed about 261 mg of caffeine per day, or two to three 8 oz. cups of coffee, reported a 36 percent lower rate of cognitive impairment and dementia than those who consumed less than the median, an average of 64 mg per day.

Even after adjusting for other factors, including age, race, weight, alcohol intake, and more, the pattern held steady. However, this study cannot be used to determine cause-and-effect.

“We know that caffeine binds to pre-existing adenosine receptors in the brain, so the findings point to a potential mechanism worth further exploring to determine a causative effect,” Driscoll said. “That will in turn stimulate the necessary translational investigations of adenosine and drug development targeting adenosine receptors as novel strategies to modulate cognitive impairment.”

Driscoll’s work has garnered much attention, from local to national and international news outlets. Reports of her work have appeared in the *Washington Post*, *Fortune*, and in news outlets in Ireland and Great Britain.

Science Bag is off to a "rocky" start!

Transport yourself far back in time with UWM Geosciences professor Dyanna Czeck as we learn about the geologic events that formed Wisconsin. We will explore our diverse geologic history including volcanoes, tall mountain ranges, warm tropical seas, and a glacier covered landscape. Sit back as we time travel through billions of years!

Science Bag is free and family-friendly. Shows are every Friday in November at 8 p.m. in the UWM Physics Building, 1900 E. Kenwood Blvd., in room 137. There is also a Sunday matinee on Nov. 13 at 2 p.m. For more information, visit [uwm.edu/science-bag](http://uwm.edu/science-bag).
Christiane Taubira returns to UWM, this time to teach

By Greg Walz-Chojnacki, University Relations

Just eight months after accepting an honorary doctorate in laws and human rights, Christiane Taubira is deepening her connections to UW-Milwaukee.

Taubira, a former French minister of justice who is known for her passionate advocacy for human rights, has accepted a five-year appointment as UWM honorary professor in the Department of French, Italian, and Comparative Literature and is affiliated as a research fellow with the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies and the Master of Sustainable Peacebuilding program.

Taubira resigned as minister of justice in January, just days before accepting UWM’s honorary degree. She was acting in protest of legislation that would strip French citizenship rights from convicted terrorists with dual nationality.

In January, Provost Johannes Britz praised Taubira for keeping “her ethical compass focused on the values of liberty and quality for all.”

“Her political engagement embodies an outstanding commitment and dedication to principles the UWM community holds very dear: the struggle for human rights, human dignity and equality for all,” Britz said.

Sarah Davies Cordova, a UWM professor of French who first met Taubira in Cayenne, Guiana, in 2007, said Taubira is “an incredible role model for UWM students and faculty.”

“Her values are very much those we aspire to at the university in terms of opening up the university to everybody,” Cordova said. “We’re very much concerned with educational opportunities for all, no matter what one’s origins or life choices might be. Her convictions about freedom of choice, equal access and equal rights mesh perfectly with the university’s mission.”

Taubira is already making an impact on UWM and Milwaukee. She delivered the 2016 Kennan Distinguished Lecture, “Citizenship and Identity in the 21st Century,” in early October.

Nicole Palasz of the Institute of World Affairs, which sponsors the Kennan lecture, said Taubira’s talk on refugees, immigrants and citizenship will bring a global perspective to local issues, which is the mission of the lecture series. Palasz pointed to Taubira’s landmark advocacy in the areas of slavery and human trafficking, marriage equality and juvenile justice.

“These issues tie into our own community’s concerns,” Palasz said.

Cordova said Taubira’s work will enrich UWM.

“As public intellectual, brilliant orator and essayist, as well as a fine listener of American blues and jazz, madame Taubira has dedicated her life’s work to addressing the injustices that continue to plague our humanity and she asks the youth of today to become well informed, thoughtful citizens,” Cordova said. “As a university community, we look forward to identifying students whose projects would benefit from her international humanistic perspective and to arranging more opportunities for engagement with faculty and the Milwaukee communities.”
Health advocate E.R. Krumbiegel’s place in Milwaukee’s history may be obscured by time, but it’s made clearer in the Encyclopedia of Milwaukee, a project spearheaded by UWM historians Amanda Seligman and Margo Anderson. There, Krumbiegel shares pages with better-known figures such as home run king Hank Aaron, poet Carl Sandburg and aviator Billy Mitchell, the city airport’s namesake.

Begun in 2008, the online encyclopedia – emke.uwm.edu – launched in the summer of 2016 with some 50 articles, a total that’s been increased on a weekly basis. That number will continue to expand, and a print edition is also being considered.

“One of the most gratifying things we have learned from working on this project is how devoted Milwaukeans are to their history,” Seligman says. “It is exciting to share the region’s past with such an appreciative audience.”

As it grows, the online encyclopedia will feature hundreds of photos and illustrations, hyperlinks and suggestions for further reading. Readers can also comment and share recollections about the articles and their subjects. Like other encyclopedias, it’s not a narrative history to be read from start to finish, but a compendium of information meant to be browsed by the curious or consulted by researchers.

So you may not get Krumbiegel’s entire life story, but you’ll learn how the former city health commissioner helped revise the city’s building code after World War II. And that he “was committed both to eliminating ‘blight’ and ensuring access to safe, decent, and affordable housing, and whose housing code was an innovative model for other cities.”

Articles are written by local experts, freelance authors and student staff, and are subjected to rigorous editing and fact-checking by the encyclopedia’s editors and students. The encyclopedia also has a Facebook page – search for “Encyclopedia of Milwaukee” – and a Twitter feed at @MkeEncyclopedia. The project is supported by UWM, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Greater Milwaukee Foundation. Visit Encyclopedia Milwaukee at emke.uwm.edu.
Alumni Awardees

Dr. Michael McCrea (’91, ’94, MS and PhD Clinical Psychology) is the director of brain injury research at the Medical College of Wisconsin and the winner of this year’s UWM Alumni Association Lifetime Achievement Award. https://youtu.be/_aUU-YNgz90

Dennis Kois (’95, BA Museum and Exhibit Design, Honors College) is the director of the Milwaukee Public Museum and this year’s winner of the UWM Foundation Alumni Achievement Award. https://youtu.be/ipWy7wEnHFg

Alumni Accomplishments

Danielle Bergner (’01, BA Economics) was named managing partner for Milwaukee-based law firm Michael Best & Friedrich LLP. http://bit.ly/2daiYki

Kari Egerstrom Collins (’15, MS Urban Studies) was named the Community Development Director of Roseville, Minn. She had previously served as the interim director and is now in the position permanently. http://bit.ly/2dT2YED

Steve Bruss (’93, BA Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies) is taking over as the newsroom leader at the Independent Mail. Bruss will head a team of more than 20 journalists. He previously worked as the senior engagement/opinion editor at The Greenville News. http://bit.ly/2drS1MG

It’s tough work to revive a tradition that hasn’t been seen since UWM had a football team – but Wayne Youngquist (’61, BA Philosophy) is leading the charge planning UWM’s homecoming. http://bit.ly/2ea0yjG

Michael Lucesi (’15, BA Psychology) was named the head swimming and diving coach at Carroll University. http://bit.ly/2dWmaQA


Stephen Wisneski (’92, MS Urban Studies) was inducted into the Xavier High School Hall of Fame, an honor reserved for the high school’s alumni who have attained significant career accomplishments. Wisneski is the deputy managing editor of The Wall Street Journal. http://post.cr/2eAcwpE

Sabina Magyar (’91, BA Communication) has opened a restaurant in Wauwatosa. Magyar, the former beverage and cheese manager of Glorioso’s Italian Market, opened The Village Cheese Shop at 1430 N. Underwood Ave. http://bit.ly/2dPPnNq

Maryssa Schlough (’16, Global Studies) is among the new crop of Americorps volunteers who are working in Montezuma County, Colo., for the Montezuma School to Farm Project. Schlough is tasked with providing garden science and nutrition education to children in the program. http://bit.ly/2eoYQ1A

Alexander San Diego, Jr. (’06, BS Biological Sciences) recently joined the Merritt Island Foot and Ankle podiatry practice in Brevard County, Fla. http://bit.ly/2eyziF
Laurels, Accolades, and Grant Awards

Andy Pacheco (Chemistry) and Marius Schmidt (Physics) have received an $800,000 award from the National Science Foundation’s Division of Molecular and Biosciences. The title of the grant is “Structure-function relationships in metalloenzymes with multiple redox-active centers.”

Karyn Frick (Psychology), received a five-year $1.8 million R01 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for her research entitled, “Mechanisms underlying memory regulation by 17beta-estradiol, canonical Wnt signaling, and BDNF in male and female mice.”

She also received a grant from the Alzheimer’s Association’s Sex and Gender in Alzheimer’s research grant awards program to study the differences in how the disease affects men and women, considering women’s hormones often play a role in memory loss and two-thirds of Alzheimer’s patients are women.

http://bit.ly/2e1f3uC

Fred Helmstetter (Psychology), also received a new five-year $1.8 million R01 grant from the National Institute of Mental Health for his research entitled, “Systems and molecular mechanisms of retrieval-dependent memory destabilization.”

The Kenwood Interdisciplinary Research Complex, which houses faculty members from the departments of Physics, Chemistry, and others, garnered a LEED Gold certification and earned praise from Building Design and Construction.


Doctoral student Allain Daigle (English) won the Domitor Student Essay award, beating out students from Yale and the University of Rochester. He received $500 for his work, titled, “Not a Betting Man: Stanford Muybridge, and the Palo Alto Wager-Myth” and will also receive assistance in having his work published in a film history journal. The award is offered annually to stimulate young scholars’ interest in early cinema studies.

In a world inundated with advertising, it’s tough to make people stop and take notice, but Emily Adkins is already turning heads.

Adkins, a Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies and a Peck School of the Arts double major, won the top student award at the United Adworkers 99 show. She took home Best in Show for designing an advertising campaign for Penzeys Spices created while Adkins was at the Milwaukee Portfolio School, and a $500 scholarship.

Adkins had some stiff competition; she beat out students from UWM, Marquette University, and the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design.

Congratulations, Emily!
Upcoming Events

Oct. 26
UWM Planetarium Astro Break: Fall monsters in the sky. 12:15 p.m. Manfred Olson Planetarium. Jean Creighton, UWM. [http://uwm.edu/planetarium/shows/astробreak/]

Oct. 28
Graduate Research Symposium for Math, Engineering, and Natural Sciences. 10 a.m. Union. Graduate students present their work.


Geography colloquium: Dispossession by Administration. 2:30 p.m. AGS Library. Jodi Melamed, Marquette University. [http://bit.ly/2dPq51q]


Oct. 31
Ctr. for Celtic Studies Samhain Celebration. 6 p.m. Hefter Center. Celebration of the Celtic new year with stories, games, and music.

Nov. 2

Nov. 4

Anthropology Colloquium: Contested Space, Conceded Place: Negotiating Political and Historical Discord on China's Southern Sacred Mountain. 3:30 p.m. Sabin G90. Robert LaFleur, Beloit University. Co-sponsored by the Department of History.

Nov. 4 - Dec. 16
Planetarium Show: Northern Lights. 7 p.m. Manfred Olson Planetarium. Tickets are $3. Show runs Fridays at 7 p.m. Nov. 4-Dec. 16. [http://uwm.edu/planetarium/]

Nov. 4 - Dec. 16
Science Bag - Geologic Time Machine: Destination Wisconsin. 8 p.m. Physics 137. Free and open to the public. UWM geoscientist Dyanna Czeck presents the geologic events that formed Wisconsin. Show runs Fridays at 8 p.m. Nov. 4-25 and a show at 2 p.m. on Sunday, Nov. 13. [https://uwm.edu/science-bag](https://uwm.edu/science-bag)

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**People in print**


**Upcoming events**  
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**Nov. 10**

**Henry W. Maier State of Milwaukee Summit: A Frank Conversation about Race in Milwaukee.** 7 p.m. Zelazo 250. Moderated by Robert Smith, UWM. Panels include Anne Bonds, UWM; Willie Brisco, Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope; Ashanti Hamilton, Milwaukee alderman; Keisha Krumm, Common Ground; and Susan Lloyd, Zilber Family Foundation. Free and open to the public. Sponsored by the UWM Urban Studies program; Center for Economic Development; Cultures and Communities; and the Center for Community Based Learning, Leadership and Research. [http://bit.ly/2eHu8AL](http://bit.ly/2eHu8AL)

**Nov. 10**


**Ctr. for Celtic Studies: Tracing The Táin Closing Event.** 6:30 p.m. Irish Cultural and Heritage Center, 2133 W. Wisconsin Ave., Milwaukee. Modern art and reading of "The Death of Cu Chulainn" by William Butler Yeats.

**Nov. 13**

**Science Bag - Geologic Time Machine: Destination Wisconsin.** 2 p.m. Physics 137. Free and open to the public. UWM geoscientist Dyanna Czeck presents the geologic events that formed Wisconsin. [https://uwm.edu/science-bag](https://uwm.edu/science-bag)


**Mark Speltz's ('09, MA Public History) newest work began at UWM.**

Speltz's new book, North of Dixie: Civil Rights Photography Beyond the South (J. Paul Getty Museum) explores the Civil Rights movement through photojournalism, adding to our historical knowledge by shining a spotlight on cities outside of the south that nevertheless were places of demonstration and societal change.

The book started as a research project for one of Speltz’s classes at UWM.

In the Media and Around the Community

Thomas Holbrook (Political Science) has been busy this month as the presidential election draws nearer. Holbrook is one of the creators of an election-prediction model that indicates that Hillary Clinton will win the election, which was discussed in Utah’s Daily Herald (http://bit.ly/2e25kz7); was among a panel of experts discussing the immigrant vote on CCTV (http://bit.ly/2dle0SJ); and weighed in on the importance of the vice presidential debate for Slate (http://slate.me/2dQDayU).

Likewise, Kathy Dolan (Political Science) has been a sought-after expert this election season because of her expertise on women in politics. She said in the Washington Times that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump stood to gain very little by attacking Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton with former president Bill Clinton’s affairs (http://bit.ly/2eabttt) and said in post-debate analysis on Wisconsin Public Radio that Hillary Clinton was better-prepared for the first of the candidates’ debates (http://bit.ly/2cCb0xY).

Free speech is essential for innovation, especially within the university system, A. Aneesh (Sociology and Global Studies) asserted in a Milwaukee Journal Sentinel editorial. http://bit.ly/2d7YSd2

Student Emily Thome (English and Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies) spoke out against some of the culture that she experiences that make her, and other women, feel like prey for some men in an editorial for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. http://bit.ly/2dcZGZs

Spring is arriving earlier in national parks in recent years, according to models created by Mark Schwartz (Geography) and cited by ScienceDaily.com. http://bit.ly/2dLwew5

The public’s trust in scientific research is decreasing, according to Gordon Gauchat’s (Sociology) research, which was quoted in a commencement address delivered at the California Institute of Technology in June and later printed in The New Yorker. http://bit.ly/1WIJFyZ

Racial and economic disparities in Milwaukee are among the worst in the nation, Marc Levine (History) said in a CNN Money report. http://cnnmon.nn.ie/2cAOHxy

Leslie and Madison Wade (both ’15, PhD Physics) are faculty members at Kenyon College and featured in the school’s website for their work with LIGO, an international collaboration using lasers to detect gravitational waves. Their work with LIGO began at UWM. http://bit.ly/2dX2Cfh


Meg Noodin (English) served as the guest speaker at the 24th annual Peace Tree Ceremony hosted by the Native American Studies program at West Virginia University (http://bit.ly/2esxO8R). She also made an appearance on WUWM’s radio program “Bubbler Talk” to talk about the origins of the name of the city of Milwaukee (http://bit.ly/2dZZfSG).

The Center for Celtic Studies is helping to present artist Coree Coppinger’s work at the Irish Cultural and Heritage Center in October. http://bit.ly/2d8ij6M

The accepted wisdom goes that Pinterest is for girls and Reddit is for boys, but that’s a product of our own need to sort culture into norms, and it’s been going on for a long time, Elana Levine (Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies) said in an online article for The Ringer. http://bit.ly/2d7SjxD

We know heroin use is a problem in the United States, but “epidemic” is not the word to use to describe it, said Christopher Medina-Kirchner (’14, BA Psychology) in a Milwaukee Courier editorial. http://bit.ly/2erRl9d

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Reproductive health advocacy  
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Too often, Kane-Lee said, health care providers don’t think about how a treatment for one condition can affect a woman’s reproductive health.

“We want providers to see women as not just a disease state, but a whole person, taking into account their life experiences and what else is going on with them,” she said.

One of Kane-Lee’s current projects is to create marketing materials dealing with the Zika virus, a mosquito-borne illness that can cause birth defects.

“Zika prevention isn’t just about wearing DEET and eliminating standing water; it’s also about ensuring that women have options and access to contraception and abortion care,” Kane-Lee said. “Half of all pregnancies in the U.S. are unplanned, and it’s really important to remember that, that if we’re trying to prevent Zika consequences, we need to underscore women’s ability to prevent pregnancy if they want to.”

It’s hard, and at times, frustrating work. There is always a battle for funding and the list of projects to tackle grows steadily. Even so, Kane-Lee loves her job.

“As a kid, I was always a feminist, and raised that way,” she said. “I can’t believe that I ended up working in a field I’m so passionate about.”

In the media  
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Jeffrey Sommers (Africology and Global Studies) was interviewed on RT news about the deteriorating relationship between Russia and the United States as peace talks in Syria break down. ([http://bit.ly/2dL2nnT](http://bit.ly/2dL2nnT)) He also gave an invited presentation titled, "Offshore Finance from the Start: Why Russia's Oligarchs do not want to annex the Baltics" at the Chicago Quantitative Alliance on Sept. 22.


Student Abbey Theiler (Global Studies) told TMJ4 that she plans to vote on election day no matter what projections may indicate about the impact of her vote. [http://bit.ly/2dhffzd](http://bit.ly/2dhffzd)

Clayton Browne ('94, MS Anthropology) explained the reasons for a negative profit margin in an article he penned for the Houston Chronicle. [http://bit.ly/2e1anV1](http://bit.ly/2e1anV1)

Tami Williams (English and Film Studies) presided over the General Assembly of The International Society for the Study of Early Cinema, also known as Domitor, at the 35th Pordenone Silent Film Festival/Le Giornate de Cinema Muto for the first time as the society’s first woman president. She will holds a four-year term from Jan. 2016-2020. Domitor is a organization for scholars working on early cinema.

Dr. Zuhdi Jasser ('88, BS Zoology) was featured in the Post Crescent after returning to his high school alma mater to speak to students and encourage them to pursue their passions. [http://post.cr/2etNzs0](http://post.cr/2etNzs0)


Young voters will pay an important part in the upcoming election, and student Nicole Lensmire (Psychology) said on WISN12 that she plans to cast her ballot. [http://bit.ly/2eCeo2m](http://bit.ly/2eCeo2m)
Nobel Prize connections

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I felt really humbled and got emotional. My second reaction was that this is so well-deserved. Ben Feringa is a professor from a university that isn’t known around the world. Right now, he is probably the most famous person in Holland. In his humble way, he mentioned that his students, postdocs and technicians deserve a lot of credit for all the work they did to make it possible. That’s something that speaks about his personality.

How did you end up at UWM?

When I first came [in 2009], the collegial atmosphere in the chemistry and biochemistry department was exceptional, so I decided that UWM was the place I wanted to work. People here try to help each other and try to stimulate each other to become better and more successful. Another aspect I love is that as a professor I can make a difference in students’ lives and can motivate them. I can help students to make better decisions and help them with their careers.

What should people know about the Milwaukee Institute of Drug Discovery?

It’s an academic entity focusing on important diseases. We have come up with new antibiotics to treat people who are infected with antibiotic resistant bacteria, new treatments for neuropathic pain, and agents for memory loss during menopause.

When I first came to UWM, I continued working with vitamin D. I’m very interested in the vitamin D receptor, the signaling receptor for vitamin D and its metabolites. The vitamin D receptor can manipulate the growth and differentiation of cells. I wanted to use this function to create new anti-cancer drugs. After several years, we found and developed compounds that can be used to treat ovarian cancer. The other research area that I am interested in is asthma. We’re currently developing a pill you can take once a day to protect you from asthma attacks. Unlike corticosteroids, our treatment can be taken chronically for a long time without any adverse effects and without the use of additional inhalers.

Wicked problems

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“To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time it’s been used in a health care context,” Graham said.

Graham, along with Amy Harley (School of Public Health, Center for Urban Population Health) Sang-Yeon Kim (Communication) and Joan Neuner of the Medical College of Wisconsin, applied for a transdisciplinary challenge grant from the Center for 21st Century Studies to adapt and implement SEQM.

They recruited a wide field of participants: primary care physicians, specialists in obesity and cancer, community advocates and educators. The team observed the participants as they worked and interviewed them to create “knowledge maps” that identified both barriers and opportunities for coordinated work. Graham views the project as a just a pilot for future efforts in Milwaukee and nationally. While the results are preliminary, the response has been positive.

“The people who participated were very optimistic about it. They made new connections they weren’t going to make otherwise. And they are thinking of pieces of their practices in ways that are more open to collaboration.”

But it’s early days.

“This needs to be done repeatedly in order to have a really good anchor in the community,” Graham said. “This year was about getting the work out to the scholarly community so that we could get more people working on it. We can’t know how well this works if we’re the only group doing it.”

Graham, whose work has focused on medical collaborations, is hopeful that the project will lead to the application of SEQM in other fields. He’s confident that it or something like it could be useful in a variety of arenas, not least of which is politics.

“There are passionate disagreements about, say, gun control, but there are also places where a lot of people agree, and this is a method that can help identify those places of overlapping interests.”