

# IN FOCUS

A close-up photograph of a camera lens, showing the glass element and the surrounding metal housing. The lens is circular and has a reflective surface.



# Student researchers shine at UWM's annual Symposium

## Pg. 4



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UWM celebrates third consecutive ‘R1’ research designation

Chancellor Mark Mone puts the credit for UWM’s recognition as a top research institution squarely on the shoulders of all campus researchers.

“You helped address societal issues and fed the bank of solutions and new products,” Mone told the crowd at a research celebration during the annual UWM Undergraduate Research Symposium at the Student Union.

The April 29 event celebrated the third consecutive time that UWM has earned the highest research rating from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This “R1” status places UWM among the world’s leading institutions of research – one of only 146 institutions, out of nearly 4,000 considered, that are placed in this category.

“Isn’t it great that we’ve gotten our undergraduate research celebration to piggyback on our R1 celebration?” he asked, donning a gold baseball cap with “R1” emblazoned in it. “How perfect is that?”

“It’s important to realize how rare and how hard this achievement is. It doesn’t happen overnight,” Mone said. “And it’s because of your sustained efforts. You’ve made us a better university.”

Doctoral programs have grown

Mone thanked two UW regents in attendance – Kyle Weatherly and Rodney Pasch – and a half dozen state legislators.

In 1965, UWM offered only one PhD program, he said. Today, there are 38 programs. And the university has conferred more than 4,000 doctoral degrees since it was first named as R1 in 2015.

“We’re probably one of the leanest universities named as R1,” Provost Johannes Britz said. “That’s why I’m so proud of this accomplishment. It means that if we had more resources, we have the potential to be a top urban institution, not just in Wisconsin, but in the nation.”

Two faculty researchers also addressed the crowd of about 300.

Research helps solve problems

Lingqian Ivy Hu, professor of urban planning, said research makes it possible to solve society’s long-standing problems.

Her current research is a case in point. Lower income and minority workers without cars live mainly in the city of Milwaukee. But the Milwaukee County’s transit system does not cross county boundaries, presenting a barrier between those who need access to good-paying jobs in the suburbs and suburban businesses that cannot find workers.

“We need to figure out an efficient and affordable way to connect them,” Hu said.

She and her research team recently were awarded a \$1 million federal grant to test FlexRide Milwaukee, an on-demand, microtransit service.

The researchers will evaluate whether FlexRide Milwaukee can improve employment of Milwaukee residents, help business to attract and retain workers, save travel time and reduce energy consumption.

“The project underscores the mission and the value of UWM,” Hu said. “Our research serves real people, real communities. And the R1 designation underscores the importance of research.”

Value of undergrad research

Distinguished Professor of Psychology Karyn Frick spoke about the value of UWM’s undergraduate research program.

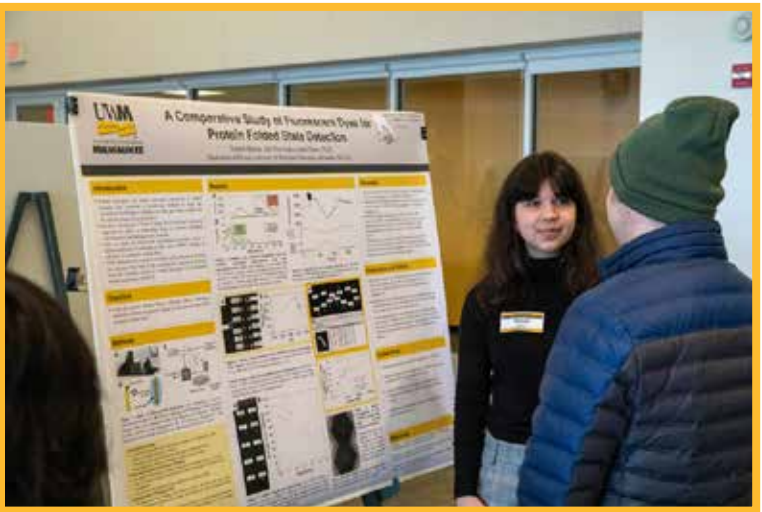
Frick’s research lab consists of graduate students and postdoctoral scientists working to unravel the role of the hormone estrogen in memory decline in women. The work is driven by the fact that women face a much greater risk of developing Alzheimer’s disease than men.

Undergraduates, who work side-by-side with the other lab members daily, are “the unsung heroes” and the “lifeblood” of the research, Frick said.

“In my years of experience at some of the top research universities in the world, including Yale and Johns Hopkins, I have never seen a university provide such strong support for undergraduate researchers and their mentors,” Frick said.

At the symposium, 280 undergraduate students presented the research they’ve been working on with more than 200 faculty members and research staff.

By Laura Otto, University Relations



(Top) Physics major Naomi Raicu talks about her research into protein folding at the symposium. (Middle) Winners at the Undergraduate Research Symposium show off their award ribbons with Chancellor Mark Mone. (Bottom) Karyn Frick, distinguished professor of psychology, talks about the importance of undergraduate researchers. (All UWM Photos by Troye Fox)



# Spotlight on student research: Stories from the Symposium

## Open to interpretation: Psych major studies pediatric medical interpreter stress

A medical interpreter’s job is to help patients and their care providers communicate. Patients and doctors with a language barrier need interpreters’ help to speak about symptoms, treatment options, insurance, and more.

But the job can take a toll, especially on the people who translate for pediatric patients and their families. That is the central component of Josie Carballido’s research.

“We want to prove that pediatric medical interpreters are experiencing distress because of their work,” she said. “Then we want to get to the bottom of what kinds of factors are causing it. How are they coping with it? And what can the hospital do to help interpreters with their mental health?”

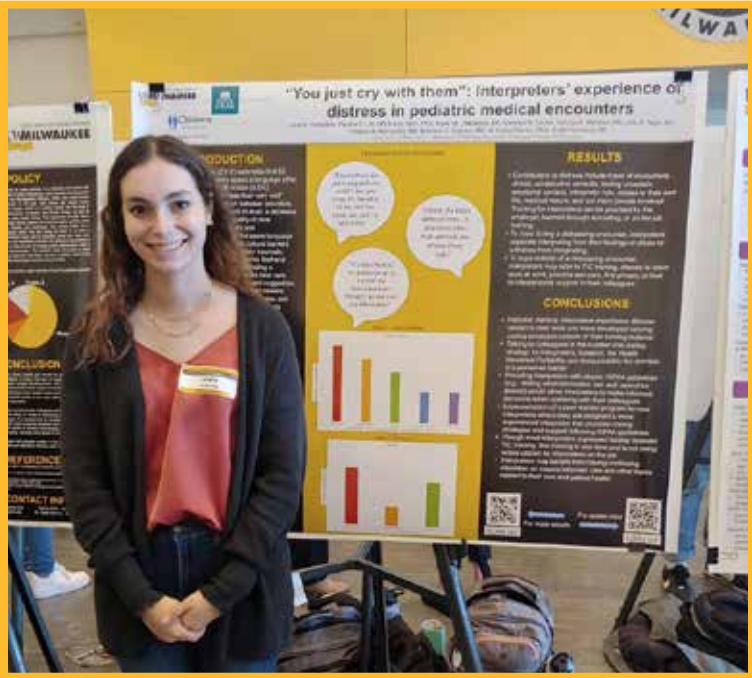
Carballido, who is set to graduate in May, is a psychology major and a student researcher. Last week, she presented her work at UWM’s [Undergraduate Research Symposium](#), which highlights the efforts of the university’s many student researchers across each school and college.

Carballido has been involved in research since her first year at UWM when psychology professor W. Hobart Davies asked her to join his lab. For this project, she’s also worked with Amy Olen, an assistant professor of Translation and Interpreting Studies. The overall project is led by psychology PhD student Paulina Lim.

Together, the team has interviewed 13 Spanish-to-English pediatric medical interpreters from children’s hospitals in Wisconsin, asking them a series of questions about their work, stress, and coping mechanisms. Carballido’s job was to transcribe each interview and then analyze the responses for common themes.

“A big thing that we’re finding was that the majority of staff interpreters are receiving some sort of emotional wellness training, but ... it seems to be just a one-time trauma-informed care training, and then that’s it. A lot of the contracted (interpreters) don’t get that training,” Carballido said.

“We also have looked a lot at what kind of factors are making interpreters more distressed in an encounter. If they’re in something like an ICU or NICU, or dealing with abuse or end-of-life care, those make it lot harder than



Psychology major Josie Carballido stands in front of her poster that she presented at the Undergraduate Research Symposium in April. Photo courtesy of Josie Carballido.

something like interpreting in the Ear, Nose, and Throat clinic.”

Other stressful factors include whether the interpreter personally identifies with their patient or family – if they have had a family member with a similar medical problem, for example, or if they have a child the same age as the patient.

“There’s evidence that (interpreters) experienced secondary traumatic stress,” Carballido said. “When they are witnessing a patient and their trauma and their stress, then they can internalize that as well, and it can traumatize (the interpreter) too. There seems to be a lot of that when they’re working in intense situations.”

Finally, Carballido said, the nature of the job is stressful: interpreters are not supposed to be emotional as they translate for their clients. Even in a sad or traumatic situation, they are expected to remain unaffected and faithfully interpret messages between the patients and care providers.

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## DIY Diversity: Physics major develops resources to highlight POC astronomers



Physics major Sparrow Roch compiled resources to promote diversity in the field of astronomy. Photo courtesy of Sparrow Roch.

Think of a well-known astronomer. Chances are you picture someone like Galileo, Sir Isaac Newton, or Johannes Kepler. In other words, a white man from hundreds of years ago.

Sparrow Roch would like to change that.

“There are many other people who have contributed to astronomy as a whole, and especially to the study of life in the universe,” Roch said. “We wanted to highlight that there are many people doing important work, but we might not discuss their contributions in our regular classrooms.”

Under the guidance of UWM Planetarium Director Dr. Jean Creighton, Roch, who uses they/them pronouns, developed a set of classroom resources highlighting the research of scientists – astrobiologists in particular – from diverse ethnicities and backgrounds. They presented their work at the [Undergraduate Research Symposium](#).

Roch is a physics and computer science major who has been interested in astronomy since they were a child. “There’s this kind of excitement to being on the edge of knowledge that I think the study of space really brings,” they said.

Roch originally graduated from Brigham Young University with a degree in human development, but they kept feeling the pull toward science. So, they enrolled in college again, this time at UWM with the hope of studying under Jean Creighton, a personal role model of Roch’s. But, when Roch looked around, they noticed that astronomy, and physics in general, is something of a “boys’ club.”

“I do think it’s very discouraging to not see people in your classes that you’re learning about who you can relate to or who look like you,” Roch noted. “(Dr. Creighton) is very, very active in trying to increase diversity and have a more equitable environment for students on campus.”

So, when Creighton approached Roch and asked for help compiling resources on diversity in STEM fields, and particularly in astronomy, Roch jumped at the chance.

The numbers are sobering. According to Roch’s research,

- From 1994-2019, for any given academic year, the number of Hispanic people achieving their [PhD in physics](#) has only recently surpassed 40 people. For African Americans, no more than 20 have achieved a physics PhD in a year.
- Of nearly 60,000 physics PhDs [awarded](#) from 1972 through 2017, only 90 were awarded to African American women.
- From 2002 through 2012, despite making up nearly a third of the U.S. population, those from [under-represented minority groups](#) made up only 3% of astronomy doctoral students.
- Black, Hispanic, and Native Americans comprise 27% of the US population but are [less than 4%](#) of the astronomy workforce.

Roch and Creighton hope that by increasing the visibility of Black, Hispanic, and other underrepresented minorities, they might help encourage those groups to pursue physics and astronomy.

To that end, Roch began compiling lists of astronomers – they narrowed her scope to astrobiologists in particular – in order to highlight their research.

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# Medical interpreters

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In the interviews, interpreters detailed a number of coping mechanisms that they developed to help them deal with the stress of their job, but by far, Carballido said, the most frequent and effective coping method was talking through bad situations with their colleagues.

But that came with its own set of problems.

“(Interpreters) feel like HIPAA is a barrier to them being able to talk to each other,” Carballido noted.

HIPAA, or the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, mandates that health care providers protect their patients’ medical and identifying information. Carballido has found that interpreters are unsure if sharing details about their jobs with their colleagues violates that mandate.

“I’ve been finding that with HIPAA, as long as you are not using identifiers like names, you can share things with

each other,” she said. “So, I’m looking at implementing some sort of training program, like continuing education, regarding HIPAA. (I’m also interested in) encouraging interpreters to speak with each other, setting up support groups for them, or setting up a peer mentor program.”

Carballido has worked on a manuscript detailing the group’s findings, which has been submitted for publication. She’s also expanded on this research for her senior thesis.

The research is important, she added, because it’s never been done before. While some psychologists have previously studied the emotional toll of medical interpretation, no one has studied how pediatric medical interpreters are impacted by their jobs. Carballido hopes that her work can help shed light on the problem and bring attention to possible solutions.

**By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science**

# Astronomy diversity

[Continued from Page 5](#)

There were challenges; Roch is not a biologist and had to enlist help to understand some of the research that was beyond their expertise. And, they added, because astrobiology is a relatively new field of research, there are fewer scientific papers published on the subject.

That’s not to mention the legwork.

“We looked at places like *bioRxiv* (a repository for biological sciences research) and *arXiv* (for astronomy research) for the astrobiology and related papers that were being posted there, and tried to search information about the authors,” Roch recalled. “I used some social media. Twitter has a pretty active astronomy scene. ... Of course, we also had recommendations or word-of-mouth where we just asked people, who are the best astrobiologists we have to know about?”

Not only did Roch have to find these scientists, but they also had to summarize the researchers’ papers into two-page abstracts so that students using the materials they developed could understand and access the scientific papers.

The result is a compilation of resources that teachers and professors can use to create assignments for their students to learn about a diverse cohort of scientists.

“(We created) projects for some of these classes where the premise of the project was, we want to learn about present-day scientists and the contributions to their fields. Because many astronomers we learned about are people from long ago, there are still a lot of overlooked astronomers and physicists and engineers making advances,” Roch said. They and Creighton provided a suggestion list of scientists to report on.

For example, they included Moogega Cooper, a planetary protection engineer at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory who has also appeared on many television shows promoting space science. Or there’s Abel Méndez, an associate professor at the University of Puerto Rico at Arecibo and the director of the Planetary Habitability Laboratory.

Then, Roch and Creighton developed a list of questions for student to answer: What is the scientist’s background? What problems are they working to solve?

“We specifically asked, how do you connect with this person, and what do you have in common? We wanted to make these people more tangible,” Roch said. “(Then) I can see that wow, there’s lots of relatable things about many of the scientists, which for me, as someone who would like to be a scientist, is very encouraging. We are hoping for that same sort of outcome with these students.”

**By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science**



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How many of you have heard of the video game Pong?

Its concept was as simple as its name. It took two players, each one controlling a paddle, hitting an electronic ball back and forth across a screen. Pong was found in arcades or — if you had one at home — the paddles were connected to a video game console wired to your TV.

Think of it like a pixelated version of pingpong.

The simplistic game might pale in comparison to the flashier, more complex titles popular today, like Minecraft, or Call of Duty. But [back when it was released in 1972](#), Pong was a smash. In fact, it became the first video game on the market to become a mass hit.

On this episode of Curious Campus is Michael Newman, a professor of English who also teaches in the Media, Cinema and Digital Studies program. Newman is the author of the 2017 book “Atari Age: The Emergence of Video Games in America.”

“Atari Age” takes a detailed swing at Pong, making this a good time to revisit the early days of video games, 50 years after they burst onto the scene. Listen to the [full show](#) at [WUWM.com](http://WUWM.com) or on your favorite podcast app.

**Pong wasn’t the first game video game on the market, but it did become the first big hit after its release in 1972. Why was it so popular?**

Part of it was this simplicity, the ease of play and the fact that it didn’t require a lot of skill to be built up in the player. It was obvious what to do. It was fun, it was familiar, and people wanted to keep playing it.

Nolan Bushnell, an entrepreneur who started Atari, said that a good video game would reward the first quarter and the 100th like it was something fun to play each time. And then you could get better at it. So I think a lot of games like that, they appeal to you immediately. But then you also want to keep getting better at them.

**What impact did Pong have on the growth of the video game industry?**

It had a significant impact from 1972 when it debuts until around 1977, when the Atari console came out that took cartridges. Initially it was called the Atari VCS for “video computer system,” and then it was renamed Atari 2600.



For those first few years, Pong and many different versions of Palm would have been the most common forms of video games that people would have played. Pong could be adopted into hockey, or similar games, using the same chip in many versions.

It was a common form of video game in the mid-70s, and I think it really established an identity for this new medium as something fun you can do with your TV set or as an alternative to other kinds of coin-operated games like pinball or like the electromechanical games that you would find in arcades like rifle shooting games. So, people became familiar with video games. They were often called “TV games.”

**What is something you learned in doing the research for “Atari Age” that might surprise people?**

I knew there were panics and a lot of fears about how young people were affected by the games. People were worried about kids not doing well in school, not getting enough sleep or harming their brains or eyes. So, I knew that was a fear — that’s typical when knew technologies come along and seem so seductive, especially to young people.

I don’t know if I realized there was a flip side to that of being hopeful and optimistic of how young people were going to use these technologies to become more familiar with computers or the high tech tools of the information age. So, there was some negative reaction, but there was some positive reaction that this was the new world that was going to open up to young people and it was exciting.

**By Laura Otto, University Relations**



# UWM alum gives a fresh perspective to Sheboygan mayor's office

Ryan Sorenson's mother gives good advice.

"Growing up, my mom always said, 'Don't sit on the sidelines and complain. Get in the game and make a difference,' he recalled from his desk in the mayor's office in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. "I think folks see that, especially in a city like Sheboygan, your voice matters here. We can get a lot of awesome things done here."

Sorenson grew up in Sheboygan and, in 2021 at the age of 27, was elected the city's youngest mayor in history. Now, with a year of leadership under his belt, Sorenson finds that the job has made him fall even more in love with his hometown.

"As the mayor, you're in the thick of the sausage-making machine," he joked. "For me, it doubles down my feelings of commitment to this community. You just see how passionate people are about making Sheboygan a better place."

## Learning the political ropes

Sorenson's political career began at UW-Milwaukee, where he majored in political science. He was a member of the Student Association, serving as its president during his junior year.

For him, UWM was the right choice because it checked many of his college boxes: A large university, close to home but not too close, plenty of activities and ways to get involved, and great professors.

"Paru Shah was definitely an awesome professor that I had," Sorenson said. "When you have an urban politics professor, it's a good platform to educate students on how to become mayor. I'm kidding, but



Sheboygan mayor and UWM political science alum Ryan Sorenson (center) wields the scissors at a ribbon cutting ceremony for a business in Sheboygan. Photo courtesy of Ryan Sorenson.

that's where I really got into the weeds in terms of politics at the local level."

He might joke, but Sorenson put his education to work immediately upon graduating in 2016. He ran for and won a seat on the Sheboygan City Council in 2017, defeating a 10-year incumbent with 74% of the vote. In 2020, he became the Common Council president.

"I made it a goal of mine to build better connections with business leaders, nonprofits, small business owners, just to say, what's working and what's not? How can the city government better help you?" Sorenson recalled.

Those were welcome questions at the start of the pandemic. Community leaders appreciated Sorenson's desire to strengthen Sheboygan.

"People were like, 'Well, we have an election coming up,'" Sorenson recalled. "'Why don't you run for mayor?'"

Their encouragement and his love for his hometown convinced Sorenson to start a campaign. He thought his youth and energy, combined with his experience on the City Council, might make him a good fit for the job.

Voters agreed.

## Sheboygan's champion

As its mayor, Sorenson is Sheboygan's biggest cheerleader. He'll happily tell you about the city's businesses, its diversity, and its willingness to try new things. His enthusiasm for it is contagious.

"Sheboygan is the Malibu of the Midwest," he declared. "We are the No. 1 freshwater surf capital in the world. Last year, we had the best tourism year on record. We hosted the Ryder Cup. We're a hidden foodie capital of the world. We have some awesome resorts. You name it, Sheboygan has got it."

But there's always room for improvement, and Sorenson has a list. He admits that the city is "not super proud of" its roads, and there's a lack of affordable housing. Businesses are still recovering from the shutdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In his first year as mayor, he's pleased that he and city stakeholders have made progress



Sheboygan mayor Ryan Sorenson speaks at a press conference while Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers looks on. Photo courtesy of Ryan Sorenson.

on all of those fronts.

"We're kick-starting our new strategic plan, so we're excited about that," Sorenson said. "And it's exciting to get caught up on our road projects, as well as collaborating with other key partners in the area start building affordable housing projects."

"Sheboygan is growing. We're expanding and keeping the energy going, but also keeping that same flavor that makes Sheboygan unique and awesome."

## Young government

There's one more way that Sorenson may have helped change his city, though he denies credit. When he was elected to the City Council in 2017, he was the only alderperson under the age of 40.

Most of the other council members were retired.

Today, "We have the most diverse council that we've ever had. We actually have, for the first time in our history, a female majority on the city council, and a handful of Millennials now. Our oldest age is 75 and our youngest age is 25," Sorenson said.

He stops short of saying he's the inspiration for such a change, but instead, points to how Millennials are taking a much bigger part in local government across the state of Wisconsin. Cavalier Johnson, recently elected the Mayor of Milwaukee, is a Millennial, Sorenson noted. So are the mayors of Wausau, Manitowoc, and Superior, as well as in other towns and cities.

Sorenson is excited to see more young people get involved in politics. Some might see their lack of experience as a hinderance, but Sorenson thinks a fresh perspective is a strength.

"I'm not going to have all of the answers," he admitted. "But (my age) is also an advantage because it doesn't necessarily box me into saying, well, this is the way we've always done things. ... If we work together, collaborate, and think outside the box, somebody is going to have a good idea and we can push some awesome initiatives."

**By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science**



# From hip-hop writer to teacher, learn the many roles of Robert “Biko” Baker

If you ask Robert “Biko” Baker about himself, he’ll tell you straight up that he’s a jock. And a nerd. And a hip-hop journalist, a historian, a teacher, a voting rights advocate, a CEO, and a proud Milwaukeean. Just to name a few.

Right now, he’s an associate lecturer in UWM’s African and African Diaspora Studies Department, where he teaches African American history. It’s a full-circle moment for Baker; he graduated from UWM in 2000 with majors in political science and Africology. He sat down to talk about his various roles.

*By Sarah Vickery, College of Letters & Science*

## *A hip-hop journalist*

**How do hip-hop and activism relate? I don’t think too many people hear one and think of the other.**

Hip-hop has changed a lot over the past 20 years. The economic strength of hip-hop is better than ever. It’s a \$4 billion industry annually. But I think many of us in the early ‘80s and ‘90s turned to hip-hop because it was a way to express yourself. Through your art, you could talk about what was going on in your community. When I moved to L.A., a big crazy world opened up for me.

**And you got to work with some legends! Drop some names...**

I’ve been in the studio with Snoop Dogg and some of the people who make music for Dr. Dre. Bone Thugs-N-Harmony and Ludacris and Shwnna and 2 Chainz and Rick Ross. I kept hustling up stories and creating hip-hop blogs to keep my name out there. I was a well-respected hip-hop journalist, I think. When rappers know you can get them in a magazine, it can open doors for you.

**You had a great gig going in LA. What changed? Why did you leave journalism?**

I wouldn’t say I’ve left. I still work on projects. For example, there’s a film called “Judas and the Black Messiah” that was executive produced by Ryan Coogler. I did the cultural intelligence report on that. I still have friends that ask me to step up sometimes.

But, I love Milwaukee. You can’t be an activist and not have a place that’s your community. I love Milwaukee. It’s a beautiful struggle, and I’d rather use my talents here than at a nightclub in L.A. I’m a historian but I spend a lot of time in the future. If you’re preparing a place in the future, knowing that Milwaukee will be a water capital, and the future of business will be here, how do you think 20 to 30 years in the front? A lot of people look at the problems and say, hey man, it’s over. Let’s get out of here. There might be days I say that and feel like that, but I do feel like there’s enough beautiful talent here. Maybe if we can coordinate and organize a little bit better, we can fix things.

## *A UWM alum*

**Do you have any standout memories from your time at UWM?**

I can hear the ghosts of my professors as I walk through the halls today. One of my professors, Winston Van Horn, just really pushed for excellence. I remember him challenging me and that was great for me, being 20 years old.

I was a jock before UWM. I came to UWM transferring from another school to play sports. My professors pushed me to put it beside (my education). So, I love UWM.

**Is it odd to be a teacher in the same place that you were a student?**

I wouldn’t say ‘odd.’ It’s pretty fresh, to use a hip-hop term. Pretty fresh, you know?

## *A UWM instructor*

**How did you find your way back to UWM?**

It was 2019. I got the call from Anika (Wilson, then-Chair of the African and African Diaspora Studies Department) – did I want to teach a class? African American history from 1865 to present. If you give me a timeline and some historic dates, my ears start to perk up. I love teaching. I love seeing the lightbulb go on in young people’s heads. It’s been a cool way for me to keep sharp and grow as a scholar.

**What are you working on these days?**

I’m focused on tech and soccer. On the tech side, I’m on the Governor’s Taskforce for Broadband. I think tech is culture. We saw during the pandemic that a lot of people of color around the state and people in rural areas didn’t have what they needed because they didn’t have access to internet. And with soccer, we need more fields in Milwaukee.



## *A business founder and CEO*

**Tell me about your business Render.**

Right after the Ferguson movement, I got burned out. I was working with a tech company called ThoughtWorks. ... A lot of the projects people were asking them for were social media stuff, websites, and lower-scale tech stuff. They said, why don’t we give you a fellowship to figure out what you want to do? I launched Render.

Since we’ve launched, it’s been cool to see how we can use stories and tech to build things. We’ve worked with everybody from Ava DuVernay to Harry Belafonte. We’re in Milwaukee. We do videos, digital stories, and tech. It’s cool. We help brands or campaigns develop personas and voices online. Ben & Jerry’s launched a new flavor years ago called “Democracy Remix” and we helped them figure out how to position it in the marketplace.

## *An activist and advocate*

**You’ve spent a lot of time working as an activist after graduating UWM. How did you come to that role?**

In 2002, I was at UCLA and transferred to the PhD program. I got caught in this weird moment of the pre-Barack Obama (presidency) youth civic engagement space, and I became a leader in that. Then Barack Obama became president and the world changed. I was still a leader in that space, and then by the beginning of the second term, I decided I needed to finish so I could focus on my own life, as opposed to being a double-student/ community activist, which was stupid.

**What inspired you to become a voting and social justice advocate?**

To say that I was anything but a jock before age 21, that would be a lie. But I was also into hip-hop. When I got to UCLA, I was writing for a hip-hop magazine, so hip-hop and activism sort of met for me. I was writing about and participating in (social) movements.

But what really turned me onto it was I was an archivist for Rev. James Lawson, who was a leader in the Memphis sanitation workers’ strike – a really Gandhian non-violence leader who continues to have a big role and influence. Instead of being an archivist, I thought, maybe I could make history instead of document history. Realize, I was young still! I got turned onto the history of the movements by a real giant of a leader.

## *A former executive director of the League of Young Voters*

**How did you start with the League of Young Voters?**

In 2004, there was this big event called the National Political Hip-Hop Convention. To go to the convention, you had to have registered voters. When I was in L.A., I turned my hip-hop events with my colleagues into voter registration events. I went to this event and was fascinated by the people all across the country who were trying to change their communities through hip-hop. One of the sister organizations was the League of Young Voters.

I thought I was going to be there two or three years as I finished my dissertation. Then Barack Obama started getting on the scene, and all of the smart people on our team said, ‘Let’s go work for Barack Obama!’ And I was like, what about what we’ve built? I was one of the main people still standing.”

We were part of the founding of a lot of important organizations that came to be known as the Black Lives Matter movement. We passed the torch to younger women of color. At that point, I was 35.

**What work were you doing with the League of Young Voters?**

It was grassroots to grass-tops. Each community was different. ... We believed that young kids could change the world through civic engagement. My focus was youth of color. Once you start voting, you start seeing yourself as a player in society as opposed to a component.

**It seems as though there are more barriers being erected to voting. What do you see as driving these barriers, and is there a way to overcome them?**

The Voting Acts expired (in 2013). The precedent to be tough on bad actors went away. Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress have been punting on this issue. So, there have been opportunities for people at the local level to exploit that. I think there are opportunities to build more bridges to civic engagement by getting around some of the barriers like Voter ID. But every campaign season, our great elected officials turn into different people, and so sometimes, it’s not always fair.



# Art + Engineering: Installation spotlights electronic and construction waste

Unusual walkway tiles created at UWM—using 95% recycled materials—now form an inspiring path in front of the engineering building at a New York university: a pedestrian stroll that spotlights problems inherent in electronic and construction waste.

From 2021-22, the Binghamton University Art Museum commissioned Nathaniel Stern, UWM professor of art and mechanical engineering, to create a long-term installation that calls attention to personal, institutional and governmental accountability in the production and disposal associated with technology and industry.

The result, installed in January, is “Circuit Boardwalk” – 200-square feet of tiles made primarily of discarded circuit boards and concrete composed almost entirely of recycled materials. The concrete was made in UWM’s Advanced and Nano Cement Laboratory under the direction of Konstantin Sobolev, Lawrence E. Sivak ’71 Faculty Fellow and professor, civil & environmental engineering.

With their emerald-green color, the tiles invite pedestrians to walk atop them. When they do, they see the fine details of a printed circuit board – copper, gold and palladium – embedded in concrete and protected by a thin layer of resin.

### Inspiring students to rethink waste systems and personal responsibility

In January, Stern and Sobolev attended the exhibition, installation and panel discussion at Binghamton University.



“The dialog between art and science, between inspiring action and change, and the technologies to do so, are key in the design of our futures,” Stern says. “We need to think about what we can do and change, individually; about the systems that create waste and our influence on them; and about new potentials and possibilities in both of those spaces.”

Each square tile – 1.5” thick and of various widths – was created at UWM in Stern’s studio and Sobolev’s concrete lab.

To make them, Stern started with recovering circuit boards from trashed computers that were decommissioned and ready for recycling at UWM Surplus.

Sobolev, with his students, then created a concrete base composed of recycled materials left over from multiple research projects that otherwise would have been sent to landfill.

“Cement and concrete are the world’s most widely used construction materials,” says Sobolev, a recognized expert in innovative concrete materials. “The most promising research in the field today addresses the recyclability of concrete and reducing its carbon footprint.”

To this end, Sobolev is leading efforts to launch a National Science Foundation Concrete Advancement Network, in tandem with Arizona State University, Oregon State University and the University of Texas at Arlington, to tackle

these very issues in collaboration with industry.

### 14 UWM student assistants helped create “Circuit Boardwalk”

Fourteen UWM students from three UWM colleges/schools worked with Stern and Sobolev as project assistants on “Circuit Boardwalk.”

From Peck School of the Arts: Meghan Berger, Laura Bogayay, Mich Dillon and Mary Widener.

From the College of Engineering & Applied Science: Aparna Deshmukh, Behrooz Farahi, Paul George, Reed Heintzkill, Garrett Kocourek, Roy Wittenberg and Filip Zemajtis.

From the College of Letters & Science: Allison Getty, Ava Ladky and Madison Sveum.

“With the worsening state of the climate, it’s increasingly important to emblemize the problem of waste in a variety of ways,” says Kocourek, a senior in mechanical engineering.

His generation of engineers, Kocourek believes, must consider sustainability in all their work. “It will become a design constraint as we work to eliminate our dependence on fossil fuels and combat material shortages.”

*Courtesy of the College of Engineering and Applied Science*

# Alumni Update: Chelsey Knuth

After completing my Urban Geography BA in 2018, I launched an Instagram account called “The Wisconsinista” that combined my passion for tourism with my knowledge of Wisconsin and its geography, both environmental and cultural.



Chelsey Knuth at the Milwaukee Centennial Rotary Arboretum.

Through sharing travel guides, hikes, tips, and local attractions, I aim to inspire Wisconsinites to embrace travel at all scales and seek out adventure right in their own backyard. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought extra importance to this mission as international travel shut down around the world and staying near home became the norm.

In the nearly four years since its inception, more than 13,000 Wisconsinites and Midwesterners have become a part of this online community. Through conversation and content creation promoting the beauty of the Midwest, we are collectively manifesting a positive shift in the dialogue about this region within the mainstream tourism industry that so often labels it as “boring” and ignores its value as a vacation destination.

As word of this passion project has spread, so too have opportunities to discuss it on larger platforms. I have not only received sponsorships from Wisconsin-based businesses and Midwest tourism boards to help promote their products and destinations but have also made media appearances ranging from guest speaking on Discover Wisconsin’s “The Cabin” podcast to acting in a Kwik Trip commercial!

Through it all, the driving force of my mission and brand is my love for place, space, scale, and all things geography. I am so grateful for the opportunity I had to study this in-depth at UWM and for the passion my professors had for this state that helped to fuel my own.

If you would like to follow along on my adventures across Wisconsin, the Midwest, and beyond, you can do so on Instagram or on Facebook by searching @thewisconsinista.

*First published in the Department of Geography’s Spring 2022 newsletter.*

## 23 Upcoming Events

**May 2 - May 12**  
**Art Exhibit - Off the Press: Exploring Reproducible War Art.** Emile H. Mathis Gallery (Mitchell Hall). Curated by Emily Hankins. The gallery is free and open Mondays-Thursdays, 10 am - 4 pm.

**May 4**  
**Planetarium Show: The Life of an Astronomer (Members Only).** 7 - 8 pm. Online via Zoom. Planetarium director Jean Creighton discusses her career. Be sure to [register](#) or sign up for membership (\$20).

**May 5**  
**Escaping Afghanistan – One Woman’s Story.** 3:30 - 5 pm. AGS Library. A conversation with Afghan refugee Maryam Durani and retired radio host Kathleen Dunn. [Registration](#) is required.

**May 6**  
**The Beastly Conference.** 12:30-4 pm. Honors House 196 and online via [Zoom](#). View presentations on beastly topics ranging from the morality of eating meat to self-published werewolf fantasy to Ancient Greek animal iconography. All are welcome.

**May 9**  
**Mindfulness and Planetary Well-Being.** 5-6 pm. Meet at the Manfred Olson Planetarium. The UWM Planetarium and Lubar Entrepreneurship Center invite you to relax, hope, move, and change. Take a walk with Planetarium director Jean Creighton to enjoy the wonders of Earth. Experience a guided mindfulness practice and learn how mindfulness can serve as a tool for change and transformation. [RSVP](#) required.

**May 15**  
**Planetarium Show: Total Lunar Eclipse.** 9:30-11:30 p.m. Manfred Olson [Planetarium](#). Witness a Total Lunar Eclipse. Telescopes and binoculars near Engelmann field will be available starting at 10 pm, with the full eclipse occurring at 11:11 pm. Free planetarium shows run every 15-20 minutes.

**May 20**  
**Planetarium Show: Constellation of the Zodiac-Gemini.** 7 - 8 p.m. Manfred Olson Planetarium. Delve into the astronomy and mythology behind the zodiac and learn how to find your zodiac constellation in the night sky with a focus on what makes this month’s constellation, Gemini, unique. [Tickets](#) are \$6.





## Congratulations, grads!

On April 10, UWM recognized 2020 and 2021 graduates who were unable to attend in-person Commencement exercises due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the ceremony, UWM highlighted three recent graduates, including **Allison Densmore ('20, BA Anthropology)**, who is now a graduate student in UWM's anthropology department. Congratulations, graduates! We are proud of your accomplishments and your extraordinary resilience! View the video [here](#).



## Alumni Accomplishments

**Stephen Schwei ('74, BA Math and Psychology)** published his first collection of poetry, entitled, "Bluebonnet Whispers: Tales of a Gay Man." The collection is exclusively available on [Amazon](#).

**Elise Peterson ('15, BA Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies)** joined [Swanson Russell](#), a branding, advertising, and public relations agency based in Lincoln and Omaha, Nebraska. She will serve as public relations counsel. She was most recently the public relations manager at Canary & Coal.

**Deborah Blanks ('18, PhD Urban Studies)** has found a novel way to test your knowledge of Black history by inventing an app with her son, Geraud. Their efforts were highlighted by [WUWM Radio](#).

**Lisa Nalbandian, ('03, MA Mass Communication)** was promoted to senior regional manager of [Wisconsin Public Radio](#). She will be responsible for creating and executing an integrated strategy for community engagement across Wisconsin, overseeing radio managers statewide.

**Sarah (Susami) Maycock, ('13, BA Communication)** was promoted to Associate Vice President, Electronic Banking Support Manager at [Northrim Bank](#) in Alaska. She has over 14 years' experience in the industry.

**Stephen McKellips ('10, MA Communication)**, has been named vice provost for enrollment management at the [University of Akron](#). He will be responsible for building and growing a diverse student body. He was previously associate vice president for enrollment and student services at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas.

**Stephanie Bennett ('96, BA Mass Communications)** was named Publisher of [MKE Lifestyle magazine](#), a division of Conley Media. She was previously a senior account executive for OnMilwaukee.com.

Several Letters & Science alumni were recognized as winners of the [2020 UWM Alumni Association Awards](#). The award winners were previously unable to be recognized due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The winners include **Kenira Thompson ('98, MS Psychology; '01, PhD Psychology)** who received a Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award; **Ashley Dineen ('08, BS; '10, MS; and '15, PhD, all Geosciences)** and **Kristian Vaughn ('13, BA History and Spanish, '15, Master's Urban Planning )** were hailed as Graduates of the Last Decade (GOLD) winners for graduate alumni, and **Kasia Weina ('10, BS Biological Sciences)** was named a GOLD winner for undergraduate alumni. All award winners were honored at a ceremony at the Pfister Hotel in April.

**Sam Hogerton ('11, MA Media Studies)** was among the *Milwaukee Business Journal's* "[40 Under 40](#)" 2022 awardees. Recognized as one of the "best and brightest the community has to offer," Hogerton is a Partner and Executive Creative Director at SRH marketing & advertising agency.

**Paul Brandenburg ('91, Masters of Public Administration)** was appointed the new city administrator of the [City of Liberty Hill](#), Texas, in April. He brings with him 30 years of experience in the public sector, and was most recently the project manager for the Brazos River Authority, which pursues alternate water sources for Texas.



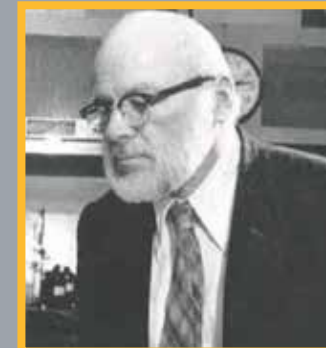
## Passings

Professor Emeritus **Peter Kovacic** of Chemistry and Biochemistry passed away on March 11. Peter joined the UWM faculty as Professor of Organic Chemistry and Research Professor in 1968 and developed the university's graduate research program in organic chemistry. Peter retired from UWM in 1987.

Peter was born on Aug. 1, 1921, in Wylandville, Pennsylvania. He earned a BA in Chemistry and Mathematics in 1943 from Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana. In 1946, he earned his PhD in Organic Chemistry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Before coming to UWM, Peter worked as a Research Chemist with E.I. DuPont Company and taught at Case Institute of Technology (later Case Western Reserve University), where he rose from Assistant Professor to full Professor of Chemistry.

Peter was extremely proud of his teaching, which included undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate levels. He was interested in using humor to support learning and healing and was known for introducing many jokes into his lectures. He had an annual tradition of dressing up in Hawaiian shirts and giving a goofy lecture.

For additional information, please see Peter's [obituary](#) or the UWM Chemistry and Biochemistry Department [memorial](#).



Professor Emeritus **Ruth Phillips** of the Biological Sciences Department passed away in late 2020. Ruth enjoyed a 31-year career at UWM from 1970-2001, teaching and sharing her knowledge with thousands of students, and securing multiple grants for her groundbreaking research in Salmonid Genetics. She authored and co-authored over 100 published articles, and she enjoyed an international reputation, traveling and giving talks at conferences all over the world including Europe, Japan, Australia, and Chile. She earned her BA in Biology at Swarthmore College in 1962, her MA at University of Indiana in 1964 and her PhD at University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 1966.

In her later years, between 2001-2015, Ruth joined the faculty at Washington State University-Vancouver part-time and continued her writing and research. After retirement, Ruth was an active volunteer for a wide variety of environmental organizations.

For more information, see Ruth's [memorial website](#). She is survived by her husband Roger Phillips (professor emeritus of UWM Slavic Languages).



Professor Emeritus **Donald Vogel** passed away on April 10. Don was a member of UWM's Political Science department from 1967 to about 1970, specializing in the field of local and state government and administration.

In the early 1970s he transferred to the UW-Extension office in downtown Milwaukee (now the School of Continuing Education). There he was a member of its Government Affairs program until his retirement in the mid-90s. He also taught occasionally for the MPA program and for the Political Science Department.

Don, a New York native and U.S. Navy veteran, earned his PhD at the University of Iowa. Over the years, Don became very well-known throughout Wisconsin for his expertise and for his gifted teaching. He was widely known and respected in local and state government.

From 1991 to 1996 he worked on a major federally-funded program operating in cooperation with Milwaukee County government to host and educate local government personnel from post-Soviet controlled Poland. Don took the lead in directing the program, arranging for each visitor to work closely with local government specialists in a host of different areas – from water treatment to zoning to tax policy, social welfare, policing, and local administration.

Don was a dedicated husband, father, and grandfather. He was a terrific chef and an expert sailor. In his spare time Don was a fine artist, an opera lover, and sports fan. In retirement he learned to play the cello and never stopped reading.





## Laurels and Accolades

**Larry Baldassaro (emeritus Italian)** is the author of “Tony Lazzeri: Yankees Legend and Baseball Pioneer,” which was just selected to receive the 2022 SABR (Society for American Baseball Research) [Baseball Research Award](#).

**W. Hobart Davies (Psychology)** and **Amy Olen (Translation & Interpreting Studies)**, UWM Psychology graduate students, and their inter-institutional colleagues in the [Collaborative for Resilience and Emotional Wellness Science \(CREWS\)](#) received [Team Science-Guided Integrated Clinical and Research Ensemble](#) funding from the Clinical & Translational Science Institute of Southeast Wisconsin. The award will allow the Collaborative to expand their research on emotional wellness and develop interventions that address patient health and health care needs among diverse communities in Milwaukee.

**Kay Wells (Art History)** received a [2022 NEH Summer Stipend](#) for her book project, “Uncanny Rivals: Designing Early American during the Rise of Fascism,” which explores colonial revival and American identity in the period 1927-1947.

**Carolyn Eichner (History)** has been named a Camargo Foundation Fellow for 2022-23 and will be joining a group of artists and scholars for an 11-week international residency at the Foundation’s stunning site in Cassis, overlooking France’s Mediterranean coast. Every year, the Foundation selects 18 individuals from around the world to come together to think, create, and connect.

**Kimberly Blaeser (English and American Indian Studies)**, Founder and Director of the nonprofit organization In-Na-Po, [Indigenous Nations Poets](#), noted that the Library of Congress hosted the organization’s [inaugural mentoring retreat](#) in Washington, DC April 25-29.

**Jennifer Jordan (Sociology)** was selected as a UW System Fellow at the Institute for Research on the Humanities at UW-Madison to complete her book on hops.

**Rachel Buff (History)** has been chosen as the recipient of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP’s) 2022 Outstanding Achievement Award. The award is presented in recognition of the outstanding efforts of an individual, chapter, or conference on behalf of AAUP principles, and will be presented at AAUP’s 2022 Biennial Meeting in June.

Students in the **Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies** program scooped up 11 awards from the regional Society of Professional Journalists [Mark of Excellence Awards](#), including winning the Best Independent Online Student Publication category for the student publication *Media Milwaukee*. Recipients included **Brianna Schubert** (Finalist in General News Reporting and Finalist in Radio News Reporting); **Hunter Turpin** (Finalist in General News Reporting); **Jessica Gatzow** (Winner in Feature Writing and Finalist in Radio Feature Reporting); **Elizabeth Charney** (Finalist in Feature Writing); **Nkaujoua Xiong** (Winner in Radio Feature Reporting); **Grayson Sewell** (Winner, Television News Reporting); **Allison Peoples** (Finalist in Television Feature Reporting); and **Matt Gotsch** (Finalist in Television In-Depth Reporting).

**Journalism** students also garnered 27 awards at the 2021 Milwaukee Press Club Awards, beating out UW-Madison and Marquette University. For a full list of award winners, please visit the Milwaukee Press Club [website](#).



## People in Print

**Carolyn Eichner (History and Women’s and Gender Studies)**. 2022. *The Paris Commune: A Brief History*. New Brunswick, NJ: [Rutgers University Press](#).

**Maria Novotny (English)**, Dawn Opel, and William Hart-Davidson. 2022. *The Patient Decision Aid as a Pedagogical Tool: Exigencies between RHM and the Health Professions*. [Rhetoric of Health and Medicine](#), 4(4).

Pamela J. Lannutti and **Erin Sahlstein Parcell (Communication)**. 2022. *Family Communication and the COVID-19 Pandemic*. In *Personal and Administrative Perspectives from the Communication Discipline during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (ed. Jim A. Kuypers), London: [Rowman and Littlefield](#).



## In the Media and Around the Community

In her new role as the executive director of the ACLU of Wisconsin, **Melinda Brennan** (‘07, BA Women’s and Gender Studies; ‘09, MA Sociolog) spoke on [Wisconsin Public Radio](#) about the need to defend free speech from government censorship.

Ahead of the spring election, **Paru Shah (Political Science)** went to [Fox 6 News](#) to weigh in on some of the political issues facing Milwaukee-area voters.

The **Greene Geological Museum** received a mention on [TMJ4 News](#) on a segment discussing the Milwaukee Formation, a unique deposit of fossils not found anywhere else in the world.

Chinese economic policies could present a problem for Milwaukee-area manufacturers and businesses, **Shale Horowitz (Political Science)** remarked in the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#).

As parents of a Kenosha teen who committed suicide sue social media companies for their alleged role in his death, **Marc Tasman (Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies)** told [Fox 6 News](#) that this type of lawsuit could lead to other suits.

**Ora John Reuter (Political Science)** spoke to the delicate balance of Putin’s popularity and Russians’ support of his regime and the war in Ukraine in a piece published by the [Washington Post](#).

**Elana Levine (English)** explained the significance of audiences shifting from cable to streaming on [Yahoo! Finance](#).

Historians have a habit of erasing the scientific contributions of women, but **Thomas Haigh (History)** helped shine a spotlight on Klára Dán von Neumann, who developed the first computer code. He talked about her influence on the [Lost Women of Science podcast](#).

The American Journal of Bioanthropology (AJBA), edited by **Trudy Turner (Anthropology)** recently handed down new guidelines for how anthropologists must handle human remains, [Popular Science](#) and [MSN News](#) reported.

The [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) detailed **Chia Youyee Vang’s (History)** efforts to preserve Hmong history among former Hmong refugees.

Where are the streets in Milwaukee named after women? Graduate student **Ayodeji Obayomi (Urban Studies)** explored the question in a piece published by the [Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service](#). [WUWM Radio](#) investigated further.

**Ching-Hong Yang (Biological Sciences)** presented his product that aims to inhibit crop diseases in apples, pears, and other fruits, at a First Look Forum where inventors could pitch ideas to potential investors, [WUWM Radio](#) reported.

After President Biden announced that millions of dollars in student loan debt would be forgiven, **Rebecca Neumann (Economics)** told [CBS 58 News](#) that the move fixed problems existing within the borrowing system.



As politicians toured Milwaukee, **Anne Bonds (Geography)** and others spoke on the city’s racial wealth gap, increasing homeownership among communities of color, and stabilizing housing for renters, as reported by the [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#). She also commented on [Patch.com](#) about a rise in white

supremist speech and actions in recent years in Milwaukee and its suburbs.

**Bettina Arnold (Anthropology)** presented an invited [lecture](#) at the Irish Institute of Hellenic Studies in Athens, Greece on Thursday, April 28, 2022 entitled “European Celtic Identity: Made in Greece?”

**Yaidi Martinez (Center for Economic Development)** discussed the driving factors behind rising rents on [TMJ4 News](#).

Several Wisconsin lawmakers announced their retirement after redistricting. **Kathy Dolan (Political Science)** told [Wisconsin Public Radio](#) said that’s not uncommon due to the potential of district boundaries shifting and creating uncertainty.

On April 14, **Jeffrey Sommers (Global Studies and African and African Diaspora Studies)** gave an invited presentation for a seminar via Zoom at the University of Virginia Law School for his book *Race, reality, and realpolitik : U.S.-Haiti relations in the lead up to the 1915 occupation* as a means by which it could be used to advance the discussion on reparations for Haiti.





On April 29-30, the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh hosted “Brick by Brick: Building African American and Africana Studies Departments,” a second summit of University of Wisconsin Black Studies professors. The first summit was held at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2020. The summit was also a follow up to the Black Milwaukee summit sponsored by the Madison-Milwaukee Scholars Strategy Network held in 2021.

The group of leaders shared ideas about increasing enrollment in Black Studies in the UW system, working collaboratively to reach out to the media, connecting with policy makers, and collaborative opportunities for Black Studies faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students. Participants also made presentations about their respective departments. Participants met with Anne Stevens, Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

Participants included **Gladys Mitchell-Walthour**, Chair of African and African Diaspora Studies (UW-Milwaukee) and SSN Madison-Milwaukee Co-leader, **Alphonso Simpson**, Director of African American Studies (UW-Oshkosh), **Frank King**, Executive Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, **Keisha-Lindsay**, Associate Professor (UW-Madison), and **Sandra Adell**, Professor (UW-Madison).