

walsaa CONNECTION

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WALSAA Senior Impact Award recipients: *Where are they now?*

This year marks the fourth year of WALSAA recognizing graduating seniors with the Senior Impact Award. The award is presented to UW-Madison CALS students who have demonstrated excellence in leadership skills, student activity participation, engagement in CALS programs and provided service to the University and the larger community. “These students not only excelled while students at CALS, but they’ve also continued to achieve beyond the UW,” said June Roush, WALSAA President. “WALSAA scholarships allow students to look beyond their major which develops strong leaders for the future.”

In 2023, Robert Hall received the WALSAA Senior Impact Award. He earned his associate’s degree at UW-Waukesha before transferring to UW-Madison. As a Ronald E. McNair Scholar under Sean Schoville, UW Entomology Professor, Hall navigated a bachelor’s degree, majoring in Genetics and U.S. History. Hall studied abroad in Ghana and Costa Rica and conducted research at Caltech. He also conducted research at the National Institutes of Health. He presently researches meiotic recombination in swordtail fish at Stanford University. Hall holds a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, Mercatus Center Adam Smith Fellowship and Bard Prison Initiative Education Fellowship for his work addressing formerly incarcerated education.



Robert Hall



Lauren Lansing

Lauren Lansing also received a WALSAA Senior Impact Award in 2023. Lansing is a Master of Public Health candidate at the University of North Carolina. She is passionate about supporting community health initiatives through public health program monitoring and evaluation. Currently, she works with the North Carolina Institute for Public Health where she supports online public health training and certification development. Lansing serves on WALSAA’s Scholarship Committee. She will graduate this spring, and looks forward to returning to Wisconsin to begin her career in public health.

“As a still relatively young program, we are thrilled by the incredible response from UW CALS seniors, with 30 WALSAA Senior Impact applications submitted this year,” shared Tracy Propst, WALSAA Scholarship Co-Chair. “This strong turnout showcases the drive, innovation and leadership of CALS students who are eager to make a meaningful impact in their fields. It’s inspiring to see the next generation of agricultural and life sciences professionals stepping forward with such passion and ambition!”

Seeing the passion and potential of these UW CALS seniors reminds us why investing in the next generation is so important. By supporting the WALSAA Senior Impact Scholarship, you help empower future leaders in agriculture and life sciences as they take their next steps toward meaningful careers. Your donation, no matter the size, makes a direct impact—fueling innovation, leadership and growth in the industries that shape our world. Join us in supporting these outstanding students and ensuring the legacy of CALS excellence continues for years to come.

WALSAA scholarships are funded through generous donations from our members. We invite you to join us on April 4 for our scholarship awards ceremony to meet the future leaders. For more information on the event or if you have an interest in donating to the scholarship fund, visit www.WALSAA.org.

IN THIS ISSUE

Member Spotlight.....	6
New Board Members.....	5
Student Impact Grant Feature.....	7
WALSAA Donor Recognition.....	3,4

CONTACT US

Wisconsin Agricultural and Life Sciences Alumni Association
PO Box 5177
Madison, WI 53705-5177
P: 608.438.1994 E: admin@walsaa.org

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

CALS Career Paths



June Roush, WALSAA President

Spring Tidings, All!

Spring is nearly upon us, and with it comes the excitement of a new season, one of my favorites! This time of year, I'd like to take a moment to highlight one of the life sciences majors and a friend's impressive accomplishments since her undergraduate years within CALS.

In her time at CALS, Dr. Maria Dais, earned a bachelor's degree in Biochemistry, graduating with honors. I first met Maria during my freshman year, in a Meat and Animal Science course. We both lived in Chadbourne Hall, and as it turns out, she went to high school with my roommate. Since then, Maria and Joyce have remained some of my closest friends. While there are many stories I could share about our college days, let's focus on academia and the diverse career paths that a CALS Biochemistry degree can provide!

How did CALS impact your life and influence your career path?

Maria: "CALS had a significant impact on shaping my career trajectory. I originally considered pursuing a pre-veterinary program, but after shadowing a veterinarian, I realized it wasn't quite what I had imagined. Many of my peers were on a pre-med track, but I wasn't sure that was the right fit for me either. I decided to explore other options. The biochemistry degree gave me the foundation to do research and later pursue a doctorate in pharmacy, where I secured a research assistant position right away. However, I soon realized that academia wasn't the right path for me. I moved to Southern California and began exploring other career avenues.

I worked as a chemist at Radian Corp., an environmental consulting firm, before transitioning to a Research Associate role at Allergan in their R&D department, focusing on pharmacokinetics. After that, I wanted a more challenging and rewarding role that could offer greater job satisfaction and a timelier impact. Six years after graduating, my bachelor's degree and transcript from UW-Madison were pivotal in my acceptance to the University of Vermont College of Medicine—there were 10,000 applicants for just 95 seats. I went on to complete a 5-year Radiology residency, followed by a 1-year fellowship at the University of California-San Francisco,

specializing in Sonology, under the mentorship of the world-renowned Ruth Goldstein, who also earned her biochemistry degree from UW-Madison."

Maria's journey highlights the immense value of a biochemistry degree from CALS, with its comprehensive science courses providing a well-rounded foundation that is respected nationwide. As she puts it: "You can do so much with this degree, and it is highly regarded across the country."

Who at CALS impacted you in your field of study or professional development, and what did they do or say that made a difference?

Maria: "I can't recall any specific names, but I do remember our first Stock Pavilion lab for Meat and Animal Science 101. We needed volunteers to help wrestle a sheep and trim its hooves. That was definitely a memorable initiation, but I think I did a pretty good job!"

Share a fond memory from your time at UW-Madison:

Maria: "There are so many fond memories, but one that stands out is attending the football games, especially during the 5th Quarter when the Band would run wildly onto the field, and we'd all polka in the stands. Another memory is walking two miles to class at the Stock Pavilion at 7:30 a.m. It felt like a post-apocalyptic journey, but it was also a reminder of the grit we needed to succeed."

I hope you enjoyed learning about another aspect of the majors supported by WALSAA. Each year, we receive numerous scholarship applications from CALS students in the life sciences. The diverse coursework offered in CALS plays a vital role in building a strong foundation—ranging from animal and human sciences to food science nutrition and well-being—essential for students pursuing postgraduate aspirations.

In closing, I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all who contributed to WALSAA's year-end student scholarship appeal. Your generous donations are deeply appreciated by WALSAA members, friends and CALS students alike.

Best Regards,
June Meixelsperger Roush (B.S. 1987)

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CALS MESSAGE

A vision for teaching and student success



Jeri Barak, Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Jeri Barak, a professor in the Department of Plant Pathology, assumed the role of CALS Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in fall 2024. She now leads the Office of Academic Affairs and advances high-quality, innovative and productive instructional programs. Here, Barak reflects on her first few months in the position and describes her vision for the college's educational efforts.

What inspired you to apply for this position?

My passion for education inspired me to apply for this position, along with my belief in the transformative power of higher education. I saw an opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the lives of students and to contribute to the growth and success of our academic community by finding opportunities to align faculty research with teaching efforts. The values and mission of CALS align closely with my own, making this role a perfect fit for me.

What has surprised you the most — in a positive way — since you started this position?

One of the most pleasant surprises has been the collective dedication to education among my CALS peers. The faculty, staff and students are all deeply committed to our college's educational mission. It's been wonderful to see how folks are willing to come together to tackle challenges.

What is your long-term vision for the Office of Academic Affairs?

My long-term vision is to create an environment where every student can thrive. This includes fostering a culture of innovation in teaching and learning and building strong partnerships. Ultimately, I want to see our graduates leave

CALS not only with a degree but with the skills and experiences that will enable them to make a positive impact in their chosen fields. At the same time, I want the office to be a resource to departments and faculty for innovative curriculum and program development.

"My long term vision is to create an environment where every student can thrive."

How can friends of CALS, such as alumni and donors, support your efforts?

Support from the college community is crucial. Alumni and donors can support us by offering mentorship, internships and financial contributions that enable us to expand our programs and resources. Every bit of support helps us move closer to our goals.

Is there anything else the CALS community should know about academic affairs or your role?

I want the CALS community to know that my door is always open. I'm here to listen, learn and collaborate. Academic Affairs is dedicated to supporting the success of every student, and we are constantly looking for ways to improve and innovate. I encourage everyone to reach out with their ideas, concerns and suggestions. Together, we can create a vibrant and supportive academic environment.

IMPACT. EMPOWER. INSPIRE.

New donors contribute to annual campaign

Generous donors contributed \$26,669 to WALSAA's annual campaign, "Impact. Empower. Inspire." The total includes a \$5,000 donation from Culver Franchising System, LLC. Twice the number of individuals made contributions compared to previous years. Funds will be directed towards WALSAA's scholarship program including the Outstanding Sophomore Award and Senior Impact Award.

"Supporting WALSAA through donations provides resources to students," said June Roush, president of WALSAA. "WALSAA's scholarship program impacts students' lives, empowers them to make major contributions in their chosen fields and inspires leadership development. It's the heart of our mission, and I'm deeply grateful to all our generous donors."

"We plan to build on this momentum," said Jane Hillstrom, vice president of WALSAA. "Our goal is to inspire the majority of our members to contribute to the annual campaign. It can be a donation of \$5 or \$5,000. When I read the bios of the students who have received WALSAA scholarships, I'm convinced they are the future leaders in agriculture and the life sciences."

The WALSAA annual campaign ran the last eight weeks of 2024 and was publicized via email, direct mail, in the newsletter, and through phone calls and emails. Past student scholarship recipients created thank you videos shared on social media. 2025 will bring new giving opportunities, along with another annual campaign beginning in November.

A Sincere *Thank You* to our 2024 Donors

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WALSAA WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS

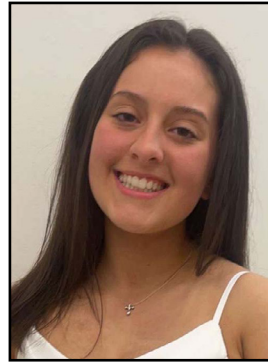
Bender and Reimann Join WALSAA Board of Directors as Student Representatives



Amanda Bender

Bender is a plant pathology major from Walworth, Wis. Active in several campus organizations, she is sentinel for the Association of Women in Agriculture (AWA) and coordinator for the Collegiate Farm Bureau's Agriculture in the Classroom program. As a Badger Dairy Club member, she was the group's World Dairy Expo business chair. She was also president of her FFA chapter while in high school. In the future, Bender plans to work towards a doctorate degree.

"I hope through this opportunity, I can continue to grow my own network while also finding a place for myself after college, giving back to the organization."



Meghan Reimann

Reimann is currently a sophomore studying Animal & Veterinary Biosciences, with certificates in Ceramics, Life Sciences Communication, and Leadership (Morgridge Center for Public Service). Originally from Buffalo, N.Y., she serves as a CALS Ambassador within Academic Affairs and works alongside their social media team. Actively involved in research, she works as an Animal Technician at the Livestock

Laboratory and is an Undergraduate Research Assistant in the Laporta Lab, where she also serves as the lab's Public Relations Manager. In the future, Reimann plans to pursue both a master's and a doctorate degree, with the long-term goal of owning her own research lab.

CALS STUDENT UPDATE

A lasting impact

Greetings to All,

As we finally settle into a routine on campus for the spring semester at UW-Madison, the CALS is thriving. From groundbreaking research to new and improved student engagement opportunities, it has been exciting to take part in it all.

Stepping into my new role as a student representative for WALSAA has given me a deeper appreciation for both WALSAA and CALS. I wanted to share a student perspective on how both groups work collaboratively to create valuable opportunities for students and alumni alike. This is evident through numerous scholarships that enable students like me to continue our education, as well as reunions that bring together dedicated alumni who still give 110% to UW-Madison. It has truly been an honor to witness the hard work and dedication of my fellow leadership team members and directors in supporting the student body.

With a new semester in full swing, my fellow students and I are adjusting to our routines—whether through coursework, research, hands-on learning experiences or social activities. CALS students are not only adapting but also innovating, bringing fresh ideas to conferences, competitions, case studies

and fieldwork opportunities. No matter where they are, CALS students are making a lasting impact.

"No matter where they are, CALS students are making a lasting impact."

As the semester progresses, I look forward to seeing CALS students' achievements highlighted through WALSAA. On behalf of the student body, I want to express my sincere gratitude to WALSAA for its ongoing support. Whether you see me on the sidewalk between classes or at a WALSAA event, please feel free to stop me and ask about life on campus.

I am excited for the semester ahead and deeply appreciate your continued support for UW-Madison and CALS.

Roll Badge!

Amanda Bender

Current Student, Plant Pathology

WALSAA Student Representative

WALSAA MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Environmental Sciences and Sustainable Food Systems



Grace Puc, WI DATCP Agriculture Program Specialist

In each edition of the WALSAA Connection, we will be highlighting the accomplishments – both academically and in the workforce – of a WALSAA member. Please see our latest interview feature below.

A 2022 graduate of CALS, I earned a bachelor's degree in Environmental Sciences and a self-designed academic track in "Sustainable Food Systems." While at UW-Madison, I directed an organization called Campus Food Shed, with the aim of combatting the issues of food waste and food insecurity on campus with one another, and co-wrote a publication in the [Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development](http://www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/1140).

www.foodsystemsjournal.org/index.php/fsj/article/view/1140

For two growing seasons I interned at the West Madison Agricultural Research Station, gaining invaluable experience working alongside farmers and researchers on a variety of projects. I also interned for FairShare CSA Coalition, a Madison-based nonprofit, working on their Partner Shares program. Partner Shares provides financial assistance and payment flexibility to limited-income households purchasing CSA shares. Post-graduation, I participated in the Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms program (WWOOF) in Slovenia, volunteering on five organic family farms in exchange for housing and food.



After traveling, I landed at the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) as Agriculture Program Specialist, implementing Wisconsin's \$27 million Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Grant program (RFSI), a Federal grant program funded by ARPA through USDA-AMS. The purpose of this program is to build resilience across the middle of the food supply chain, offer more and better markets to small farms and food businesses, support the development of value-added products, ensure fair prices and wages, create new and safe job opportunities and strive to eliminate future food supply chain disruptions, reminiscent of those experienced during the pandemic.

I just came up on my one-year work anniversary at DATCP. Over the course of the last year, I worked with 235 applicants to the RFSI program from around the state, an external review committee of 48 food systems professionals to review applications, the USDA-AMS team to review, revise and approve Wisconsin applications and, finally, Wisconsin's 71 RFSI grantees to kick off their projects. This year I look forward

to supporting the implementation of these exciting projects, conducting site visits across the state and working with stakeholders/partners. The thing I like most about my job is the fact that I get to work *for* the Department of Agriculture but *with* food systems stakeholders, producers, innovators and leaders across the entire state. I love being in a "connector" or "liaison" role getting the folks on the ground the resources, connections and information they need to best support them. The government is not nearly as removed from the everyday lives of Wisconsinites as I would have expected. The coworkers in my division are incredibly passionate about the work they do and the people they work for (the people of Wisconsin). I am on the phone daily with businesses, individuals, Tribal partners, nonprofit organizations – there are so many resources housed here and it's great when people take advantage of them!

What message would you like to give to current and potential members?

For recent graduates: you can still do work in the field you studied or are passionate about without necessarily having a job title directly related to your major. For example, in my division alone staff would be successful with backgrounds in food science, accounting, communications, ag economics, business, environmental studies, nutrition and so much more. When I first started job hunting, I felt very pigeonholed by my major into a career that I assumed had to be strictly science-based. However, I really appreciate having a science/ag academic background in my day-to-day communications with ag industry players throughout our state.

What was the biggest influence UW-Madison, CALS and/or WALSAA had on you?

When I was a student, the Environmental Sciences major had four predetermined tracks: Ecology, Physical Environment, Geospatial Sciences or Environmental Policy & Social Perspectives, and the Food Systems Certificate did not yet exist. I am so grateful to CALS for allowing me the opportunity to propose my own set of coursework for faculty approval of a self-designed track in Sustainable Food Systems. This allowed me to take courses such as *Animal Agriculture & Sustainable Development* with Michel Wattiaux, and *World Vegetable Crops* with Irwin Goldman, that contributed towards my degree program. These two professors, and many other incredible faculty members of CALS, played a huge role in my ever-growing interest in this field.



STUDENT IMPACT GRANT FEATURE

Plant Sciences Graduate Student Council

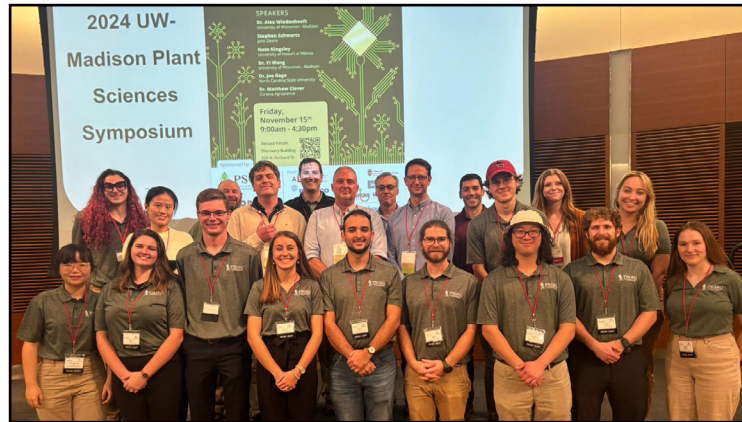


Audrey Morrison, PSGSC President

On Nov. 15, 2024, the Plant Sciences Graduate Student Council (PSGSC) hosted the 14th Annual Plant Sciences Symposium. UW-Madison is an invited institution which takes part in the Corteva Symposia Series, and PSGSC is the student body that takes the responsibility in hosting this legacy event. The 14th Annual Plant Sciences Symposium was held in the DeLuca Forum in the Discovery building. There were six invited speakers: Dr. Alex C. Wiedenhoef (USDA Forest Products Laboratory, UW-Madison), Stephen Schwartz (John Deere), Nate Kingsley (Lyon Arboretum, University of Hawaii Manoa), Dr. Yi Wang (UW-Madison), Dr. Matt Clover (Corteva Agriscience) and Dr. Joe Gage (North Carolina State University). Our theme for this event was "Growing into New Tech: Plant Sciences in Bloom." Each speaker brought a unique perspective of how different technologies are being used in their respective fields, or how their research/work is contributing to those advancements. Speaker presentations were 30 minutes long, followed by 10 minutes of questions and answers from the attendees. At the conclusion of the symposium, all speakers were invited onto the stage together for a speaker panel discussion. This gave attendees the chance to ask questions to the speaker group as a whole, or circle back to specific questions for a speaker that might not have been answered earlier in the day.

We had six graduate students deliver a Lightning Talk, giving a summary of their research in three minutes or less. This was an audience-based competition: a voting form was available, and we were able to give the top three graduate students an award for their lightning talks. We also had 17 students present research posters, three of which were undergraduate students. During our lunch break, attendees had the chance to interact with the students presenting posters, learning about the various types of plant science research across campus. Attendees could vote for their favorite posters (and presenters' "poster pitch"), in which we were able to give awards for the top undergraduate and graduate poster presenters.

This year, PSGSC also implemented travel awards for students from outside universities to travel to Madison, attend our symposium, and present their research as part of the Lightning Talks. The two travel award winners for this year were from the University of Minnesota and North Dakota State University.



Throughout the day, we saw roughly 115 attendees. This included students, faculty and staff from UW-Madison. We also had a large number of industry professionals in attendance as well. During event breaks, all attendees had the opportunity to network and chat with one another. Bucky the Badger even made attendance during our lunch and poster presentation session!

Although our event was completely in-person, we did record the presentations and upload them to our PSGSC YouTube page. They

can be found at: www.youtube.com/@psgsc_UW-Madison. Live posting on our social media during the event captured speakers and the information they were presenting. After the event concluded, speakers, council members and some attendees headed over to the Sett for some bowling and socializing, continuing conversations from event.



We want to thank all of our sponsors for their support of this large event. Twelve graduate students worked in planning this event since early 2024. An event of this caliber could not have been possible without council members' volunteer hours and the financial support of our sponsors. We thank WALSA and the funding match from CALS. WALSA has been a supporter of PSGSC's annual efforts in hosting our symposium, and we are especially grateful for their support this year.

With Gratitude,
Audrey Morrison
2024 Plant Sciences Graduate Student Council President



Your CALS Connection For Life

P.O. Box 5177, Madison, WI 53705-5177

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What's New @CALS

Fall 2024 Enrollment

A total of 928 new students joined CALS this fall – 678 first-year undergraduates, 89 undergrad transfer students and 161 new graduate students. The college saw an **increase of more than 20% in new undergraduate students.**

cals.wisc.edu

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 4 ♦ WALSAA Awards Ceremony

May 10 ♦ CALS Spring Commencement

September 20 ♦ WALSAA Football Fire-Up

UW Foundation, Madison



SAVE THE DATE