Working to improve life in Wisconsin

Since the Wisconsin Academy was founded in 1870, we’ve been working hard to improve life in Wisconsin by sharing the best ideas across the sciences, arts, and letters. In this, our 2015–2016 annual report, we share highlights from our events and exhibitions, our magazine and reports. These are all ways we fulfill our mission to bring people together at the intersection of the sciences, arts, and letters to inspire discovery, illuminate creative work, and foster civil dialogue on important issues.

Fostering civil dialogue on important issues

Let’s consider that civil dialogue is not the first phrase that comes to mind for most people when someone says, “climate change.” But, it does for us.

In December 2015 and January 2016 the Wisconsin Academy co-hosted two live-streamed public forums on the historic Paris climate accord. Held through our Climate & Energy Initiative in partnership with the University of Wisconsin Global Health Institute, these two forums connected us to five Wisconsin-based leaders from academe and industry who were in Paris to participate in the 21st Convention of the Parties (COP21). In these forums we explored dimensions of the emerging international climate accord and its impact on human rights, carbon reduction targets, business and industry, human health, and species and habitat. More than 1,000 people attended these forums and viewed them online around the state—and world. They had a rare opportunity to see informative presentations, ask thoughtful and provocative questions, and participate in a civil discussion around a complex and charged issue. Dozens of people approached staff members after these forums to thank the Academy and our partners at the Global Health Initiative for providing opportunities to learn about and discuss Wisconsin’s response to a globally changing climate.

Later, in the spring of 2016, we hosted a public conference exploring the indelible connection between science and policy. We convened the Science, Policy & Water Summit through our Waters of Wisconsin Initiative, which noted the shrinking role of science in the realm of policy—most notably in environmental regulatory programs in Wisconsin and beyond. We heard a remarkable talk about what science is and how it works from atmospheric scientist and Wisconsin Academy Fellow Steve Ackerman. This was followed by a bipartisan panel of current and former legislators that frankly explored a topic that is important not just to the scientific community, but to all Wisconsinites. A few week’s later, Curt Meine from our Waters of Wisconsin Steering Committee, spoke to an overflow audience at Sheboygan’s Mead Public Library about our analysis on the state of Wisconsin’s waters, and what we have learned from science, but also from the cultural and ethical considerations of our most precious resource.

All of these forums and talks show that people in Wisconsin are hungry for a chance to dig in to important issues in ways that inform, rather than inflame, the conversation. This is why civil dialogue is so important right now, and why the Academy is such a trusted resource for informed and engaged citizens.
Cultivating Wisconsin’s creative capacity

It was another year of great exhibitions at the Academy’s James Watrous Gallery in Overture Center for the Arts. More than 9,000 visitors came to see the work of twelve Wisconsin artists in five exhibitions, many of which feature side-by-side exhibitions of two artists selected through a formal Call for Artists.

At least once a year we curate a special exhibit that includes the works of multiple artists on a particular theme that intersects with the sciences or letters aspects of our mission. Fall 2015 featured LOGJAM, an exhibition of works created with saplings, brush from invasive species, and old-growth stumps by artists Brenda Baker, Kevin Giese, and Mark Iwinski. We explored this topic further with two Academy Talks: one with folklorist and Academy Fellow Jim Leary (who introduced us to logging camp songs—a few a bit too colorful for broadcast!), and another on the history of Wisconsin’s changing forests with UW-Madison professor of forest and landscape ecology, David Mladenoff.

While most experience the James Watrous Gallery as visitors, one of our primary objectives for the gallery is to elevate and showcase the work of Wisconsin artists. Our exhibiting artists frequently tell us how much they value the opportunity to work with a professional curatorial team to develop an exhibit in a beautiful gallery space at Overture Center. This exposure and support enhances their development as professional artists, and Wisconsin and art lovers benefit, too.

This same commitment to elevating Wisconsin’s creative work can be found in our magazine, Wisconsin People & Ideas. Wisconsin writers—whether poets or fiction writers, feature writers or investigative journalists—come together in every issue to tell Wisconsin’s story. The magazine also sponsors the best statewide fiction and poetry contests, rewarding excellence in creative writing with cash awards, writers residencies, and a reading at the Wisconsin Book Festival.

READ ON
James Watrous Gallery Exhibitions
2015–2016 Season

Gone Wild: David McLimans
July 17, 2015 to August 23, 2015

LOGJAM: Brenda Baker, Kevin Giese & Mark Iwinski
September 10, 2015 to October 25, 2015

Sandra Byers: The Nature of Things
November 5, 2015 to December 27, 2015

Rina Yoon: Between In and Yeon
November 5, 2015 to December 27, 2015

Debbie Kupinsky: Recollections
January 15, 2016 to March 6, 2016

Allison Welch: Meet Allison, an American Girl
January 15, 2016 to March 6, 2016

Tom Berenz: Towards the North
March 18, 2016 to May 8, 2016

Shane McAdams: Beat a Path, and Make It Fast
March 18, 2016 to May 8, 2016

The Archive as a River: Paul Vanderbilt and Photography (Appleton)
March 31, 2016 to May 8, 2016

Gwen Avant: Either Way
May 20, 2016 to July 3, 2016

Gregory Klassen: Heliotropism
May 20, 2016 to July 3, 2016
Opportunities for lifelong learning

This year our Academy Talks participants explored a broad range of topics, from music of the historic logging camps of the Northwoods to the power of theater and the visual arts in small communities to the ways in which health care disparities affect us all. We also featured a series of three talks focused on how writing can shape our future, whether it is our communities, our relationship with the natural world, or how we communicate about issues. In order to continue the exploration and conversation, video recordings of most of these Academy Talks are available on our website and on Wisconsin Public Television’s University Place.

In the fall of 2015 we hosted the Academy’s first member meeting in more than a decade. More than fifty members joined us during the two-day gathering in Madison. On the first evening, two of our distinguished Fellows, Alta Charo and Kathy Kelsey Foley, spoke about the value of the Wisconsin Idea. Each provided compelling cases and personal stories that articulated how Wisconsin’s historic, deep investment in inquiry and its practical applications elevates the lives of all its citizens and attracts high quality leadership to the state. We celebrated the long-time Academy memberships of Millard and Barbara Susman and Louis and Fran Rall. We also presented Jerry Marra, our archives volunteer, with a Citation of Appreciation. On Saturday we explored a few hidden gems on and near the UW-Madison campus, including the Geology Museum, the Kohler Art Library artists’ books collection, the Academy’s archives at the State Historical Society, and the Center for Limnology on Lake Mendota. Art and poetry workshops, an exploration of our imperiled waters, and a discussion about the future of the Wisconsin Idea rounded out the formal meeting. With the positive feedback we received, we hope to offer more gatherings like this one in the future for Academy members and friends alike.

In the spring of 2016 we also inducted an unprecedented eleven honorees as distinguished Wisconsin Academy Fellows, which is another way we celebrate creative leadership across the sciences, arts, and letters.
Academy Talks, Initiative Forums, and Other Events
2015-2016 Season

Managing Water Like Nature with Kevin Shafer
September 8, 2015 • Greenfield Public Library

Songs of the Northwoods with James P. Leary
September 15, 2015 • Overture Center, Madison

Waters of Wisconsin Summit
September 21, 2015 • Pyle Center, UW–Madison

Visual Art & the Wisconsin Idea with Maryo Gard
September 24, 2015 • Overture Center, Madison

LOGJAM: USDA Forest Products Lab Tour
October 16, 2015 • UW–Madison

Nelson Institute Jordahl Lecture with Timothy Egan
October 22, 2015 • Monona Terrace Convention Center

Wisconsin People & Ideas Contest Readings
October 23, 2015 • Wisconsin Book Festival, Madison

Wisconsin Academy Member Meeting
November 6 & 7, 2015 • UW–Madison Campus

The State of Wisconsin’s Forests with David Mladenoff
November 8, 2015 • Overture Center, Madison

Local Government Summit on Energy & Resilience
November 18, 2015 • UW–Stevens Point

The Promise of Paris: A Panel Discussion
February 9, 2016 • WI Institutes for Discovery, Madison

Writing Wisconsin’s Climate with Sharon Dunwoody
February 28, 2016 • Overture Center, Madison

The Burden of Poor Health with Theresa Duello
March 8, 2016 • Woodson Art Museum, Wausau

Poetry and Pi(e) with Kimberly Blaeser
March 14, 2016 • Academy Steenbock Offices, Madison

Writing Wisconsin’s Waters: A Panel Discussion
March 22, 2016 • Overture Center, Madison

Wisconsin Academy Fellows Awards Ceremony
April 17, 2016 • Pyle Center, UW–Madison

Writing Wisconsin’s Communities: A Panel Discussion
May 3, 2016 • Overture Center, Madison

Science & Policy Initiatives Forum and Talk
May 10, 2016 • Union South, UW–Madison

The Waters of Wisconsin with Curt Meine
May 17, 2016 • Mead Public Library, Sheboygan

Inside the Creative Process with Jennifer Uphoff
May 19, 2016 • Gerold Opera House, Weyauwega

Live from Paris (webcast)
December 9, 2015 • WI Institutes for Discovery, Madison
Making better bones

Garden designers and home remodelers will often look at a challenging site and say, “Yes, it needs work. But it has good bones.” Bones are the structure and basic design elements that make everything else come together and function well. In addition to our programs, we made significant investments in the bones of the organization that many rarely see, yet are essential to healthy operation and potential for growth.

In a dynamic world where digital communication is changing all the time, keeping pace is essential for an organization whose mission embraces “connecting Wisconsin people and ideas.” In 2015 and early 2016 we embarked on a major website re-design to make our digital visitor experience a better one. We set the goal of making site navigation easier and more nimble. We linked together thematic content to enhance opportunities for learning more about a certain subject through our vast collection of images, articles, and videos. And we made event registration and other forms of online participation a snap. Analytics help us track what’s working (or not) and make continual improvements.

Like a great website, a highly functional contact management system is another essential for a healthy nonprofit. Yet say the word “database” and most peoples’ eyes glaze over. While we don’t have customers in the sense of a commercial business, we do have a database with thousands of contacts—Academy members, program participants, magazine writers, exhibiting artists, and many more. Nothing can sour a relationship like a misspelled name, an expected magazine that never arrived, or the same e-mail message popping up six times. That’s why we’ve improved our data systems and e-messaging capacities over the past year in order to make sure you are getting the right message from us at the right time.

For an organization born 146 years ago, we’ve got some great bones. And we owe these bones—and our amazing programs and publication—to our donors, members, and program sponsors who keep us healthy and thriving.

Thank you for a great 2015–2016 season.

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We are fortunate to have talented and dedicated business and civic leaders working together to further the Wisconsin Academy’s mission to inspire discovery, illuminate creative work, and foster civil dialogue on important issues.

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Established in 1982, the Fellows award represents the highest level of recognition conferred by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters. Drawn from a pool of statewide nominees, Fellows are elected for their extraordinary levels of accomplishment in their fields as well as lifelong commitments to intellectual discourse and public service. For a complete list of Wisconsin Academy Fellows, visit wisconsinacademy.org/fellows.

Wisconsin Academy 2016 Fellows

Marcia Bjornerud
Professor of Geology and Environmental Studies at Lawrence University; author and essayist

Stephen R. Carpenter
S.A. Forbes Professor of Zoology and Director of the Center for Limnology at UW–Madison

Parry Karp
Professor of Chamber Music and Cello at UW–Madison; cellist, Pro Arte Quartet

Jesse Lee Kercheval
Zona Gale/Marjorie and Lorin Tiefenthaler Professor of English at UW–Madison; poet

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In Appreciation of Our 2015–2016 Donors and Sponsors

The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters is pleased to publicly acknowledge those individuals and organizations who gave a cash or in-kind contributions of $100 or more between July 1, 2015, and June 30, 2016. Your generosity is an investment in our operations and in quality programs and publications that explore, explain, and sustain Wisconsin thought and culture. Thank you for joining us in mission to connect Wisconsin people and ideas for a better world.

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The Full Circle Society is our way to recognize and thank those who have included the Wisconsin Academy in their estate plan. They provide resources needed to be able to share the best in Wisconsin thought and culture for generations to come.

Thank you to the forward thinking individuals who are leaving a legacy through an estate gift to the Wisconsin Academy:

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Members and friends of the Wisconsin Academy are encouraged to consider including a gift to the Wisconsin Academy in your estate plans. An investment through your will, trust, or by beneficiary designation benefits the health of our endowment, while ensuring the future of our programs and publication.

If you are not listed, but have made a commitment or would like more information about leaving your legacy to the Wisconsin Academy, please contact Amanda E. Shilling at 608-263-1692 x16.

*gifts realized

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The Wisconsin Academy Foundation is a separate 501(c)3, established in 1992, is dedicated to the stewardship of the Academy’s endowment as a way to provide the Academy with a steady source of income in perpetuity. Currently, this income represents approximately one-third of total annual funds needed for Academy programming and operations.

A special thank you to the many donors who contributed to the Great Performance Fund at the Madison Community Foundation, which is separate from the permanent endowment held by the Wisconsin Academy Foundation. The Great Performance Fund directly supports Academy Talks and James Watrous Gallery programming at Overture Center for the Arts.
Thank you to the multitude of individuals and organizations that support the Wisconsin Academy and its programs. Your invaluable commitment of time, talent, and services makes all the difference.

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- Madison Opera
- Mead Public Library
- Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies
- Orange Tree Imports
- University of Wisconsin Geology Museum
- UW–Madison Center for Limnology
- Wega Arts
- Wisconsin Historical Society

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- Erin Olsheski
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- Annaleigh Wetzel

Many individuals shared their time and talents with multiple Academy programs, they are only listed once.

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- Nickolas Butler
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- Elizabeth Wyckoff
- Allen M. Young

Many individuals shared their time and talents with multiple Academy programs, they are only listed once.
WISCONSIN ACADEMY 2015–2016 Year-End Financial Statement

Fiscal year 2016 Revenues
Fiscal year ending June 30, 2016
- Academy Foundation Distributions: 34%
- Contributions: 32%
- Grant Revenue: 20%
- Donated Services: 6%
- Membership Dues: 4%
- Earned Income: 2%
- Conferences & Events: 2%

Fiscal year 2016 Expenses
Fiscal year ending June 30, 2016
- Administration: 20%
- Gallery & Arts Programs: 20%
- Magazine & Digital Communication: 16%
- Membership & Development: 15%
- Academy Initiatives: 15%
- Academy Talks & Fellows: 7%
- Communications: 5%
- Program Development: 2%

Statement of Activity
Fiscal year ending June 30, 2016

Revenue
- Academy Foundation Distributions: $269,760
- Contributions: $254,737
- Grant Revenue: $153,093
- Donated Services: $49,088
- Membership Dues: $33,121
- Earned Income: $14,258
- Conferences & Events: $12,830
Total Revenue: $786,887

Expenses
- Program-related Expenses: $441,108
- Administration: $145,873
- Membership & Development: $110,631
- Communications: $32,973
Total Expenses: $730,585

Change in net assets: $17,396

Net assets – Beginning of year: $209,226

Net assets – End of year: $226,622

Statement of Financial Position
as of June 30, 2016

Assets
- Cash and cash equivalents: $174,774
- Other current assets: $8,783
- Unconditional promises to give: $16,838
- Fixed assets, net: $108,973
Total Assets: $309,368

Liabilities
- Line of credit: $0
- Accounts Payable: $3,125
- Unearned revenue: $11,043
- Other liabilities: $12,276
Total Liabilities: $26,444

Total Assets - Total Liabilities: $309,368

Auditors: Wegner CPAs, LLP

About this Report
The Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts & Letters is an 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization (EIN 39-1054856) dedicated to connecting Wisconsin people and ideas for a better world. Our endowment is managed by the Wisconsin Academy Foundation, a separate 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization (EIN 39-1681809).

In an effort to provide transparency and context for our operations, the Wisconsin Academy publishes an annual report. For a digital version of our 2015–16 annual report visit wisconsinacademy.org/2016report.