

BIOCORE

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON



Pictured **above** Biocore students in Biocore 382 assemble on the first day of class at the Biocore Prairie for the ecology unit. **At right** Biocore Peer Mentors engage in a student led teamwork exercise in preparation for their role guiding the learning of the latest cohort of Biocore students!



Director's Corner – Paying It Forward

Dear Biocore Friends,

As we welcome the new year, we hope you were able to spend time with family and friends, and held space to reflect on the past year. I'm doing a lot of reflecting myself. In some ways 1993 seems like yesterday! That was when, as a young Assistant Professor in what was the Department of Zoology, I started teaching in a remarkable, award-winning program that has shaped my entire career at UW-Madison. As the University and my department have undergone many changes, Biocore has remained a constant. The dedication of the students, staff, and faculty in the Biocore community to a distinctively different, life-changing sort of biology education continues to be high-impact teaching at its best. It's been an honor to be a part such an amazing community for over three decades, and it's exciting to be involved in Biocore as it looks to the future.

First, we want to let you know about some changes in Biocore leadership that maintain the high level of long-term commitment to Biocore that we've all come to expect. Dr. Heidi Horn, who was our Associate Director last year decided to take a position with more flexibility. We are very pleased to announce that Dr. Anna Kowalkowski, who has been a key instructional staff member is our new Associate Director. Anna is definitely "paying it forward" – she was an undergraduate in Biocore, as well as a Biocore Postdoc. Anna has done an amazing job amid many changes this summer and fall. Our own Dr. Danny Parrell, also an undergraduate in Biocore, and previously our High Impact Practices Facilitator, is succeeding Anna as a core instructional staff member. Finally, my long-time teaching colleague, Professor Shelby O'Connor, finished a three-year term as Faculty Director at the start of the summer. We're grateful for Shelby's leadership and dedication, and I continue to look forward to teaching with Shelby in Biocore 383. To succeed Shelby, I'm stepping in as the Interim Faculty Director after a previous 18-year term of service. Along with Anna and Danny, Carol Borcharding (our Administrator) and Seth McGee (our long-time Lab Instructor), it's an honor to serve Biocore again.

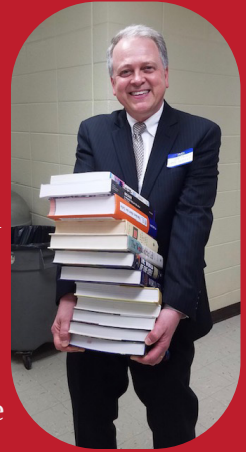
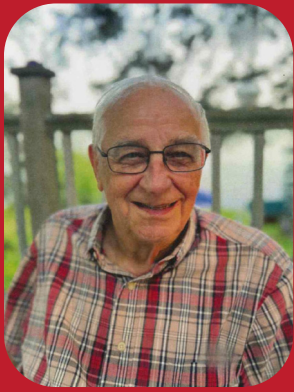
Second, we want to let you know about how Biocore fits into the future of Biology in the College of Letters and Science (L&S), Biocore's long-term administrative home. Like the Departments of Botany and Integrative Biology, Biocore is becoming a part of the new Department of Biology in Fall of 2026. Biocore still retains its cross-college character as a University-wide honors program, with many of our faculty coming from outside of L&S, but we also hope that Biocore gains even more recognition as a showcase of high-impact practice teaching and learning in the biological sciences.

We want to extend a hearty thank-you to everyone in our extended Biocore community. We are grateful for your continuing support and encouragement. We love hearing from you, and we would love to see any of you in Noland Hall, the Biocore Prairie, or one at one of our Outreach Events. Exciting things are ahead for 2026, and we appreciate you now more than ever!

--Jeff

In Memoriam - Dr. Wayne Becker - 1940-2025

In October of 2025, Dr. Wayne Becker (left), former Biocore instructor and Emeritus Professor of Botany passed away. Wayne taught with Biocore from 1970 until 2002! With 1970 being only the 4th year of the Biocore Program, Wayne contributed generously to the culture of student-centered learning in Biocore with his dedication to improving instruction. Wayne was an enthusiastic lecturer for Biocore 303 (now 383) and Biocore 323 (now 485). Wayne Becker lives on in the education of each and every Biocore student through their reading of "Becker's World of the Cell" a textbook written specifically for the Biocore curriculum and used in our Cellular Biology course, Biocore 383. Now approaching the 11th edition, Interim Biocore Faculty Director and Biocore Faculty Instructor, Dr. Jeff Hardin (pictured right) carries on the tradition of authoring this book. We are saddened by the loss of Wayne and we offer condolences to his family and loved ones.



Biocore Student Highlights



Evelyn (Evie) Browning, a Biocore Senior this year, was awarded the prestigious Marshall Scholarship. Evie completed the Biocore Certificate in Spring 2025 and will earn a bachelor's degree in Genetics & Genomics, and Data Science this year. The Marshall Scholarship gives American students the opportunity to attend Graduate School in the United Kingdom. Evie will be attending the University of Cambridge and the Wellcome Sanger Institute next year in order to study the contributions of genetic variants to neurodevelopmental conditions. Congratulations Evie!

"It's a dream come true to have this opportunity. Biocore has been a foundational part of my undergraduate experience, and I can't wait to use everything I've learned to help improve our understanding of the role of genetics in neurodevelopmental conditions."
-Evie Browning

Outreach Ambassadors Win the Kemper Knapp



In the spring semester of 2025 the Biocore Outreach Ambassadors were awarded a Kemper Knapp Award from the Kemper Knapp Bequest. The outreach ambassadors have used this award to support their many pronged efforts to increase science literacy and engagement in local communities inside and outside Madison.



Biocore Students Win a Wisconsin Idea Fellowship

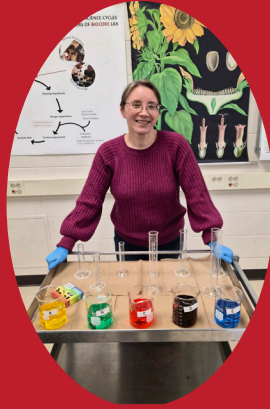


Biocore students Khadijah Dhoondia, Bisma and Iqra Arif, along with colleagues Musaab Tareen and Ilhan Mohamed of the Islamic STEM

society (iSTEM) earned a Wisconsin Idea Fellowship this year funding their efforts to create a youth Science Camp for Muslim kids in both Madison and Milwaukee communities. Their objective is to provide Muslim youth with an opportunity to connect with their faith and science in communities across Wisconsin. The iSTEM team has been working hard in the Summer and Fall semesters in preparation for two Science Camps hosted with community partners, Madinah Academy of Madison and the Islamic Dawah Center of Milwaukee. These camps will be held in the summer of 2026.

Welcome and Farewell

We welcomed a new Associate Director to the Biocore program this school year. Dr. Anna Kowalkowski was selected in August 2025 to take the lead as Biocore's next Associate Director! Anna has previously served as a Teaching Faculty member with the Biocore team. Her experience as a Biocore instructor and as a dedicated teacher and researcher make her exceptionally well prepared for this role. We are excited to see the program grow under her stewardship. Anna will continue to teach Biocore 181, Biocore 384, Biocore 401, and Biocore 486. Students also saw Anna return lecturing this Fall with Biocore 485 where she covered the gastrointestinal, lymphatic, and cardiac systems.



Dr. Heidi Horn resigned from her position as Biocore's Associate Director last year. Heidi served Biocore for two years as Associate Director and Teaching Faculty. In this role Heidi brought her experience as an ecologist to the forefront guiding Biocore students in our outdoor classroom, the Biocore Prairie, during the first semester lab. Heidi's enthusiasm and spirit will be missed. Heidi has not traveled far, she has begun teaching a course with our very own Dr. Shelby O'Connor. Consider their course, Path 501: Topics in environmental viral pathogen surveillance, for your advanced breadth in biology needs. This course sounds infectious!



We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Daniel Parrell as Teaching Faculty in Biocore. He brings expertise and enthusiasm in microbiology and science outreach to this core position in the program. Danny can be seen teaching in Biocore 181, Biocore 401, Biocore 382, and Biocore 384. He is the advisor for the Biocore Outreach Ambassadors where he provides mentorship to students as they serve the broader Wisconsin community.



Last year saw the departure of Dr. Shelby O'Connor as Biocore faculty director. As a former TA, and an ongoing faculty instructor with the Biocore program, Dr. O'Connor led Biocore with first-hand knowledge of the program's needs and practices. Dr. O'Connor will still be found teaching Biocore 383, and wearing her Biocore apparel in locations all over the globe. Thank you Shelby, we truly appreciated your leadership!



UW-Bat Brigade



The UW Bat Brigade is spreading its wings. Led by Biocore lab instructor Seth McGee, the group saw a boost in membership, equipment, and data collection this year. Beyond their signature walking surveys in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, the Brigade now monitors the skies every night of the summer using a new static recording system located at the Biocore Prairie. In October, students celebrated International Bat Week with a screening of the new research documentary, *The Invisible Mammal* in Noland Hall. Check out the recent UW News story that features the Bat Brigade in action. While the group's mission is centered on Biocore student engagement, the Bat Brigade is open to anyone interested in helping and learning about bats. [Click here to join in on the fun!](#)

Biocore's Service Learning Missions



Biocore students visited the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, Goose Pond Sanctuary this year as the fall weather set in. A team of students from our most recent cohort enrolled in Biocore 381/382, and a few older students too, spent 4 hours collecting the seeds from native plants, learning about the prairie ecosystem, and they event helped to release monarch butterflies reared by the Madison Audubon staff members. The efforts of Biocore students on this day support the ongoing restoration and conservation efforts of the Goose Pond Sanctuary by providing a crucial supply of native plant seeds. These seeds will be strategically sown in support of restoration efforts.

Congratulations Biocore Class of 2025!



Congratulations to the latest class of Biocore graduates. Your hard work will carry you into your next adventure! We could not be more proud!

-Biocore Program Staff and Faculty

