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## The Wisconsin Idea in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

One of the things that makes me proudest to be a UW alum is the Wisconsin Idea. Few other universities have done such a good job of embracing the concept that an institution of higher learning should benefit people beyond the boundaries of the classroom.

In 1908, UW President Charles Van Hise emphasized that the university's knowledge "must be carried out to the people." A few years later, the term the Wisconsin Idea became widespread, often coupled with the phrase "the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state."

In those early years, UW faculty embodied the Wisconsin Idea by helping legislators draft the nation's first workers' compensation laws and other pioneering legislation. The university's Extension was created to provide summer courses and other programs that did everything from focusing on sanitation and prenatal health to teaching farmers new techniques. The article in this issue about Aline Hazard (page 40), who brought farm women the latest in domestic science via WHA radio, is a perfect example of how the UW reached out to those who otherwise had no connection with the university, generating good will and earning the support of state citizens.

Today, the Wisconsin Idea has become more comprehensive and diversified. The university is forming new partnerships with business and industry, as well as new connections with public and private institutions. It is responding to problems in Wisconsin communities by bringing in multidisciplinary teams of faculty. It is expanding the Wisconsin Idea so that the boundaries of the university become the boundaries of the world through distance education and other resources.

The economic benefits of the Wisconsin Idea are immeasurable. More than one hundred companies in Wisconsin are based on intellectual property from UW-Madison. You can read about one of them, a spin-off business that helps patients who have lost their sense of balance, on page 28. The university's Research Park has been so successful that plans are now in place for Research Park II, which will create an additional fifteen thousand high-paying jobs. The new Wisconsin Institutes for Discovery will not only spur economic development, but will generate cures for disease and advances in biotechnology that will have worldwide impact.

In light of our new global, information-dominated economy, the Wisconsin Idea is more relevant than ever. In this era of tight budgets and shrinking state support, it is critical for us to spread the word about the university's function as a knowledge powerhouse and a rugged economic engine so that we can retain the good will of the people of the state.

To quote UW System President Kevin Reilly, "we must transform our universities to make it clear that outreach and engagement are not just options ... not a bonus ... but are truly at the heart of what we do."

Regina Millner JD'85, MS'91  
 WAA Chair of the Board  
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