



Wisconsin Union

Experiences for a lifetime



SOCIAL JUSTICE HUB
THE WISCONSIN UNION

The Wisconsin Union: A historical timeline of building community, inclusion and supporting social justice

go.wisc.edu/UnionSocialJusticeHistory

Revised 1/18/19

This is a document in continuous development, compiled from a variety of researched documents¹ and materials over the decades. As with all history, this history is not complete. If you have edits and additional information that can be included, please send updates to Jim.Rogers@wisc.edu (Program Director, Social Justice Hub, prior Wisconsin Union Archivist).

1907 The Wisconsin Union forms.

The Wisconsin Union was somewhat of an orphan organization for many years following its inception in 1907. It moved around the campus from one venue to the next—most notably the old, decrepit YMCA building on Langdon Street, which was finally condemned and razed.

1919 University of Wisconsin students persevered in their quest for a permanent college union building and began raising funds in 1919. "Under the State of Wisconsin constitution of that era you could not borrow money. There could not be a state debt for any purpose beyond \$100,000. This grew out of the Civil War in which constitution writers decided that the state would never go into debt again to run a war or anything else. So you had to have the cash in hand before a contract to build would be approved."²

1914 Formation of National Association of Student Unions (ACUI's forerunner) with a goal to share their knowledge. Seven schools attended: Case School of Applied Science and the state universities of Purdue, Ohio State, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan. The Ohio State University's Ohio Union was the only United States university having a building designed and erected as a union. All university reps were students, except Edward S. "Beanie" Drake of Ohio State. *"Actually, the student president of the [Wisconsin] Union at that time [Fred M. Hall] was the first president of the Association of College Unions. You see, it was a highly student-oriented organization at the beginning; so the president of the Association was a student."*³ The "union's" unique role on each campus, was acknowledged by the delegates stating *"It was believed by those present at this meeting that the union is the most vital force in unifying the student body, molding the college spirit, and promoting democracy, thus tending to break down arbitrary class and social distinctions. Without such a unifying force any student body, which is naturally broken up into different departments and classes, is apt to center its*

¹ A graduate student compiled around 2001 the "Chronology of the Wisconsin Union's Diversity Initiatives 1928-2001. Also see, go.wisc.edu/UnionDiversityInitiatives

² Porter Butts, n.d., cassette recording

³ Porter Butts, n.d., cassette recording

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interest and enthusiasm in some particular department or organization, rather than in the school as a whole.⁴ The union was seen as a community recreation center embracing social recreation and cultural recreation—music, the arts, stage, crafts. . . . Students did not have ready access to recreational and social activities if they did not belong to a fraternity or sorority or get asked to greek events. This made student life for many "lonely" and "grim and dreary."⁵

- 1916** The group met again in 1916. When World War I broke out attention was diverted elsewhere until the war was over. Unions built shortly after World War I were largely war memorials, including those at Purdue, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, and Wisconsin.
- "Characteristic of the time, they were also all men's unions, following the pattern of the British gentlemen's club. In American society women were seen as homemakers who did not need a college education; therefore, the student bodies of most universities at that time were predominantly male (Butts, n.d.)." Most families also could not afford to send all their children to college, so they would send their sons. So in this context, it's not too hard to identify why unions coming along at the turn of the century were men's clubs ... "We soon found out that this was a grave mistake. And we were reminded of it by the girls who remembered that they raised more money for the building than the men did, among other things. What's more, they simply didn't want to be isolated. They didn't want a separate women's club building. And, indeed, the men didn't either. It was an unnatural kind of division. "*⁶
- 1906** The YMCA, located next to the Armory on the current Alumni Park opens.
- 1919** The University Board of Regents approves the idea of building a campus community center as a memorial to World War I with an auditorium as "one of the principle elements."
- 1920s** Students began to raise the money necessary to build the Union facility. Nearly half of the students in the 1920s donated at least \$50 to the Memorial Union Building Fund. That is equivalent to \$500 in current dollars, a generous amount considering they knew they would not benefit from the new building as students.
- 1925** Groundbreaking for the Memorial Union began, and in 1927 aviator Charles Lindbergh placed a wreath on the cornerstone in memory of his Wisconsin classmates who died in World War I.
- 1928** In October, the Memorial Union opened, located on the shores of Lake Mendota, right next to the site of the old YMCA. In its charter, the union stated that its purpose would be "to provide a common life and a cultivated social program for the members of the Wisconsin Union."⁷ As Porter Butts, the student leader who became the union's first director, said: *So here it was, early at the beginning, concluded that the business operations and food operations of the building should be supportive of the general social, cultural, and recreational purposes of the union ... They said nothing about food service or balancing the budget, or so on. 'Cultivated social program' was the key phrase, and 'common life,' meaning faculty and staff and alumni, as well as students. We at the beginning scratched the student-only designation.*⁸
- 1929** The first college union art gallery was initiated at the Memorial Union.

⁴ The National Association of Student Unions, 1915, p. 3

⁵ Porter Butts, n.d.

⁶ Butts, n.d., cassette recording

⁷ The Association of College and University Unions, 1929, p. 21

⁸ Butts, n.d., cassette recording

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- 1930** The first recreational craftshop on campus and the first in any college union was created.
- International Weekend is held, with the purpose to “aid in the abolition of hereditary dislikes due to racial and political differences, and to assist in the furtherance of world amity.”
- 1932** The ping-pong room in Memorial Union is renamed the Katskeller by the Women’s Affairs Committee to counteract the men-only Rathskeller.
- 1933** The first college nightclub is initiated in Tripp Commons, the Memorial Union.
- The International Club holds its first exhibit of costumes, dishes and other objects from international countries.
- 1935** The Wisconsin Union is designated by UW Board of Regents as “The Division of Social Education.”
- 1939** The first college to incorporate a theater with the opening of the Wisconsin Union Theater.
- 1943** Dr. Charles Wesley lectures on the “Challenge to Democracy” to defeat problems of race bias in America.
- The Union elects its first woman president.
- 1944** Othello, starring Paul Robeson, Uta Hagen and Jose Ferrer performs in the Wisconsin Union Theater.
- Union Directorate votes to oppose, as a body, the display of racial discrimination on campus.
- 1949-50** The Theater’s 10th anniversary season features Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking from the stage and then addressing an overflow audience on the Union Terrace from the Theater balcony.
- The International Club hosts Pakistan Ambassador M. A. H. Ispahnai.
- 1952** Patrick Murphy Malin, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, lectures on “Civil Liberties Under Fire.”
- 1953** Jazz legend Louis Armstrong performs at the first of three Wisconsin Union Theater engagements.
- Eleanor Roosevelt lectures on “The United Nations Today and Our Part in It.”
- Trygve Lie, former secretary-general of the United Nations and Norwegian statesman, gives a lecture.
- 1954** The International Club organizes a United Nations Weekend.
- 1956** The Forum Committee organizes a mock Democratic and Republican National Presidential Nominating Convention.
- 1957** A mock U. S. Senate is held, with debates on civil rights, labor, and foreign aid.

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A Married Couples group is formed to organize social programs.

- 1958** The Forum Committee organizes a panel called “Problems of Ethnic Integration – the North is Not Exempt.”
- First Wisconsin “Panel of Young Americans,” designed to answer questions on prejudices and misconceptions, is created.
- 1958 May 16** Senator and future president John F Kennedy speaks at the Wisconsin Union Theater.
- 1959** Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt gives her third and final Wisconsin Union Theater talk.
- 1959** Jazz singer Ella Fitzgerald performs in the Wisconsin Union Theater.
- 1961** Henry Kissinger lectures on “American Policy and Disarmament.”
- Operation Abolition, a propaganda film on the San Francisco student riots against the House Un-American Activities Committee, is shown and debated by a law professor and state representative.
- 1962** Martin Luther King, Jr., speaks on “The Future of Integration.” He returns in 1965.
- Walter Heller, a Kennedy advisor, speaks on the negative impact of racial bias on economic growth.
- 1963 May 30** The Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. addresses a Wisconsin Union Theater audience.
- Teodoro Moscoso, assistant administrator for Latin American in the Agency for International Development, gives a lecture.
- Showing and discussion of “To Find a Home,” a film on racial bias in Madison housing.
- 1964** Harry Golden, publisher of the Carolina Israelite, speaks on civil rights.
- 1965** John Lewis, National Chairman of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, lectures and leads a rally.
- The Forum Committee organizes a series of lectures and seminars on civil disobedience.
- 1966** Robert Resha, South African Nationalist leader, lectures.
- Saul Alinsky, executive director of the Industrial Areas Foundation, speaks on community organizing in urban areas.
- 1967** Albert Raby speaks on “Civil Rights – Black Power: Where do we go from here?”
- 1968** Students boycott Union food services for three days after a Black non-student was ejected from the Rathskeller.
- 1969** The Forum Committee organizes and sponsors the Black Revolution Conference. Speakers include: Jesse Jackson, Anthony Henry, Hosea Williams, Jonathan Royal, Dr. Nathan Wright

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Jr., Rev. Andrew Young, Gwendolyn Brooks.

- 1970** Madison Alliance for Homosexual Equality holds a “coming out” dance in the Union.
- The Forum Committee cosponsors a four-day conference, “Black Arts: Expression Towards Liberation.”
- 1971** Union South opens.
- 1972** Volunteer Services Office, forerunner of the Morgridge Center for Public Service, is established at Union South, serving as a clearinghouse for volunteer opportunities for students.
- 1973** The International Affairs Interest Area of WUD is established.
A Black student art show, “Black Expressions,” is shown in the gallery.
- 1977** Ericka Huggins, leader in the Black Panther Party, lectures.
Betty Friedan, founder of the National Organization for Women, is the kick-off speaker of the Feminist Lecture Series, which includes Brenda Eichelberger, Florynce Kennedy, and Warren Farrell.
- 1978** A week-long tribute to South Africa features a Sharpeville Commemoration benefit.
Bella Abzug speaks on the Equal Rights Amendment.
Disabled Awareness Day, “Ask Me Anything,” is held at Union South.
- 1980** African-American History Month features Louis Farrakhan speaking on “Social/Political/Factual Ramifications of World Events upon Black People of America,” Wade Nobles speaking on “The Black Family in Today’s Society,” a Black Ball, and a William T. Williams art exhibit.
The Union sponsors a mini-course on social and personal changes in women’s lives.
WUD puts on a documentary film program called “Northeast Wisconsin Indians: Challenges and Confrontations.”
- 1981** A panel discussion is held entitled “Women in Management: Up the Down Ladder?”
James Abourezk, founder of the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, lectures.
- 1982** First joint recital by the two Wisconsin Union Theater favorites, pianist Emanuel Ax and cellist Yo-Yo Ma. Together or separately, the two appeared more than 10 times since their respective Concert Series debuts in 1975 and 1979.
WUD co-sponsors the first annual Multicultural Orientation and Reception.
The International Culture Awareness lunch series is started
African American History Month is celebrated with lectures by Nikki Giovanni, Bobby Seale and Kwame Ture, Vince Evans, and Elizabeth Carnegie.
- 1983** Saturday Night Ethnic Special features reggae, salsa, and Native American folk music in the Rathskeller.
Women to Women: Guatemalan Women Speak.

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- 1986** Craftshop constructs fourth floor crossover to make the facility accessible to individuals with physical disabilities.
- Out and About Celebrating Gay and Lesbian Culture includes lectures such as Paula Gunn Allen's "Gay and Lesbian Rites in Native American Culture."
- WUD presents the "American Pictures: The Country You Never Knew" program, a documentary about the plight of the underclass in America.
- 1988** The WUD Film Committee sponsors the Hispanic Film Festival.
- The WUD Art Committee sponsors "Compañeras: Women, Art and Social Change in Latin America Exhibition" and "Asian Artists Exhibition."
- Charles King, head of Atlanta's Urban Crisis Center, gives a lecture.
- Rabbi Carol Glass speaks on "The Jewish American Prince/ss: Harmless Humor or Denigrating Stereotype?"
- 1989 Feb** A committee of students, faculty and staff, appointed by Chancellor Donna Shalala and led by Dean of Students Mary Rouse and landscape architecture professor Bruce Murray, adopts a plan to repurpose the Armory as a "gateway to the university" for visitors as well as much needed space for student services programs, with renovations completed 1997 - April 1999.
- An educational component on multiculturalism is added to the Union's Orientation program for new employees.
- Raise Your Voices, a multicultural feminist fair, is organized.
- Ron Smith speaks on the African Diaspora.
- 1990** The Interim Multicultural Center, in the Memorial Union, establishes the first annual Multicultural Graduation Reception and Awards Ceremony for students of color.
- Maya Angelou speaks in Wisconsin Union Theater.
- Union Council selects Jim Rogers as an openly gay student as Wisconsin Union President.
- 1991** Ideas and Issues Committee sponsors a forum on diversity in the University, focusing on curriculum modification.
- The Wisconsin Union bans smoking in the Memorial Union and Union South, leaving only smoking designated areas outside of the building entrances. This, at a time when the Rathskeller was a social hub on campus with lots of smoking since the building opening.
- 1992** Hoofers outdoor recreation establishes PEOPLE: Providing Equal Outdoor Programming and Leadership Experience to offer access to people with disabilities for all Hooper activities; the Ski Accessibility Program is part of PEOPLE.
- Social Education sponsors the WUD-wide "Americanism" program that includes a variety of performances, speakers, and exhibits concerning the term "American."
- Fighting the Myths of AIDS presentation by the: Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Campus Center.
- Jessie Jackson speaks in Wisconsin Union Theater.
- 1993** Nadine Strossen, president of ACLU, speaks on civil rights under Bill Clinton.

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First annual Lesbian-Gay-Bisexual Film Festival is presented in the Union.

Cosponsored showing of film “Liberators” with lecture by William McBurney

1994

Helen Zia speaks on “Not Black, Not White: An Unjaundiced View of Asian America.”
The WUD Contemporary Issues Committee is established through combining the Ideas and Issues and Science and Society committees.

Cosponsor Women’s Film Festival with Campus Women’s Center and WUD Cross Cultures Committee

Sexual Assault Awareness Week Film with Sexual Assault Awareness Committee.

1995

The International Conversation and Coffee Hour is established by the Contemporary Issues, Cross Cultures, and Travel committees.

Panel on rape in response to recent city/campus events presented with the Women’s Center and Cross Cultures Committee.

The Performing Arts Committee cosponsored Holocaust Remembrance Week and Seung Hwa: Race/Rape/Rage/Revolution

1996

Social Education co-sponsors with Associated Students of Madison the QUESTions conference, concerning diversity in the community.

WUD conducts a Multicultural Self Study.

Jonathan Kozol speaks to raise awareness of children in inner cities.

Ann Bancroft speaks on being the first woman to travel to both the North and South Poles.

AIDS, Issues and Activism by Alternative Breaks and Contemporary Issues

Touched with Fire exhibition with Alliance for Mentally Ill of Wisconsin

1997

Cofounder and former chair of the Black Panthers, Bobby Seale speaks on his experiences fighting racism.

Patricia Ireland, president of NOW, speaks on feminism and activism in the 21st century.

Unheard Voices with the 7th Annual Conference on Campus Sexual Violence

1998

Lecture by Liam Mahoney on human rights abuses/death squad activities in Central America and Asia

2000

WUD co-sponsors the first annual Hip Hop as a Movement Conference.

2001

Art Committee hosted an exhibition by UW graduate student painters and by Madison Community Artists that focused on healing and recovery from gender violence

The Community Services committee held the Ribbon Campaign in response to 9/11 by giving out white and yellow ribbons to symbolize hope and peace.

The Dinner and culture series was developed

Morgridge Center works with University Health Services to offer series on social issues

2002

Lecturer Lani Guiner examined the experience of people of color signaling larger institutional inequalities.

Former President of South Africa, FW de Klerk spoke about the international debate on divided

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societies and the management of political change.

Transgender activist Leslie Fienberg argued for the acceptance of all trans people and the necessity to build coalitions between all progressive political groups.

The “Global Connections Children’s Fair” program is created.

- 2003** The Cookies & Milk program series was initiated with appearances by Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, Chancellor Wiley, and Dean of Students Loulou Hong, among others
- 2004** After 70 years of preeminence in the presentation of music from around the world, the Wisconsin Union Theater’s World Stage Series and the Madison World Music Festival are established.
- 2007** Alliance for Program Equality established to address perceptions and accessibility for Rsos program in Wisconsin.
- International Cinema screen “aimee and Jaguar” and held a panel discussion on LGBT issues from WWII to present
- Held a conference, “Celebrating the Many Faces of Public Service”, in celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Morgridge Center for Public Service.
- The Morgridge Center for Public Service Excellence in Civic Engagement Student Award is created.
- 2008** A new program was created in response to the economy, *Taste of the Terrace*, offered free food for UW students and cooking demonstrations and contests among Union food service units.
- 2010** The first ever campus-wide celebration of service learning travel, the Service Travel Symposium, was successfully staged with 17 cooperators and an estimated attendance of 150
- Collaborated with the UW Japan Tsunami Relief group on a benefit screening of *Howl’s Moving Castle*, which helped raise over \$1000
- 2011** United Nations Dr. Murali talks about Afghanistan, UN Career options, Millennium Development goals.
- Hosted first LGBT Film Festival
- 2012** Hosted Human Rights Awareness Week
- 2013** Wisconsin Diversity Award established
- 2016** Cuisine food security and systems was established
- Lecture by Andrew Soloman-“How Our Identities Emerge From Our Struggles”
- The Global Connections Committee focused on explicitly incorporating social justice into existing programs and developed new programs centered on issues of injustice.
- WUD Music hosted the Music for Mental Health Program
- WUD Performing Arts Committee set goals to book more artists engaged with social justice and those confronting race, gender and sexuality issues.
- 2017** The Jones Leadership Center internship positions with Porchlight are established

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Food Sovereignty event is hosted.

RED Talk: Killer Mike “Systemic Racism & Police Brutality”:

WUD Film worked with the Havens Center for Social Justice to present the Social Cinema series

WUD Society and Politics Committee hosted No Perfect Victim: Sexual Assault Awareness Spoken Word and Kamilah Willingham

2018

Wisconsin Food Stamps/SWAP benefits discussion.

The UW-Madison Ad Hoc Study “[Report to the Chancellor on the KKK at the University of Wisconsin -Madison](#)” is completed.

The Wisconsin Union initiates an internal Inclusion Study to better understand the extent to which students of color, and others from historically underrepresented and disadvantaged groups, feel a sense of connection to and belonging with the Memorial Union, the Memorial Union Terrace, and Union South.

The Memorial Union celebrates its [90 year birthday](#) (opened Oct 5, 2018)

Union Council approves the creation of a Social Justice program providing “purposeful out-of-classroom education through direct experience where students further develop skills to engage in social justice work and to provide leadership for our democracy.”

2019 Jan

The Wisconsin Union opens the Social Justice Hub with this purpose:

The Wisconsin Union Social Justice Hub provides purposeful out-of-classroom education through direct experience where students further develop skills to engage in social justice work and improve the quality of life for all.

2020 Sept

The Social Justice Hub moves from the Wisconsin Union to be part of the created UW-Madison Office of Inclusion Education.

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