History of the UW-Madison Institute on Aging (IOA)

1973 • The Institute is Founded
- as the Faye McBeath Institute on Aging and Adult Life.
- Faye McBeath, whose uncle founded the Milwaukee Journal where she worked for 20 years, inherited her uncle’s fortune and gave generously during her later years.
- She was explicitly interested in establishing a gerontology center.
- Additional support came from the UW-Madison Graduate School.

1973-1981 • Beginnings of the Institute: Focus on Community Service
- The Faye McBeath Foundation supported the Institute financially through 1980.
- The Institute was led by Director Martin Loeb, from the School of Social Work.
- The focus was largely on serving the needs of older people in the community.
- During its first 8 years, the Institute:
  - expended $221,000 in community service projects
  - was awarded training grants for graduate education from the Administration on Aging and National Institute on Aging
  - had 6 research projects on many aspects of the aging process, yielding about $125,900 per annum, from various funding sources
  - stimulated the development of campus courses on aging and services to professionals working on behalf of older adults.
  - Over 120 faculty affiliates from approximately fifty campus departments participated in the Institute’s programs.
  - The Institute became a known resource for individuals and community workers serving older adults.
  - Ultimately, during the first 8 years, the Institute laid the groundwork to advance knowledge in the field of aging at UW.

Gerontology is the study of aging, including its biological, psychological, and social aspects, across the lifespan.
Professor David Featherman, Dept. of Sociology, was named IOA Director in 1980.

The UW Graduate School assumed administrative leadership & funding for the Institute in 1981.

A new mission statement:
- made aging research and education prominent goals
- included a multidisciplinary research emphasis
- noted that explorations of both growth and decline in life are best pursued within a lifespan framework.

There was steady growth and productivity during the 1980s, particularly in social science research.

The Institute began forging links between the psychosocial & biomedical aspects of aging research, and included biomedical faculty in the IOA's executive committee.

Four multidisciplinary research areas were conceived as frontiers of aging:
- biology of aging and clinical geriatrics (biomedical sciences)
- life-span development and social gerontology (social behavioral perspectives).

IOA began offering a Biology of Aging seminar.

In response to its changing mission and new funding, we became the UW–Madison Institute on Aging (IOA).

IOA began offering its free, annual colloquium in 1989, a key element in fulfilling its outreach goals.

The colloquium continues to bring together well-known researchers from other institutions and UW faculty to provide updates on the social and biological aspects of aging.

The event, conceived largely as an endeavor in research translation and dissemination, draws a large crowd of both researchers and the general public.

From its beginning, IOA has worked to promote awareness of aging research on campus.

In 1990 IOA began publishing informational booklets that offered an overview of aging research from faculty across campus.

These booklets were published periodically for more than a decade, until most information became available via the IOA website.

Services provided to affiliates included:
- support applying for and administering grants
- computing through IOA's membership in the UW Social Science Computing Cooperative.
1989-1994 • IOA Expands to Include More Biomedical Research

- The IOA was expanded to include funding from the UW Medical School, which joined the Graduate School to oversee the direction and activities of the Institute—a key step in making the IOA a truly multidisciplinary institute.
- The new IOA Director, appointed in 1989, Professor William Ershler, was from the Department of Medicine, where he was Head of the new Geriatrics Section.
- He was also Director of the VA GRECC (the Veteran’s Administration’s Geriatrics, Research, Education, and Clinical Center), and ties were forged between IOA & GRECC to administer the Biology of Aging and Age-Related Diseases Training Grant awarded by the National Institute on Aging in 1990. The grant supported training in the biology of aging for several physician/scientists each year, funding over 80 trainees over three decades.
- The IOA included a clinical emphasis during this time, hosting:
  - interdisciplinary geriatric assessment and primary care geriatric clinics
  - problem-oriented, half day clinics, on topics such as osteoporosis, memory disorders, falls, incontinence
  - a separate Older Adult and Geriatric Clinic at the University Station.

1991 • IOA Newsletter Begins

- IOA’s first newsletter was called Aging Notes.
- It began by reporting on activities of the Institute and its affiliates (grants received, new faculty profiles, aging events).
- Later it began to include summaries of research findings.

1993 • Eloquence & Eminence Lectures Begin

- Co-sponsored by the IOA, this series featured emeritus faculty from UW departments speaking about their areas of expertise.
- The lectures were held at UW on Sundays to maximize attendance and were broadcast on Wisconsin Public Radio.
- Audiences gained insights and inspiration from hearing active older adults known for their teaching excellence and historical perspective.
- 2018 was the 25th anniversary of this lecture series.

Geriatrics is a medical specialty focused on the diseases of old age
Professor Carol Ryff, Dept. of Psychology, became the new Director of IOA in 1995. She was part of the initial MIDUS study, a national survey funded by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 1995.

Under her leadership, MIDUS was expanded to include cognitive, biological, and neuroscience assessments, as well as to broaden the focus on racial disparities via recruitment of African Americans from Milwaukee.

New funding for MIDUS was obtained from the National Institute on Aging in 2002. Such funding has been continuous over the past two decades, totaling more than $150 million.

In 2011, MIDUS was further expanded to include a second national sample to study the impact of historical changes on aging, such as the Great Recession.

Now with over 11,000 participants, MIDUS has become the major component of IOA's work.

In 2022 funding was received to carry the study forward another 6 years.

Assessments on the original participants will span 30 years of aging.

New projects will focus on identifying risk factors for Alzheimer’s disease and the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 1996, IOA established its first home page on the world wide web, providing IOA affiliates opportunities to post information about their aging research.

The website has continued to increase networking and spread information about aging related events, news, classes, job opportunities, and community resources.

The MIDJA study (Midlife in Japan) is a parallel study to MIDUS that began in 2008 with 1000 adults, aged 30 to 79, living in Tokyo.

Funding was renewed in 2012 and supported collection of two rounds of data (sociodemographics, psychosocial factors, and physical health, including biomarker data).

Comparison of MIDUS & MIDJA data has shown, for example, that independence is more strongly associated with better health and well-being in the US, whereas interdependence with others is more firmly linked to health in Japan.
The colloquium continues to be IOA’s popular outreach event, with 650 people registering for its 30th annual event. Now a one day event held on campus, the 2018 colloquium included:

- an internationally known, keynote speaker, Sir Michael Marmot, and three speakers from UW addressing the topic of Inequality & Health
- a health & resource fair with 45 local exhibitors
- a poster session showcasing recent aging research
- new investigator awards given to students & trainees to recognize outstanding achievement in aging research.

2021 marked the 30th anniversary of IOA’s newsletter, now called Aging News.

The newsletter now focuses on sharing aging research results from IOA affiliates and MIDUS, for 2000 readers from the public and campus.

Below are the banners from some previous issues: