

L&S SAA: AIM Annual Report 2024-2025

Mike Pflieger, Assistant Dean/Director, August 21, 2025

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Overview

Academic Information Management provides essential services for L&S departments, programs, governance committees, and policy/information implementation efforts related to undergraduate degree, major, and certificate programs. Our services provide departments planning data, analysis for assessments, and consultation for curriculum development and approval through official college and university governance, as well as oversight of curriculum implementation, exception processes, and data reporting and governance.

Staff

Susan McMillan, Policy & Planning Analyst II
Wyl Schuth, Policy & Planning Analyst I
Michael Zenz, Policy & Planning Analyst II
Mike Pflieger, Assistant Dean/Director

Core Functions

- Curriculum & Degree Analysis
- Curriculum Implementation
- Data Assets and Analysis Requests
- Degree Clearance
- Process Improvement
- Operational System Support
- Consultation
- Data Governance
- Leadership, Collaboration, Service

2024-25 Highlights

This was an extraordinarily busy year for AIM. Several initiatives and campus changes are converging that require expert policy analysis and expertise from AIM staff. Some of the most impactful efforts were:

- Music Education degree revisions and implementation
- LAS Forward consultation, analyses, and recommendations
- How-To-Get-In pilot for content in Guide
- Digital Accessibility standards implementation
- DARS system migration and retirement of legacy DARS Advisor Request pages
- Data Literacy workshops
- AIM-RO collaborations to standardize Guide content for DARS alignment
- Enhanced guidance for L&S departments for Guide/Lumen production
- Retirement of Distinction in Major graduation credential
- 153 programs reviewed and published in Guide 2025-2026
- Improved guidance for L&S departments for Lumen/Guide content

Curriculum and Degree Outcomes Analysis

AIM staff are involved in the review, analysis, assessment, and research on L&S undergraduate degree, major, and certificate programs. We provide insight that is essential for well-functioning curriculum for our students, advisors, and administrative resources.

Lumen Program Proposals

AIM provides analyses of proposed curricular changes to undergraduate programs, focused on these aspects of curricular implementation and outcomes:

- Program requirements must be conducive to auditing in DARS and thus must specify the number of courses and credits, and the discrete courses eligible for a degree, major, or certificate program to be achievable and completed.
- Programs should cohere to L&S policies governing degrees, majors, and certificates so that students have consistent experiences and do not face hardships such as extended time-to-degree. AIM ensures that programs are within normal ranges for numbers of required credits, include residency and quality of work standards, and that Honors is properly based on the core major learning outcomes of the major.
- Programs should not require curricular exceptions for students to complete the program. AIM has unique experience identifying when program requirements and other policies create bottlenecks or otherwise necessitate manual intervention. If so, we suggest alternative solutions so that curriculum management is low maintenance and equitable for all students.
- Programs should have appropriate rigor, and not present unnecessary barriers to student degree attainment or disenfranchise certain populations of students. Most commonly, this is proposed as declaration requirements published on “How To Get

In” pages, in Guide. When there are requirements to declare a major or certificate, AIM analyzes the rationale for these barriers and attempts to project, through data analysis (if possible) whether the stated goals are likely to be achieved through these policies and when necessary, to suggest alternative approaches to the proposing department, or the L&S Curriculum Committee.

With these objectives in mind, AIM analyzed and provided feedback for 153 Lumen Program proposals for approval by L&S and university governance for publication in Guide:

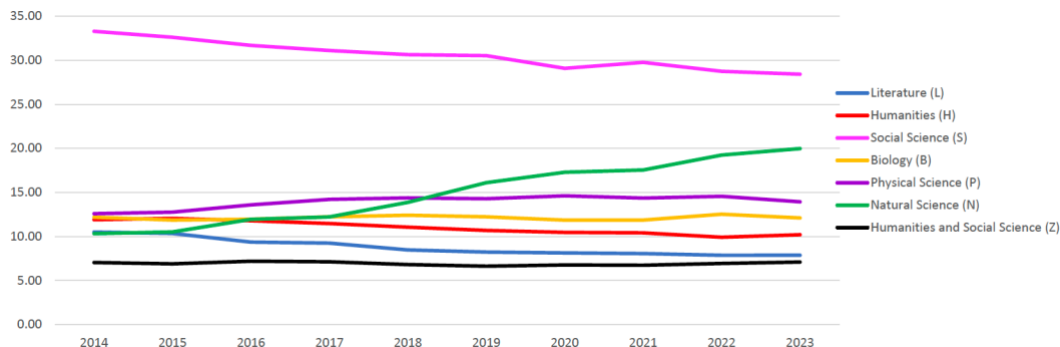
- 137 proposals for Guide 2025-2026, of which:
 - 10 proposals were for new programs
 - 39 were approved at LSCC
 - 98 were administratively approved based on AIM and TLA review
- 16 mid-cycle updates for Spring 2025 publication
- Updates were made to 4 Lumen Structures pages:
 - Entering the College
 - Requirements
 - Policies & Regulations
 - Honors

Research Studies

AIM conducted several studies of student outcomes and curriculum requirements in 2024, much of it requested for the LAS Forward project and other faculty bodies interested in how the L&S degree requirements are impacting students or departmental budgets and staffing considerations. These research studies were shared and/or published:

Students in L&S Undergraduate Degrees

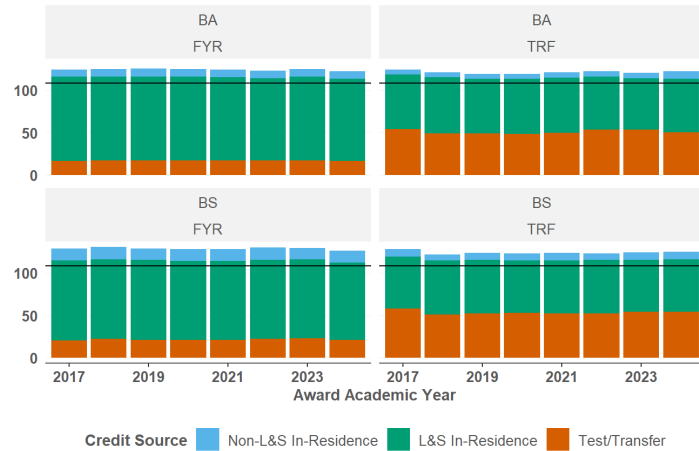
Requested by the History Department and submitted to the LAS Forward working group, followed by a presentation to that group about the key takeaways. Among the data provided was an analysis on student credit attainment by Breadth attribute, which showed a drop in Social Science credits and a steady increase in Natural Science. These trends are reflective of the shifting interests of students who, during enrollment expansion, are choosing computational and hard science curricula in greater numbers.



LAS credits outside of L&S

Requested by L&S Curriculum Committee to consider the impact of its decisions to award LAS credit to non-L&S courses and student choice to meet the degree requirement for LAS credit with non-L&S courses. The study showed there is no significant concern that L&S students are completing a large proportion of their LAS credits outside the College.

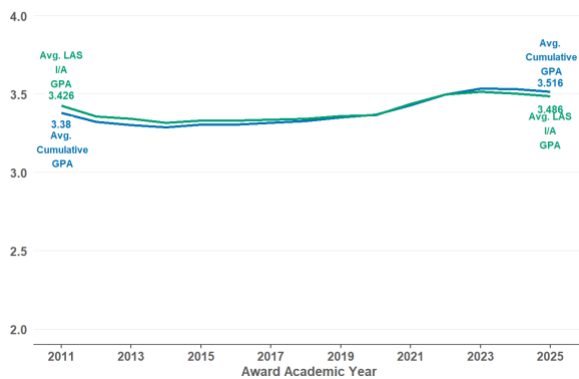
Median Number of LAS Credits Earned by L&S BA and BS Degree Recipients
Horizontal Line is 108 LAS Credit Requirement



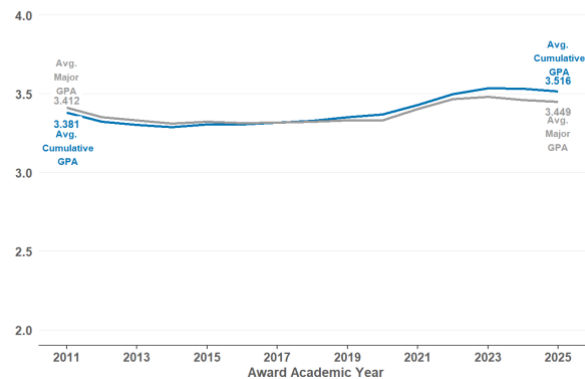
Quality of Work in L&S Degrees

Analyzes the average GPA in the four Quality of Work requirements in the L&S BA/BS degrees. This analysis shows the compression of GPA near the top of the scale, which makes diminishes GPA as a useful metric of academic performance. Students obtain nearly the same GPA in all four L&S Quality of Work requirements, and there may be opportunity to simplify and strengthen these requirements in a future version of the BA/BS degrees.

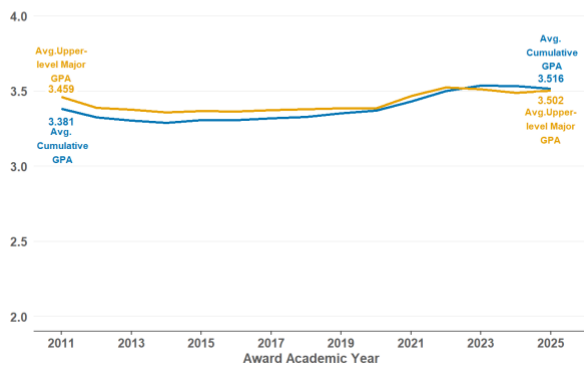
L&S Undergrad. Degree Recipient Average Cumulative and LAS I/A GPAs
2011-2025



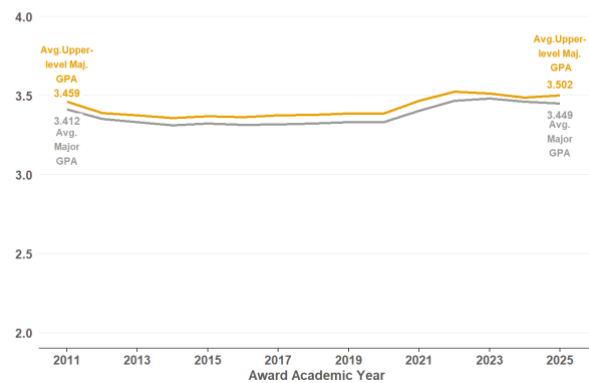
L&S Undergrad. Degree Recipient Average Cumulative and Major GPAs
2011-2025



L&S Undergrad. Degree Recipient Average Cumulative and Upper-level Major GPAs
2011-2025



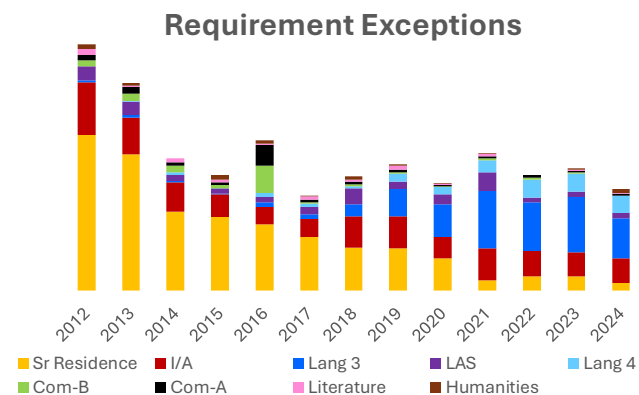
L&S Undergrad. Degree Recipient Average Major and Upper-level Major GPAs
2011-2025



Based on the Quality of Work in L&S Degrees whitepaper and subsequent analysis, AIM prepared a policy reform proposal for L&S Curriculum Committee as to consider in the 2025-2026 academic year.

ADS Exception Analysis

AIM provided an analysis for ADS showing the steep drop in degree exceptions since 2012. The only category of degree exceptions to increase were waivers to the BA and BS language requirements.



Curriculum Implementation

AIM oversees the implementation of curriculum in the degree audit system (DARS), authorizations for exceptions to L&S undergraduate requirements.

DARS encoding

AIM ensures that L&S degree audits are high quality, and conducive for multiple purposes:

- Degree clearance
- Academic Advising
- Policy Enforcement
- Data extraction and analysis
- NCAA eligibility reporting

To serve these purposes, AIM ensures that degree audits are accurate, reflect the approved curriculum, readable by a variety of users, and balance the needs of most academic records with non-standard situations such as unusual enrollment patterns, inarticulate transfer equivalencies and test scores, and exact (fractional) credits.

AIM provides documentation of changes to DARS as well as department training and information for DARS users. AIM authorizes L&S users for DARS access.

DARS system integrity

In addition, and because L&S is the largest stakeholder to the UW-Madison implementation of uAchieve/DARS, we are involved in quality assurance, consultation on features and system migrations, as well providing feedback to the Office of the Registrar on the degree audit service.

In 2024 and 2025, AIM made a substantial contribution in testing the new new DARS App in comparison to the existing DARSweb platform, revealing differential outcomes and reliability concerns with the new platform that prevented a service disruption for many/all users.

Guide-DARS alignment project

In partnership with the Office of the Registrar, AIM is providing guidance for degree requirement encoding standards that will strengthen the alignment between what is published in Guide and how DARS is encoded to reflect the approved curriculum. This effort will result in standardized languages used by departments, approved through Lumen, and encoded in DARS with the expected result to be a better common understanding of the requirements in each of our programs.

Refresher course (Repeated non-repeatable courses) and GPA impact

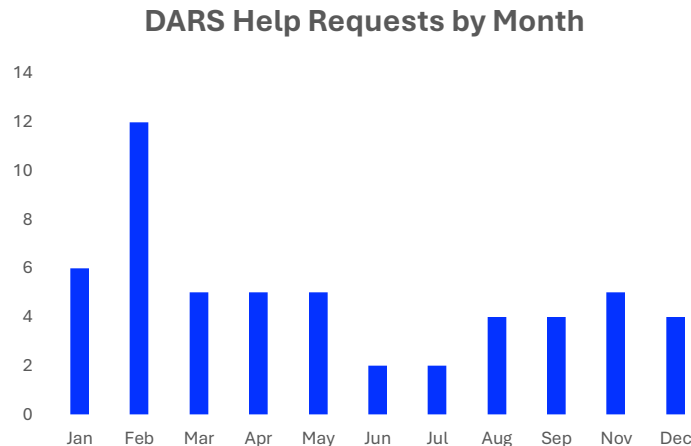
In partnership with the Office of the Registrar, identified a solution for a long-standing problem when students repeat passed courses more than twice, and the inaccurate GPA computations resulting from this in DARS.

Staffing and encoding challenges: Consultation and feedback was provided to the Associate Registrar regarding recent experiences and challenges. In 2024, staffing changes in the RO realigned the service and renewed the partnership between L&S and RO, as well as resulted in a stronger connection between the DARS technical support team in the RO and the DAPIR technical support team responsible for warehousing L&S DARS data.

Department relations and support

AIM is first contact for L&S departments to report DARS issues and needing access to the systems. In 2024-21025, AIM:

- Authorized 22 staff and student workers for DARS access.
- Fielded approximately 54 DARS Help requests from January 2024 to August 2025.



Data Assets and Analysis Requests

To maximize the use of data without expanding staff, AIM adopted a strategy to create data assets for self-service. Primarily, these are developed in Tableau where information is approved as having a public and campus purpose, and in HTML reports where the information is for internal audiences.

HTML Reports

These reports were created in 2019 for academic planning and assessment and are particularly useful for departments considering changes to their curriculum, undergoing a mandatory self-study and program review, or who are tracking program growth and student outcomes. An innovation of reports is that the data collection and reporting method allowed AIM to scale access to all undergraduate L&S programs and refresh them synchronously at the conclusion of each academic year. They provide trend data over a rolling 10-year period, which is key information for program assessment and planning.

In 2024-25 AIM added two new features to existing reports. *Students in L&S Undergraduate Majors* now includes these added features Subplans and Number of major graduates.

AIM responded to interest by the Academic Associate Deans to aggregate major report data by L&S Areas of Study (academic division: Arts & Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Sciences, and Computer, Data, and Information Sciences). These reports are currently in draft awaiting approval to publish.

Tableau Visualizations

AIM maintains data visualizations/dashboards hosted in Tableau for institutional use:

- Courses used to meet L&S degree requirements (145 views since July 2024)
- Courses used to meet L&S major requirements (216 times since July 2024)
- Courses used to meet L&S certificate requirements
- Undergraduate Major Curricular Exceptions (121 views since July 2024)
- Undergraduate Degree Clearance Deficiencies (375 views since July 2024)

Cyclical data/analysis for operational support

AIM receives requests for data for individual units on a routine basis. Each year or semester, L&S provides the following units data and/or reports for their planning and operations:

- CAE: pre-semester enrollments
- SCE:
 - pre-SCE placement test scores
 - Math 118 outcome report
 - student profile report
- L&S Honors:
 - Self-Study/Program Review
 - Progression benchmarks
 - Faculty Senate report
 - Under-represented student support
- SAA Scholarships:
 - PBK eligibility
 - Demographics reports
 - Dean's Prize eligibility
- English: scholarship eligibility reports
- French/Italian: scholarship eligibility reports
- Computer Sciences: Center for Inclusive Computing grant application
- Communicative Sciences and Disorders: Annual assessment reporting

Ad Hoc data requests

AIM also serves data and analysis upon request to departments on a variety of questions and for a variety of needs, including program review, curricular change management, student interest projections, operations, and student outcomes concerns. AIM served data and analysis to these departments and programs between June 2024 and August 2025:

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| • Botany | • Integrative Biology |
| • Philosophy | • Spanish |
| • English (3 requests) | • Mathematics |
| • Psychology (3 requests) | • LaFollette School of Public Affairs |
| • Chicana/x & Latina/x Studies | • Legal Studies (2 requests) |
| • Computer Sciences | • Geology & Geophysics |
| • Political Science | |

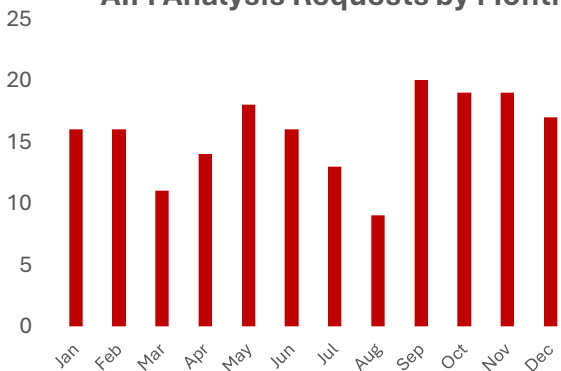
AIM provided data, analysis, and advice for SAA:

- AAS:
 - Probation Advising
 - Transfer student preferences re: SOAR modality
 - Unenrolled student report (proposed)
- ADS
 - Degree Exception Trends
 - Major Declaration Process Changes (proposed)
 - Grade Clemency and Repeat Policy (proposed)

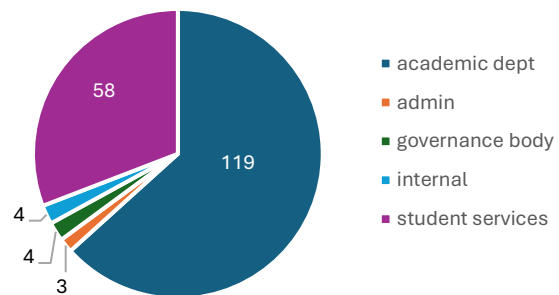
- Students Suspended multiple times (for FAC)
- CAE: SCE student counts
- Academic Communications Manager: Strategy for admission yields
- Associate Dean:
 - Bradley Roundtable – student counts
 - STEM Scholars steering and implementation
 - Plan combinations at graduation
 - Major interest on application for admissions guidance

Since the inception of the AIM Data/Analysis request form in 2021, we have received 188 requests, of which roughly 65 were submitted from January 2024 to August 2025.

AIM Analysis Requests by Month



Analysis Requests, by Dept Type



Degree Clearance

AIM clears L&S undergraduate degrees using an automated process that has become the model for efficiency on campus. The expeditious process AIM developed reduced the delay between final semester grades and degree conferral by several weeks. Today, AIM clears over **95% of degree-eligible** students the day after final grades and academic actions are posted. This example prompted the other undergraduate schools and colleges to expedite their processes, thereby expediting the posting of L&S additional majors and certificates.

AIM provides information to Academic Deans Services about degree eligible students, three times a semester, twice for “pre-clearance” messaging and once at the conclusion of a multi-week degree confirmation process. Students who were not awarded their degrees are provided to ADS in a Tableau visualization for follow-up. In 2024-2025, AIM cleared 5,084 students for 4,624 L&S degrees and 485 Additional majors.

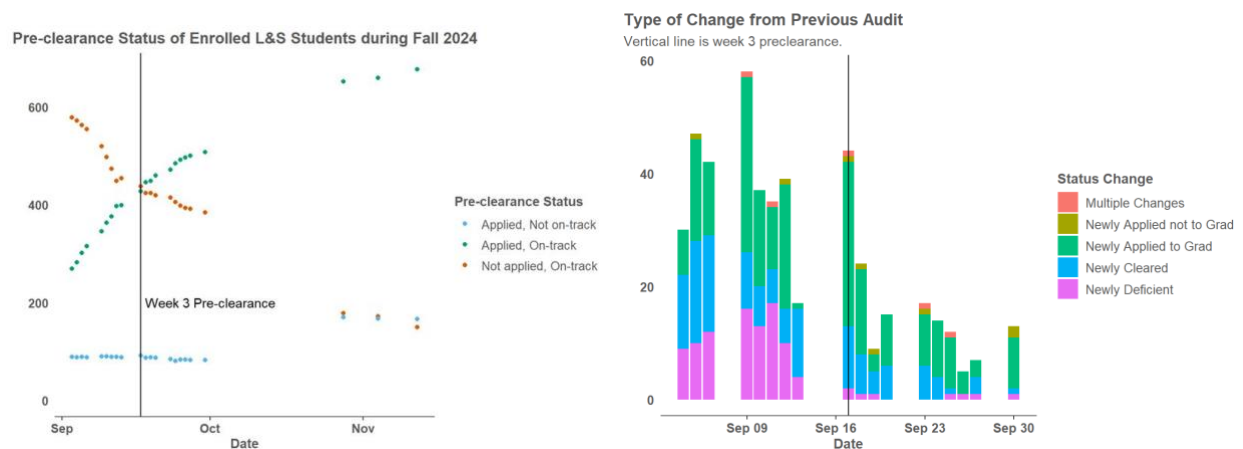
Process Improvement

Aligned with our culture of continuous quality improvement, AIM frequently reviews processes and provides rationale for governance to consider policy reforms.

Analysis of Pre/Degree-Clearance outcomes

AIM and ADS met to discuss the outcomes of the pre-clearance process and whether any adjustments were needed. After reviewing the data from Weeks 3 and 11 pre-clearances, we concluded there to be no evidence that messaging students earlier or more often than the current schedule would change outcomes.

This graph indicates that the first two weeks of the term are fluid, as students are adjusting their class schedules, receiving advising, and declaring their intent to graduate. After week3, the number of students both applied to graduate and on-track steadily increases while the number of students applied increased.



Students applied but not on-track to clear remains unaffected by our process, suggesting that communications are not affecting graduation status in the middle of the term.

However, after the term, AIM is clearing 95% of students applied to graduate in the day after final grades are posted; our process seems to be working well and aligns with the realities of student activity in their final semester.

Policy & Style Guideline Updates

In summer 2025, L&S staff with Lumen/Guide responsibilities met regularly and through online collaboration, approved extensive updates to the L&S Policy & Style Guidelines for departments to submit change proposals via Lumen or Next-Guide. The new Guidelines are being finalized and will publish to a new website, with links to the KB for technical instructions and to Guide for official policy language.

Operational System Support

AIM analysts work with database administrators across campus to ensure our data is stored securely, access is provided responsibly, and our data assets and analyses are grounded in quality institutional data.

Snowflake

Academic Planning & Institutional Research (DAPIR) extracts and stores L&S degree clearance audit data in Snowflake, the campus enterprise data warehouse. This data is consumed by Tableau visualizations and used for research and analysis on student

outcomes in L&S degrees, majors, and certificates, as well as to report the use of curricular exceptions.

Tableau

AIM develops Tableau dashboards that are hosted on RADAR, the institutional repository for data visualizations and downloadable reports. These assets are anonymized and provided for academic planning, program review, and curricular governance. We collaborate with DAPIR, RO, and other analytical offices in this development.

DARS Authorizations and DARSX Administration

AIM authorizes users for DARS access and to request curricular exceptions for L&S undergraduate programs using DARSX. AIM also manages the array of programs available in DARSX and what kinds of exceptions are allowed for each requirement. Since 2024, we have granted DARS access to 19 new L&S staff persons and 7 student workers, and DARSX access to 19 new academic advisors and other designees from L&S departments.

Consultation

Consultation to LAS Forward Committee on how students complete L&S degrees, the relationships between various degree requirements and major requirements, and advice on implementation of proposed changes.

- Language Institute: AIM's analysis on students' completion of BA/BS Language requirement implications and how UW-Madison compares with peers, nationally.
- L&S Inclusive Excellence Committee: 10-years of data provided on student outcomes to support Inclusive Excellence strategy.
- Lafollette School of Public Policy: Consulted with Director of Strategic Initiatives and Undergraduate Program Manager on development of their proposed major launching in 2026.
- Geology & Geophysics: Provided data, perspective, and advice to faculty for revising the major and eliminating undeclared major "tracks." Reviewed and commented on a Notice of Intent to propose a new named option in Environmental Geoscience that will be proposed Fall 2025.

Data Governance

AIM participates in campus data governance, initiatives, communities of practice, and is responsible for the ethical and appropriate use and distribution of the data we provide. In this capacity, we attend data governance meetings and provide insight, input, and effort to promote the [Data Governance](#) program at UW-Madison.

Data Stewardship

In accordance with campus data policy, AIM does not share student identifiable information outside of Student Academic Affairs. Requests for row-level student identifiable data are referred to the Office of the Registrar, the data steward for student records. All student identifiable information used by AIM is secured in GitLab repositories which are supported and secured at UW-Madison.

Promoting Data Literacy

- Michael Zenz and Susan McMillan co-presented with the Center for Digital Accessibility on *Accessible Data Visualization and Publishing*, for the UW-Madison Data Wonks Community of Practice.
- Susan McMillan serves on the L&S Inclusive Excellence Committee as an analyst consultant, where she provides perspective, data, analysis, and expertise to the committee's efforts to understand and improve outcomes for underrepresented students.
- Susan McMillan presented *Everybody Counts* and *Everybody Counts Again*, introductions to using data responsibly, to 50 attendees. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive.
- AIM and partners in TLA co-developed and presented an L&S Administrative Topic of the Month entitled *Curricular and Student Data to Support Decision-Making*, for 113 L&S faculty and staff in attendance.

Leadership, Collaboration and Service

Susan McMillan

- Co-presented *Harnessing uAchieve Audit Data to Support Your Operational and Analytic Needs* at the 2025 CSI annual conference.

Mike Pflieger

- Serves ex officio on L&S Curriculum Committee.
- Chairs the L&S Dean's review committee for recruited student-athletes.

Wyl Schuth

- Serves on the Client Advisory Board for College Source, Inc. (CSI), the software vendor for uAchieve (DARS), Transferology, and the Transfer Evaluation System used by UW-Madison for degree auditing and transfer credit processing.
- Attended the annual 2025 College Source User's Conference in June and advised CSI on product features and implementation strategy.
- Co-presented at Wisconsin Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers (WACRAO) conference with colleagues from Marquette University and UW–River Falls on the use of CollegeSource platforms in recruitment, transfer, degree audit, clearance, and analysis of student outcomes.
- Invited to reprise WACRAO presentation at CollegeSource 2025 national conference. Co-presented with colleagues from Marquette and UW–River Falls.
- Serves as Past President on the Executive Board of UW–Madison's chapter of the Phi Kappa Phi national honor society.

Michael Zenz

- Co-chairs the Data Wonks community of practice, which facilitates discussion and collaboration among data analysts and providers on campus.
- Serves as an alternate on Academic Staff Assembly.

- Co-presented *Harnessing uAchieve Audit Data to Support Your Operational and Analytic Needs* at the 2025 CSI annual conference.

Recognition and Appreciation

Awards

Michael Zenz's was nominated for the 2025 OACS Collaborative Impact Award for his work with the English Department on ENGL 100 course grade gaps.

Feedback

Lisa Ellinger, Director of Strategic Initiatives – La Follette School of Public Policy:

The LaFollette School consulted with Mike Pflieger and AIM as we developed our proposed undergraduate major in public policy. Elaine Klein from L&S administration highlighted Mike as a key resource to consult with. Mike helped identify the crucial considerations to keep in mind and shared the invaluable data resources available to us. That data has also helped us articulate the growth of our program with external audiences and generate support for our proposal.

Katie Block, Assistant Registrar for Degree Audit and Academic Programs:

I've greatly appreciated the partnership between the RO DARS and L&S AIM teams this past year. Our collaboration, especially around style, standards, and accessibility in encoding, reflects a mutual acknowledgment that our efforts often intersect, and demonstrates how collaboration leads to stronger outcomes and deeper understanding across our teams.

Emily Fletcher Professor & Chair and Martha Gibson, Director of Undergraduate Studies – Philosophy Department:

The work of Mike Pfliger and his team at AIM has been invaluable to the Philosophy Department. We have been working with AIM for more than a decade. And we have come to rely on the data and analysis they provide to, among other things, plan our curriculum, conduct self-studies, project our hiring needs, and measure potential interest in certificates. While we could speak in detail of their contribution to all of these areas, we will speak to just one, undergraduate planning

On curricular matters, over time, we have had changing enrollment patterns in particular courses, where enrollment in some drops and in others picks up. It is difficult to know how many sections of a course to offer or how often to teach particular upper level courses. AIM has provided information which helps us manage and improve our course offerings in relation to the student population. They provide information about how many students are taking particular philosophy courses to satisfy Gen Ed requirements. They have shown us how the population of our double majors has significantly changed. (We have more double majors than ever before and more than half come from the sciences. And where we used to have a good number from Physics, that number is dropping, but we have an increasing number in Computer Science.) They have identified courses that are feeder courses for other philosophy courses and for the major. Generally, the information AIM has supplied has been incredibly helpful to us in matching present student interest and numbers with course offerings, and with anticipating changing trends and predicting how we should approach future course development.

We have come to depend on them for analysis before we make significant changes. We want to emphasize how beneficial their work has been for us, and how much we appreciate having had access to such a resource.