

Paula Bonner

Paula Bonner, Consulting Vice President, brings to the firm over 25 years of Advancement leadership experience, with particular expertise in Alumni Relations. Her work emphasizes focusing on the changing needs and interests of alumni through innovation in programs, services, and communications.

Paula Bonner is president of the Wisconsin Alumni Association and Chief Alumni Officer for the University of Wisconsin–Madison. Paula joined the WAA in 1989 as associate executive director and was named President and CEO in January 2000. The Association serves over 425,000 graduates living around the world. On July 1, 2014, the Wisconsin Alumni Association, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, merged with and into the UW Foundation, also an independent supporting organization, forming the Wisconsin Foundation and Alumni Association (WFAA).

Paula ensures that the association is on the leading edge of changes in alumni relations and responsive to the changing landscape of public higher education and the UW's increased need for alumni advocacy, engagement, and financial support. Concurrently, she has also encouraged her staff to focus on the changing needs and interests of the alumni through innovations in programs, services, and communications. At the core of her leadership of alumni relations and engagement is her commitment and belief in the power and influence of the alumni in the life of the university and that bringing the alumni voices and an “alumni-centric” point of view to the campus and to everyday work will create the most relevant and meaningful relationships between alumni and the university, the university and its alumni, and among the alumni.

In addition to her position as President and Chief Alumni Officer, Paula is a member of the University's Leadership Council and the UW/WFAA executive advancement team. She has served on many major University search and screen committees including Chancellor, Athletic Director, Deans, and other leadership academic and non-academic hires. Paula co-chaired the University's Sesquicentennial Celebration Committee in 1999 and the Community and Campus Installation Convocation for Chancellor Carolyn M. Martin in 2009.

Under Paula's leadership, the Wisconsin Alumni Association marked a yearlong celebration of its 150th anniversary in 2011. During the planning and celebration of the anniversary, a visionary project: Alumni Park, One Alumni Place, and Alumni Pier was begun. The multiyear, multimillion dollar project—completely funded by gifts from alumni—will be completed and opened in the spring of 2017. These beautiful outdoor and indoor spaces transform the lakeshore that welcomes alumni and visitors and the exhibits and stories tell of the legacy and impact of Wisconsin's alumni on the world.

As an active member and participant in professional organizations such as The Big Ten Alumni CEO's group, CASE District V, the Council of Alumni Association Executives (CAAE), and CASE, Paula has held a variety of leadership and service roles. Most recently she was elected to the CASE Board of Trustees. She served as President of CAAE from 2014–15 and continues to serve on the CAAE Board of Directors as Past President. She is a former member of the CASE Communications Commission.

Paula was the first recipient of the CAAE Forman Fellow Award which was established to help advance and promote those professionals ready for the top leadership role for alumni associations.

Prior to joining WAA, Paula was UW–Madison’s associate athletic director, with responsibility for directing its 11 women’s intercollegiate sports program. The program was ranked 17th in the country when Paula left UW Athletics in June, 1989, for her career at the Wisconsin Alumni Association. Last fall, the UW Athletic Department inducted her into its Athletics Hall of Fame in recognition for her leadership and advocacy for women’s sports and her commitment to equity and diversity.

Paula is a proud lifetime member of the Wisconsin Alumni Association, Bascom Hill Society, and the Madison Club. She serves as vice chair of the Capitol Lakes Board of Directors. She was honored with the Madison Civics Club Advocate Award in 1999. In 2012, she received the TEMPO International Leadership Award. She resides in Madison with Ann Schaffer, her partner and spouse of 25 years, and their fabulous dog, Howie.

Paula holds a Bachelor of Science from University of North Carolina, Greensboro, and a Master of Science from the School of Education at University of Wisconsin, Madison.