

**Bassam's remarks at the Lee Hansen Celebration of Life
Heritage Building at the Oakwood University Woods Campus
May 16, 2026**

I am Bassam Shakhashiri. Four and a half years ago I retired from the Department of Chemistry. I arrived in Madison one week after the infamous bombing. When I met Lee, I liked Lee. When I met Sally, I really liked Lee then.

In eight days I will mark the 52nd anniversary of my becoming a US citizen. I and others were sworn in by Presiding Federal Judge James Doyle, the father of our former governor. He said to us several things. But the one that stands for me and the one I repeat all the time, Judge Doyle said: Enjoy your freedoms. When I told Lee this, he said, congratulations of course, and he said there's a plaque attached to Bascom Hall, I'd like to show it to you. I said, Lee, I'm from Lebanon, we have Phoenician plaques, Syrian plaques, Roman plaques. He said please come. It's what is on the back of this program.

Lee and I served on many committees, especially the Committee on Undergraduate Education (CUE). And I have here with me a copy of a report of the CUE. The title of the report is *Improving the Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students*. The chair of the subcommittee is none other than Lee Hansen. This report was not only about improving writing skills of students. It was about what the university is, and what the university should be.

Lee was a citizen of UW-Madison. Lee lived the Wisconsin Idea. He would often ride his bicycle to my home on Door Drive, and after I moved to my home on Thorstrand Road, and we would talk about the university. You know about this book. This book entitled, *Academic Freedom on Trial*. On the cover of the book is the plaque attached to the side of Bascom, the Sifting and Winnowing plaque.

Lee believed in the integrity of our institution. Lee lived the Wisconsin Idea in the classroom and outside the classroom. Freedom is what I became more aware of after reading Lee's book. We need Lee now, not only on this campus but around the country. It is crucial for all of us as we celebrate the legacy of Lee to remember what the Wisconsin Idea is and what the Wisconsin Idea must be for the 21st century.

Lee was a pillar of the Wisconsin Idea. Lee was my friend.