

## Distinguished Alumni Award Winner

# CARISSA MOFFAT MILLER



By Micaela Myers

Carissa Miller says that receiving a quality education changed the trajectory of her life, and she has devoted her career to making sure kids get the best education possible. In 2018, she was named chief executive officer of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), becoming the first woman to lead the organization in its then-90-year history. CCSSO is a nonpartisan, nationwide, nonprofit organization of public officials who head departments of elementary and secondary education across the country.

“At CCSSO, I work with so many incredible state leaders who are passionate about making sure education is of the highest quality for all kids,” Miller says. “It’s an honor to

work with state leaders and have an impact on the federal level to make sure education for kids is equitable.”

After earning her bachelor’s degree from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 1992, she came to UW in 1995 for her master’s in sociology. Her husband, Clark Miller, is also a UW alum (M.A., history, ’98; J.D., law, ’01). In 2009, Miller earned her doctorate in education from the University of Idaho. After serving as deputy superintendent at the Idaho Department of Education, she joined CCSSO in 2013. She and her family live just outside of Washington, D.C.

Miller advises UW students to keep an open mind because you never know where your career will take you. “My advice is to not think about a career as a linear path but to think about each job or class or degree as building your skills, abilities and experiences. My biggest growth and opportunities came because I was willing to volunteer and take on new projects,” Miller says. “I grew up on a farm and ranch in western Nebraska. Every job was yours. I took that into how I thought about work and my education.”

Miller looks back at her time at UW fondly. “As an employee at UW, I worked in the residence halls,” she says. “I still keep in touch with many of those students. Laughing in the dining hall with them, the relationships, celebrating milestones and then watching their life progress — they’re all such incredible memories.”

Miller also appreciated the small class sizes and her excellent professors and classmates: “My degree helped shape me into a more critical and analytical thinker about data and to better understand the value in relationships among and with people. One of the most important characteristics of a leader is a keen ability to listen and understand other people’s perspectives. I feel like my time at UW and my degree in sociology honed that skill and are a critical part of how I approach my job and life in general today.”

Miller marked her own major non-academic milestone at UW, giving birth to her first child in Laramie about a week before her husband graduated from law school in 2001.

Winning the Distinguished Alumni Award is humbling, Miller says: “I get a little emotional, to be honest. I know so many incredible UW graduates. I’m deeply touched to be included in this esteemed group. I hope that, as an alumna, I can highlight the caliber of the institution, how important UW was to me and how much it invests in its students.”