50 Years Later, Public Service Endures

by Sarah Dickson ’18 and Dylan Russell ’17


These words were used to define the MPA program when we sat down with five alumni to learn what they think makes this place, this program, and our alumni special. Over the last five decades, the program has evolved in response to the needs of a changing world. However, our conversations with alumni reveal that for the past 50 years, the MPA program has consistently promoted a tradition of good governance through public service.

We interviewed one alumnus from each decade of the program’s existence.

Why Choose Carolina MPA?

We wanted to know what attracted these five to Carolina MPA. What they had in common was a motivation to attain a degree that could be applied in a practical setting and that would help them serve the greater good. All five said they felt Carolina was an obvious choice.

“The program’s national recognition made this the easiest academic decision,” said Fagan Stackhouse, “because ours is the most comprehensive MPA program in the nation.” Marchell Adams David said the MPA program gave her the “opportunity to develop her understanding of the various elements and layers of local government.”

“Carolina MPA’s practical focus helps students be prepared from day one to be successful and thoughtful contributors to the workplace. The program encourages students to think critically about the field they are entering and how they can contribute in meaningful ways,” Ryan Fehrman said.

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It’s finally sinking in: I am about to spend six months in Italy starting in January 2017. I am grateful for the opportunity to teach and conduct research at the University of Salento in Lecce through the Fulbright Scholar Program. While I am experiencing some anxiety about being away from my home for this long, I have no hesitation about leaving the MPA program in the capable hands of my colleague Willow Jacobson. She has already started asking hard questions of me: “Why this?” and “Why that?”

The MPA program will benefit from having fresh eyes on the many policies and procedures that we rely upon for leading and managing in partnership with the School of Government, the Graduate School, and the University. I want to thank Willow in advance for serving as director during my absence, and more importantly, for her dedication to the MPA program.

I also want to thank Johanna Foster ’05 for serving as president of the MPA Alumni Association board. Johanna provided excellent leadership in this position and initiated two substantial changes. One has already been implemented—the transition from an annual conference to an annual alumni event. The other—exploration of the board’s mission going forward—has been taken up by the incoming president: Catherine Clark ’99.

For many years the Alumni Association has been responsible for planning and hosting the annual Public Administration Conference. However, with the addition of an online format and the resulting growth of our student body (from 60 to currently 250), the conference was becoming more of a student event. After several substantive and fruitful conversations, the alumni board decided to replace the conference with alumni events including the 2017 Spring event and regional alumni happy hour hubs.

In 2015 we hosted approximately 50 alumni during the annual conference at the School of Government. This year, we have already hosted more than 75 alumni through happy hour hubs and the alumni reception on November 4. The March 31, 2017, event will also give us the opportunity to celebrate the program’s 50th anniversary. The day will include alumni/student presentations, the Deil S. Wright Lecture with UNC President Margaret Spellings, and the Dean’s Dinner.

Moving away from the alumni conference also gave us the chance to examine how we provide opportunities for our students to network with each other. Our first two-day Student Symposium on November 3–4 was attended by 94 on-campus and online students, and we have scheduled a student immersion event for April 2017.

Johanna began a conversation with the alumni board about the mission of the Alumni Association during her last meeting as president, which will continue under Catherine’s leadership. The current mission is to foster community among students, faculty, alumni, and friends in order to promote and extend the core values and goals of the MPA program. The annual Public Administration Conference satisfied much of that mission. The board is now discussing revising the current mission to accurately reflect how the Alumni Association can more directly impact alumni, faculty, and student success, including promoting development and engagement activities on behalf of the program.

As an ex-officio member of the alumni board, I came away from the last board meeting with a sense of pride and excitement for two reasons. First, alumni commitment to the success of the MPA program is unmatched by other public administration programs. This commitment and engagement is a critical factor in attracting the very best students to Carolina MPA. Second, the Alumni Association’s openness to change helps to strengthen and ensure the future of the program.
Public Service: A Career and a Legacy

Since the program’s founding in 1966, skepticism of public institutions has increased. Therefore, said Fehrman, “the need for trained MPAs is more relevant now than ever before.”

The most recent election season has left many disgruntled with the state of political discourse, but these Carolina MPA alumni are not discouraged. A commitment to public service endures despite news headlines, budget cuts, or cynicism. Stackhouse reminds us that “a strong, fundamental belief in public service and the earnest desire to give more than you receive enriches and enhances the lives of others.” Fehrman is encouraged by his interactions with current MPA students. “Their intelligence and heart for doing good for people in the community is evident,” he said.

“You could earn a good living in myriad ways,” said Chris Long, “but if you want to be satisfied, then there is great gain in the personal sacrifice that is associated with public service.”

“…there is great gain in the personal sacrifice that is associated with public service.”

Carolina alumni go to work filled with the hope that they can improve the lives of those they serve. Adams David would like her legacy to reflect how she has balanced the needs of a diverse and ever-changing community without compromising her commitment to being a steward of public trust. Brent Troxell hopes that his legacy will be “taking unceasing action in the pursuit of change.”


Public institutions and public perceptions have evolved over the last 50 years, but the service-oriented, optimistic elements of the Carolina MPA experience are still strong among alumni long after they leave the program—and they’re inspiring students to make a difference in their communities and the world.

MPA and Military Service: A Good Fit

On November 4, the School of Government hosted the UNC Veterans “Thank You” Banner during its tour of campus.

The School salutes the many veteran and active-duty service men and women, including those who have continued their public service with governments and other organizations in North Carolina and across the United States. Several School and MPA faculty and staff members are veterans. But the big news is that the MPA program currently has 40 active duty or veteran service members attending the program (and another six who graduated on December 17).

Eight of the 40 active duty or veteran service members who currently attend or teach in our Master of Public Administration program visited the School of Government on November 4 for the new Student Symposium.

Note: Veterans Day originated as “Armistice Day” on November 11, 1919, the first anniversary of the end of World War I. Congress passed a resolution in 1926 for an annual observance, and November 11 became a national holiday beginning in 1938.
TRUE CAROLINA BLUE: BETH RIORDAN

by Dylan Russell ’17

Beth Riordan grew up in a family dedicated to public service. Vacations were planned based on the location of conventions held by Lions Club International, a nonprofit community service organization of which her parents were members. Her earliest memories include helping her parents at volunteer events—school sport concession stands, mobile meal deliveries, church activities, and meetings at the township zoning board. Riordan’s parents instilled in her the importance of working for the greater good, something she now passes on to her children.

Riordan was born and raised in Marion, Ohio, where she was one of only 74 students attending her high school. Despite growing up in a small town, she knew she was destined to travel. She has traveled for pleasure to more than twenty countries; Brazil and New Zealand are her favorites. As a major with the US Army Special Operations Command, she is currently stationed at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville, North Carolina.

Riordan professes to joining the Army because she likes challenges and because in high school, she regularly “welled up” at the sound of the national anthem. As a public affairs officer, she has taken many memorable trips, including one to escort media to a wreath-laying event at President John F. Kennedy’s gravesite to “recognize his vision of, and contributions to, the [US Army Special Forces] Green Berets.” She has also traveled extensively to participate in planning conferences for large-scale military exercises.

Riordan enrolled in the MPA program because of Carolina’s reputation for academic excellence. The online format was an added plus because it fit so well with her busy and unpredictable lifestyle. Since beginning the program in January 2015, she has moved states twice. Her husband—also a major with a different unit of the US Army Special Operations Command—was deployed for six months, and they welcomed a new daughter. Flexibility has been essential.

Balancing a military career with raising a family and attending graduate school may be one of those challenges Riordan was up for when she joined the Army. She said balancing work with school was the easy part. “The good thing about the Army,” she said, “is that soldiers are encouraged to seek self-improvement.” But she said the real challenge was balancing school with being a mom of two children under the age of four.

One of the most rewarding parts of her MPA experience comes through contributing to the virtual conversations held on the MPA@UNC platform, offering a unique perspective to other students through her career in military public affairs.

Riordan enjoys the connections that she has formed with fellow MPA students. Whenever she is on a trip for the Army, she said she craves their collegiality. “You better believe that I will send my classmates an e-mail and ask about getting a bite to eat together!”

Beth Riordan graduated on December 17, 2016, along with 29 of her MPA classmates, at a ceremony at the School of Government.
Bringing Everyone to Campus

MPA STUDENT SYMPOSIUM AND STUDENT IMMERSION EVENTS

by Sarah Dickson ’18

When the MPA Public Administration Conference transitioned to a series of new alumni-focused events, faculty and staff had the perfect opportunity to rethink the way students gather. “We’ve been wanting to have our entire student body come together on campus,” said MPA Director William Rivenbark. “The Student Symposium held on November 3–5 at the School of Government provided a way for both online and on-campus students to not only network with each other and alumni but to work together on issues of importance.”

Town Hall

On Thursday night, online students gathered for a town hall meeting where Rivenbark entertained questions on topics including curriculum, competencies, and evolution of the online format. “The town hall provided online students the chance to have those ‘hallway’ conversations they would have if on campus with Dr. Rivenbark, faculty, staff, and each other,” said Tracy Smith Miles, an online student from Greensboro. “The environment was one of open, supportive, and honest dialogue.”

Case Study: Diversity and Inclusion

Willie Ratchford, executive director of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Community Relations, presented to students and facilitated case studies on diversity and inclusion. Concentrating on the importance of dialogue in the workplace, he discussed active listening and emphasized the significance of approaching diversity communication with an open mind. “Mutual respect is key to understanding diversity,” he said. “We have to get beyond demonizing people who think differently from us.”

Students met in small groups to discuss solutions for improving diversity within the workplace. While the cases were fictional (such as improving diversity within the largest employer in the town of Inclusion, North Carolina), students found the details could be realistically applied to real-world situations. Representatives from each group shared their ideas with other attendees, including such tactics as diversity training, community outreach, and partnering with an educational institution to develop job skills for the diverse population of Inclusion.

Hot Topics in Public Administration

School of Government faculty members talked with students about a variety of timely issues relevant to careers in public service.

Frayda Bluestein, professor of public law and government and associate dean for faculty development, discussed transparency and openness in local government, raising awareness that digital records and social media have changed expectations internally and externally for government transparency.

Shannon Tufts, associate professor of public law and government and director of the School’s Center for Public Technology, discussed ways to improve technology in public organizations, including upgrading systems, evaluating processes, and making investments. “The biggest challenge in the public sector,” Tufts said, “is that we don’t spend enough money on IT.”

Maurice Ferrell, assistant director of the Center for Public Technology, focused on the evolution of leadership styles and influence within public administration.

Marcia Perritt, special projects manager for the School’s Development Finance Initiative (DFI), talked about DFI’s work assisting governments in financing development projects throughout North Carolina.

2017 Student Immersion

A student immersion course will be held in Spring 2017 for on-campus and online students. Faculty member Whitney Afonso will host the 1.5 credit course on financing and implementing change in local government, addressing issues of balancing fairness with pragmatism and short-term versus long-term change. The experience will include both asynchronous coursework and an on-campus weekend April 20–22.
A Conversation with Faculty Member David Ammons
by Dylan Russell ’17

David Ammons had served nine years at the University of Georgia’s Carl Vinson Institute of Government when he was invited to join the UNC School (then Institute) of Government in 1996. Excited at the opportunity to work directly with practitioners on local government productivity, he leapt at the opportunity despite having to leave friends and connections in Georgia.

In addition to teaching in the MPA program and serving as MPA director from 2001 to 2006, Ammons works across a variety of local government client groups, focusing most of his instruction on performance measurement and benchmarking.

By working with both practitioners and MPA students (future practitioners), Ammons said he has appreciated being able to influence the field of performance measurement through his work at the School. Throughout his tenure, he has encouraged his students to think more analytically. As director of the MPA program, he used his expertise to introduce changes, including half-term courses that engaged more School of Government faculty, courses tailored to individual student interests and career paths, and the addition of economic development courses.

Like many MPA faculty members, Ammons has stayed in contact with former students over the years. It is not unusual for him to receive calls from alumni looking for recommendations of more recent graduates with analytical skills.

Ammons cited three things that set the Carolina MPA program apart from others. Individually, these qualities are not unique, he said; however, in combination they create an experience that one can find only at UNC-Chapel Hill.

1. The cohort system allows for students to come together and form bonds that extend well beyond their time in the classroom.
2. The strength of the alumni network and alumni’s interest in being engaged with current students provides support throughout one’s academic and professional career.
3. The program’s location within the School of Government and the School’s daily engagement with public officials offer students practical knowledge of real-world issues.


Ammons currently serves on the board of directors of the Center for Accountability and Performance at the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA). In 2014 he received the Joseph Wholey Distinguished Scholarship Award presented by ASPA’s Center for Performance and Accountability for work in the field of public sector performance. Ammons earned a PhD from the University of Oklahoma.
Scholarships Support Future Public Service Leaders

Through more than half of the program’s history, scholarship support was, for the most part, non-existent. But since the late 1990s, thanks to the generosity of alumni and friends, 21 funds have been created to help recruit top students to Carolina MPA.

Scholarships are awarded once an endowment or fund achieves a market value that is determined by the University. Since 2000 (when our records start), Carolina MPA has awarded 465 scholarships. Our two newest endowments—the Tom Lundy Scholarship and the Online Student Support Endowment—were created in 2016 and have not yet paid out but are growing as a result of the continuing generosity of alumni and friends.

If you received a scholarship before 2000, we want to know. Send your information to Brandon Foster at foster@sog.unc.edu.

For more information about these scholarships, visit mpa.unc.edu/node/306. To make a gift, visit mpa.unc.edu/giving.
A Relationship Built to Last
THE CAROLINA MPA ALUMNI MENTOR PROGRAM
by Sarah Dickson ’18

Alumni are a critical part of the Carolina MPA program, frequently offering advice and guidance to students. They connect with each other and often stay in touch throughout their careers.

A mentorship program was created in 2015 with the goal of continuing to build the alumni network and foster student development. The Carolina MPA Alumni Mentor Program facilitates connections by matching current students with alumni in a mentor-mentee relationship. The relationship is designed not only to enhance students’ educational experience and professional growth but to cultivate professional networks.

Taylor Libby ’05, employee relations consultant at UNC General Administration, and recent graduate Laura Hawkes ’16 reflected on their experience with the mentor program.

Libby signed up to mentor a student because she wanted to “pay it forward” in the same way alumni had helped her when she was a student. She also saw this as an opportunity to learn more about how the Carolina program is changing and growing over time.

Hawkes, an operations consultant at Big Buddy Program, a local nonprofit in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, wanted to connect with an alumnus who has taken a similar career path. The two worked together during Hawkes’ time as a student and through her post-graduation job search. “As an online student, I also wanted to connect with someone who had attended the program in Chapel Hill,” she said.

“Having Taylor as a mentor showed me how flexible the public administration degree could be,” said Hawkes. Libby’s experience in human resources was also useful to Hawkes as she finished the MPA program and began preparing her resume and cover letters, submitting applications, and interviewing for jobs. “Although the majority of my coursework dealt with government, Taylor showed me how she applied her studies to higher education administration and human resources.”

For Hawkes, the mentor program was an opportunity to share the ups and downs of graduate school life with someone who can relate. “It was great having someone to talk to about different situations and help navigate my search,” said Hawkes. “Taylor helped me think through different options and encouraged me throughout the job search process. Thanks to her support, I landed a new job that has allowed me to grow professionally.”

By mentoring Hawkes, Libby hoped to confirm that everything she learned in the program and the experience of going through the program would still be relevant as a public servant.

Despite some on-campus/online student differences, the shared experience in the Carolina MPA program has forged a bond between Libby and Hawkes as it has other mentors and mentees. They took many of the same classes, had the same professors, and were motivated by the same thing: a rewarding career in public service. The mentor-mentee relationship has been mutually beneficial. “It’s been wonderful to develop a personal and professional relationship that I hope will continue for years to come,” said Libby.

To learn more and sign up to become a Carolina MPA Alumni Mentor, visit mpa.unc.edu/node/1186 or contact Susan Austin at 919.966.4159 or austin@sog.unc.edu
An Update from the MPA Alumni Board President

by Catherine Clark ‘99

There are so many exciting ways for MPA alumni to be engaged with the program. As your new alumni board president, my top five recommendations are below. I hope to see you all in person or online in 2017!

1. Join your fellow alumni in Chapel Hill to celebrate our 50th anniversary on March 31. The day’s events will include alumni presentations at the School of Government, the Deil S. Wright lecture, and a festive Dean’s Dinner at the Carolina Club. Watch your inbox for details and registration information.

2. Participate in free, alumni-led webinars for Carolina MPA students and alumni. These sessions explore job skills and workplace topics that will be of interest to professionals at any career stage.

3. Join the Carolina MPA Alumni Mentor Program. Share your wisdom and experience with a student as he or she navigates the MPA program and job market. Visit mpa.unc.edu/node/1186 for more information.

4. Serve on the MPA Alumni Association board. We need seven to 10 new members each year from a range of class years. If you can’t attend meetings in person at the School of Government, you can join in from your home or office. E-mail Susan Austin at austin@sog.unc.edu for more information.

5. Post a job to help students or alumni find their next career. Send openings to jobczar@sog.unc.edu. Are you in search of your next gig? To be added to the Job Czar’s weekly distribution list, e-mail Allison Binkley, career services, at binkley@sog.unc.edu.

The best way to be notified about upcoming events and engagement opportunities is via e-mail. To be added to the MPA alumni contact list or update your e-mail address, contact Brandon Foster at foster@sog.unc.edu or Susan Austin at austin@sog.unc.edu.

Congratulations December 2016 Carolina MPA Graduates!

Giorgi Alasania
Alexandra Bartz
Stephen Tyler Baxter
Patricia Bradley
Loren Clark-Moe
Evan Davis
Ryan Fletcher
Matthew Gould
Jonathan Griffin
Rachel Gruber
Laura Hawkes
Sarah Henricks

Sandra Hinderliter
Ashlea Hitchcock
Jacqueline Kannan
Nicole Kaufman Dyess
Chelsea Locklear
Michael Milton
Andrew O’Brien
Corey Petersohn
Paul Plymouth
Andrea Ponikvar
Thomas Rhea
Beth Riordan

Ryan Rotundo
Christine Sadler
Kimberly Sanders

Charles Stevens
Perla Tajeddini
John Wilson
New Endowments Support MPA Students

By Sarah Dickson ’18

Over the years, the MPA program—with the help of alumni and friends—has created and expanded the number of endowments designed to recruit top-level students. The new funds will provide support for both on-campus and online students.

The J. Thomas Lundy Leadership in Public Service Scholarship

Tom Lundy ’71 retired in September 2016 after 44 years serving Catawba County, North Carolina. At his retirement celebration, friends, family, and colleagues surprised Lundy with the establishment of a scholarship in his name. “It is nice that people thought enough of me to help find a way to help others who are coming into the profession,” said Lundy. He is excited about giving people new to public administration the opportunity to develop the skills needed to serve their community. “I’ve looked at it as a calling, an opportunity to serve others,” he said. “I see this scholarship as a way to encourage, invest, and support young people and, in a broader sense, our communities.”

“I see this scholarship as a way to encourage, invest, and support young people.”
—Tom Lundy

The MPA Online Student Support Endowment

Mike Silver ’16, who attended Carolina MPA via MPA@UNC, has been instrumental in the creation of the MPA Online Student Support Endowment. “As a former online student,” said Silver, “I know how helpful financial support would have been. I am sure my cohort and current students feel the same. As alumni, it is important that we continue to be involved and help to make the MPA experience better for future students who aspire to be public service leaders.”

Since its inception in 2013, 72 students have graduated from the online format. Currently, more than 200 online students attend the program from locations around the world.

While the Online Student Support Endowment will specifically support an MPA@UNC student, Silver hopes that alumni from both the on-campus and online formats will contribute to the endowment and support students committed to public service leadership.

“It is important that we continue to be involved.”
—Mike Silver
Life Events

On the Move

Carol S. Botsch ’71 retired after 21 years as a professor of political science at the University of South Carolina Aiken.

Shannon Byers ’06 is the residency determination service program manager for College Foundation of North Carolina in Raleigh.

Brodi Fontenot ’99 launched Fontenot Strategic Consulting LLC in Washington, DC.

Kelly Kleinkort ’15 is director of learning abroad for the University of Houston in Texas.

Taylor Libby ’05 is employee relations consultant at UNC General Administration in Chapel Hill.

Trevor Lobaugh ’16 accepted a position as a budget and management specialist with Montgomery County, Maryland.

Brian Manning ’15 is regional director for the Appomattox Regional Library System in Hopewell, Virginia.

Deepi Panjabi ’14 is the data and research manager for Read Charlotte in North Carolina.

Ashleigh Price ’08 has been promoted to deputy business services division manager for engineering and property management with the City of Charlotte.

Ryan Regan ’14 is the marketing project manager for North Carolina’s Southeast in Elizabethtown.

Barry Reed ’86 is chief of party for the USAID-funded Global Communities Dobre Program in Kiev, Ukraine.

Katie Reich ’14 joined UNC-Chapel Hill’s Center for Global Initiatives as the research, communication, and program manager.

Francine Stefan ’16 is a program specialist with the Southwest Environmental Finance Center based in the School for Civil Engineering at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Mike Simmons ’84 is assistant vice president of academic affairs at the University of North Texas in Denton.

Accomplishments

Kevin McLaughlin ’09 has published Innocent: A Spirit of Resilience, the story of Opwoyna Innocent, a former child soldier whom McLaughlin met during a 2014 trip to Uganda.

Michael Milton ’16 was promoted to the rank of full colonel in the US Army Reserve, confirmed by the US Senate in September 2016. Milton is president of the Institute for Reformed Leadership and Training and director of the Chaplain Ministries program at Erskine Theological Seminary in Due West, South Carolina.

Joseph M. Moore II ’05 was awarded the 2016 Outstanding Public Official Award by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

New Arrivals

Sonya Smith Hohlt ’98 and husband Michael welcomed son Owen Michael on September 15, 2015.

Seeking Nominations for the Donald Hayman Distinguished Public Service Award

The MPA Alumni Association seeks nominations for the Donald Hayman Distinguished Public Service Award. This award is given to individuals who consistently exemplify high standards of service to the public and/or the organization they serve. Nominees must be graduates of the Carolina MPA program or otherwise associated with the MPA program or the School of Government.

When is the deadline for nominations?
February 15, 2017

When will the award recipient be announced?
At the MPA 50th anniversary celebration on March 31 in Chapel Hill

Who can nominate candidates?
MPA alumni, School of Government colleagues, and MPA faculty possessing detailed knowledge of activities and career can nominate candidates

What are the nomination specifications?
Nominations must consist of no more than a two-page narrative describing the candidate’s achievements; additional material such as newspaper articles, publications, or video of the nominee may be submitted.

Send your nominations to Susan Austin at austin@sog.unc.edu. For more details, visit mpa.unc.edu/node/187
Save the Date

FEBRUARY 7, 2017
HAPPY HOUR HUB, ASHEVILLE
5:30–8 p.m.
Barley’s Taproom and Pizzeria

FEBRUARY 2017
Every Friday and Monday
MPA JOB FAIR
School of Government, UNC-Chapel Hill
For more information, contact Susan Austin at 919.966.4159 or austin@sog.unc.edu.

MARCH 31, 2017
50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
Alumni and Student Presentations
Deil S. Wright Lecture
Dean’s Dinner
School of Government and Carolina Club, UNC-Chapel Hill

SPRING 2017
HAPPY HOUR HUB, RALEIGH
Location and date TBD

HAPPY HOUR HUB, ATLANTA
Location and date TBD