

# IMPACT

## ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

WINTER • 2020

### From Military to MPA

#### HOW ARMY OFFICERS FULFILL THEIR LEADERSHIP POTENTIAL AT CAROLINA

by Kathryn Paquet

Many students who come through the Carolina MPA program have familiar stories: some arrived straight out of college; others spent time working in different sectors and decided to undertake a career change; some served in programs like AmeriCorps and the Peace Corps. But Max Dixon '19, Sarah Manion '20, and Daniel Alvarez '21 spent their time before Carolina doing something entirely different: devising military intelligence strategies and leading civil affairs forces overseas.

In 2015, the U.S. Army founded the Performance Based Graduate School Incentive Program. Through this initiative, top-performing captains in the basic branches can receive a full scholarship for graduate studies in one of eight disciplines: business administration, history, public administration and policy, computer science, international relations, government, economics, or national security and strategy. Once they've completed the degree program, the officers fulfill the remainder of their service obligations in the Army.

In carrying out the program, Army branch managers typically look at a pool of top performers, select ideal candidates, and offer them the opportunity to apply. After filling out paperwork for the scholarship, an



Max Dixon '19



Sarah Manion '20



Daniel Alvarez '21

officer proceeds with the graduate school application process the same as other applicants. Both Manion and Alvarez were approached by their branch managers regarding the scholarship. Dixon went down a slightly different path, seeking out the opportunity himself when looking to avoid being relocated from Fort Bragg.

"I think it's a natural fit to make the jump from military to public administration, because you go from working with people who have that service motivation in the military to people who have the same service motivation in the public sector," Manion said.

"To me, going into public administration is a continuation of service," Dixon agreed. "I think there's a lot of overlap [with the military], particularly in the leadership aspects."

All three officers faced a starkly different environment in the Carolina MPA classroom than what they were used to in the military.

*continued on page 3*

## DIRECTOR'S COLUMN



**Bill Rivenbark**  
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In prior columns, I have mentioned the importance of our MPA program being accredited through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). Our accreditation allows us to demonstrate to our stakeholders that we adhere to the seven accreditation standards required by NASPAA. It also requires us to make program changes as these accreditation standards evolve over time in response

to best practices. One area that NASPAA is currently focused on is ensuring that students have professional development opportunities outside of the classroom, which is part of standard four of student support and standard five of professional competencies. These co-curricular activities provide students with personal and professional growth opportunities while pursuing their graduate studies in public administration.

We have responded to NASPAA's expanded emphasis on professional development by providing students with an opportunity to meet with Allison Binkley, our associate director of career services and professional development, in order to create a co-curricular plan during their time in the MPA program. This parallels the same process of students meeting with Elizabeth Langefeld, our associate director of academic advising and student life, to create an academic plan. A co-curricular plan encourages students to be intentional on the activities they want to pursue outside of the classroom for personal and professional development within the context of their respective career goals and within the context of building a professional network.

We begin with numerous program-supported activities and opportunities. For example, we encourage and support our students who want to attend the North Carolina City and County Management Association Winter Seminar, which is held annually in February and which is in alignment with our focus on local government administration. This academic year we decided to

financially support students who wanted to attend the winter conference of the North Carolina Local Government Budget Association, responding to the number of students who begin their careers in budget offices. The MPA program also has formalized a process that allows our students to take courses offered by the School of Government, giving them the opportunity to interact, network, and learn with public officials across the state.

There are several professional development opportunities on a national level that we support and encourage students to add to their co-curricular plans. We support students who apply and are accepted to the NASPAA student simulation competition, which provides a forum for MPA students across the nation and abroad to compete in teams on solving global problems. We support students who want to be part of Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL)—a national organization that desires to attract the “brightest minds” to local government. This academic year we also had the opportunity to send 12 students to the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) conference in Nashville, which occurred in part from several generous alumni donations to specifically pay for their lodging expenses.

I also want to take this opportunity to highlight the cornerstone of a student's co-curricular plan—the Professional Work Experience—which has been a major part of the MPA program since established in 1966. Before taking on this program requirement, each student must now complete a learning contract that clearly describes the student's personal goals within the context of the Professional Work Experience. Again, our goal is for students to experience personal and professional growth through intentional co-curricular plans while pursuing their graduate studies at Carolina.

I would like to conclude by thanking our alumni who play such a major role in helping us accomplish this goal, from providing financial resources for students to attend conferences to providing professional work experience. Without you, our alumni, we would not be able to provide our students a holistic approach in becoming public service leaders!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bill Rivenbark". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

William C. Rivenbark  
Professor and Director



*continued from From Military to MPA..., on page 1*

"It can be hard for leaders and older individuals to listen and say, 'This 20-year-old has a really unique perspective on something I've never thought about,'" Alvarez said. "The culture at UNC is very different from the culture in the military, and I think being uncomfortable can make you better as a leader and make you better as a person."

"I was between five and 15 years older than everyone in my cohort," Dixon offered. "I was the only one with kids. I was the only one who was dealing with a lot of adult problems, so it was a bit of a different experience."

One day, in faculty member Rick Morse's *Public Service Leadership* class, Dixon and his classmates were asked to form groups and discuss their personal best as leaders.

"One person was talking about a summer internship, one was talking about being a camp counselor, and I had written mine about deploying a detachment and sending people to 12 different countries at the same time," Dixon shared.

"Where I find my perspective differs the most is that, because the military is such a rigid bureaucracy and it's very mission focused, your job almost necessitates you putting all of your personal preferences and ideologies aside to focus on the mission at hand," Manion added. "It's,

'Don't pay attention to who's being offended by what's going on. Don't pay attention to the personal effects of this situation—what needs to be accomplished?'"

However, Manion believes that the perspectives she gains from classmates can also help her look at the bigger picture in public administration.

"In the Army, your focus is your mission and not necessarily your soldiers' individual feelings," she said. "On one hand, it's an asset to keep an unbiased view of situations if you're coming at them from an analytical perspective, but at the same time, it's really difficult to remember that, 'Oh wait, these other factors also matter and can be very significant in this situation.'"

Alvarez and Manion believe the skills and experience they take from the MPA program will allow them to achieve greater success in the Army as well as after retiring.

"Getting a varied perspective on people from all over the place and how they view local government is going to be very helpful for me, because in some of the places I've deployed to, local government is extremely important," Alvarez explained. "If I can take the lessons learned and gained from the research and projects, it's going to make me a more effective civil affairs officer and leader."

"The program has given me some specific personal things that I can work on in terms of understanding leadership philosophies and organizational structures to know how to communicate with leaders and subordinates better," Manion added. "I have some very tangible skills that I can use for the next ten years until I retire. In a decade from now, when I've retired from the military, I'll have that alumni network and those career resources that I can tap back into."

Dixon, who graduated in 2019, has already seen the impact his studies have made on his career. He currently works as an assistant professor of military science at University of Kentucky and has applied many lessons from the MPA program to the instruction of his own students. "There are so many things that cross between the two sectors," he explained. "I've spent a lot of time this semester working with my cadets on situational leadership models and it's almost identical to what is taught at UNC."

In addition, the program has helped Dixon pinpoint what he wants to do when his service in the Army has concluded.

"The program was not only a great opportunity from an Army and career perspective but actually helped a lot in shaping what I plan to do post-Army," Dixon shared. "That is going to have a lasting impact."

## Congratulations December 2019 Carolina MPA Graduates!

Lorrie Fair Allen  
 Jennifer Arnold  
 Gary Beck  
 Adam Caldwell  
 Jordan Cansler  
 Nicholas Cerra

Richard Cloninger  
 Andrew Cutler  
 Manisha Dass  
 Ashleigh Genevich  
 Tammy Laurence  
 John L. Lowery

Dan May  
 Mike Moynahan  
 Molly Murray  
 Sarah Pence  
 Emily Schultz  
 Michael Silverman

Courtney Skeete  
 Miles Spann  
 Jeffrey Stapler



## Fall Immersion: Data for Public Impact

Over the first weekend of October 2019, nearly 50 online and on-campus students came to the School of Government for Carolina MPA's annual immersion course. Carolina MPA has hosted this course at the School of Government in each of the last three years as an immersive learning and networking opportunity. This year's immersion was designed and led by alumnus and adjunct instructor John Quintero, '02. Each year the course aims to address a current topic in the field of public administration. Titled *Communicating Data for Public Impact*, this course was designed provide students with the knowledge and skills to share data with members of the public.



Before students gathered in Chapel Hill, they were assigned readings and online exercises to be completed each week. The students also applied what they were learning to critique some of their past work in the MPA program and consider how they would improve it based on what they had learned.

Once in Chapel Hill, students were hosted to a welcome dinner and introductory lecture from Quintero. Over the next two days, students were divided into work groups to solve challenges in storytelling, design of visual elements, and communicate complex information. Student groups ultimately produced graph books that visualized elements of a data set. Students were quickly able to apply what they had learned and recommend ways in which these examples could have been improved. Students also had the opportunity to learn from guest panelists including School of Government faculty and MPA alumni who regularly use data in their work. On Friday night, after a full day of data and graphics, students



gathered with MPA faculty, staff, and alumni for the annual Carolina MPA Fall Reception.

After the three-day immersion was complete, student groups submitted online presentations of their work and each student submitted an

### Life Events are now online!

Keep up with your fellow Carolina MPA alumni by visiting our online "Life Events" page, updated quarterly. Our MPA life events include career updates, marriages, births, and more. Find the list at [mpa.unc.edu/life-events](http://mpa.unc.edu/life-events).

## Thank You from the UNC ICMA Student Chapter

The UNC ICMA Student Chapter would like to thank everyone who made it possible to attend the 2019 fall ICMA Conference. The generosity of individual alumni donors as well as support from the Public Service Enrichment Endowment enabled all 12 members of the chapter to travel to and stay in Nashville for the conference. It was a unique learning and networking opportunity, and a lot of fun! Every student returned with a variety of initiatives we hope to implement once we start our careers.

We spoke the whole way home about a furthered passion for increasing equity and ethics in the field. This was really the continuation of a luncheon on ethics in local government that our group attended at the conference along with several other ICMA student chapters. Thank you again to everyone who made it possible

to push the careers of Carolina MPA students forward. Go Heels!



individual critique of a presentation they had done in the past. Students applauded the course for its relevance

to their studies in the MPA program. The importance of graphics as a method to clearly convey a meaning

or message will be something each student can take with them in their careers as public service leaders.

## “The times they are a changin’.”

by Joe Moore '05

Bob Dylan released this track in 1964—only a couple years prior to UNC establishing the MPA program, I will note. In Dylan’s own words, “This was definitely a song with a purpose,” recognizing the dramatic changes of the times. And while this song has become an oft-used anthem since its release, the reality is that times have always been changing. It’s only a matter of being observant to the change and answering the call.



**Joe Moore '05**  
*Manager, Town of Zebulon  
 Alumni Association  
 Board President*

Born out of an idea from UNC law professor Albert Coates, the School of Government was established to answer the call to improve the lives of North Carolinians by engaging in practical scholarship that helps public officials and citizens understand and improve state and local government.

The Carolina MPA program attached itself to this legacy when it moved to the School of Government and placed future public service leaders in the same building with public service practitioners.

More recently, the program changed again by expanding the way it delivers courses. The addition of the online format has strengthened the program’s ability to attract diverse students (educational background,

work and life experiences, geographic location, age, race, and gender), and in turn has produced a more a diverse alumni base.

In order to more effectively serve the changing alumni base, the MPA Alumni Association re-evaluated its purpose and programs. That self-reflection created three focus areas to fulfill our mission: Contribution, Collaboration, and Connection. We also have three committees to spearhead and oversee activities in these areas.

- **Contribution: How we as alumni support the program through our giving**

The success of the program, and subsequently the effectiveness of public service, rests heavily on attracting and supporting the highest quality students. Our financial support not only maintains this success, it is also our opportunity to recognize how the program has benefitted our careers. This committee is responsible for fundraising.

- **Collaboration: How we as alumni support the program through our volunteer efforts**

The education offered by the MPA program is at its fullest

### GET INVOLVED!

From organizing a Happy Hour Hub, to mentoring a current student, to serving on the Carolina MPA Alumni Association Board, there are many ways to get involved with the program. Visit [mpa.unc.edu/get-involved](http://mpa.unc.edu/get-involved) or contact Kristin Pawlowski at [pawlowski@sog.unc.edu](mailto:pawlowski@sog.unc.edu) or Brandon Foster at [foster@sog.unc.edu](mailto:foster@sog.unc.edu) to learn more.

and most robust when we serve as mentors, volunteers, and employers to the student body. We are a valuable and necessary extension of the education experience. This committee is responsible for engaging alumni with students by collaborating with faculty and staff.

- **Connection: How we as alumni connect with each other**

The strength of the program’s well-being is only as strong as the alumni network. We must be an association that supports and advocates for each other. This committee is responsible for connecting alumni with each other and the association through myriad events relevant to the diverse locations, interests, and career stages of our diverse alumni base.

The times are changing. How will you answer the call? Send me a note at [jmoore@townofzebulon.org](mailto:jmoore@townofzebulon.org) and let’s find out together.

## Introducing Kristin Pawlowski, Associate Director of Alumni and Employer Relations

by Kathryn Paquet

Carolina MPA is excited to announce the addition of Kristin Pawlowski to its staff. Pawlowski began her role as associate director of alumni and employer relations in October 2019. A native of Potomac Falls, VA, she spent many years working in law before pivoting to academia as an academic success counselor at the Florida Coastal School of Law. Most recently, Pawlowski worked as a professional development and career coach in UNC's Honors Carolina program. An enthusiastic Tar Heel, Pawlowski is thrilled to bring her skills and expertise to this new role on the Carolina campus.

**Q: How will your experience at Honors Carolina influence your work as associate director of alumni and employer relations?**

KP: My professional coaching abilities greatly improved through my time in Honors. As a former attorney, I was accustomed to being the subject matter expert who offered advisory guidance. But as a professional development and career coach, I assumed the role of collaborative partner, quickly learning that by taking a coaching approach, I was able to instill in my students the confidence they needed to unlock their personal and professional potential. I am excited to draw upon these skills to promote the success of the MPA community.

**Q: What will your responsibilities entail?**

KP: As associate director of alumni and employer relations, I will be working with and supporting alumni as they reach certain junctures in their careers where they may be looking to grow, expand, or change. I will also

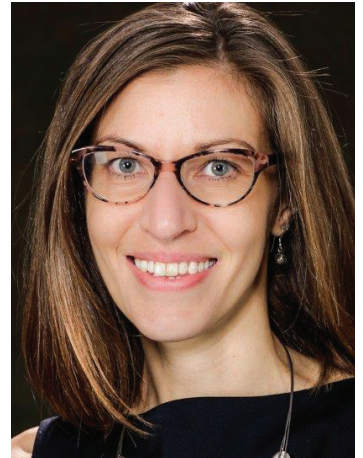
provide direct support to students throughout their Professional Work Experience, or PWE. That will include providing insight on the objectives of the PWE, making sure program requirements are met, and facilitating conversations with employers to promote securement. I look forward to helping students use the PWE to explore their professional interests.

**Q: What do you find most fulfilling about helping students and alumni with professional development?**

KP: Seeing the amazing things that they're doing. When I was young, I wanted to save the world, and I think I've come to really appreciate just being able to have some sort of an impact that sets individuals on a path toward success and achievement. I'm looking forward to working with students so they can have a positive impact in North Carolina and the other states our community represents.

**Q: Why was Carolina MPA the right fit for you?**

KP: First, I think there's something about Carolina. I heard that when I interviewed; there's just this aura of positivity and support. I've always felt it, from the students and staff to the faculty and administration. It was that, coupled with a program that promotes the development of the future leaders in the state. That really resonates with the personal enjoyment and pleasure I find in providing my exposure and experience to students to help them be change-makers. In addition, I have great respect for the work that our faculty members are doing within the School of Government.



**Q: In five years, where would you like to see the MPA program, specifically in the realm of alumni and employer relations?**

KP: We have an amazing group of alumni who are so eager and willing to contribute to the program that has supported their successes. I would like to see us at 100 percent engagement across our alumni pool. As far as employers, I would like to see an increase in established relationships with different organizations that are reflective of the interest areas of our students. I also want to ensure that we, as an institution, are engaging in conversations to stay apprised of trends in the field so we can always be at the cusp of educating our students to be the future of the government and nonprofit sectors.

**Q: What are your three favorite things to do in the Chapel Hill area?**

KP: Frequent Farmers' Markets (Chapel Hill and Carrboro alike), attend local community events, and get lunch with friends at Sage.



# TRUE CAROLINA BLUE: SYDNEY LAWRENCE, MOLLY GASKIN, AND REBEKAH APPLETON

by Kathryn Paquet

According to NASA, 18 of the 19 warmest years on record have occurred since 2001. Climate change is one of the public sector's leading problems, and tackling it requires creative, intersectional thinking. Sydney Lawrence, Molly Gaskin, and Rebekah Appleton, the first students to enroll in UNC's Bachelor of Environmental Science and Master of Public Administration dual-degree program, are up to the task.

The program, launched in 2016, provides a unique track for students who are interested in gaining leadership expertise and organizational knowledge to solve large-scale environmental issues. Undergraduate environmental science classes focus on topics like geographic information systems, earth systems science, and biology, while MPA courses provide knowledge on organization theory, budgeting, and public service leadership. The program aims to equip future public service leaders to find sustainable solutions for their communities.

Appleton, a native of Durham, came to UNC in 2015 to study biology but switched to environmental science after taking a class on the sociological dimensions of the topic.

"It blew my mind in terms of what the world of environmental science actually meant," Appleton said. "I loved learning about how the environment and ecology affect people—specifically marginalized communities." This inclination led her to explore the dual degree.

Lawrence, who grew up in Wilmington, found out about the dual-degree



Sydney Lawrence '20



Molly Gaskin '21



Rebekah Appleton '21

program from adjunct faculty member and alumna Emily Gangi in an MPA course as an undergraduate environmental science major. Lawrence quickly realized how much she enjoyed studying the intersection of environment and government, and though she was more than halfway through her undergraduate career, decided to apply.

"I became the first student accepted into the program," Lawrence said. "A lot of people referred to me, and still refer to me, as the 'guinea pig'."

Gaskin, who arrived at UNC from Eldersburg, MD, in 2015, learned about the MPA program during a Women in Local Government event she attended at the School of Government. Having already decided to pursue a minor in urban and regional studies, Gaskin was beginning to see a future in public service, and a dual degree was the last piece of the puzzle.

"It appealed to me because it gave me a clear path forward from studying environmental issues to practical problem solving in the public sector," Gaskin explained.

Nearing her spring 2020 graduation, Lawrence can see how the skills she's gained in the MPA program have enhanced her environmental science

knowledge. "I've learned so much about how public organizations work, how to be a leader, how to manage people, and more generally, how to be a successful public servant," she said. "It's provided me with the skills necessary to resolve environmental issues that affect communities."

After earning her degree, Lawrence hopes to work full-time for the Environmental Protection Agency, where she interned and currently works part time.

"One of my favorite things I learned in environmental science is that smaller solutions can solve some problems more sustainably than huge projects," Gaskin said. "That idea is important in public administration because local governments are on the ground delivering services and can make changes that could have a wider reach."

After graduating in spring 2021, she hopes to work in a local government role focused on sustainability or environmental financing.

Appleton, who plans to work in nonprofit leadership after graduating alongside Gaskin, believes the skills she is learning in the MPA program will leave her with deeper perspectives on leadership and equity that she couldn't have gained in environmental science alone.

"Environmental science gave me an understanding of the world, and the MPA program is giving me an understanding of people. Both are important in order to try to make a difference in public service."



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## Upcoming Events

Visit [mpa.unc.edu/alumni-events](http://mpa.unc.edu/alumni-events) for full details and to register

### MARCH 31

GiveUNC



Carolina's Annual Day of Giving—mark your calendars!

### APRIL 2

Deil S. Wright Lecture

UNC SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT  
3:30–5 PM



Norma M. Riccucci, professor at the Rutgers University–Newark School of Public Affairs and Administration, will deliver a lecture entitled, *Preparing People of Color for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jobs: Unfulfilled Promises and Lost Opportunities*. Join fellow alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the program for this annual lecture.

Happy Hour Hub

TOBACCO ROAD SPORTS CAFÉ  
1118 ENVIRON WAY, CHAPEL HILL

Immediately following the lecture



# IMPACT

