

IMPACT

ALUMNI NEWSLETTER

WINTER • 2021

Harnessing the Tides of Change

HOW TURBULENT TIMES PROVIDED VALUABLE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

by Kathryn Paquet

On February 3, 2020, the City of Durham's Budget and Management Services division held interviews for their annual summer internship position at the UNC School of Government. Molly Gaskin '21 was offered the position and excitedly accepted, looking forward to achieving her professional work experience (PWE) requirement and learning the inner workings of the City's government through budget sessions, shadowing police officers, and going on solid waste ride-alongs. Then COVID-19 happened.

"Several parts of our job description and onboarding process instantly went out the window," said Pat Madej '16, Gaskin's supervisor and senior budget and management analyst for the City of Durham. "The task of getting the actual work done felt easy, but clearing these hurdles to organically meet with other staff meant we needed to get creative as we brought Molly into the department and organization's culture." In order to ensure Gaskin was still able to integrate into the organization, Madej created an "open-door policy" on Zoom and led daily full-team check-ins.

Additionally, Gaskin had the opportunity to lead an original qualitative research project examining whether departments considered equity implications when making budget requests. Before beginning, Gaskin had never conducted her own qualitative research.



"It was really great to be able to practice some of the techniques that we learned in our research course in an actual project that I got to see through from start to finish," Gaskin said.

"Molly's thorough research and fresh perspective provided us with really useful data that we will use to build on our process in the future," Madej said. "My goal with hosting the PWE has always been to create a win for everyone, and I think we achieved that again."

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DIRECTOR'S COLUMN



Bill Rivenbark
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For the second time in nine years as director of the MPA program, I am writing this column from home. Without question, I hope that this edition of *IMPACT* finds everyone doing well and managing in these difficult times of distancing and uncertainty.

In a prior column, I wrote about how our program has much to both celebrate and confront as we continue to address growing competition for students, evolving accreditation standards, and national rankings occurring

on an annual basis. I had no way of knowing then what we would add to that list—a global virus that is impacting higher education around the world. Universities are turning to virtual instruction and trying to anticipate how this experience will create new opportunities, while simultaneously responding to unprecedented challenges.

I am pleased to announce that the MPA program has finalized its strategic plan under the leadership of faculty member Willow Jacobson, providing us with a path for the next five years. We started at the top with our vision, mission, and values. While you will recognize our recommitment to the mission of preparing public service leaders, the vision statement is new. The MPA program is fortunate to have its home in the School of Government, where we want to continue to build on the fundamental advantages of our location. As a result, our vision is to become a nationally recognized leader in engaged scholarship, which is in alignment with the School's mission of engaging in practical scholarship and our shared commitment to advance good government. We also took this opportunity to expand our public service values, adding diversity and inclusion. In response, our faculty engaged in a five-week training opportunity to further our understanding on how to make these new values a meaningful part of our culture both inside and outside the classroom.

The adopted strategic plan contains goals and objectives that focus on five fundamental areas of the MPA program, including our location in the School, student recruitment, financial support and job placement, faculty capacity and engaged scholarship, alumni engagement and

accomplishment, and program visibility and reputation. I want to take this opportunity to provide additional context regarding our two alumni goals of engagement and accomplishment.

Vision

A nationally recognized leader in engaged scholarship whose faculty, students, and alumni transform thought, organizations, communities, and lives.

Mission

To prepare public service leaders and create usable knowledge that improves governance.

Public service values

- Accountability and transparency
- Respect and equity
- Efficiency and effectiveness
- Professionalism and ethical behavior

First, we are working very closely with the MPA Alumni Association Board to expand our relationship with the already very engaged alumni. Alumni benefit from interacting with each other and keeping that network strong provides opportunities for our students, especially as talented applicants are seeking programs in which they can interact and work with alumni. Second, we recognize the phenomenal impact that alumni are having in their effort to embody the mission of being public service leaders, and we are excited to do more to share that with the alumni network and the profession. Enhanced awareness of alumni accomplishments helps in student recruitment and in the program's broader reputation nationally and internationally.

Although we do not know exactly how COVID-19 will impact the remainder of this academic year or the next, I do know that our commitment to strengthen the Carolina MPA brand remains intact regardless of future challenges; we know that Carolina MPA students and alumni are on the frontlines of helping communities throughout this crisis. Therefore, I want to thank you, our alumni, for your support as we seek to accomplish our vision in the years ahead and continue to focus on our mission of preparing public service leaders.

William C. Rivenbark
Professor and Director



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While Durham has hosted UNC MPA interns for many years, the Town of Holly Springs took the leap for the first time in 2020, hosting Clay Fleming '21. Like Madej, Corey Petersohn '16 had a vision for Fleming's PWE experience that would require re-working after the pandemic began. However, by the time Fleming started the position in May, the state had moved into phase two, so he joined Petersohn and the rest of the team in person with safety precautions.

Fleming's experience was shaped not only by the pandemic, but also by the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement after the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Ahmaud Arbery. As protests spread

around the country, Holly Springs residents began a movement of their own to demand that funds be allocated to purchase body cameras for the police department.

"I got to sit in on conversations with council members, the town manager, police, and IT, and everyone had varying perspectives," Fleming said. "One of the biggest skills I took away is the ability to step back and look at an issue with a bird's eye view to investigate what's at the heart of what's going on and understand people's motivation."

Despite the curveballs thrown by the pandemic, Petersohn, like

Madej, feels the PWE experience was extremely valuable.

"This was the first time Holly Springs hosted a PWE, and it was a great learning experience for both Clay and us," Petersohn said. "In the long term, by hosting an MPA intern, we are building the next generation of public service leaders. By offering these developmental opportunities to students, we are contributing to the diversity of their experiences and skill sets, from which we all can benefit."

Interested in hosting a summer intern or learning about best practices for remote internships? Contact Kristin Pawlowski at pawlowski@sog.unc.edu or visit tinyurl.com/HireCarolinaMPA.

Navigating Diverse Perspectives in a Virtual World

by Kathryn Paquet

In 2020, the United States faced a global pandemic and large-scale reckoning with racist systems in our society. This year's MPA Immersion course covered both issues, serving as a microcosm for what was occurring beyond its virtual walls.

Due to COVID-19, online and on-campus students convened virtually October 22–24 for *Navigating Diverse Perspectives*, led by faculty member Leisha DeHart-Davis. DeHart-Davis designed the course with the goal of helping students gain a deeper understanding of our varied identities and the privileges and disadvantages that come with them.

Guest speakers included Vaughn Upshaw, professor of public health leadership at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health; Brian Williams, associate professor of public policy at the University of Virginia Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy; and Faith Brodie '03, public housing director for the Town of Chapel Hill. Upshaw, Williams, and Brodie led students through discussions and activities on identifying implicit

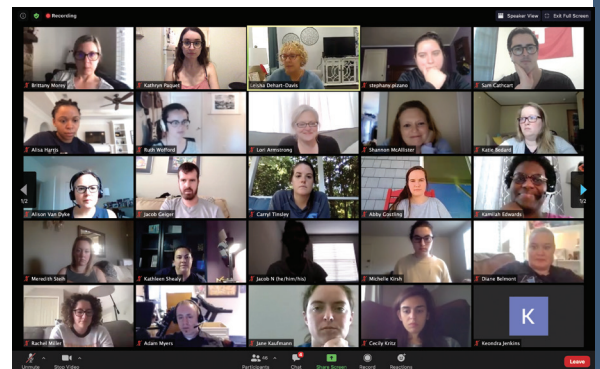
bias, understanding the harm of microaggressions, and reimagining government services to combat systemic racism.

While a virtual environment was a new turn for the course, which the program has offered in person since 2015, the physical distance did not hinder students' ability to engage deeply and thoughtfully with course material and discussions.

"We were able to reflect on our own biases and hone techniques that will allow us to better overcome them," said Kamilah Edwards, first year online student. "As leaders in public administration, every one of these areas is critical for our success in the public and nonprofit sectors."

The course provided students with the opportunity to gain concrete tools for becoming better advocates and allowed them to make lasting connections with peers.

"As a pre-career, on-campus student, I really enjoyed getting to learn from online students I had not met



Faculty member Leisha DeHart-Davis (top row, third from left) debriefs with students between guest speaker sessions.

before," said Cecily Kritz, second year on-campus student. "The variety of perspectives and experiences from students in different stages of their careers enriched our conversations."

"It was nice to be part of a community after many months of quarantining and social distancing," Edwards agreed. "As a first-year online MPA student, I knew few of the students prior to joining the class, but now I have contacts that I will keep up with throughout my MPA journey."

An Interview with Obed Pasha

by Kathryn Paquet

The School of Government welcomed Obed Pasha to its faculty ranks in June 2020. Pasha is an assistant professor specializing in performance management. Before joining the School, Pasha served as an assistant professor at Cleveland State University's Levin College of Urban Affairs, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst's School of Public Policy, and Georgia State University's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies.

KP: What originally led you to pursue studies in public administration?

OP: Growing up in a small town in Pakistan, I learned to appreciate the role public institutions play in people's lives. At their best, these institutions support the most vulnerable and add value to the quality of life of all residents. At their worst, they can be oppressive and deprive individuals of a dignified and wholesome living. I decided to pursue a career in public administration to help government institutions provide better services to all citizens, especially those who are marginalized.

KP: What attracted you to the School of Government?

OP: The School of Government is an extraordinary place that provides the rare opportunity for practitioner-oriented scholars like me to apply

their knowledge directly to the field. I engage with local and state government officials, learn about their challenges and opportunities, and collaborate to enhance public services. Conducting influential research, teaching, and advising is tremendously gratifying.

KP: What research are you currently working on that excites you?

OP: Fellow faculty member Whitney Afonso and I are looking at the fiscal impact of the pandemic on North Carolina counties. We plan to empirically test whether following certain best practices helps counties deal with the crisis more effectively. In another project, faculty member Willow Jacobson and I are studying how performance management practices have changed for municipal governments during COVID-19 and how they help local governments deal with the crisis. With these studies, we hope to understand better how public agencies can be more resilient and prepared for future events.



KP: What do you see as today's leading challenges for public administration leaders?

OP: I believe the biggest challenge to public administration today is to re-establish its relevance to the citizens. Emotionally charged events over the last few months following Mr. George Floyd's murder have

eroded the trust citizens place in public officials. There is a lot of pressure on officials to re-imagine public services, make broad adjustments to their organizational values, and cater to populations from an increasingly divergent value spectrum. These are complex, wicked problems with no easy solutions.

KP: What do you hope to accomplish at the School of Government?

OP: I want to meaningfully engage with public officials to support their services and needs. We are truly fortunate to have highly skilled, passionate, and resilient public officials who work every day to serve the people of this state to the best of their capabilities. I seek to offer innovative and effective courses, advice, and research to meet the actual needs of our local government employees.

Congratulations, 2020 Graduates!

AUGUST

Alice Bradford Brown
Hannah Rochelle Colston
Grace Frances
Zaynub Mohamed Jarbu
Stephen McConoughey

Benjamin Rue Silliman
Danielle Marie Stephenson
Mason P. Veal

DECEMBER

Andrea Delane Alexander
Dylan McKay Allen

Rebecca Elizabeth Brown
Samuel Bryan Croom
Brian Edward Hedengren
Shelley Gist Kennedy
Misty Randall Leland
Anna Elizabeth Manning
Ashlyn Shockley Martin

Holden Keith McLemore
Raphaelle Marie Miller
Brook Michaelis Redding
John Marshall Stewart
Matthew Bryan Taylor
Ginger Huntsinger Yarbrough

New Fellowship Provides Practical Experience

In January 2020, Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL) partnered with the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) to establish the Popular Annual Financial Report Fellowship Program. The effort was led by two UNC MPA alumni: ELGL Executive Director Kirsten Wyatt '02, and GFOA Executive Director Chris Morrill '85. Below is an interview with the two about the fellowship, which provides practical financial reporting work experience for graduate students. Six UNC MPA students participated in the inaugural fellowship class.

What is a PAFR?

CM: The Popular Annual Financial Report, or PAFR, is a government financial reporting document used to communicate complex accounting and budgeting information in an easy-to-read format. GFOA has three awards for financial reporting: budget, Certified Annual Financial Report, and PAFR.

KW: I'm a big PAFR fan, because it can take a budget typically packaged in a huge binder and distill that information down into a format that an average community member can review and understand. GFOA's reputation and credibility make their awards program important for local government finance departments, so ELGL wanted to find a way to support and promote the creation of PAFRs.

Why did you create a fellowship program?

KW: Shortly after COVID-19 shutdowns, I started hearing from MPA and MPP programs with concerns that enrolled students wouldn't be able to get professional work experience or internships. I reached out to Chris to see if GFOA would be interested in partnering with ELGL to put together a summer program for graduate students.

CM: GFOA saw this as an opportunity to help our local government members create their first PAFR documents, and also for students to learn more about financial reporting. Through our outreach to local governments, we found that we could add 40 of our members to our new "Triple Crown" program, which recognizes organizations that receive the three financial awards. The added bonus was giving students more exposure to the GFOA organization and the resources and training we provide to the government finance field.

What is the benefit to local governments and graduate students?

CM: The obvious benefit to local government is the creation of a PAFR. None of the 40 local governments that participated in this pilot program had created a PAFR before, and now they have one that can be used as a template in future years. This program also raised the awareness of the PAFR for the local governments in the

program and organization-wide. We're looking forward to showcasing and celebrating the completed PAFRs from the fellowship program.

KW: For graduate students, there's something meaningful about having a tangible work product they can share. The PAFR they created is an expression of practical skills, which is a nice complement to the work they're completing in their programs. We also built an eight-week training program to cover Excel, PAFR development, graphic design, Canva, and PAFR evaluation and scoring. Additionally, the Fellows met for co-working time so they could learn from each other and build their local government connections.

What's next for the program?

KW: We're currently evaluating program structure, tools, training, and support with the help of current Carolina MPA student Andreu Sutterby '21. This will guide us as we plan for the second cohort of PAFR Fellows.

PAFR FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM by the numbers		
15 Graduate programs nationwide	29 Fellows	40 Participating local governments (2 in NC)

CM: The early feedback has been wonderful. One Fellow was already tasked with creating a PAFR for their new local government internship after their supervisor saw on LinkedIn that they had participated in the PAFR Fellowship program. We look at this as another value-add for GFOA members who want to expand and improve their financial communications.

Current Fellows

Daisy Calixtro	Sam Ingalls
Andreu Sutterby	Sara Ellis-Sanborn
Michael Barron	Thomas Persico

If your organization would like to participate in a future PAFR Fellowship program, please contact Kirsten Wyatt at kirsten@elgl.org.

Life Events

Marchell Adams-David '92 is manager of the City of Raleigh, NC.

Susin Seow '97 is deputy director of principal gifts for University Development at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Erin Grogan '04 is principal researcher at Grasshopper Research and Evaluation in VT.

Justin Amos '06 is budget and evaluation manager for Gaston County, NC.

Peter Franzese '06 is assistant manager of the Town of Spencer, NC.

Lana Hygh '08 retired as director of special projects for the Town of Cary, NC.

Anne Roper Bowen '08 is director of development at The Williams School in Norfolk, VA.

Suzanne Julian '09 is director of corporate and internal communications at Self-Help in Durham, NC.

Rachel Meyerson '12 is operations officer, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in New York City, NY.

Brian Farkas '13 is North Carolina State Representative, District 9.

Jeremy Schmidt '14 is logistics officer, deputy assistant chief of staff G-4 with the United States Marine Corps, 3D Marine Expeditionary Brigade in Okinawa, Japan.

Rafael Baptista '15 is performance management director for Buncombe County, NC.

Kat Thompson '15 is director of training and supported employment at Employability in Savannah, GA.

Amy (O'Neal) Crout '16 is land use and zoning attorney at Womble Bond Dickinson (U.S.) LLP, Raleigh, NC.

Elizabeth Biser '17 is president at Biser Strategies LLC.

Margaret Murphy '17 is housing policy analyst at the Missouri Housing Development Commission in Kansas City.

Hannah Osborne '17 is senior management analyst for Loudoun County, VA.

Ebony West '18 is programs associate, elections and voting, for the Democracy Fund in Washington, DC.

Adrienne Augustus '20 is media relations and mental health programs manager, corporate communications and public relations executive for the City of Hyattsville Police Department in MD.

Colin Stifler '21 proposed to partner of seven years, Ashley Schultz.

New Additions

Steve Buter '06 and Harriet Buter welcomed Theodore Jones Buter on August 3, 2020.

Chris Riddick '07 and Lauren Propst-Riddick welcomed Zoe Kellan Riddick on July 21, 2020.

Brian Murphy '10 and Jennifer Tesh Murphy welcomed Sutton Grace Murphy on June 12, 2020.

Anne Davis-Blayney '13 and **Edward Michael Blayney '15** welcomed Emmet Blayney on May 21, 2020.

Allison Hutchins '13 and Charlie Queen welcomed Caroline Glee Queen on October 17, 2020.

Carla Davis-Castro '14 and Leo Crippa welcomed Maksym Alessandro Crippa-Castro on August 19, 2020.

Stephen Moore '14 and Heather Eileen Caldwell Moore welcomed Grace Eileen Moore on February 13, 2020.

Ryan Regan '14 and Emily Regan welcomed Nora Rose Regan on September 1, 2020.

Jeremy Schmidt '14 and Amber Schmidt welcomed Ever Leigh Schmidt on August 29, 2020.

Jenifer Baptista Della Valle '15 and **Rafael Baptista '15** welcomed Eleanor Lourdes Baptista on June 24, 2020.

Corey Petersohn '16 and Emily Petersohn welcomed Avery Leigh Petersohn on July 28, 2020.

Brian Haney '17 and Lauren Logan Haney welcomed Elizabeth Logan Haney ("Eliza") on July 27, 2020.

Tracy Smith Miles '17 and Jordan Miles welcomed James Ross Miles on November 7, 2019.

Raphaëlle Miller, current student, and Jamie Miller welcomed Nolan Stephen Miller into the world on October 8, 2020.

A Note From Alumni Association Board President Corey Petersohn

When I joined the Alumni Association Board two years ago, I did so with two goals in mind. First and foremost, I wanted to work with an organization that helps our public service leaders advance their careers. Second, as an alumnus of the online format, I wanted to ensure those who were not physically on campus felt as much a part of the UNC family as their on-campus counterparts. Back then, I never could have imagined a world where all our students attend class from home out of necessity.



UNC MPA Alumni Association Board President Corey Petersohn with daughter Charlotte.

As I begin my term as board president and we enter the second year of the pandemic, I think back to my two goals. Now more than ever, we need to build each other up. Our alumni across the globe are facing challenges unlike anything we have seen in our lifetime. I also want to ensure current MPA candidates know, regardless of how they are attending class today, they will receive both an incredible education and access to one of the most robust and enthusiastic alumni organizations in the world.

I have been very fortunate in my career to have worked with and for alumni. It was at a School of Government reception that I first sought out a mentor to help transition my career to local government. I happened to meet the new manager of my town. I struck up a conversation with him, he invited me to continue the conversation over coffee the next

week, and two months later, I was working for him. It was a fortuitous series of events, but ultimately it was the willingness and enthusiasm of a fellow alumnus that propelled my career forward.

The reality of our present situation means it will be a while before we can gather in the School's atrium again. However, that does not mean as alumni we should not seek to continue to provide fellowship, mentorship, and opportunity. We have had to get a little creative with Zoom happy hours and virtual trainings. Everyone has had to learn how to mute their microphone and share screens. But I challenge my fellow alumni, especially those in senior leadership positions, to help close the virtual divide. Be accessible in new ways, volunteer your organization for service learning projects, and get creative with internship opportunities. We must take a personal and intentional responsibility in building paths for future leaders. As the old saying goes, leave it better than you found it.

IN MEMORIAM Gene Swearingen '70



We are saddened to share that Mason Eugene "Gene" Swearingen '70 passed away unexpectedly on April 2, 2020. Gene's local government career spanned more than 40 years, including positions with the cities of Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Alexandria, Virginia; and Garrett Park, Maryland. He also served as the interim assistant county administrator in Shenandoah County, Virginia, as a consultant to communities in Virginia and North Carolina, and as adjunct professor in the Virginia Tech Public Administration program. He was an avid musician who performed in numerous rock bands until his passing. Gene was preceded in death by his son Mason "Sam" and is survived by his wife and soulmate of 45 years, Mary, brother Steve (wife Brenda), daughter-in-law Linda, son Nathaniel, son Chris (wife Maggie), daughter Katie Remuzzi (husband Chris), and four grandchildren: Timmy, Abby, Robby, and Bridget.



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IMPACT

Upcoming Events

Visit mpa.unc.edu/alumni-events for full details and to register.

MARCH 30

GiveUNC



Mark your calendars for UNC's annual day of giving, GiveUNC! This event provides an excellent opportunity to show your Tar Heel pride and support the mission of UNC MPA and the School of Government through matching gifts, challenges, and more.

APRIL 8

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 titled, *Preparing People of Color for 21st Century Jobs: Unfulfilled Promises and Lost Opportunities*. Join fellow alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends of the program for this annual lecture.

Live stream details forthcoming.

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