



# IMPACT Alumni Newsletter



## Professional Work Experience Gets Students Out of the Classroom and Into the Workplace

UNC Master of Public Administration students gain the opportunity to apply their skills and knowledge in the real world by completing the Professional Work Experience (PWE). A required part of the MPA curriculum, the PWE helps students explore new projects and experience working at different public service organizations, while also deciding what areas of public service are the best fit for them.

“The PWE has been and remains an important component of the curriculum and marks a pivotal stage of MPA learning,” said Willow Jacobson, director of the UNC MPA program. “It gives students a chance to apply, test, and explore how theories and course concepts work in practice. It is an opportunity to refine knowledge, skills, and competencies and develop insights into strengths, interests, and areas for continued development. Moreover, students often make lasting relationships that shape their careers.”

Below, several current MPA students discuss their PWEs, what they learned about themselves, and where they want to take their careers moving forward.

### **Kinsey Beauclair** Community Empowerment Fund (CEF), Chapel Hill

“I worked with community members toward their goals of gaining employment, housing stability, and financial savings. I also contributed to the development of CEF’s homebuyer program, which supports low-income and first-time homebuyers in Chapel Hill.

“Additionally, I conducted a research project to evaluate the impacts of Chapel Hill’s Inclusionary Zoning Ordinance. This provided me valuable insight into housing in Chapel Hill and our duty as public administrators to make affordable housing more accessible. My time with CEF also exposed me to the ins and outs of nonprofits and encouraged me

to continue working with equity-focused nonprofits in the future.”

### **Scott Powell** Budget and Management Services, Wake County

“The most rewarding experiences of my PWE all included elements of change management, whether internally for a 16-person team or countywide for 4,500-plus employees. For example, I witnessed—and played a very small part in—the shift to zero-based budgeting for contractual services for all departments to right-size contracts. This involved new work products, process improvements, training, and mass communications, to say the least. On a smaller scale, I worked with budget staff to re-tool our office’s graduate internship process, enhancing our ability to recruit and retain top talent.

“I was fortunate to continue my PWE part-time through the fall after beginning in the summer.

# From the Director



**Willow S. Jacobson, Director • 919.966.4760 • jacobson@sog.unc.edu**

I am proud of the MPA program—the great work within the program and within the field of study by our outstanding faculty, the talented students, and how our amazing alumni continue to have a positive impact on organizations, communities, and the world.

In 2012, we decided to add an online format to our MPA program to expand access and impact. From the beginning, we made the important distinction that we were adding a format of our existing program, not an alternative program, leading to our often-used phrase “one program, two formats.” Over the years we have kept this value as a central tenet in our decision-making, ensuring that we have the same admission standards, curriculum, competencies, thesis substitute, career services, and the list goes on.

When we decided to move into the online space it was still an emerging area, and we did not have the expertise and experience to build the program that we needed. We began a partnership with the online program management partner 2U, Inc., to support the online format. We have enjoyed a robust, decade-long partnership benefiting students who need the flexibility of an online MPA. 2U brought significant expertise, capacity, and technology to this partnership. Working with 2U allowed us to create an exceptional online experience. I believe that, had we tried to do that work alone, we would not have been able to overcome the hurdles in entering online education. I'm grateful for that partnership, and what that has meant for our ability to create an outstanding online format for our program.

We are at a different point in time now, one in which we have an opportunity and the skills and resources

internally at the School of Government that can support a transition in the operating model of the online format. Starting Fall 2024, we will no longer work with 2U as the online program management partner. Though 2U remains a partner across the UNC-Chapel Hill campus, the MPA program's administration will be brought in-house and carried out by the MPA program and School of Government. We are excited about this transition and what it means for the program, and our students, faculty, and staff. As part of this change, we have the long-term opportunity to: 1) provide a more unified MPA program experience—on campus and online; 2) enhance the student experience; and 3) make our MPA program more accessible and affordable, for more North Carolinians, aligning the tuition model with that of our on-campus program.

This transition reinforces our commitment to “one program, two formats.” I am excited about the transition, what it will mean for our MPA program, and the strategies it will open to us to continue to enhance experiences for our students. Like any change, it does not come without lots of work. I am so very grateful for the dedication and tireless work of the MPA staff as we have prepared for this transition. The work behind the scenes has been tremendous and done with professionalism, skill, grace, and lots of coffee. I'm also thankful to Dean Aimee Wall for her support and leadership during this transition.

Sincerely,

Willow S. Jacobson

Director, UNC MPA

Associate Dean for Graduate Studies

Robert W. Bradshaw Jr. Distinguished Professor of Public Administration and Government

To support the MPA program, visit [GiveToMPA.unc.edu](https://GiveToMPA.unc.edu).

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In winter, I took on a full-time position with the county. I believe the strongest component of my application for a full-time role was my understanding of and fit with the team's culture. To that end, I credit Dr. Jacobson's organizational theory course with giving me the tools and perspective to identify aspects of a team's culture, buy-in, and ultimately co-create it.

“At each step of the journey, I encountered and learned from UNC MPA alumni at all levels of the organization who took the time and initiative to answer all my questions,

sharing the thought process behind their actions and leadership.”

**Wendy Welsh**  
Manager's Office, Town of Carrboro

“Throughout my PWE, I was fortunate to spend time with each department director to understand their jobs and challenges experienced in Carrboro. I was able to help with pressing issues for the town manager by researching peer municipalities' ordinances on road connectivity, stormwater management, and police traffic-stop benchmarking. I attended council meetings, created and distributed bi-weekly

Council-Manager updates, and compiled council priorities with comprehensive goals for the management team to better understand priorities going forward.

“For a career in public administration, this experience provided valuable insight into a town's management team and what it takes to make a town operate smoothly with high demand from its council and residents. This talented staff left a lasting impression on me and encouraged me to continue my work in local government.”

## 2023 ICMA Conference

### Thoughts From an MPA Student

by Micah McRea '25

As an on-campus, first-year UNC MPA student, I started the program immediately after completing my undergraduate studies at Lenoir-Rhyne University. Although I am certain about pursuing a career in public service, I am still exploring specific areas of interest. Attending the 2023 International City and County Management Association (ICMA) Annual Conference was an incredible way to kick off my MPA journey—the opportunity to build my network and attend inspiring keynotes and educational sessions made for a valuable experience.

The conference provided a unique opportunity to interact and connect with various local government professionals. The generous support from MPA staff, faculty, and alumni throughout the conference cannot be overstated. It was evident that our success as students mattered, and they would assist in any capacity.

The generosity of MPA alumni allowed 22 other MPA students and me to enjoy the convenient location of adjoining Airbnbs less

than a mile from the conference center. It was only a short walk, though many of us elected to use electric scooters as a fun means of transportation. The scooters also proved to be fantastic for exploring downtown Austin. Being able to immerse ourselves in Austin's culture briefly and have some fun together was a bonus of being in such a central location.

The camaraderie that developed among the MPA students during our time in Austin is something I'll remember for years to come. One moment that stands out to me was being there to encourage my fellow MPA students during their presentation on mayoral effectiveness. Presentations at this conference by students in the UNC ICMA Chapter were a great moment for the MPA program to stand out.

My experience during this year's ICMA conference strengthened my interest and commitment to work in the

public service field. It reinforced the importance of public service values and highlighted the significant difference an individual can make while working in this field. I am genuinely grateful for the opportunity, as it has reaffirmed my choice to pursue my MPA at Carolina. I am confident my connections and takeaways from the conference will have a lasting impact on my career.



McRea at the ICMA conference in Austin

## UNC MPA Faculty Are Engaged Scholars in Leading Public Administration Organizations

Reflecting the breadth of their expertise, UNC MPA faculty serve as committee members, board members, and editors of some of the nation and the world's leading scholarly public sector organizations.

"Our faculty have been extraordinarily successful connecting the School's model of engaged scholarship with the broader national academic and professional communities," said UNC School of Government Dean Aimee N. Wall. "As recognized experts in their fields of public administration, they are making practical and significant contributions that not only advance the field but directly benefit our students and North Carolina's public officials every day."



### WHITNEY AFONSO

Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Editorial board member** | *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*; *Public Budgeting and Finance*; *State and Local Government Review*

**Executive committee member** | Association for Budgeting and Financial Management

**Finance committee member** | Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration



### LEISHA DEHART-DAVIS

Professor of Public Administration and Government  
Director, Local Government Workplaces Initiative

**Founding board member** | Consortium of Race, Gender, and Equity Researchers

**Board member** | Center for Organizational Research and Design, Arizona State University

**Editorial board member** | *The American Review of Public Administration*; *State and Local Government Review*



### WILLOW S. JACOBSON

Director, UNC MPA Program  
Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Board member** | The Section on Personnel Administration and Labor Relations, American Society for Public Administration

**Editorial board member** | *Public Personnel Management*; *Review of Public Personnel Administration*; *Korean Journal of Policy Studies*



### JONATHAN Q. MORGAN

Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Board member** | International Economic Development Council



### KIMBERLY L. NELSON

Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Board member** | The Section on Intergovernmental Administration and Management, American Society for Public Administration

**Co-editor** | *State and Local Government Review*

**Co-chair** | Local Government Education Committee, Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration; Graduate Education Committee, International City/County Management Association

**Editorial board member** | *Public Administration Review*; *The American Review of Public Administration*



### OBED PASHA

Term Associate Professor of Public Management

**Associate editor** | *Public Administration Review*



### WILLIAM C. RIVENBARK

Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Editorial board member** | *International Journal of Public Administration*; *Public Administration Quarterly*; *Public Administration Review*



### JOHN B. STEPHENS

Associate Professor of Public Administration and Government

**Steering committee member** | University Network for Collaborative Governance

## UNC MPA Alumni Albert and Gladys Coates Society Sees 29 Donors in 2023

Whether supporting scholarships, professional development opportunities, or the ability to respond to current needs and requests from students and faculty, every gift is a meaningful testament to the value of UNC MPA and is instrumental to ensuring the program is best able to support future public service leaders. We are truly grateful for every gift from those who have chosen to support the program.

The UNC MPA Alumni Coates Society recognizes MPA alumni who contribute \$5,000 or more to any MPA-designated fund or funds in a calendar year. In 2023, 29 UNC MPA Alumni Coates Society Members contributed more than \$175,000 to the UNC MPA program. Since this effort's inception in 2021, 36 alumni have been members in at least one of the past three years. The total contributed by those alumni surpasses three-quarters of a million dollars.

### Thank you to the alumni who have taken a leadership role in this effort!

J. Russell Allen '77

Stephanie Fowler Benson '82

Jerri Bland '93

Gary Cannon '78

David Cooke '82

Larry Davis '85

Jim Donnelly '93

Lori Victor Feller '95

Brodi Fontenot '99

Ruffin Hall '93

Marie Hatem '81

Wally Hill '79

Ed Kitchen '74

Chris Long '81

Tom Lundy '71

Alice Mahood '20

Mark McDonald '95

Peggy Merriss '82

Flo Miller '77

Thomas Mirc '17

Chris Morrill '85

Martha Perego '79

Charles Perusse '92

Roger Stancil '77

Richard Stevens '74

Peter Varney '70

Mal Watlington '69

Richard and Pat

Woodcock '77

## President's Column

Dear UNC MPA Alumni Community,

As I step into the role of incoming president of the UNC Master of Public Administration Alumni Board, I am both honored and excited to continue the remarkable work of past presidents and board members. The Alumni board's mission, at its core, is to advance and support UNC MPA alumni by fostering strong connections among alumni, students, and faculty.

I am committed to enhancing the ways in which our alumni can connect, engage, and contribute to the MPA program and, equally importantly, to each other. We have one of the best UNC alumni communities, with graduates creating lasting connections that provide support throughout all stages of their professional and personal journeys.

As president, I hope to build on the board's past and current work and create strategic goals and activities that can carry over each year. I believe this will help create a sense of continuity but will also provide alumni and current student members with a set of activities they can rely on each year. By focusing our efforts on connection, collaboration, and contribution, we can amplify the impact of the UNC MPA program and reinforce our commitment to the core values of collaboration, diversity, stewardship, integrity, professionalism, and exploration.

I am excited about the journey ahead and the opportunity to work together to strengthen our community and the broader field of public service!

Sincerely,

Toney Thompson '18

President, UNC MPA Alumni Board



Congratulations to our most recent additions to the UNC MPA alumni network!

### Fall 2023

Nicholas Debo

Jonathan Douglas Hill

Hogan Eastwood Medlin

Wesley Merritt

Julia Lee Murphy

Jackson Alexander

Peterson

David Schexnayder

Mariel Yukie Downes  
Takamura

Dai Tworek

Rachel Lynn Werz

Amanda Wesson

### Summer 2023

Christina Jeanne Bice

Katherin Sanders  
Godwin

Meredith Ray Marlier

Shane C. Rudloff

Stephen Lee Thompson

Katie Emily Webster

# Life Events

## On the Move

### Barry Reed '83

Chief of Party, Creative Associates International, Chevy Chase, MD

### Pat Pate '84

Manager, City of Winston-Salem, NC

### Ann Wall '86

Deputy Executive, Albemarle County, VA

### Brendan Burke '87

Director, Mosley Center for Public Management, Suffolk University, Boston, MA

### Ben Durant '88

Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President for Finance and Operations, Montclair State University, Montclair, NJ

### Teresa Derrick-Mills '90

Senior Research Fellow, Urban Institute, Washington, DC

### Susin Seow '97

Executive Director of Development for Scholarship Support, UNC-Chapel Hill

### Erin Eckert '00

Strategic Services Associate, Duke Palliative Care, Duke University Health System, Durham, NC

### Elizabeth Earle Jordan '00

Sales Manager, Caruso Homes, Inc, Fuquay Varina, NC

### Jen Christian '01

Senior Director, Network Leadership Development, NeighborWorks America, Washington, DC

### Emily Bruce '03

Director of Major Gifts, NC Aquarium Society, Raleigh, NC

### Chris Harder '03

Deputy Director, Economic Prosperity and Housing, City of Vancouver, WA

### Kari Feinberg '04

Deputy Chief of Staff, Houston Independent School District, Houston, TX

### Jess Aylor '05

Executive Director of Library Development, UNC-Chapel Hill

### Monica Evans '07

Senior Community Development Advisor, Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, GA

### Allan Beckman '08

Supervisory Program Analyst, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, DC

### Carrie Henderson '08

Advisor, TSG Advisors, Tallahassee, FL

### Erin Aldrich Miller '08

Stewardship Coordinator, U.S. Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Cincinnati, OH

### Trevor Fleck '09

Director, National Consulting Partners, Woodbridge, VA

### Molly Boyle '12

Planner II, Town of Hillsborough, NC

### Emily Adair '15

Rural Funding and Grants Manager, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, Raleigh, NC

### David Finley '15

Director of Data and Performance, City of South Bend, IN

### David Goldberg '15

Principal, Athenian Oath Advisors and Co-Founder, Disaster Relief Strategies, Concord, NC

### Grant Whitley '15

Associate Vice President of Data Science, Trillium Health Resources, Greenville, NC

### Maria Chiochios '16

Assessment and Analytics Manager, University of Oregon Libraries, Eugene, OR

### Pat Madej '16

Strategic Initiatives Manager, Durham County, NC

### Rachel Pepperman Taylor Morin '16

Finance and Administration Lead, Women Make Movies, New York, NY

### Austin Rouse '16

Director of Business Recruitment, Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina, Raleigh, NC

### Billy Cook '17

Associate, LATAM Credit Training, Citi, New York, NY

### Michael Evans '17

Director of Business Intelligence, Hampton Roads Alliance, Norfolk, VA

### Will Hagerty '17

Operations Officer, Norfolk Airport Authority, Norfolk, VA

### Hannah Osborne '17

Senior Capital Program Analyst, City of Raleigh, NC

### Adora Thayer '17

Finance and Business Compliance Analyst II, NC Department of Information Technology, Raleigh, NC

### Travis Crayton '18

Senior Director of Planning, Research Triangle Park, NC

### Mary Frances McClure '18

Pastor, Moyock United Methodist Church, Moyock, NC

### Tara Nattress '18

Senior Management Analyst, Central Pines Regional Council, Durham, NC

### Francesca Ramsawak '18

Assistant Head of School, Transitions Program, Cooke School and Institute, New York, NY

### Ebony West-Maurice '18

Senior Program Associate, Democracy Fund, Durham, NC

### Aaron Brown '19

Budget Manager, Wake County, NC

### Angela Gravelly-Smith '19

Assistant Director, Living Cities, New York, NY

### Emily Schultz '19

Director of Student Services, School of Dental Medicine, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC

### Matthew Van Epps '19

Senior Vice President, Main Street Health, Henderson, TN

### Jake Levitas '20

Planning Supervisor, Urban Projects Group, City of Raleigh, NC

### Megan Oleynik '20

Senior Utilities Engineer, City of Alexandria, VA

### Kaitland Finkle '21

Regional Planner, Land of Sky Regional Council, Asheville, NC

### Mira Singhal '22

Presidential Management Fellow, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Washington, DC

## New Additions

### Wren Davisson '13

and Michael Gilbert welcomed Julia Davisson Gilbert on October 24, 2023.

### Renisha Howard Jones '13

and Wilson M. Jones Jr. welcomed Skyler C. Jones on December 13, 2023.

### Kat Thompson Gardner '15

and Josh Gardner welcomed Juliet Anne Gardner and Lillian Jenny Gardner on December 5, 2023.

### Lauren Brune '16

and Ben Labe welcomed Penelope Iris Brune Labe on August 31, 2023.

### Heather Curry '17

and Patrick Curry (and big sister Carina) welcomed Jude Arthur Curry on May 21, 2023.

### Ricky Ruvio '17

and Victoria Ruvio (and big brother Vance) welcomed Ava Leigh Ruvio on July 21, 2023.

### Toney Thompson '18

and Alisha Thompson welcomed Theo Joseph Thompson on October 19, 2023.

## In Memoriam

### Steve W. Raper '74

Class of '74 alumnus Steve Raper passed away on December 28, 2023. A commissioned Navy veteran and Carolina double alumnus, Steve was a dedicated public servant, serving more than 35 years in local government, including his final 16 years as city manager of Rocky Mount. Steve was also a dedicated mentor and advocate for the UNC MPA program, even serving as an inspiration for others to attend the program. Mike Ruffin '82 recalls, "I met Steve in 1975 when we were both working for the City of Rocky Mount. He was an intern in his second year of the MPA program. It was the first time I'd heard about the program, and thanks in part to Steve, I entered in 1982. It was the best I decision I ever made." To view his full obituary, please visit [go.unc.edu/steve-raper](https://go.unc.edu/steve-raper).

### Patricia J. Wright

Patricia J. Wright passed away on December 5, 2023. "Pat" to UNC MPA alumni, faculty, staff, and friends who were fortunate enough to know her will remember that she was Deil Wright's partner in all things for more than 50 years. MPA alumni will remember Pat cohosting the annual kick-off picnic. For more on the life of this beloved faculty spouse, please visit [go.unc.edu/patricia-wright](https://go.unc.edu/patricia-wright).



**SCHOOL OF  
GOVERNMENT**

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OF NORTH CAROLINA  
AT CHAPEL HILL**

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CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

*Upcoming*  
**EVENTS**

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

## **GiveUNC 2024**

March 26th is GiveUNC, the University's annual day of giving! This year, UNC MPA will be raising support for the UNC MPA Director's Innovation Endowment Fund, established to provide unrestricted funding that supports student and program opportunities.

Since the start of GiveUNC, the School of Government has finished near the top University-wide in the number of individual donors. Contributions to UNC MPA are key to that success, and we hope you will help us continue to lead in this effort!

