

# IMPACT Alumni Newsletter



## Local Government Workplaces Initiative



## 20 Years of Improving Local Government Workplaces

In 2024, we celebrated the 20th anniversary of the Local Government Workplaces Initiative (LGWI) at the UNC School of Government. LGWI is the only university-based center in the country dedicated to local government workplace climate research. It is led by Leisha DeHart-Davis, a professor of public administration and government and director of the LGWI.

LGWI began in 2004 at the University of Kansas School of Public Affairs and Administration and was formalized after DeHart-Davis joined UNC-Chapel Hill. The Initiative aims to help cities and counties create great workplaces and improve public service delivery by listening and responding to employees. Over 20 years, LGWI has surveyed, interviewed, and facilitated group discussions for more than 25,000 local government employees and has completed 42 workplace climate surveys with local governments inside and outside North Carolina.

"We aim to be the go-to resource for local government workplace climate

improvements," said Clay Fleming '21, assistant director of LGWI. "When local governments across the country think about listening to employees, we want to be the first choice."

One service LGWI offers local government is a comprehensive workplace climate survey with evidence-based questions that can be customized according to a local government's needs. Additional services include facilitating pre- or post-survey focus groups, infographics, creating action plans, customized training for employees or leadership, and research contract services.

### Support in Guilford County

In 2021, the Guilford County Board of Commissioners updated the county office's core values and goals. They established "Our People Matter" as a value, reflecting a desire to support employees' well-being and provide a positive and compassionate office environment. They engaged LGWI to conduct a workplace climate

study to give leadership a deeper understanding of employees' perspectives and attitudes.

LGWI conducted two surveys, one in 2021 and one in 2023. The 2021 survey had a 63 percent response rate. It revealed strengths in supervisory practices, teamwork, organization identification, and values, as well as opportunities for improving employee voice, pay and benefit satisfaction, and burnout.

Guilford County took recommendations from its employees and LGWI and set goals to improve results. Some of the action steps they took include creating a communications department, forming a committee that gives employees a voice in policy and workplace improvements, adopting new pay and benefit plans, increasing technology investments, adjusting staffing ratios to prevent burnout, and holding small group sessions for open discussions with leadership.

# From the Director



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

We are living through a time of rapid change and growing uncertainty across public service sectors. The challenges we face are complex, evolving, and sometimes daunting. Yet amid this shifting landscape, not only does interest in the Master of Public Administration remain steady—it's stronger than ever. This year, we are seeing record levels of interest and enrollment in our MPA program, a clear signal that people remain deeply committed to leading and serving in times of need.

Applicants today are motivated by the same values that drive our alumni and public service professionals: a desire to make a difference and a readiness to step into leadership roles in the face of complexity. They come to us with urgent questions and bold ambitions, reminding us why this work matters.

As we prepare our students to meet current and future demands, we look to those who know this work best—our alumni. Your insights and experiences are essential to keeping our curriculum responsive and relevant. After January's MPA Career and Networking Fair, I had the opportunity to hear from alumni and employers about what's needed from today's MPA graduates. That feedback continues to inform our teaching, informing the knowledge and skills we emphasize so that our students are ready to respond—and to lead.

We are deeply grateful for your continued involvement and support. Your work in communities, agencies, and organizations exemplifies the UNC MPA mission, and your mentorship and guidance model our program's values in action.

While the road ahead may be unpredictable, I take comfort in knowing that wherever there is challenge, UNC MPA alumni will rise to meet it. Thank you for being a vital part of this journey.

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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When LGWI compared the 2021 and 2023 survey results, it revealed that the County had 16 improvements, including greater employee voice, less burnout, and higher pay satisfaction. The response rate was also 11 percent higher than the 2021 survey, indicating more engagement.

"Guilford County has partnered with LGWI on two climate surveys, several employee focus group processes, and related follow-up initiatives," said Daphne Taylor, Guilford County human resources assistant director. "The LGWI team brings expertise, transparency, and objectivity to the process, which has fostered a sense of trust among our employees. The partnership has produced tangible benefits and has been well worth the investment."

Through engaging LGWI, Guilford County was able to understand employee needs and implement action steps that improved the workplace.

## Impact on local governments

Beyond Guilford County, other local governments have used survey results to transform their workplace climate through initiatives like:

- **Changing communications strategies** to increase transparency, clarity, and accessibility
- **Training and leadership coaching** for employees to enhance their skills
- **Strategic planning** to create employee-centered metrics and goals within the organization
- **Creating employee task forces** to increase employee input in decisions
- **Increasing manager-employee interaction** opportunities to enhance transparency and build trust

"It's critical for local governments to engage with their employees; the dividends are monumental," said Lloyd Payne, city manager of the City of Concord. "When the City of Concord decided to survey its employees, we hired LGWI. As a result of what we learned, we have implemented dozens of new initiatives that have helped us keep our employee turnover rate low, even in the current job market."

## Data supporting innovative research

DeHart-Davis uses data from the initiative in her academic research. So far, the data has been used for 23 journal articles and an award-winning book.

"I am currently working with a group of scholars to study citizen incivility in local government," said DeHart-Davis. "Incivility burns out employees, increases quit rates, and affects public service delivery. We are studying how local governments can manage incivility to protect employees and improve public service delivery. Data from LGWI is essential in projects like this."

Several papers using LGWI data have won best article awards. Based on her research with LGWI data, DeHart-Davis received the 2024 Herbert Simon Award for the Scientific Study of Bureaucracy.

LGWI is an important part of the School of Government's mission to serve the state. It is an invaluable resource for local governments seeking to better understand their employees and improve their workplace climates. If you would like to partner with LGWI on a project, contact [sog\\_lgwi@unc.edu](mailto:sog_lgwi@unc.edu).

## 20 Years of LGWI

Completed **42**  
Workplace Climate  
Surveys with  
local government  
organizations

Surveyed,  
interviewed, and  
led focus groups  
with **25,000+**  
local government  
employees

Provided the  
data for **23**  
journal articles  
and an award-  
winning book





# SPRING 2025 UNC MPA GRADUATION



## Graduates

Skye E. Allan  
Carlo Alvarez  
Sandra Kay Bean  
Matthew Daniel Begley  
Erin Sydney Beiner  
Francis Maceachron Boggs  
Christopher Thomas Bouzane  
Patrick Anderson Bradey  
Eugene Isham Bradley  
Halle Bradshaw  
Michael Cahill  
Christopher Layne Cole II  
Cady Cooper  
Charles Ethan Davis  
Charles Nathan Davis  
Philip Matthew Dellinger  
Chelsea Leonor Dukes  
Colin Robert Fox  
Jennifer L. Fulton  
Makayla Hipke  
LeBon Hobayan  
Keegan Huynh  
Amro Ilaiwy  
Keagan James  
Benjamin King  
Caitlin Ann Lancaster  
Richard Foster Livingston  
Colby Lee Mask  
Micah McRea  
Lekira Renee Moore  
Alyssa Marie Pacheco  
Avangelyne Padilla  
James Patrick Quackenbush  
Kayla Reep  
Cody Ray Rocha  
Matthew Philip Rowe  
Alisa Shore  
Hallie Julian Springer  
Julia Nicole Warren  
Adrienne Yvette Woods  
Andrew Stephen Wright

Recent graduates from the UNC Master of Public Administration program gathered with faculty, family, friends, and staff on Saturday, May 10, 2025, to celebrate their commencement and coming next chapter in their public service careers.

In total, 41 students graduated from the program during the ceremony, receiving their diplomas from UNC-Chapel Hill.

UNC MPA Director Willow S. Jacobson took to the podium as the ceremony began. She addressed the students and reminded them of the importance of their public service higher education: “You’ve done more than earn a degree,” she told them. “You have answered a calling.”

Jacobson shared three wishes with her new graduates: to treasure the bonds formed in graduate school—with their peers and external support systems, to carry the flame of public service forward, and to celebrate victories—even the small ones.

School of Government Dean Aimee Wall echoed the same conviction, reminding the students that their education and skill sets position them uniquely well to meet this moment in the public sector landscape.

“You’re stepping into roles that shape how communities live, thrive, and grow,” she said. “Whether you’re stepping into local government, nonprofits, state government, the federal government, private, public policy, anywhere you’re heading, you are precisely the kind of leader that this time calls for.”

James E. Holshouser Jr. Distinguished Professor of Public Administration and Government Carl W. Stenberg presented the annual Deil S. Wright Research Paper Award. This year’s award went to graduate William Summer for his paper, “Emotional exhaustion in the Hillsborough County Sheriff’s Department.”

Keynote speaker Valerie Lemmie stepped up to the podium to address the graduates before her—urging them to stay steadfast in their public service conviction and not let obstacles impede their sense of purpose in leading public sector change.

“Leadership is, quite frankly, harder than management. You don’t always see results. But you keep going. You bring your courage, your convictions, and your creativity.”

In her closing remarks, Lemmie spoke to the graduates about the importance of staying connected to the bigger picture and why they felt the call to serve the public in the first place.

“Remember that it is all about the vision. You want to inspire your people to want to do something bigger than themselves, to want to be with you and others that you aspire to,” she said. “This means you have to think big, think new, think ahead, and stay in touch with your creative potential.”

The School of Government congratulates the most recent UNC MPA graduates and wishes them well in their future public service endeavors.

# Ongoing Career Support for MPA Alumni

Navigating career change can be daunting, especially for public service professionals facing burnout, layoffs, or unexpected job transitions. Allison Binkley and Shauna Hines-Farmer, the dynamic team behind the MPA program’s career, alumni, and employer engagement efforts, are leading strategies to support alumni and students.

Binkley and Hines-Farmer assist students and alumni with resumes, cover letters, interview skills, job searching, and career exploration. “We’ve seen more alumni recently who didn’t want to leave their jobs but are now in a place where career exploration would be beneficial,” said Binkley. Binkley and Hines-Farmer have held over 30 career sessions with alumni this academic year, mostly related to job searching. “Something unique about our services is that alumni receive unlimited career coaching for life, which is specific to the area in which the MPA program specializes. Career coaching offers cost savings and is a valuable resource for our alumni.”

In addition to job search support, the team is well-positioned to act as connectors for alumni looking to build their network. “This is so much more than career coaching,” says Binkley. “We can say ‘you should go talk to this person’ and that can open up all new

possibilities for someone in terms of where they want to go with their career and what that looks like.”

Binkley brings over 15 years of career services experience to the School as director of career, alumni, and employer engagement, in addition to being president of the North Carolina Association of Colleges and Employers (NCACE) and active with NASPAA Career Professionals. Hines-Farmer, assistant director of career, alumni, and employer engagement, brings six years of experience in nonprofits and career services and is active within NCACE and the Carolina career community.

In addition to connecting with the team, Hines-Farmer encourages alumni to check out another valuable resource for networking and career development called Heels Engage. This campus-wide platform is the official MPA alumni space for career resources, alumni connections, and networking. With 178 members and counting, Heels Engage offers valuable connections to current students and other alumni. “It’s a great place to crowdsource information,” said Hines-Farmer. “Take advantage of the people who have signed up for the platform and reach out to them. This can further your growth and potential for connection”. Register at [go.unc.edu/mpagroup](https://go.unc.edu/mpagroup).

## UNC MPA Career, Alumni, and Employer Engagement Team



Allison Binkley  
Director



Shauna Hines-Farmer  
Assistant Director

Additionally, if alumni are part of the Carolina Alumni Association, they can receive limited amounts of career counseling. Learn more at [careers.unc.edu/alumni](https://careers.unc.edu/alumni).

The MPA team also offers career development services to all current students in the program.

To schedule a career services session, contact [mpa\\_career@sog.unc.edu](mailto:mpa_career@sog.unc.edu) or visit [go.unc.edu/mpacareer](https://go.unc.edu/mpacareer).

# Life Events

## On the Move

### Ronette Sutton '90

Clery Act Compliance Coordinator, UNC-Chapel Hill

### Bob Boyette '92

Retired, Manager, Town of Marion, NC

### Bill Stockard '94

Assistant Dean of Human Resources, Nicholas School of the Environment, Duke University

### M. Zulayka Santiago '99

Senior Director for Equity Centered Leadership and Philanthropy, MDC

### Erin Eckert '00

Program Director, Duke AHEAD, Duke University School of Medicine

### Kathryn (Katie) McCoy '01

Strategy Director, Charlotte Douglas International Airport

### Nathan Branscome '04

Senior Director, Victims Services, Sylogist

### Joe Moore '05

Assistant Director of Infrastructure NC, Timmons Group

### Doug Paris '05

Director, Water and Sewer Authority of Cabarrus County

### Nicholas Dula '06

Economic Development Manager, NC Department of Transportation Rail Division

### Randall Lyons '06

Senior Fiscal Analyst, Peachtree DeKalb Airport; Senior Budget Analyst, DeKalb County, GA

### Darrell Butts '07

Assistant Manager, Chatham County

### Neil Dermody '07

Senior Manager, Privacy and Data Governance, OPTrust

### Megan Wright '07

Senior Management Coordinator, City of San Antonio

### Terry George-Waterfield '08

Small Business Liaison Officer, Acuity International

### Megan Wright '09

Senior Management Coordinator, City of San Antonio

### Seth Cutter '12

Vice President of Industry Affairs, Airports Council International - North America

### Casselle Smith-McCoy '12

Partner, Troutman Pepper Locke LLP

### Mattie Sue Stevens '13

Assistant Administrator, Augusta-Richmond County

### Sarah Hazel '14

Chief of Staff, City of Charlotte

### Olivia Hammill '16

Human Resources Business Partner, Kimley-Horn and Associates, Inc.

### Matthew James '16

Recycling Program Analyst, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality

### Heather Curry '17

Assistant Budget and Performance Manager, City of Asheville

### Theresa M. Harrison '17

Executive Director for Community Engagement, University of South Carolina

### Nicholas Smith '17

Manager, Town of Midway

### David Payne '18

Environmental and Economic Project Coordinator, NC Department of Environmental Quality

### Adam Caldwell '19

Business Development Representative, WithersRavenel

### Hannah Earnhardt '20

Director of Advancement, Omni Montessori School

### Madeline (Maddie) Shea '20

Consultant, Raftelis

### Andreu Sutterby '21

Technical Assistance Program Manager, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners

### Eric Wilson '21

Chief of Staff, NC Department of Justice

### Abby Gostling '22

Manager of Special Projects, Guilford County

### Chase Loudermelt '22

Emergency Management Specialist, Charleston County

### Joseph Salicco '22

Associate Consultant, Raftelis

### Traci Thompson '22

Commercial Lending Housing Program Associate, Self Help

### Delaney King '23

Strategic Project Coordinator, North Carolina Association of County Commissioners

## Awards

### Ed Kitchen '74

Received the Adelaide F. Holderness/H. Michael Weaver Distinguished Service Award

Learn more at [giving.uncg.edu/connect/events/distinguished-service-awards](https://giving.uncg.edu/connect/events/distinguished-service-awards)

## MPA Students Dive into Emergency Management

Each fall, the MPA program brings students together for the Immersion—a weekend-long intensive course that offers a deep dive into a timely and impactful area of public service. Paired with the Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum and Reception, this annual event is designed to broaden perspectives, build connections, and strengthen professional practice.

This year's Immersion, taking place October 9–11, will focus on emergency management and be led by School of Government faculty member Crista Cuccaro. Students will explore how local governments coordinate emergency response across public health, infrastructure, law enforcement, and emergency services sectors. "The course will provide an in-depth exploration of emergency management in local government," Cuccaro explains, "with a focus on collaboration across critical sectors and coordination between local, state, and federal agencies."

Alumni are once again invited to apply to attend the full Friday session of the Immersion, offering a chance to reconnect with students and faculty while diving into a topic relevant to their work. Final selections will be made in late August. Apply at [go.unc.edu/immersion](https://go.unc.edu/immersion).

Whether or not you participate in the class, all alumni are encouraged to attend the Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum on Friday afternoon, followed by a reception at the School of Government.



### Mark your calendar

Friday, October 10, 2025

MPA Immersion, Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum and Reception



## UNC MPA Improves its Top 25 Public Affairs Ranking

In its 28th year at the School, the UNC MPA program improved its top 25 spot in the 2025 *U.S. News & World Report* "Best Graduate Schools" rankings.

The program improved two spots to rank 21st overall in the public affairs category. This marks the 13th consecutive year UNC MPA has maintained its position among the top 25 public affairs programs in the country.

The program maintained its second-ranked position in the local government management specialty area and retained its top-10 ranking in public management and leadership, ranking 10th. UNC MPA maintained a top-20 ranking in the public finance and budgeting specialty, coming in at 18th best in the country.

"The UNC MPA program remains committed to achieving our mission to prepare public service leaders and create usable knowledge that improves governance," said UNC MPA Director Willow Jacobson. "We are grateful to our public administration peers in higher education for recognizing our continued success. Our success would not be possible without strong support from our alumni, faculty, staff, and students."

### #21 PUBLIC AFFAIRS

### #2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT

### #10 PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP





# MPA Career Treks Kick Off in Hillsborough

In January, the MPA program launched the first of many Career Treks with a visit to the Town of Hillsborough. MPA alumnus Eric Peterson '88 and his team welcomed students for an engaging walking tour, where they explored the town's economic development initiatives and climate action plan.

This experience allowed students to witness real-world projects, connect with local government professionals, and engage with MPA alumni working in the field. Spearheaded by the MPA Alumni Association Board and the ICMA Student Chapter, this collaborative effort reflects our commitment to

expanding meaningful, hands-on learning experiences for students. We look forward to growing this initiative. If your organization is interested in hosting a future MPA Career Trek, contact Allison at [binkley@sog.unc.edu](mailto:binkley@sog.unc.edu) to get involved.



# Carl Stenberg Wins Prestigious Elmer B. Staats Award

The School of Government congratulates Master of Public Administration faculty member and James E. Holshouser Jr. Distinguished Professor of Public Administration and Government Carl W. Stenberg on his recent receipt of the 2025 Elmer B. Staats Lifetime Achievement Award for Distinguished Public Service from the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA).

Stenberg was presented as this year's winner at the ASPA Annual Conference. As stated by the nominating body's requirements, candidates for the honor should demonstrate commanding public service careers with significant career accomplishments, contributions to public service, and contributions to ASPA.

"This recognition for lifetime contributions is the capstone of my public service career, which spans over 50 years," Stenberg said. "I've worked at the federal, state, and local levels and served as chief executive officer of a national nonprofit organization. I've also spent 35 years in three universities. I was really honored to receive this award and am thankful to my School of Government colleagues for nominating me."

To learn more, visit [sog.unc.edu](http://sog.unc.edu).

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*This recognition for lifetime contributions is the capstone of my public service career, which spans over 50 years.*



**Give  
UNC**  
3 • 25 • 25

On March 25, we celebrated GiveUNC, UNC-Chapel Hill's annual day of giving. Thanks to the incredible support of our alumni, friends, faculty, and staff, the day was a huge success for the School of Government and the MPA program! As in previous years, our supporters ensured we punched well above our weight on the day, having the third-highest number of donors and the fourth-highest amount of money raised across campus.

The School received 399 gifts from 288 donors, 26 of whom were first-time contributors, raising over \$191,600. Of this amount, more than \$100,970 directly supports the MPA program. MPA alumni and students were

instrumental in the day's success, making up over half of the total donors, and we are so incredibly grateful for their support. Here are some of the reasons they gave:

*"I'm thankful for the impact the UNC MPA program made in my life and career! I'm especially thankful for the amazing professors and employees."* —Josh Edwards '05

*"I am supporting the next generation of public servants."* —Johanna Foster '05

Thank you to everyone who supported our efforts. We look forward to doing it again next year!



# 2025 UNC MPA

## — BY THE NUMBERS —

### STUDENTS



**229**  
TOTAL

**161**  
online

**68**  
on-campus

### 51 INSTRUCTORS



**21** lead faculty | **30** adjuncts



**62** GRADUATES

fall, spring, summer

### SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT COURSES TAUGHT BY MPA FACULTY

**109** TOTAL

**42** online

**64** on campus

**3** hybrid



**81** COURSE SECTIONS

**50** online

**31** on-campus

### ALUMNI

**1,376** total

**84** taking School  
of Government  
courses

#### work sectors

**65%** government

27% local | 17% state | 9% federal

**1%** military | **18%** nonprofit

**28%** private





**SCHOOL OF  
GOVERNMENT**

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OF NORTH CAROLINA  
AT CHAPEL HILL**

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Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3330

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# *2025 Upcoming* **EVENTS**

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

### **UNC MPA Alumni Kickoff Picnic**

SATURDAY, AUGUST 23  
5:00–7:30 P.M.

UNC School of Government  
Knapp-Sanders Bldg.

Join students, alumni, faculty, staff, friends, and families as we kick off the academic year at the annual picnic hosted by the UNC MPA Alumni Association.

## SAVE THE DATE

### **Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum and UNC MPA Alumni Reception**

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 10 • 3:30–5:00 P.M.  
(Reception immediately following)

UNC School of Government • Knapp-Sanders Bldg.

The theme of this year's Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum is emergency management, also the topic of this year's MPA Immersion. The Alumni Reception will immediately follow the Forum. Stay tuned for registration details.