

# IMPACT Alumni Newsletter



John Terziu



Erin Mathis



Tori Rakich

## Military Families and Veterans Begin Their MPA Journey Through Service to Service Initiative

by Katie Geith

The UNC MPA program celebrates the kickoff of the first cohort of students pursuing their MPA degrees while participating in the Service to Service program. The program supports veterans and military families during their education and preparation for public service careers. The Volcker Alliance launched Service to Service in October 2024, selecting 12 schools to participate in the program, which aims to recruit participants, provide networking opportunities and professional development, and facilitate job placement in state and local government upon graduation.

Nearly 15 percent of the UNC MPA student body are either active-duty military personnel, veterans, or serving in the National Guard. Additionally, North Carolina has one of the largest military footprints in the United States,

with over 89,000 active-duty personnel serving at bases across the state.

Below, three Service to Service participants share their stories.

### John Terziu

#### Why did you decide to join the Service to Service initiative?

Since retiring, my heart has been set on finding a way to continue serving, not just in theory, but in a way that allows me to stand shoulder to shoulder with those who share the same calling.

Service to Service felt like the perfect opportunity to do exactly that: to be back among my brothers and sisters in arms, united by a common mission and a relentless drive to make a difference. It isn't just a program for me; it's a chance to live out my purpose again in the company of those who know what it means to sacrifice, lead, and serve.

#### What draws you toward a career in public service?

For me, the answer is simple: people. I believe deeply in helping people, lifting them up, solving their problems, and improving their lives. Public service gives me the chance to channel my energy and capabilities into something far bigger than myself. It's about impact. It's about using every ounce of energy I have to ensure that communities thrive, and people feel seen, heard, and valued.

#### What was the cross-school kick off like in mid-September?

I walked into that room and immediately felt I was surrounded by the highest caliber of people this world has to offer. Every single person was educated, driven, mission-focused, and deeply inspired. The air carried the weight of purpose. It reminded

# From the Director

## The Enduring Power of Mentorship

Recently, I revisited the acknowledgments section of my dissertation—a section I wrote more than two decades ago. While there are many things I would change about the content of my dissertation, what struck me was the staying power of those acknowledgments. That section was my opportunity to recognize mentors, advisors, and personal supporters who helped shape my journey. Reading it now reminded me just how critical mentorship—both formal and informal—has been throughout my life and how extremely lucky I have been.

In the UNC MPA program, we are fortunate to have a formal mentoring program that continues to thrive. This year alone, we have 53 alumni-student matches, and I am deeply grateful to see so many of you investing in the next generation of public service leaders. Beyond that, I witness peer mentoring every day—students supporting one another in ways that often extend well beyond graduation. These relationships matter. They leave a lasting impact on individuals and on our community.

I am honored to lead a program that cultivates public service leadership, not only through coursework but also through the relationships and support offered by faculty, staff, students, and alumni. That spirit of mentorship is woven into the fabric of UNC MPA.

I am also thankful for the continued guidance of previous MPA directors—David Ammons, Carl Stenberg, and Bill Rivenbark—each of whom worked tirelessly to leave the program stronger than they found it. David has retired (though he's still finishing another book!), and Carl is preparing to retire. Still, their legacies remain vibrant within the program, the School, and the profession. While they are giants in the field of public administration, with well-deserved awards and accolades, we know them as teachers, mentors, and friends who care deeply about this community.

If you haven't yet participated in the UNC MPA mentorship program, either as a mentor or mentee, I encourage you to do so. And if you already have a mentor, but it's been a while since you connected, reach out. These relationships matter more than we often realize.

What I wrote in my acknowledgments all those years ago still rings true for me today: "I would not be here without the support of so many, and I am so grateful."

Sincerely,



Willow S. Jacobson



**Willow S. Jacobson**  
Director, UNC MPA

Associate Dean for  
Graduate Studies

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

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me of being back in uniform, where excellence was the standard and you could feel the energy of a team that refused to settle for less than greatness.

#### **What are you most looking forward to during this experience?**

The people, without question. To be surrounded by such highly intellectual, passionate individuals is an honor. But more than that, I look forward to being part of a team again that doesn't allow differences to divide us. Instead, we embrace diversity as a source of strength. We come from different walks of life, with different beliefs and values, but ultimately, we are united by one thing: our shared mission. And when you bring that kind of unity and focus together, there is nothing we cannot achieve.

#### **Erin Mathis**

#### **What draws you toward a career in public service?**

My experiences as a kid drive my interest in public service now. My father retired from an enlisted career in the Air Force when I was eight and did not work until I turned 16.

My mother worked a minimum wage job. My mother suffered a debilitating injury at work, which left her permanently injured and unable to work. Due to the income reduction, my family qualified for free breakfast and lunch programs at school. I cannot overstate how much of a difference the free and reduced lunch program made for me. Now that I am older and in a very different financial situation, I want to play a role in ensuring that others can receive the necessary assistance that I had.

#### **What are you most looking forward to during this experience?**

I am most looking forward to the opportunities to meet other people interested in public service who have different experiences than my own.

#### **Tori Rakich**

#### **Why did you decide to join the Service to Service initiative?**

I decided to join because the mission really resonates with me. My husband served in the Army for nine years, so I have really seen how service shapes not just careers but also families. Service to Service felt like the right space to connect with others who

share that commitment and to learn from people navigating similar paths, as I am, into the public sector.

#### **What draws you toward a career in public service?**

For me, it comes back to the classroom. After spending a decade as an educator, I know how policies and systems directly affect people's lives. The experience I had teaching made me want to step into public service to help shape larger systems so that they work better for our communities. I'm also deeply passionate about animal welfare and environmental protection, so a career in public service gives me a way to combine that passion with my skills in teaching, advocacy, and research.

#### **What are you most looking forward to during this experience?**

I am most looking forward to continuing to connect with other fellows. Hearing how others navigate similar challenges, whether juggling life and study or transitioning into a new career space, really helps inform my own career trajectory and decisions.

## ***Jerry Cox Local Government Fellowship***

### **Preparing students for impactful careers in local government**

Through the Jerry Cox Local Government Fellowship, UNC MPA partners with a local government to supplement the jurisdiction to support an intern for a 10-week summer internship. This shared investment ensures that students receive meaningful, hands-on learning experiences and host organizations gain valuable support they might not otherwise afford.

This year, Zakiya Parker '26 served as the fourth Jerry Cox Local Government Fellow, interning in the Lee County manager's office. Previous fellows have contributed to Guilford, Alamance, and Person Counties, leaving a legacy of professionalism and impact.

Lee County expressed appreciation for the fellowship and Zakiya. Zakiya's professionalism and drive helped the county tackle several lingering projects, demonstrating the benefits of this initiative for the jurisdiction and experience it provides MPA students to engage in meaningful work.

For Summer 2026, as the fellowship enters its fifth year, we will again empower a Tier 1 or Tier 2 county in North Carolina providing MPA students with opportunities to serve and learn while strengthening local governments across the state.



*"... I wasn't just observing government; I was deeply involved in the work. I saw firsthand how difficult decisions about limited resources can carry enormous consequences for the county's future."*

## CONGRATULATIONS RECENT GRADS



### SUMMER 2025

Cheryl Boruff  
Gregory Burnham  
Patrick Creech  
Neal Duncan  
Whitney Fox  
Dade Hundertmark  
Nelson Layfield  
Julia Long  
Alison Van Dyke  
Ian Wheeler

### WINTER 2025

Jason Amato  
Joshua Baird  
Peter Deanna  
Morgan Flynt  
Angelica Foster  
Brianna Frink  
Renee Garner  
Joy Garretson  
Matthew Haas  
Daniel Russell Pulley  
Jennifer Scharfman  
William Shinego  
Stephanie Starr  
Tyler Talley  
John Watts  
Alyssa Zimmerman

# MPA Students Attend ICMA Winter Conference in Tampa

by Emma Gillam '26

At the 2025 ICMA Conference in Tampa, 35 MPA students took on the Sunshine State—our biggest group yet! The week consisted of informative sessions, great conversations, and meaningful time spent together as a program.

One of my favorite sessions was The Five Myths of AI Assistant Usage in Local Municipalities, where managers and AI leaders discussed how artificial intelligence can expand capacity and level the playing field for rural communities. Their emphasis on creativity and accessibility showed how innovation can truly serve the public good. I also attended a panel on lessons learned from natural disasters, which included John Connet, the city manager from my hometown of Hendersonville. His reflections on Hurricane Helene and the importance of long-term investments such as public WiFi access, community outlets, and resilient infrastructure through capital projects made the discussion especially meaningful.

Beyond the sessions, the conference provided many moments of connection. On-campus and online cohorts bonded over coffee, waterfront dinners at Sparkman

Wharf, and late-night trolley rides. The UNC MPA Happy Hour Hub and NCCCM Dinner allowed us to network with alumni and managers from across the state—many of whom made our attendance possible.

We're especially grateful to our alumni donors whose generosity helps fund student lodging. Because of them, we not only learned from professionals in the field but also strengthened the friendships that make our MPA experience so special. The ICMA Annual Conference is always a memorable event that reinforces my commitment to a career in public service and reminds me why I chose the UNC MPA program.



UNC MPA students Sierra Hockenbury, Emma Gilliam, and Megan McFadden at the ICMA conference.





## Celebrate a Lifetime of Dedication

Carl W. Stenberg dedicated his career to strengthening local government and mentoring the next generation of public service leaders. As he prepares to retire in June, we are excited to announce the **Carl Stenberg Local Government Research and Professional Development Fund** to carry that legacy forward by supporting students



pursuing research, internships, and hands-on experiences in local government. Celebrate with us by making a gift today! Scan the QR code or visit [go.unc.edu/StenbergEndowment](http://go.unc.edu/StenbergEndowment).



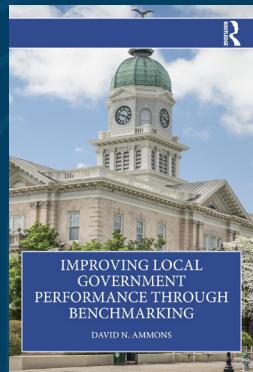
## Create a Lasting Legacy

You can create a lasting impact by including the UNC MPA program in your estate or financial plans. By working with UNC MPA and the Office of Gift Planning, you can explore options that align your philanthropic goals with your commitment to public service, ensuring future generations of MPA students have the resources to lead and serve their communities.

If you are interested in learning more, reach out to the UNC MPA program or the UNC Office of Gift Planning at [createalegacy@unc.edu](mailto:createalegacy@unc.edu).

## New Book by Retired Faculty Member

David Ammons, former School of Government faculty member and Albert Coates Professor Emeritus of Public Administration and Government, has authored a new book. Published in May 2025, *Improving Local Government Performance through Benchmarking* describes the two types of benchmarking used by local governments—metrics benchmarking and best practice benchmarking—and cites examples and lessons learned across the nation and around the globe, including prominently, lessons from the North Carolina Benchmarking Project.



## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Dear UNC MPA Alumni,

I am honored to serve as the incoming president of the UNC MPA Alumni Board and continue the tradition of strengthening our incredible network. The UNC MPA program has shaped leaders who make a difference in communities across the country, and our alumni are living proof of that impact every day. I want to express my gratitude to MaryBeth Spoehr and the other past presidents whose leadership and dedication have enriched our MPA community.



As we look ahead to 2026, my focus will be on deepening alumni engagement, both with one another and with current students. I am inspired by the work of our Alumni Board in recent years to grow the mentorship program, implement Alumni Days of Service, and increase giving to the MPA program, supporting opportunities for students. Our alumni network is one of the program's greatest assets, and together we can ensure it continues to thrive.

I also recognize that this is a challenging time for public administrators. That reality makes our connections and shared commitment to public service more important than ever. By supporting one another and the next generation of leaders, we can help navigate these challenges and create a meaningful impact.

Thank you for being part of this incredible community. I look forward to working with you to advance the mission and values that unite us.

Go Heels!

**Carly Lappas '22**

Incoming President, UNC MPA Alumni Board

# Life Events

## On the Move

### Ed Kitchen '74

President, Joseph M. Bryan Foundation

### David Cooke '82

Chief Operating Officer, Sundance Square, Fort Worth, TX

### Lori Nicholson '93

Executive Search Consultant, Executiveld & Search

### Deborah Momsen-Hudson '94

Director of Lending, Housing Partnership Network

### Jenny Noonan '95

Associate Dean of Communications and Marketing, Sanford School of Public Policy, Duke University

### Robyn Fehrman '02

Executive Director, Teach for America NC

### BJ Collins '03

Deputy Director, Office of Grants and Debarment, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### Owen Franklin '03

Vice President and Managing Director of Field Programs, Trust for Public Land

### Jesse Spring '04

Interim Medicaid Director, Wyoming Department of Health

### Mike Branum '05

Registered Nurse, Vive Adolescent Care

### Kayla Mallon '08

Enterprise Customer Success Manager, Onfleet

### Terry Waterfield '08

Director, Supply Chain Management, Acuity International

### Janelle Scott '09

Policy and Legislative Lead, Council of Large Public Housing Authorities

### Erika Walker '09

Member and Owner, Cultivate Community, NC

### Catherine Renbarger '10

Project Manager, Division of Water Infrastructure, NC DEQ

### Trevor Fleck '12

Chief Strategy and Financial Officer, Precision Signing Agency

### Sarah Viñas '12

Director of Housing and Neighborhood Services, City of Durham

### Sarah Hazel '14

Chief of Staff, City of Charlotte

### Amanda Stratton '14

Western NC Recovery Navigator, UNC School of Government

### Brent Thompson '15

Chief of Staff, Simpson University

### Connor Winstead '15

Development and Infrastructure Director and Assistant Manager, Town of Duck, NC

### Jonathan Griffin '16

Finance Director, Town of Apex

### John Mark Wilson '16

Mission Operations Lead, Forterra

### Mark Kurbansade '17

Deputy Manager and Community Development Director, City of Dacono, CO

### David Lambert '17

Director of Strategic Projects, NC Department of Commerce

### Nick Smith '17

Government Affairs Director, Winston-Salem Regional Association of Realtors

### Kelly Bush '18

Magnet Schools Assistance Program Grant Coordinator, Durham Public Schools

### Michael Doig '18

Director, Office of Emergency Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

### Jonathan Holt '18

Senior Budget and Management Analyst, Guilford County, NC

### Alexandra Lamperti '18

Enrollment Manager, UNC School of Education

### Libby Seguin '18

Business Development Manager, Global Commercial Disputes, Reed Smith LLP

### Ceara Corry '19

Family Centered Treatment Coordinator, Coastal Horizons, Guilford County

### Jerald Crook '19

Project Director, Alabama African-American Civil Rights Heritage Sites Consortium

## **Timothy Shober '19**

Project Administrator,  
Southeast Tennessee  
Development District

## **Justin Stirewalt '19**

Finance Officer, Surry County

## **Laura Terzigni '19**

CEO, Boys & Girls Clubs of  
MetroWest

## **Courtney Feliz '20**

Grants Manager, Blue Cross  
Blue Shield of North Carolina  
Foundation

## **Matt Hutton '20**

Vice President of Economic  
Research and Policy, NYC  
Economic Development  
Corporation

## **Hallee Haygood '21**

Senior Budget and  
Management Analyst,  
Wake County

## **John J. Sauve, '21**

Principal, The Sauve Law  
Firm, PLLC

## **Conor Ryan '22**

Planner III, Town of Holly Springs

## **Tiffany Oliva '22**

Assistant Manager, City of  
Greensboro

## **Becky Hawke '24**

Manager, City of Wilmington, NC

## **Dania Khan '24**

Management and Budget  
Analyst, Mecklenburg County

## **Scott Powell '24**

Senior Budget and  
Management Analyst, Wake  
County

## **Ben King '25**

Clerk, Town of Archer Lodge

## **Retirements**

### **Carol Weatherly '79**

US Customs and Border  
Protection (retired)

### **Tony Caudle '81**

Manager (retired), City of  
Wilmington

### **Susan Robertson '81**

Manager (retired), City of  
Augusta, ME

### **Tim Barth '84**

Manager (retired), Town of  
Columbus, NC

### **Michael Halford '92**

Manager (retired), Guilford  
County, NC

### **Beth Eastlick '95**

Senior Assistant Vice President,  
Alumni Engagement and  
Development (retired), Duke  
University

## **Awards**

### **Peggy Merriss '82**

Received the 2025 ICMA  
Distinguished Service Award.

## **Nuptials**

### **Anna (Naples) Carney '24**

and  
Patrick Carney were married  
May 3, 2025.

### **Abby (Gostling) Banask '22**

and  
John Banask were married  
May 17, 2025.

### **Jonathan Yeomens '09**

and  
Alice Ming-Yi Ju were married  
August 16, 2025.

## **New Additions**

### **Katie Masood '13**

and Saad  
Masood welcomed Amir Roger  
Masood on June 22, 2025.

### **Lauren Brune '16**

and Ben Labe  
welcomed Daphne Aurelia  
Brune Labe on August 26, 2025.

### **Pat Madej '16**

and Kelsie  
Martinez welcomed Lucy Ann  
Martinez Madej on May 1, 2025.

### **Caley Trujillo Patten '16**

and  
Michael Patten welcomed Myles  
Patten on February 19, 2025.

### **Alexandra Lamperti '18**

and  
Trevor Lamperti welcomed  
Penelope Rose Lamperti on  
June 10, 2025.

### **Laura Terzigni '19**

and  
Christopher Terzigni welcomed  
Quinn Terzigni on September 5,  
2025.

### **Brian Murphy '20**

and Jennifer  
Murphy welcomed Merritt June  
Murphy on June 4, 2025.

### **Molly Marcarelli '21**

and  
Justin Marcarelli welcomed  
Mia Elizabeth Marcarelli on  
October 21, 2025.



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2026 Save the  
DATES

JANUARY 29  
**UNC MPA Alumni  
Breakfast and Happy  
Hour Hub at NCCCMA**

Winston-Salem

Whether or not you are attending the NCCCMA Conference, we invite you to join us for the annual UNC MPA Alumni Breakfast in the morning and our annual Happy Hour Hub in the evening from 5:00 to 7:30 at Small Batch Beer Co. in Winston-Salem.

MARCH 24  
**GiveUNC 2026**

UNC MPA and the School of Government will join the University in celebrating the ninth year of GiveUNC. Small but mighty, we have a history of outperforming the other small schools and units across campus. In 2025, we finished third in the total number of gifts, trailing only the College of Arts and Sciences and the Business School, and ranked fifth in dollars raised. We hope you'll mark the calendar to support our efforts again!

APRIL 28  
**UNC MPA Happy  
Hour Hub**

Charlotte

Spring will have sprung, and we'll be in Charlotte to host another UNC MPA Happy Hour Hub. More details to come!