



iMPAct Alumni Newsletter

A LIFETIME OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Carl Stenberg Retires



When Carl Stenberg arrived at the UNC School of Government in 2003, he had already lived several public-service lifetimes—as assistant director of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, executive director of the Council of State Governments, director of the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia, and dean of the Yale Gordon College of Liberal Arts at the University of Baltimore.

Stenberg came to Chapel Hill not to wind down a career, but to begin a new chapter—one that would shape the UNC MPA program and the field of local government for the next two decades.

After earning his BA from Allegheny College and his MPA and PhD from the State University of New York at Albany, Stenberg had worked at the front lines of how federal, state, and local governments share power and responsibility.

Those experiences gave him an unusual fluency. He could talk to a county

manager about a budget shortfall on Monday and to a U.S. House subcommittee about intergovernmental policy on Friday, and bring the same clarity to both rooms.

As one International City/County Management Association (ICMA) colleague put it, “Carl is a rare academic who understands the theoretical foundations of management and leadership, but who is also steeped in the practical aspects, especially at the local government level.” That fluency—equally at home in a county manager’s office and a congressional hearing room—became the hallmark of his two decades at the School.

From 2006 to 2011, Stenberg served as director of the UNC MPA program, stewarding it through a period of growth, accreditation, and rising national stature. He brought to the role a commitment to engaged practice, a deep respect for North Carolina’s local-government tradition, and a belief that the program’s job was not just to teach public administration but to prepare leaders.

In 2004, he led the creation of the School’s *Public Executive Leadership Academy* (PELA), an intensive professional-development program for senior local-government leaders, and served as its lead faculty member for two decades.

The academy has since served hundreds of municipal and county managers across North Carolina. He was also instrumental in establishing an ICMA student chapter at UNC and has served for years as a steadfast mentor to the students who pass through it.

Stenberg’s scholarly output is the kind that gets dog-eared. *Managing Local Government: An Essential Guide for Municipal and County Managers* (2026) and *Managing Local Government Services: The Challenge of Change* (2021), both co-authored with faculty member Kim Nelson, are foundational references for public-sector executives and students.

From the Director

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



I have been reflecting on what a gift it is to have colleagues whose commitment, dedication, and service have helped define who we are as a program and as a field. Their impact will be felt in ways that cannot be fully measured—in the lives of students they have taught and inspired, in the scholarship that has shaped our fields, in the mentorship that has guided careers, and in the relationships that have sustained a vibrant academic community.

Having arrived at UNC at the same time as Carl Stenberg, it is especially difficult to imagine this place without him. We have been fortunate to have faculty and program leadership whose work built not just a curriculum or a reputation, but a culture—one that cohorts of students and faculty inherit, live up to, and expand upon.

What stands out most about these colleagues is not only their national recognition, though they have earned it. It is that those of us who have worked alongside them know them as friends and as people of deep character. I remember, years ago while living in New York, hearing someone from North Carolina say “he is good people.” It was not a colloquialism I was used to, but I have come to appreciate its meaning. “Good people” is exactly how I would describe the faculty, staff, students, and alumni of the UNC MPA program.

I count myself fortunate to work in a place defined by such people—individuals who do great things, who lead on a national stage, and who help shape organizations, communities, and lives across North Carolina and around the world. It is both a privilege and a responsibility to carry forward the legacy they have created.

With gratitude,

Willow S. Jacobson
Director, UNC MPA

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

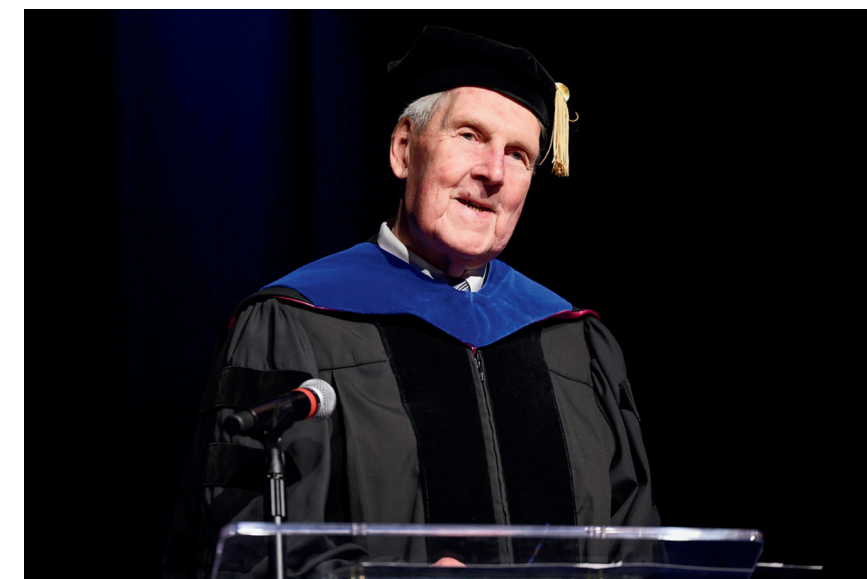
Robert W. Bradshaw Jr. Distinguished Professor of
Public Administration and Government

Continued from “A Lifetime in Public Service”, page 1

Intergovernmental Relations in Transition (2018), co-edited with David K. Hamilton, has shaped how a generation of scholars and practitioners understand federalism. Stenberg and UNC MPA faculty member Colt Jensen are working on a second edition, to be published in 2027.

The recognition has followed. Stenberg served as a National Academy of Public Administration Fellow since 1984 and former chair of its board; past president of the American Society for Public Administration; and ICMA Honorary Member in 2020, one of fewer than 80 in the award’s 100-year history. In 2025, he received the Elmer B. Staats Lifetime Achievement Award from ASPA, which Stenberg called “the capstone of my public service career.”

Numbers and titles only tell part of the story. A different picture emerges from those who know him: a steady mentor, a generous colleague, and a teacher who treated public service as a calling worth taking seriously. Closing his remarks to this year’s graduating class, Carl reminded students to think about their own legacies, and offered a parting note that fits him as well as any tribute: “And try to enjoy every day along the way.”



Carl Stenberg deliver the UNC MPA commencement address in May 2026.

*“I am proud to be a ‘pracademic,’
comfortably traveling between,
and bridging, the worlds of theory
and practice.”*

CARL STENBERG ♦ 2026 MPA GRADUATION REMARKS

*Honor
Carl Stenberg’s
Service*



The Carl Stenberg
Local Government
Research & Professional
Development Fund

This newly announced fund
supports MPA students
pursuing research,
internships, and hands-on
experiences in local
government.

Alumni who wish to honor his
incredible service and lasting
legacy are invited to give.

GivetoMPA.unc.edu



SCAN TO GIVE

SPRING 2026 UNC MPA GRADUATION

Celebrating 46 New Graduates from On-Campus and Online Formats

On May 9, the program celebrated forty-six new graduates from its on-campus and online formats—all under one unifying theme: home. Director Willow Jacobson asked graduates to thank the family, friends, and mentors in the room, and Dean Aimee Wall told them that wherever they land, the School of Government will always strive to be their “home team.”

Faculty member Colt Jensen presented the Deil S. Wright Best Paper Award to graduate Tori Rakich, whose paper examined how North Carolina counties are navigating artificial intelligence in public-sector hiring. Fittingly, retiring faculty member Carl Stenberg gave the commencement address, describing public administrators as living bridges and urging graduates to be resilient, lead from anywhere, keep learning, build a network, and shape a legacy.



Graduates

Brianna Beadle
Benjamin Bogle
William Bulloss
Noah Champion
Vernon Corbin III
Sarah Dhunjshaw
Jackson Dille
Noah Ellington
Jasmine Fisher
John Flesch III
Brenda Portaro Garcia
Emma Gilliam
Miles Grooms
James Hairston
Nathan Heim

Makaley Hightower
Patrick Jones
Caroline LaGow
Ryan Ledbetter
Javier Limon
Sarah McConville
Megan McFadden
John McLean
Emily McNutt
Dennis Miller
Carlos Morales
James Moser
Sara Paige Murray
Ryan Oathout
Lillian Parker

Zakiya Parker
Meredith Penny
Susan Rahimzadeh
Tori Yvonne Rakich
Kajal Ravani
Sharon Zea Rincon
Allison Seguret
Kimberly Sonderman
Kirsten Tucker
John Verdejo
Molly Wells
Cindy Williams
Caitlyn Wilson
Rachel Wooster
Josie Zakrzewski



What Stays with You

What changed during their time in the MPA program? Recent graduates share the experiences, insights, and aspirations they are taking with them into the workforce.



Sara Paige Murray

Learning alongside an online cohort of experienced public servants sharpened her collaboration and idea development, and a range of perspectives pushed her thinking on what public service can be. By the end, her long-term goals felt clearer.



Patrick Jones

He came in expecting technical knowledge and got it—but the coursework also asked him to look hard at himself. Through that self-reflection he carries forward not just professional advancement but a stronger sense of self.



Brenda Portaro

She entered with a state-government background and wanted to understand local government. A Professional Work Experience (PWE) at the Town of Holly Springs gave her hands-on practice in strategic planning and financial analysis—and a wider network.



Stephanie Starr

Already in county-government leadership, she was struck by how quickly the public sector's complexity outran her foundation. The MPA closed those gaps—from a leadership development plan to a finance course that reframed her view of public funding.

Life Events

On the Move

- Anne Tompkins '84**
Retired
- Chris Morello '90**
Executive Director, Newport News/Williamsburg Airport, Virginia
- Christina Lyndrup Farrell '92**
Commissioner, New York City Emergency Management
- Ruffin Hall '93**
Deputy County Manager, Wake County, North Carolina
- Ingrid Flory '99**
Director of Community Life and Engagement, Massachusetts Department of Developmental Service
- Daniel S. Holt '00**
Published Author, The Ghost of the Mountain Kings: A Shaker Novel
- BJ Collins '01**
Deputy Director, Office of Grants and Debarment, United States Environmental Protection Agency
- Sharon Paynter '01**
Senior Vice Provost for Research and Innovation, East Carolina University
- Kent Wyatt '02**
Strategic Communications Director, Clackamas Education Service District
- Nathan Branscome '04**
Vice President, Victim Services Suite, Sylogist, Limited
- Jesse Springer '04**
Medicaid Director, Wyoming Department of Health
- David Leonetti '05**
Business Development Director, City of Hickory, North Carolina
- Ryan Ewalt '06**
President and CEO, Variable, Inc.
- Mira Kline '07**
Senior Director, Talent Acquisition and Development, Freedman Consulting
- Gus Carvalho '12**
Principal Enterprise Architect, SplashBI
- Nick Geis '12**
Assistant City Manager, City of Johnson City, Tennessee
- Katie Masood '13**
Senior Director of Development, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School
- Meghan Boyd Ward '13**
Assistant Attorney General, North Carolina Department of Justice

- Joseph Beasley '15**
Vice President, Infrastructure and Economic Development, McGuireWoods Consulting
- Cole Justad '15**
Associate Budget Director, North Carolina Central University
- Maia Knox '15**
Government Relations Administrator, Department of Natural Resources and Parks, King County, Washington
- Eric Reese '15**
Director of Strategy and Delivery, Centre for Homelessness Impact
- Lauren Brune '16**
Fiscal Management Specialist, PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources
- Andrea Ponikvar '16**
Vice President of Philanthropy, Cleveland Zoological Society
- Stefan Schropp '16**
Senior Regulatory Counsel, Paradigm
- Audrey Shore '16**
Director of Annual Giving, UNC-Chapel Hill
- Brian Haney '17**
Deputy County Administrator, Powhatan County, Virginia
- Kevin King '18**
Enterprise Consultant, Funnel Leasing
- LeeAnne Lawrence '18**
Senior Assistant Attorney, City of Charlotte, North Carolina
- David Payne '18**
Director of Intergovernmental Affairs and Economic Development, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality
- Rebecca Truluck '18**
Department Business Manager, Planning and Development Services, Wake County, North Carolina
- Manisha Dass '19**
Senior Workforce Coordinator & Knowledge Management Specialist, Research Triangle Institute International
- Laura McBryde '19**
Director of Management & Budget, Catawba County, North Carolina
- Matt Van Epps '19**
U.S. House of Representatives, Tennessee's 7th District
- Brian Farmer '20**
Budget and Performance Manager, Town of Apex, North Carolina
- Ross Hatton '20**
Assistant Professor, Perelman School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania
- Holden McLemore '20**
Litigation Attorney, Whitley Law Firm
- Hallee Haygood '21**
Budget Systems Administrator, City of Durham, North Carolina

- Daisy Badillo '23**
Assistant Director of Annual Giving and Constituent Engagement, UNC-Chapel Hill
- David Schexnayder '23**
Strategic Planning and Performance Analyst, Town of Apex, North Carolina
- Stephen Thompson '23**
Business Officer, Museum of the Cape Fear, North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultral Resources
- Anna Carney '24**
Budget Analyst II, NC Dept. of Adult Corrections
- Mariah Maheswaran '24**
Management Analyst, Town of Garner, North Carolina
- Mary Propst '24**
Town Arborist, Town of Huntersville, North Carolina
- Lauren Wilcox '24**
Budget and Management Analyst, Alamance County Government, North Carolina

Awards

- Larry Davis '85**
Jack Vogt Career Achievement Award, North Carolina Local Government Budget Association

Nuptials

- Michael Beauregard '24**
and Emma Cecilia DeMartino were married April 25, 2026

New Additions

- Megan Garrett '16**
welcomed Eamonn Garrett Ellis (April 5)
- Tom Bennett '20**
welcomed Hayden Thomas Bennett (May 12)
- Daisy Badillo '23**
welcomed Sebastian Badillo (March 12)
- Ashley Wolf '14**
welcomed Anna Caroline (January 12)

In Memoriam

- David R. Allen '18**
January 14, 1960–February 19, 2026

Education

- Richard D. Kingsberry '78**
Earned doctoarate of Religious Education

Community Engagement

- Carol Botsch '71**
Volunteering with senior adults through the University of South Carolina Aiken



UNC MPA alumni do amazing things, and we want to celebrate it all! Scan the code to send us your latest update.

Kitchen Scholarship Recipients Turn Opportunity Into Impact

In Carolina's Master of Public Administration program, scholarship support does more than offset tuition. It gives students the freedom to pursue opportunities they might otherwise forgo and allows them to engage in their studies without financial distraction. Olivia "Liv" Stark '27 and Jacob "Jake" Brown '27, both recipients of the J. Edward Kitchen Scholarship, illustrate what that support makes possible.



Relieved of some financial strain, Stark has pursued opportunities well beyond the classroom, attending professional conferences hosted by the International City/County Management Association and North Carolina City and County Management Association, and building connections throughout the MPA network. "Because of this scholarship, I am able to fully focus on becoming the kind of public servant I hope to be," she says. She is preparing for a career in local government grounded in equity, sustainability, and community trust. This summer, she will support budget and performance management efforts through her Professional Work Experience (PWE) with the Town of Apex.

Jake Brown, a first-generation college graduate and the first in his family to pursue a master's degree, understood the financial realities of graduate education firsthand. The Kitchen Scholarship helped make his enrollment at Carolina possible. "Because of this scholarship, I am able to be a member of the best MPA program in the world," he says.



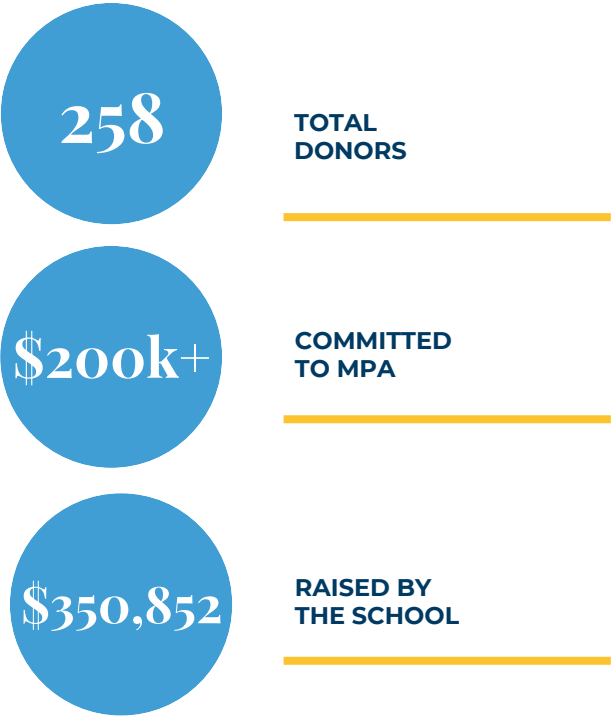
That support enabled Brown to extend his studies beyond the program's core requirements, from an emergency management immersion to a course on military leadership. He has strengthened his connections with peers through collaborative projects and discussions of ethics in public service. Brown intends to return to eastern North Carolina to serve rural communities.

Together, Stark and Brown demonstrate the broader value of scholarship support, which reduces financial barriers while expanding what an MPA education can offer.

THANK YOU!

Give
UNC
3 • 24 • 26

GiveUNC Showcases Strength of UNC MPA



In total, the School raised \$350,852.65 through 378 gifts from 258 donors, meeting all six of its fundraising challenges. UNC MPA alumni and students played a central role, accounting for 125 of those donors and committing more than \$200,000 to the program's scholarships and funds.

Private support is what lets the program do what it does: bring in remarkable students, send them into hands-on learning, and prepare them for careers in public service. We are grateful to everyone who participated.

The Program at a Glance

A snapshot of our students, alumni, and graduates—and the impact your support makes possible.

BY THE NUMBERS

243

STUDENTS

72 on-campus
171 online

1,587

ALUMNI TOTAL

94 took SOG
courses

75

GRADUATES

Fall, spring, and
summer
2025–2026

THE IMPACT OF YOUR SUPPORT

\$510,000

CORE IMPACT · SCHOLARSHIPS

Total scholarships awarded
across online and on-campus
students, expanding access
and opportunity

\$20,000+

PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

Direct support for students'
participation in conferences,
trainings, and networking that
advance their careers

WHERE ALUMNI WORK



Government 55%
Local 27%
State 18%
Federal 10%

Private 26%

Nonprofit 19%

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING & CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Opportunities your support makes possible for our students.

- ◆ Conference attendance supported through Professional Development Grant funding
- ◆ Housing assistance at key national conferences to reduce financial barriers
- ◆ Signature events such as the Career Discovery Series and Career & Networking Fair
- ◆ MPA Immersion — financial support for engagement in the annual course

Meet the School's New Faculty

Serving with Purpose: New Faculty Reflect on Their First Year Teaching in the MPA Program

This year, the UNC School of Government welcomed three faculty members whose backgrounds in local government management, organizational leadership, workforce development, and public service are already enriching the classroom and strengthening the School's service to communities across North Carolina.

We caught up with Colt Jensen, Julie Beasley, and Dylan Russell after their first year to learn what drew them to Carolina, what they've learned, and how they hope to prepare the next generation of public service leaders. For MPA alumni, these faculty represent more than new colleagues; they are helping carry forward the program's long tradition of connecting rigorous scholarship with practical leadership.



Colt Jensen, Julie Beasley, and Dylan Russell

Colt Jensen joined the School after serving on the faculty at Georgia Southern University, where he built a national reputation for his research on local government management, rural governance, and organizational leadership. At Carolina, he teaches MPA students while working directly with local governments across North Carolina, bringing today's management challenges into the classroom.

Julie Beasley first joined the School as an adjunct faculty member before accepting a full-time appointment. Drawing on nearly two decades of executive experience in human resources, communications, and organizational leadership, she helps prepare current and future public leaders to build healthy organizations, lead through change, and strengthen workplace culture. Her work connects the MPA classroom with executive education for practicing public officials across the state.

For Dylan Russell, the journey has come full circle. Russell first arrived at Carolina as an MPA student before joining the School's staff, helping launch Lead for North Carolina, and ultimately becoming a faculty member. Today he continues to serve as Executive Director of Lead for North Carolina while teaching and mentoring MPA students pursuing careers in public service.

What brought them to the School of Government?

Each faculty member described the School's unique mission, combining teaching, research, and direct service to North Carolina, as the primary reason they chose Carolina.

"The School of Government offers a rare combination: practical research, real-world teaching, and direct connection with public officials," Jensen explained. "I get to hear firsthand about the challenges facing state and local governments, draw on what research already tells us to help those communities, and generate new answers where the research and resources fall short."

For MPA students, that means classroom discussions are grounded in current challenges facing cities, counties, and public organizations across North Carolina rather than theory alone.

Beasley was drawn to the School for similar reasons. "While most public administration schools focus solely on student impact through undergraduate and graduate programs, our mission also focuses on service to the state," she said. "This dual mission was particularly compelling because it allows scholarly research to have direct, measurable impact—findings generated through academic inquiry translate immediately into curriculum for MPA students and practitioners."

What surprised them most during their first year?

While each faculty member arrived with an understanding of the School's reputation, experiencing its statewide impact firsthand proved even more impressive.

"The sheer breadth of the School's work has surprised me most," Jensen reflected. "I knew the School offered a lot of courses and services, but this year showed me just how wide-ranging that work really is."

Beasley echoed that sentiment. "Upon entering my role, I had a foundational understanding of the School's programming and its consulting work with local governments. However, there is a meaningful difference between reading about an organization's impact and witnessing it firsthand."

Russell found himself surprised by the opportunities that come with the School's longstanding reputation. "The biggest surprise has been realizing how much the School's reputation creates opportunities to serve," he said. "Being on the faculty has opened doors to conversations I care deeply about: how we attract people to public service, how we support them once they arrive, and how we help public institutions prepare for the future workforce."

What moment from their first year stands out most?

For Jensen, the highlight wasn't confined to campus. "What stands out is the chance to travel across North Carolina, speak with city councils, and talk directly with managers and staff about the issues they are navigating. Those conversations have been some of the most rewarding parts of my first year."

Those conversations also strengthen the MPA classroom, allowing students to learn from the challenges local governments are facing today—not years ago. Beasley found her most meaningful moments celebrating student success.

"It is difficult to identify a single defining moment—the experience has been consistently rewarding," she said. "What has proven most meaningful is witnessing the culmination of student and participant learning and accomplishments on graduation days across the MPA, Civic Fellows, and Advanced Leadership Corps programs."

For faculty members, graduation offers a visible reminder that their work extends far beyond the classroom. Every graduate represents another public servant equipped to strengthen communities across North Carolina and beyond. Russell pointed to North Carolina's inaugural Public Service Recognition Week and Public Service Summit as a defining moment.

"It is hard to pick just one, but the creation of North Carolina's first Public Service Recognition Week and the Public Service Summit is definitely a highlight," he said. "To have Governor Josh Stein, State Auditor Dave Boliek, Raleigh City Manager Marchell Adams-David, and so many other public servants from across the state come together to speak about the importance of public service was incredibly meaningful."

"The event brought people together around a shared idea: that public service is essential to the future of North Carolina, and that we have to be much more intentional about helping people see themselves in that work." For many alumni, that mission will sound familiar. It is the same commitment to public service that first brought them to Carolina and continues to define the School today.

How do they deepen engagement with students?

Looking ahead, all three faculty members see exciting opportunities to deepen their engagement with MPA students and continue to strengthen one of the nation's leading public service education programs. Jensen's focus is on building the connections he has already formed with students while developing practical teaching resources that will help students understand the complex relationships, institutions, and decision-making processes that define successful local governments.

Beasley looks forward to expanding research collaborations with faculty and MPA students. She is particularly excited about creating opportunities for students to engage in applied research that advances scholarship while continuing to translate research into practical tools that strengthen public organizations and the people who lead them. Russell is focused on creating pathways into public service through his work with Lead for North Carolina and the School's new undergraduate minor in Government, Law, and Public Service, creating another pathway for students to discover careers in government and eventually the MPA program itself.

Together, their work reflects a shared commitment to preparing principled, innovative, and effective public servants for communities across North Carolina.

Dean Aimee Wall believes these faculty members are already making an important contribution to that mission. "These new faculty members bring incredible energy, ideas, and expertise," she said. "It can be challenging to find new faculty members who can live and breathe our mission and values. With these hires, I feel as though we truly won the lottery. Our students and public officials will build connections and trust with them as they have with generations of School faculty who have come before."



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Upcoming Events

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

Aug

22

SAT

UNC MPA Alumni Kickoff Picnic

5-7:30 PM • KNAPP-SANDERS BUILDING

Join students, alumni, faculty, staff, friends, and families to kick off the academic year. Register at

give.unc.edu/sog/events/mpa-kickoff

Oct

9

FRI

Deil S. Wright Public Service Forum & Alumni Reception

3:30-5 PM • RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

This year's Forum focuses on meeting basic needs, the topic of this year's MPA Immersion.

Oct

19

MON

UNC MPA ICMA Happy Hour Hub

5-7:30 PM

(Re)Connect with MPA alumni, students, faculty, and staff for drinks, lite bites, and great conversation at Shenanigans in Long Beach, California, for UNC MPA's annual Happy Hour Hub held during the ICMA Conference: give.unc.edu/sog/events/happyhourhub/longbeach