

Master of Public Administration Newsletter



Director's Update

We are grateful to have celebrated another successful year thanks to the support of our faculty, students, alumni, and staff. With our record-level enrollment, we are excited to be hiring new faculty for Fall 2021 and Spring 2022 to support our growth.

This year we graduated more than 37 students in our Master of Public Administration Program. Our graduates continue to serve our state and beyond, whether they are established in their careers or beginning a new one.

Additionally, we are pleased to announce that we are the sole host of Montana's Certified Public Managers Program (CPM). The CPM will build in the area of training and development for public and non-profit sector employees. Stay tuned for more information regarding registration and a cohort model.

If you are interested in serving as a mentor for our students next year, we would love your help. Please reach out to me (sara.rinfret@umontana.edu). The only commitment for this mentorship is to meet with a student two times per semester to provide career advice, and these conversations can occur remotely.

We look forward to seeing you soon,

—Dr. Sara Rinfret, Associate Dean & MPA Director



2021 Celebrating Students & Hooding Ceremony

This spring we were able to hold our first in-person event since the COVID-19 pandemic began. On April 30, 2021, nearly one hundred graduates, alumni, current students and their guests gathered at Ten Spoon Winery for an outdoor, socially distanced celebration. Our keynote speaker was Anna Whiting Sorrell, Program Director for Kauffman & Associates, who spoke of forging her own path in her career and how her MPA degree helped open doors to success.

"I ask that you take your MPA with a commitment for service to do good for yourself, for your families, for our state and for our country," said Whiting Sorrell. "And maybe someday you'll look back and remember this day and know that you, too, have planted the seeds of your legacy in those that you have mentored, taught, and touched through public service."

Attendees also heard from Kali Wicks (MPA Alumni Board member and Manager of Government Relations at Blue Cross Blue Shield) who honored the 2020 and 2021 MPA Distinguished Alumni Award winners Mary Windecker (Executive Director, Behavioral Health Alliance of MT) and Deena Mansour Executive Director, Mansfield Center).

Professor Panarella honored the 2021 Baucus Leaders Montana: Clara Bentler, Ashley Brittner Wells, Jacqueline Baldwin-LeClair, Rachael Foe, Cara Grewell, Renee Kelley, and Connor Timpone. Dr. Barsky honored the Pi Alpha Alpha executive team: Kristin Sleeper, Emily McCulloch, Max Hamberger, Desirae Linquist, and Tiana Jensen. The Public Service Award winners were also recognized: Jordon Gregory, Intern of the Year; Emily Sather, Nonprofit Specialization; Emily McCulloch, JD/MPA, Heather Sobrepena, MPA; and Sam Scott, 2020 MPA.

Dr. Rinfret honored the graduating students, who came wearing their regalia, and spoke of the accomplishments of the class of 2021. Normally the Dean of the School of Law placed the hood around students' shoulders, but in the interest of safety, this year's graduates were hooded by their guest—usually a partner or close family member who had supported them throughout grad school.

Dean Paul Kirgis closed out the ceremony with applause for the faculty and staff of the Department of Public Administration & Policy. "How better to celebrate than in a beautiful place," he said, gesturing to the mountains in view, "and what a wonderful way to bring all of us together in this inclusive community that is the hallmark of this program."



MPA Student Pugh's International Win at NASPAA-Batten



MPA student Kaitlin Pugh led her team to a second-place finish at the 2021 NASPAA-Batten Student Simulation Competition. This international event is designed to give graduate students in public policy and administration the opportunity to test their skills on real-world data. This year's theme was "Pandemic 2.0" and included 400 students from 120 universities at four global sites competing virtually.

Pugh's team included students from Villanova University, Georgetown University, Fundação Getulio Vargas and Columbia University. "The theme connected us regardless of our backgrounds," she said. "Our team was able to have such a fun time while working on policy decisions."

Two other UM MPA students, Meghann Schroeder and Chelsey Porter, also participated in the event on other teams.

"Although my team didn't make it to the final round, we had a great time!" said Porter. "I now have even more respect and admiration for the public officials navigating the current global pandemic."

"It was extremely rewarding," said Schroeder. "I now have greater insight and proficiency, as well as a new network of colleagues to collaborate with."

"We're so proud of Kaitlin for this accomplishment and representing the University of Montana on a global scale," said Dr. Sara Rinfret. "She certainly has set the bar high for our MPA students, and the department plans to continue sending participants to this renowned experiential learning event."

Vernon Receives Academic Administrator Award



Every year the University of Montana recognizes outstanding performance in the fulfillment of assigned responsibilities with the Academic Administrator Award. We would like to congratulate our MPA Core Faculty Member and Director of Experiential Learning and Career Success, Dr. Andrea Vernon, this year's award recipient.

"I am overwhelmed with gratitude," said Vernon, "and that this work is so worthwhile and rewarding. I feel very lucky to be part of the DPAP team."

MPA Alumni Spotlight: Anne Hughes



As Missoula County's Chief Operating Officer (COO), Anne Hughes provides oversight to a variety of departments, including Human Resources, Office of Emergency Management, Relationship Violence Services, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, among others. In the past eleven months, she has played a large role: assisting with efforts to establish a joint information center, standing up the County's vaccine coordination team, and overseeing the hire of nearly 500 new employees in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

When asked what she is looking forward to in the coming year, she said, "I'm excited as we start to wind down because we have been in triage mode for so long, reaffirming our ability to lean into problems and utilize collaboration as our initial response. Looking ahead, we actually get to be around each other again."

When asked how an MPA degree helped her land this new position, Hughes answered that the foundational elements of public administration are critical to building a strong basis for how anyone approaches a job in the public sector. She added, "My master's degree was helpful to reinforce that I was going down the right path, affirmed my values, and allowed me to build confidence around what I wanted to do."

While looking back on skills learned in graduate school that she continues to use today, Hughes highlighted the importance of being curious about the world and being mindful that there are new ways of looking at things as best practices constantly change and evolve.

DPAP extends our sincerest congratulations to Anne Hughes, COO, in her latest professional endeavor and wish her and the entire Missoula County administrative team luck in the coming year!

DPAP Programs Recognized on National "Best" Lists

The Department of Public Administration & Policy's programs continue to receive high-ranking recognition on national lists of best programs. In 2021, Best Value Schools placed UM's MPA program fourth nationally out of the Best 25 Masters in Public Administration Schools. They also placed UM fifth nationally in Best Masters in Nonprofit Management Programs.

Additionally, U.S. News & World Report placed UM at No. 123 in the nation for Best Public Affairs Program. This establishes UM as the top institution for public affairs in Montana and the No. 2 in the Big Sky Conference.

"The past year has made it clear how much we all depend on our public servants," said Paul Kirgis, Dean of UM's School of Law. "This ranking shows the quality of the training our MPA students receive and the value they will contribute to their communities and to our state."

New Micro-Credential in Nonprofit Leadership & Development



Beginning this summer, we are offering a new, fully online micro-credential in nonprofit leadership and development. The micro-credential delivers a pathway for nonprofit professionals to advance their skills through leadership and development coursework. It also serves the need for nonprofit professionals to obtain additional training in board management, fundraising, and program planning and evaluation.

"We're continuing our strong partnership with the Montana Nonprofit Association to meet workforce

demands," said Dr. Sara Rinfret. "The micro-credential creates a learning opportunity for anyone wanting the advantage in professional development from a nationally ranked program."

The program is open to anyone with a bachelor's degree in any field with a 3.0 GPA or higher. To earn the micro-credential, students complete just three courses. Each course in the micro-credential will provide students opportunities to complete specific research projects to advance their skills. To learn more, visit <https://www.umt.edu/law/mpa/curriculum/nonprofit-micro-credential.php>

2021 Public Service Academy: Resiliency & Leadership



We are excited to be planning for an in-person 2021 Public Service Academy! This year's theme is "Resiliency and Leadership for Public and Nonprofit Sector Professionals" and will be held on August 5 & 6, 2021 on the University of Montana campus.

To see the full line-up of sessions and trainers, please visit our website umt.edu/law/mpa/about/academy.

The Early Bird registration rate ends on May 30, and all registrations close on July 25. Discounts are available for UM students and employees as well as groups of ten or more. We recommend registering as early as possible since we've sold out every year.

Academy participants are also encouraged to enter the second annual [Baucus Innovation Challenge](#). This "pitch competition" invites your department, agency, or program to share a 2-3 minute video that explains how you have developed an innovative approach to enhance public service, address an unmet need, advance understanding in the field, and/or improve programmatic efficiency or effectiveness. Videos will be played during the lunch session on August 5, 2021 at the Public Service Academy and participants will vote for a winner to receive \$500 to re-invest in their innovative work.

We look forward to seeing the submissions and having the opportunity to learn alongside and connect with everyone this summer!

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