

# THE MPA NETWORK

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ISSUE 37/ FALL 2015

## Note from the Director

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As I write this note, I have now been the Interim Director of the MPA Program for a little over three months. It has been an enlightening ride thus far...

I know everyone reading this owes a debt of gratitude to my predecessor, Dr. Gregory Plagens, for his work directing the program for the last four years, including the Herculean task of preparing the program for NASPAA accreditation. We are now fully accredited through 2019. We are honored by NASPAA's recognition of our program and the role it continues to play in educating the next generation of public servants in southeastern Michigan and beyond. While the reaccreditation reflects the work of so many people over so many years, the actual administrative work of *getting it done* owes so much to Greg's work. Thank you, Greg, for what you did for our program (and for how you have helped me transition into my new role).

Dr. Jeffrey L. Bernstein Speaking of transitions, this semester marks the last one that Dr. Joe Ohren will be teaching at EMU. Joe is headed off to what we all hope will be a long, healthy, and happy retirement. Joe has been an extraordinary friend and mentor to me during my time at Eastern, as he has been to so many of you. We will miss him in ways we cannot even begin to contemplate; things will simply not be the same without Joe down the hall! Fortunately, we will have the opportunity to recognize Joe, and his many accomplishments, over the next few months (and in the pages of this newsletter).

One of the first things I did as Interim MPA Director was to speak to Professor Barbara Patrick's PLSC 510 class, as an orientation to the program. I began that evening by telling our students something they already knew – they will end up underpaid and underappreciated relative to their abilities and work ethic. But, that evening, I thanked our students. Against so many challenges, they would be out there on the front lines, serving our society through government work, nonprofit work, or any of the many ways our students serve. Public and nonprofit administrators are not appreciated enough, and I wanted our students (and, by extension, our alumni) to know that we, as a faculty, appreciate that you dedicate your careers to serving others.

My job, as I see it, is to continue to help us be a program that trains the remarkable students who go out there on a daily basis to make the world better. Our students, and our alumni, inspire my colleagues and I to work hard and provide you with the best program we can.

I hope you will be in touch to let us know how you're doing, to tell us what we're doing right, and (especially) to share ideas for how we can do better. I look forward to hearing from you!

*Jeffrey L. Bernstein*

### THE MPA NETWORK

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The MPA Network is published biannually by the Department of Political Science at EMU to inform MPA alumni, current students, public officials, and academics about the activities of the MPA program and its graduates.

<http://www.emich.edu/mpa>

## DEPARTMENT WELCOMES MPA ALUMNI OUTREACH COORDINATOR



Rose Soliven

This fall, the Department welcomed Rose Soliven to the newly created MPA Coordinator position. The Department created the coordinator position to work on student recruitment, placement, and alumni relations.

Ms. Soliven received her MPA from Indiana University in 2013 and has experience in the nonprofit sector working for the Indiana Non-Public Education Association and Asian Services of Indiana. She received her bachelor's degrees in journalism and psychology from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

The flexibility and variety of the work, in addition to the large communications component, drew Soliven to the position. While pursuing her MPA, she worked at the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University doing marketing, which will be a large component of her work for the program here. She wants to increase the user friendliness of the website, in addition to producing a new program brochure, an MPA Handbook, and other marketing materials.

Ms. Soliven will also serve as an important point of contact for alumni. She will meet with employers and alumni who are now active throughout the state. She welcomes alumni communications, including suggestions for the program.

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## ALUM OFFERED DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY THROUGH HARVARD



James Wickman III

James T. Wickman III, an EMU MPA alum, is currently the Township Manager of Hartland, Michigan. Mr. Wickman recently completed the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program offered through Harvard University, with a Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) fellowship.

After completing the Harvard program, Mr. Wickman emphasizes the benefits of professional development opportunities to career professionals in public service. His experiences in the field post-graduation have shown him that “academia can do little to prepare for the realities of managing Board dynamics, or managing people.”

The multiplicity of relationships to manage is an extremely important aspect of working in the public sector. Mr. Wickman stated, “Your ability to manage relationships with the Board or Council makes or breaks your success.” The career requires active listening skills and the ability to identify areas of common ground, search for creative solutions, and build consensus with care.

Mr. Wickman offers the Michigan Local Government Management Association (MLGMA) as a tremendous resource for professional development in the local government sector, particularly the invaluable “true kinship” it offers. He expressed how you are always only a phone call away from an individual who has directly experienced the problem that you are having.

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## REMEMBERING FORMER DEPARTMENT HEAD DR. JOANNA SCOTT



Dr. Scott

EMU Political Science professor and former department head Dr. Joanna Scott passed away on October 31. Dr. Scott referred to herself as a “Jersey Girl” after spending her formative teenage years in New Jersey. She is survived by her husband Doug and children, Adam and Aemilia.

Scott received her B.A. from Barnard, M.A. from Columbia, and Ph.D. from the University of Strathclyde in the United Kingdom. She came to EMU in January 1990 from California State University-Long Beach. At EMU, Scott served as department head from January 1990 to May 1995 and taught a variety of political philosophy courses. She strongly supported academic unions and organized labor.

She is a noted scholar of the political philosopher Hannah Arendt. She regularly presented her research at major political science conferences and held a number of offices in the discipline including serving on the governing body of the American Political Science Association. Dr. Scott will be missed as a colleague and friend of the department.

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## ALUMNI NEWS

- Joe Koenig ('92) published his book, *Getting the Truth*, in October 2014. After retiring from 26 years on the Michigan State Police, Joe started his own private and professional investigations company in Grand Rapids, KMI Investigations.
- John T. Buck ('07) retired as Redford Police Chief and now teaches as an adjunct faculty member at Schoolcraft College.
- Emily Christian ('07) is working as Assistant City Manager for the City of Riverside, Ohio. She has also worked as Assistant to the City Manager and Special Projects Manager for the City of Huber Heights, Ohio.
- Samuel Gedman ('07) recently completed a Ph.D. in political science and government at the University of Mississippi and now works as a technical and training specialist for the Durham County Board of Elections in North Carolina and an instructor at the University of Memphis.
- Michael Demand ('12) started as Benefits Coordinator in the EMU Human Resources Department in October. Mr. Demand worked in the Public Affairs Department for the Detroit Tigers during the 2015 season.
- LeeAnn Woody ('13) works for Detroit Medical Center and was recognized as Harper-Hutzel's Most Engaged Employee in March 2015.
- Brittany Beaster ('14) recently accepted a Program Analyst position at Mathematica Policy Research.
- Allyson Forest ('14) received a job at Oakland University as a public health program coordinator immediately after graduating from EMU and is currently running a \$1.9 million CDC grant. She is also pursuing a Master of Public Health at Oakland University.
- David Palmer ('14) was named a 2015 Leadership Detroit Fellow and 2013 Michigan Political Leadership Program Fellow.

## A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CITY ADMINISTRATOR OF AUBURN



Patricia Rayl

Patricia Rayl, an alumna of the EMU MPA Program, recently accepted the position of City Administrator for the City of Auburn, Michigan. The position is vacant by retirement for the first time since 2000, meaning Rayl has quite the legacy to live up to; however, she feels the family-friendly community is a good fit, given her upbringing and past experiences.

Rayl's high energy and experience with grant writing helped the hiring commission distinguish her from the other candidates. Auburn Mayor Lee Kilbourn also stated that the commission "liked that she operates by consensus. She'll talk with various members of the board; she'll go out in the community" (MLIVE).

Commitment to the community is one value that helps guide Rayl's decisions. "You have to be true to your values, and the community's values, and firm in your convictions," Rayl told us. "It needs to be the best decision possible with the data available at the time." Her first goal is to get to know the citizens of Auburn and build the trust necessary to bring positive changes to the community.

Rayl completed her bachelor's degree in general science at EMU minoring in journalism and mathematics. She previously worked as Director of the Downtown Development Authority in the Village of Blissfield, Michigan, and Manager of Blissfield's Main Street Program, which is part of a statewide program supporting downtown revitalization efforts.

## MPA ALUMNI ADVISORY BOARD RECONSTITUTED



Left to Right: John Fike, Debra Polich, Brittany Beaster

The MPA Advisory Board has been reconstituted for the Fall 2015 semester! The new board members met for the first time on December 10 to share ideas. Board members represent a diverse group of professionals in the field, many of whom are alumni, representing the program's areas of concentration.

The Advisory Board provides beneficial guidance and recommendations to program faculty and the department related to recruiting and retaining students, identifying new or changing curriculum needs to respond to workforce demands, changing program mission, and fundraising to support special programmatic needs. A few of the new board members share their hopes for serving:

**John Fike:** "I'm very interested these days in doing more to help our students learn more about the process of initiating institutional change."

**Brittany Beaster:** "I feel I can contribute to shaping the success of the program by emphasizing the increasing relevance of data in government administration and the need to equip leaders with the skills necessary to synthesize and transform data into actionable policies."

**Laura Shue:** "I hope to both renew and strengthen the relationships that have long cemented EMU's place as the premier producer of southeastern Michigan's public administrators and to provide a feedback loop on the requisite skill sets our changing professional landscape demands."

### BOARD MEMBERS

- Nickie Bateson, CFO, Great Lakes Water Authority
- Brittany Beaster, Program Analyst, Mathematica Policy Research
- John K. Bennett, Police Officer, City of Detroit
- Natalie Burg, Writer/Editor, Self-employed
- Jessica Cotton, Program Coordinator, Girls Group
- John Fike, Nonprofit Administration, MPA Adjunct Faculty
- Nate Geinzer, Assistant to the City Manager, City of Farmington Hills
- Brian Keisling, Director, Bureau of Medicaid Operations and Actuarial Services, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- Andy LaBarre, Washtenaw County Commissioner; Executive VP & Director of Government Relations, A2Y Regional Chamber
- Amy Malmer, Membership Manager, SEMCOG
- Barbara Niess-May, Executive Director, SafeHouse Center
- Debra Polich, President/CEO, Artrain/The Arts Alliance
- Bill Richards, Local Government Management, MPA Adjunct Faculty
- John Seto, Director of Housing Security and Safety Services, University of Michigan
- Laura Shue, Director of Data Quality and Compliance, University of Michigan Health System

## DR. JOSEPH OHREN: A LEGACY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT EDUCATION

Dr. Joseph Ohren has been with the EMU MPA Program since 1985, just five years after the program's founding. Drawn to founder Chuck Monsma's vision of the program and desirous of a "role in shaping a growing program," he returned to Michigan (he grew up in Grand Rapids) after 13 years of teaching political science and public administration at Northern Kentucky University.



Dr. Ohren Then and Now

At Northern Kentucky, Ohren was instrumental in drafting an MPA program. However, because of his desire to work with graduate students, Ohren left before the program was ever approved. His experiences with starting a graduate program from scratch helped influence his early years with EMU's program. The program's ability to maintain its NASPAA accreditation has been aided by Dr. Ohren's authoring and drafting of program self-studies. He cites working on the program's very first and most recent self-studies as memorable and proud moments of his career.

In his time here, Ohren has watched the MPA program grow and change. He feels that the current incarnation of the program is the best it can be in terms of serving students. Although enrollment declines pose challenges, the program relies less on part-time faculty and is stretched less thin than during peak enrollment in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Ohren views the biggest challenge to the program as marketing: "How do we make ourselves known so we can compete with other programs?"

Ohren recalls one of his proudest moments as winning the Institutional Values Award in 2005 for his work in community engagement. He proudly displays the award on a shelf above his office desk. The award recognizes almost 20 years of representing EMU in the community. For the bulk of this work, Dr. Ohren has helped 60 communities with goal setting and team-building programs in conjunction with the Michigan Municipal League and other state organizations of local governments.

In his remarks at the program's 35th anniversary celebration last winter, Dr. Ohren recalled his attraction to the program and to public service: "I saw myself making a contribution to something larger than myself," and that contribution has culminated in seeing former students statewide making contributions through public service.

One of these students, Marie Sherry, currently the Treasurer/Finance Director for the City of Dexter, owes her interest in local government to Dr. Ohren's state and local government course, which she took in the Fall semester of 1992 as a 27-year-old Navy veteran. When she decided to come back to Eastern for her MPA, she took as many of Dr. Ohren's classes as she could: "He was the mentor who guided me through my capstone project with enthusiasm, and when our paths have crossed throughout the years since, he never fails to bring something positive to the conversation."

Sherry's sentiments echo that of so many other students as she says a big thank you to Ohren for "sparking the interest that has led to my enjoyable career in local government service" and borrowing an old Navy phrase, she offers, "'fair winds and following seas' as you move into retirement."

Although retiring from teaching, Ohren intends to continue his community work through more leadership workshops. In addition, traveling will keep him busy. He has children in New York City; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Yuma, Arizona; and other family in Washington and Texas. He intends to visit National Parks, besides Sleeping Bear, and hopes to open a new chapter in environmental activism.

In his many years with the program, Dr. Ohren has impacted the lives of countless students and his fellow faculty members. Wherever retired life takes Dr. Ohren, he will be sorely missed at Eastern Michigan University for his positive attitude and wealth of public administration knowledge.

### OHREN STUDENT INTERNSHIP SCHOLARSHIP

The Joe Ohren Internship Scholarship helps students who are placed in unpaid internships gain valuable work experience, which can be a critical factor in the hiring process. Please show your support with a donation to the following link:

<https://www.emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=01868> (Click the title for hyperlink)

### FIND US ON LINKEDIN AND FACEBOOK

Have you ever wondered what the MPA program was up to in between our semiannual newsletters? The Public Administration program has a LinkedIn group and a Facebook group dedicated to connecting alumni, current students, and interested individuals from the surrounding communities. Join the group to receive updates about program activities, networking opportunities, and current events affecting Michigan public administrators. Search for us on LinkedIn under **Eastern Michigan University Master of Public Administration (MPA) Students, Alumni & Faculty**, or on Facebook under **Eastern Michigan University MPA Students, Alumni & Friends**.



### MPA DEVELOPMENT FUND

If you are wondering how you can give something back to the MPA program, please consider making a contribution to the MPA Development Fund. All contributions are tax-deductible and are used to support student and alumni planning and events. Click the title for hyperlink or visit: [www.emich.edu/polisci/donate](http://www.emich.edu/polisci/donate)

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*Thank you for your support!*