

MPA Student & Alumni Newsletter

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Department of Political Science
Sam Houston State University
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DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

By *Fatih Demiroz, PhD*

Happy New Year, and welcome to the latest issue of the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter! As we embrace 2025, I'd like to share some updates about the program.

In 2024, the SHSU MPA Program was proud to serve as one of the sponsors of the Texas Emergency Management Conference, held May 27-30 in Fort Worth. Our program was well represented by faculty members

(Drs. Ahmadu, Wang and myself) and one of our MPA students, Billy Hooper. It was a pleasure connecting with our alumni, current students, and prospective students who stopped by our booth. Thank you for making the event so memorable!

I am also delighted to welcome Dr. Peiyao Li as the newest member of our MPA Program faculty. Dr. Li earned her Ph.D. in Community Resources and Development from Arizona State University. She brings valuable expertise to our program and will be teaching the *Disaster Resilience* in spring 2025. We are thrilled to have her on board!



This issue features a fresh format that highlights the research and accomplishments of our MPA faculty. I hope you enjoy learning about the impactful work being done to advance knowledge and practice in public administration.

Finally, I want to extend my gratitude to Dr. Wang for preparing the newsletter and to all the MPA faculty and staff for their dedication and hard work. Your efforts are vital to the success of our program and community.

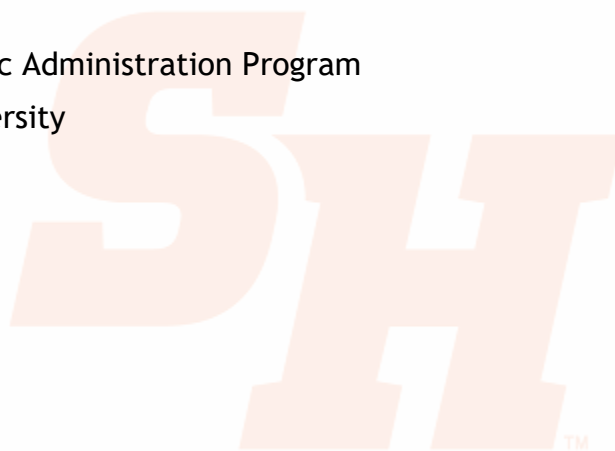
As always, we want to hear from you! Please share updates about your professional milestones, such as promotions or new positions. Additionally, if your agency is hiring or seeking interns, we'd be happy to circulate announcements to our students and alumni.

Thank you for staying connected with the SHSU MPA Program. I look forward to sharing more updates with you in the next issue.

Warm regards,

Fatih Demiroz, Ph.D.

Director, Master of Public Administration Program
Sam Houston State University



ALUMNI INSIGHT

Why Would Anyone Choose Public Service in Today's World?

By Gary Ashmore (MPA '24)

Gary Ashmore possesses nearly 39 years of diverse experience spanning military, corporate, and governmental sectors, holding various leadership positions. After retiring as a Senior Director at AMD, where he managed R&D teams for software and hardware design, he returned to Texas. He currently serves as the General Manager of the Lower Trinity Groundwater Conservation District, overseeing operations in Polk and San Jacinto counties. Additionally, he volunteers and serves as a director on several boards of local non-profit organizations and governmental entities.



In today's fast-paced, success-driven world, public service might seem like an unconventional choice. With society often focused on profit margins, luxury lifestyles, and social media fame, choosing a career that is typically lower-paying, highly scrutinized, and full of challenges may not appear all that appealing. Add to that the risks and dangers many public servants face—especially first responders who put their lives on the line daily—and it's easy to wonder: why would anyone choose to navigate bureaucracy, face constant political and public scrutiny, and confront real danger when other career paths seem more straightforward, lucrative, and safe?

Being a public servant offers something deeper. Many people pursue an MPA initially for career advancement, which is perfectly valid. Yet public service is about more than professional growth. It's about leadership, making a difference, and contributing to a better society. As you move forward, you'll find that public service challenges you to create meaningful change, even when resources are limited, and results take time. You're here to lead with purpose, not just to advance your career, and that sense of purpose is what keeps so many of us committed to this path.

My Journey into Public Service.

My Journey into Public Service.

After nearly 30 years in the military and private tech sector, I found myself at a crossroads. My career had taken me around the globe – living and working in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, even longer than I had been in the United States growing up – leading large teams and driving business success while navigating diverse cultures and governmental styles. Although those experiences brought me pride, business acumen, and leadership skills, something still felt missing in what I would call my sense-of-purpose. So, at the age of 45, my wife and I decided it was time for me to retire completely. The relentless pursuit of profits, market share, and competition had brought me plenty of money, but I realized I was unhappy and simply burned out. I envisioned a simpler life—maybe fishing, hunting, watching sunrises, and just enjoying the quiet of the countryside. The first year felt like an extended vacation, and I embraced it with plenty of fun and travel. By the second year, I had turned my attention to building a farm with my wife, raising livestock, and growing our own food. But by the third year, something inside me began to change. Farming was rewarding, but it didn't fill the sense of purpose I found myself missing again. I just wasn't the happy-go-lucky man I wanted to be. One day, my wife humorously and lovingly suggested, "Maybe it's time you found a real job again or a divorce attorney."

That's when I began volunteering for local non-profits. It started with small commitments—working a day at a food bank, helping out at an animal shelter, and even organizing disaster relief efforts for my neighbors and community.

“... public service was about directly helping people. I could see the immediate impact of my efforts on individuals and families.”

Gradually, I realized that, unlike the corporate world, public service was about directly helping people. I could see the immediate impact of my efforts on individuals and families. Instead of driving profits, I was restoring hope. This shift began to fill the void that had been growing since my retirement. Eventually, I also formally became General Manager of the Lower Trinity Groundwater Conservation District for the State of Texas. While I found some processes in public administration relatable to my business background, I also encountered the frustrations of working within the slower, bureaucratic machinery of government. Balancing community expectations with limited resources that required constant adaptation. Public service – both in non-profits and government administration – proved to be similar yet distinct from the business world. It demanded a different leadership approach, one rooted in patience, navigating complex regulations, and finding creative ways to motivate volunteers and serve the community with regulated authority. Though the skillsets overlap, public service requires a deeper focus on collaboration, resourcefulness, and long-term impact. That is why I chose to pursue an MPA, equipping myself with new tools to be more effective in public service.

Being in Public Service.

Public service certainly comes with its challenges, and navigating these obstacles requires resilience and adaptability in both the non-profit sector and official government roles. Here are my top pros and cons that come with the job.

The Pros

1. Making an Impact

Public service gives you the chance to make a tangible difference in people's lives. Whether you're leading a government department or assisting families in the aftermath of a disaster, the impact is both real and visible. The shift from focusing on profit margins to prioritizing human value was profoundly fulfilling for me. Each time I delivered food, helped someone navigate through complex government process, or organized community events, I could see the hope it brought to those in need. That immediate reward was far more satisfying than any corporate achievements I had experienced.

2. Sense of Purpose

Public service isn't just a job – it's a calling. When you work in this field, you contribute to something larger than yourself. Managing teams of volunteers, advocating for sustainable practices, and seeing the positive changes in the community provides a sense of purpose that transcends any financial gain you will ever see. For me, this sense of purpose filled the void I had felt post-retirement and enabled me to pass on my experience and skills to others. It is like engaging in the continuity of government we study in graduate school—where theory meets practice, and the experiences and knowledge you earned are passed down to the next generation of leaders, ensuring stability and preparedness for future challenges.

3. Personal Growth

Public service constantly challenges you to grow, pushing you to innovate and adapt in the face of complex problems and limited resources. As General Manager of a state office regulated by multiple layers of government, I've had to navigate intricate legal frameworks while balancing conservation, community needs, and regulatory requirements – adding a level of complexity rarely encountered in the private sector. Pursuing an MPA helped me learn strategies for effective leadership in both the non-profit and public sectors, enhancing my skill in people management, resource optimization, and delivering meaningful impact. Leadership in public service demands ongoing personal growth, as ever-evolving challenges require creative thinking, flexibility, and expanded capabilities.

4. Community and Collaboration

Public service thrives on collaboration. The relationships you build with volunteers, community members, and fellow public servants are powerful. I quickly learned that no matter how driven you are, success isn't achieved alone. Public service is about bringing together diverse talents to work toward a shared goal.

The Cons

1. Bureaucracy and Red Tape

One of the most challenging aspects of public service is dealing with bureaucracy. In both government and non-profits, complex regulations and administrative procedures can slow down progress. I constantly manage paperwork and processes that delay the implementation of otherwise great ideas. Patience and persistence are essential to navigating these hurdles while staying focused on the end goal.

2. Limited Resources

Financial constraints are a constant in public service. Non-profits rely heavily on donations and grants, while government agencies often operate under strict budget limitations. I frequently face tough decisions about resource allocation, knowing that needs always exceed available funding. This challenge calls for creative problem-solving and making the most of limited resources to achieve the greatest possible impact.

3. Public Scrutiny

Every decision in public service is made under the watchful eye of the public. Whether I'm managing a non-profit initiative or overseeing government operations, mistakes are highly visible, and criticism can be harsh. However, this scrutiny drives accountability and motivates me to prioritize doing what's right over what's easy.

4. Balancing Expectations

One of the most emotionally taxing aspects of public service is managing the high expectations of the public with the reality of limited resources. People often expect immediate results, but meaningful change takes time. It's easy to feel frustrated when problems seem endless, but I stay focused on the long-term impact, knowing that every small step contributes to a larger, lasting difference.

It's Worth It: Motivating Future Public Servants.

For those pursuing an MPA, you've already taken a crucial step toward leadership in public service. Whether your goal is to lead a non-profit, manage first responders, or work in emergency management, you've chosen this path because you want to be part of the solution. With this choice comes responsibility—not only to your community but also to inspire others to lead. Public service is about leaving a legacy. The work you do today will ripple through your communities for years to come. When I reflect on my work in public service, I don't dwell on the bureaucracy or frustrations. I think of the lives we touched and the hope we restored today and tomorrow.

As Mahatma Gandhi is often credited with saying, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others." While Gandhi's words capture the spirit of selflessness, I'd add that being a public servant isn't just about personal fulfillment or a paycheck. It's about shaping the future and building your community to inspire others to follow in your footsteps. So, stay the course. Your work will shape the future, and your legacy will live on in the role that leadership brings to you in your application of an MPA. Oh, and don't forget to pause and watch a sunrise every now and then.

Faculty Spotlight: Peiyao Li, PhD

Dr. Peiyao Li joined the Political Science Department at SHSU in 2024 as an assistant professor. Her research interests include nonprofit management, philanthropy, and emergency management. She earned her Ph.D. in Community Resources and Development from Arizona State University.



Why did you decide to become an educator?

My motivation to become an educator is deeply rooted in my mentors' significant influence on me during my college years. One teacher was especially inspiring. She introduced me to theoretical models I had never encountered before and connected them to real-world phenomena, sparking my curiosity and interest in pursuing my Ph.D. degree. Through this journey, I witnessed firsthand the powerful role that scholars play in shaping the lives of their students. In my doctoral program, my mentors serve as role models. They demonstrate strength, persistence, and passion for nurturing students' potential. As female scholars, they also demonstrate the incredible impact women can have in academia. I am dedicated to passing on the positive influence I received from my mentors to my students, supporting them as they explore the wonders of the world around them..

Why did you decide to focus on public administration?

I grew up in a coal mining area in China. Back in the early 2000s, there were always accidents that led to injuries and fatalities among community

The victims and their families always asked for support from the government, but in most cases, they received only limited financial assistance from corporations. This experience motivated me to think critically about how to better support the community and why the government often falls short in managing such incidents. As a result, when I entered college, I chose to study public administration to gain knowledge on the operation of government. In the following years, I gradually refine my research interest in community mutual support in emergency management.

What makes a good public sector leader?

There are multiple important qualities to consider broadly, such as capabilities, personalities, and skills. I firmly believe that the most vital thing is genuine care. A good public sector leader must truly care about the lives of the individuals they serve and the future of the community. This deep sense of care inspires passion and commitment, motivating leaders to continuously improve their skills, pursue new knowledge, and remain dedicated to addressing the community needs. Additionally, professionalism, open-mindedness, and a focus on long-term planning are essential for effective leadership.

What is your teaching philosophy?

My primary teaching goals are to foster an openness to differing perspectives, equip students with problem-solving abilities, and encourage their active engagement in communities. From my perspective, public administration is a practical-oriented field. It is important for us, as educators, to prepare students to be responsible citizens and capable community leaders. So, in my class, I always encourage students to think about public issues as members of the community and apply theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. I am designing the Disaster Resilience course, which will be available to students in Spring 2025, as a community engagement course to motivate students to think of disaster resilience in a more practical way.

What do you do when you aren't working on your classes or research?

When I am not working on classes or research, I enjoy spending time with my family. We often go hiking, cook together, and watch movies.



RECENT MPA GRADUATES

[Summer 2023]

Dietert, Tyler J.
House, Jeffrey P.
Scott, Mariah C.
Sharp, Connor C.
Sidebottom, Bryan R.

[Fall 2023]

Gonzales, Geri L.
Howard, Alexandra L.
Tusing, Steven R.
Wells, Justin

[Spring 2024]

Blackwell, Teresa
Chappell, Charles A.
Coons, Rebekah L.
Fuller, Ty-ie J.
Lawson, Cynthia C.
Peacock, Jason D.
Riley, Carianne M.
Taylor, Phillip K.
Weimer, Christopher A.

[Summer 2024]

Ashmore, Gary D.
Biglow, Ressard E.
Hooper, William C.
Jackson, Shannon E.
McGinnis, Matthew D.
Morris, Paul G.

[Fall 2024]

Beasley, Latasha
Cudd, Brady
Davis, Whitney P.
Glass, Devin G.
Howard, Gabrielle L.
Maldonado, Sebastian
Mitchell, Antonio O.
Rodriguez, Bryan D.
Shook, Daniel T.

ALUMNI & STUDENT UPDATES

Hilary Webb [MPA '21]

- Started working for Killeen ISD as a school safety specialist in June 2024

Rafael Hernandez [MPA '22]

- Working for Ellis County as Emergency Management Senior Specialist



If you have any personal or professional announcement to share with us, please send it to wjwang@shsu.edu

FACULTY UPDATES



Aisha S. Amadu, PhD

Dr. Ahmadu's research explores disaster science, public budgeting, infrastructure, and federalism. She is currently leading a grant-funded project at SHSU to examine factors affecting property loss during disasters. The study aims to inform policies that mitigate disaster impacts, enhance community resilience, and reduce social vulnerability. Recently, Dr. Ahmadu published an article in *Public Integrity* titled "Democracy, Freedom, and Budget Transparency: A Multinational Analysis." The study highlights the critical role of democracy and freedom, such as disclosure, free speech, and citizen participation, in promoting budget transparency.



Robin Bittick, PhD

Dr. Bittick's interests include public administration, political philosophy, and U.S. national security. He teaches courses on Ethics in Government and Organization Theory and Behavior. His current research examines the intersection of religion and politics, particularly theology's influence on political objectives, as well as institutional credibility and complexity theory in public administration. Dr. Bittick has published in journals including *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, *Public Integrity*, and *Public Administration Quarterly*.



Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Dr. Demiroz specializes in disaster resilience and government-society relations, focusing on democratic administration, accountability, and bureaucratic responsibility. He teaches courses in Public Management, Human Resource Management, Governing Complex Policy Problems, and Public Administration. His current work includes a series of articles exploring the concept of the deep state, with one article under review and several others in progress.



Peiyao Li, PhD

Dr. Li specializes in nonprofit engagement in disaster resilience. She is currently working on a project to explore nonprofit strategies for managing the risks of deploying volunteers in disasters. Dr. Li recently published an article titled "Strategic Hazard Mitigation Planning" in the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*. The article examines the quality of local hazard mitigation plans in Louisiana and concludes that these plans lack a true strategic roadmap for future risk reduction.



Sungdae Lim, PhD

Dr. Lim specializes in leadership, innovation, and social equity in public and nonprofit management. His recent research uses 11 years of data from the Korean Public Performance and Management survey to analyze political and social effects on turnover intentions among Korean public servants. He co-authored an article in *Public Administration Review* titled "Focusing on the Individual in Cross-Sectoral Collaboration," examining how leader characteristics improve decision-making in cross-sector collaborations using data from Lebanese mayors and nonprofit executives.



Wenjiun Wang, PhD

Dr. Wang specializes in emergency management, coordination, and decision-making. Her recent research explores planning activities and the boundary-spanning roles of emergency managers. She recently co-edited and published *The Elgar Encyclopedia of Nonprofit Management, Leadership, and Governance*. This comprehensive resource features contributions from over 200 renowned experts and serves as an authoritative guide for those interested in the rapidly expanding nonprofit sector.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Published twice a year, the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter will provide updates on the MPA program, our faculty and staff, current students, and graduates. To ensure the Newsletter reflects your interests and celebrates your accomplishments, we welcome your contributions in the following areas:

Personal & Professional Announcements related to moves, births, marriages, deaths, promotions, career transitions, graduations, certifications, accomplishments, awards, etc.

Activities and Events information related to activities and events that you, your organization, or another organization plan to hold or sponsor over the next few months.

Job Opportunities announcements related to job opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

Grant Opportunities announcements related to grant opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

Information Briefs We invite students and alumni to submit information briefs (400-500 words) that covers a topic that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

Book Summaries or Reviews We invite students and alumni to submit short summaries (~300 words) or reviews (~1000 words) of a recently published book or report that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

Submission Info

Submit content to Dr. Wang (wjwang@shsu.edu).



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