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Current Student and Alumni News

- A recent issue of the Coast River Business Journal featured an article about UAP alum, Blaire Buer-gler. Blaire is an AmeriCorps volunteer through the RARE (Resource Assistance for Rural Environments) program and is serving as the downtown association coordinator for the program. Read more at this Link
UAP alum Mark Bonsignore writes that he has been involved in a voluntary project in Jersey City, NJ that's now getting attention on a regional and national basis, including the Wall Street Journal. Learn more about the project at Embankment.org. (Via UAPSA's Facebook Group)
Congratulations to Laura Craig! Laura, a junior in Public and Urban Affairs, has been selected to represent Virginia Tech and the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at the 7th Annual ACC Meeting of the Minds undergraduate research conference. Read more at this Link.
MURP graduate Dustin Akers has a new job as Project Manager at The Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City. Dustin serves on the UAP Alumni Advisory Committee and is a past leader in UAPSA. Congratulations, Dustin!
Congratulations to Dr. Derren Rosbach, a PhD graduate of our Planning, Governance and Globalization program and UAP Visiting Instructor, who has recently accepted a faculty post at Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Worcester, Massachusetts!
Current MURP student, Abby Boggs, was a participant in the GSA 28th Annual Research Symposium held in the Graduate Life Center on March 28, 2012. She won one of the first place prizes for her poster presentation. Her research presentation was called "An Ecological Audit of Luxury Sustainable Tourism Venues." The main focus of Abby's research was on sustainability initiatives at a large scale luxury resort in Meadows of Dan, Virginia.
Board of Visitors Names UAP's Nick Onopa as Student Representative. The Virginia Tech Board of Visitors named Nick Onopa as one of its two student representatives serving on the governing body. Read more at this link.
Have news to share? Post it on our Facebook group or on LinkedIn

Faculty News

- Hall Named Research Chair of TRB Committee. Dr. Ralph Hall will be the Chair of Research for the TRB (Transportation Research Board) Committee on Transportation and Sustainability.
Sanchez Presents on Equity, Highlights Forthcoming Book. Dr. Tom Sanchez was an invited panelist at the Complete Streets Conference sponsored by the UCLA's Luskin School of Public Affairs held on March 2nd. His new book with Marc Brenman, Governance and Equity: Planning Ahead as if People Mattered, will be published by Island Press in August.
New Projects and Publications from UAP's Ralph Buehler. MURP student Darren Buck and Assistant Professor Ralph Buehler presented the paper "Bike Lanes and Other Determinants of Capital Bikeshare Trips" at this year's Transportation Research Board Annual Meeting in Washington, DC. Click on the following link to see the poster: Buck Buehler Poster CaBi TRB 2012.
Buehler Published Final Report on Bikeshare. In January, the MURP environmental studio class and Assistant Professor Ralph Buehler published a final report on short-term users of Capital Bikeshare in Washington DC. The report received attention by the nationwide blog of the League of American Bicyclists, WNYC's Transportation Nation, and other local blogs and websites. (here are the links: Mention on League of American Bicyclists (national) blog: link. Mention on WNYC's Transportation Nation: link.
Second Edition of Noted Textbook from UAP's John Randolph. UAP faculty member and former SPIA Director, Dr. John Randolph, has an updated version of his noted textbook, entitled, Environmental Land Use Planning and Management, (Island Press, 2011). "Since the first publication of this landmark textbook in 2004, it has received high praise for its clear, comprehensive, and practical approach. The second edition continues to offer a unique framework for teaching and learning interdisciplinary environmental planning, incorporating the latest thinking, newest research findings, and numerous, updated case studies," noted Island Press. Read more about the book at this link.
New Book on Sustainability Co-authored by UAP's Ralph Hall. UAP's Dr. Ralph Hall has a new book on sustainability that is co-authored with Nicholas Ashford at MIT, entitled, Technology, Globalization, and Sustainable Development: Transforming the Industrial State. The book offers a unified, transdisciplinary approach for achieving sustainable development in industrialized nations. Read more about the book at this link.
Metropolitan Institute, Partners to Study Struggling Cities. The Metropolitan Institute and partners have been awarded a grant to help struggling cities. MI's Assoc. Director, Joe Schilling, will serve as VT's PI on the three-year project. Read more at this link.
UAP's Paul Knox Delivers Interim Report on VT Long-Range Planning Effort. UAP's Dr. Paul Knox delivers interim report on VT Long-Range Planning Effort. University-wide discussions on future directions for Virginia Tech are beginning to gel. University Distinguished Professor and Senior Fellow for International Advancement, Dr. Knox, summarized the five subcommittee efforts in a report to the university Academic Council. Read more at this link.
A Conversation with UAP's Ralph Buehler. Assistant Professor Ralph Buehler in the Urban Affairs and Planning department in the School of Public and International Affairs and Faculty Fellow to the Metropolitan Institute, shared some of his background and research highlights recently. Read more at Faculty Fellow Showcase: Ralph Buehler | Metropolitan Institute at Virginia Tech.
UAP Professor and VT's Executive Director of NCR Operations, Dr. Jim Bohland, Retires. Dr. Bohland retired in March 2012 after 31 years of service to VT. Please join us in extending our congratulations for his valuable service as a scholar, professor and administrator. Read more at this link.

VT UAP Ranked Nationally!



Social Media

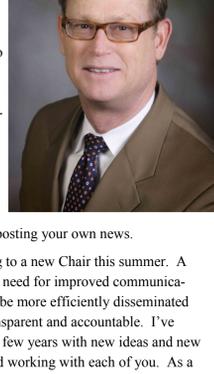


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Letter from the Chair

As you will read in this issue of the UAP newsletter, UAP students and faculty have been very productive this year, being involved in many exciting activities. You will also read about a couple of our outstanding alumni James Steffens and Steve Gunnells. Over the past two years we have been making a special effort to connect with the graduates of our programs and discovering some fascinating professional accomplishments and career paths. The UAP newsletter will continue to profile alumni and invite letters and updates that we can share with the UAP family. As a reminder, we are trying to (re)connect students, faculty, and alumni with our Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Blogger social media channels, so please visit them to sign up so you can receive regular updates as well as posting your own news.



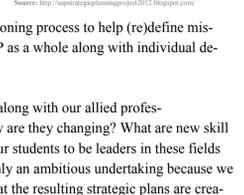
Some of you may know that UAP will be transitioning to a new Chair this summer. A key goal I've had over the past two years has been the need for improved communications so that program news and announcements could be more efficiently disseminated and so that program administration could be more transparent and accountable. I've been pleased to hear from many of you over these last few years with new ideas and new enthusiasm as a result of these efforts and I've enjoyed working with each of you. As a UAP faculty member, I'll look forward to supporting the new Chair as UAP continues to develop new leaders in support of our dynamic profession.

- Tom Sanchez

Participate in UAP's Degree Engagement Project

By Thomas Sanchez

UAP is looking to its future teaching, research, and outreach across undergraduate, masters, and doctoral level degrees. We are seeking your active involvement in this process as we envision the future of the program.



Strategic planning commonly occurs for individual degrees, but we consider this to be quite limiting. For instance, our degree programs share resources and aspirations and therefore, should be knowledgeable of one another and well-integrated. Ultimately we would like for the visioning process to help (re)define missions statements, goals, and action plans for UAP as a whole along with individual degree programs and certificates.

We set our sights on the future of our discipline along with our allied professions. Where are these professions headed? How are they changing? What are new skill areas that are needed? How should we prepare our students to be leaders in these fields in terms of skills and knowledge? This is certainly an ambitious undertaking because we seek very broad and inclusive participation so that the resulting strategic plans are creative and forward-looking. So far the visioning process has been insightful, challenging, and rewarding and we're delighted to have heard from so many alumni, faculty, staff and students. Your input is vital to the vision of UAP as an international leader in urban affairs and planning education.

Please join us in participating in this important effort; visit our project blog for more information about how you can get involved.

Special thanks to our Advisory Committee Members

Interested in joining the Advisory Committee? Please contact Tom Sanchez at tom.sanchez@vt.edu.

- Darren Asper
Dustin Akers
Jennie Bob (J.B.) Bizal (Culpepper)
Mark Calhoon
Arica Young
Christine Foote
Matthew Roylance
Theresa Kanter

Sustainable Europe Field Trip 2012

Interested in studying abroad in Europe? UAP is hosting a study abroad trip for Summer 2012 in Europe. The 2012 Sustainable Europe course is designed around a sequence of three interrelated modules.

Part 1: History and Theory of Contemporary Sustainable Development: How is Switzerland Translating Idea into Practice? (Instructor: Dr. Ralph Hall, VT) Since the late 1980s, the idea of sustainable development has received growing attention from government agencies, businesses, non-government organizations, and civic groups. As a result, it can now be found behind many public policy initiatives and business activities in virtually all sectors of the economy. Yet, people using the idea often lack a firm grasp of the origins of the concept. This first module will lay the foundation for a common understanding of sustainable development. We will explore the emergence of sustainable development and will review and discuss several critical ideas frequently used when describing the concept. Further, given the importance placed on innovation as an engine of "green" growth/development, we will review the idea of innovation and the role of businesses and government in promoting innovation for sustainability. Each student will then apply their knowledge of sustainability to critically evaluate the Swiss government's approach to sustainable development.

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Regional Resilience Grant Awarded to Dr. Margaret Cowell, PhD

Dr. Margaret Cowell received a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to support her research on regional resilience in deindustrializing Midwestern regions of the United States. The larger research network of which Dr. Cowell is a member, "Building Resilient Regions" (BRR), is working on a national analysis of metropolitan resilience in the face of various economic and social challenges. This interdisciplinary team of scholars and practitioners is investigating why regions matter now, what constitutes resilience in the face of these challenges, and what factors help to build and sustain regional resilience. Dr. Cowell's own research examines industrial Midwestern metropolitan regions in the United States as they struggled with the economic restructuring that began to unravel regional economies during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Using a combination of both economic data and qualitative data collected from interviews with former stakeholders in each region, she is identifying how local reactions to this prolonged economic downturn were fashioned, whom they involved, and in what ways they contributed to or detracted from regional resilience in these metropolitan areas.



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Current Student Story: Lida Aljabar

By Tiffany Luu

Lida Aljabar is an undergraduate in Public and Urban Affairs with a concentration in Environmental Affairs and a minor in Landscape Architecture. Although classes are Lida's main priority, she also works on land preservation and agricultural viability projects as an intern for the Floyd County Department of Community and Economic Development. In addition, she interned for the office of Senator Mark Warner in Roanoke, Virginia. Her key responsibilities are to take opinions from constituents, assist with casework, and research various state issues and policies.



Source: Lida Aljabar

Lida is primarily interested in the areas of urban planning where social progress and environmental stewardship intersect. Sustainable community development, neighborhood revitalization and brownfield redevelopment, growth control measures, and land conservation are some examples. She has also come across a recent interest in models of local, sustainable food systems, because she believes that this type of system can meet social, environmental and economic goals. In addition, planners can feasibly implement several measures to help the cause.

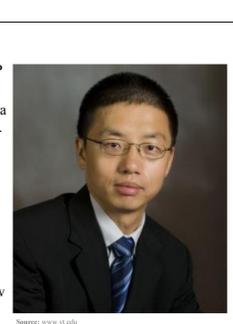
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Lida was also recently named 2012 Outstanding Graduating Senior in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies. Congratulations Lida! Read more here.

Faculty Profile: Dr. Yang Zhang, Ph.D.

By Tiffany Luu

Dr. Yang Zhang is an Assistant Professor in UAP at the Blacksburg campus. Although Dr. Zhang grew up in central China, he often refers to the area as the Kansas of China. He earned both his Bachelor of Science in 1997 and Master of Science in 2000 from Beijing University. Subsequently, Dr. Zhang went on to earn his Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Science from Texas A&M University in 2006. He serves as a research fellow of the Next Generation of Hazards and Disasters Researchers Program, funded by the National Science Foundation (NSF). In addition, he is also a research fellow of the Peking University (China)-Lincoln Institute of Land Policy (U.S.) Center for Land Use Policy and Urban Development and of the Hazard Reduction and Recovery Center.



Source: www.vt.edu

Research

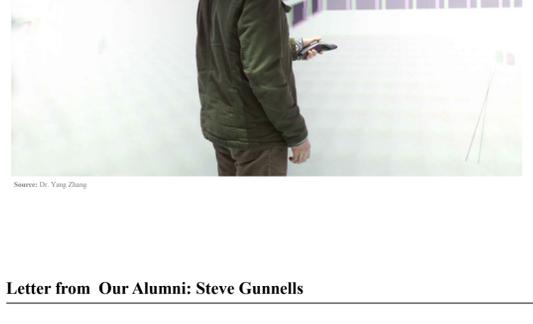
The primary focus of Dr. Zhang's research is the dynamic interaction between natural systems and human activities. His recent work examines adaptive policies that encompass policy formulation, policy evaluation, capacity building, and policy adjustments, especially through the lens of urban system recovery following catastrophic disasters and adaptive human behavior. His projects are within both domestic and international (China) contexts, and a number of his recent initiatives have been funded by the National Science Foundation, the Virginia Sea Grant, and the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. Dr. Zhang's research is mainly quantitative, and his work often demonstrates his skills in Geographic Information System (GIS) and econometrics.

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GIS Field Trip to Visionarium

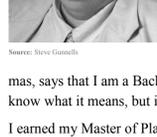
By Tiffany Luu

On February 13, 2012, students in Dr. Yang Zhang's UAP 5114 Computer Applications (GIS) class took a field trip to the Visionarium at Virginia Tech. The purpose of the field trip was to link applications in supercomputing and visual analysis technology to urban planning. Students were able to explore Blacksburg by standing in place through a three-dimensional model called the VisCube. This particular model is called "3D Blacksburg" and students could experience Blacksburg's features of topography, aerial photography, and buildings. The Visionarium is located in 3050 Torgerson Hall.



Source: Dr. Yang Zhang

Letter from Our Alumni: Steve Gunnells



Steve Gunnells sent this note in response to our call for input about the UAP Strategic Plan and we thought we'd share his insightful update with the UAP community.

I graduated with a BA in Urban Affairs and Planning in 1989. When the Westmoreland County office building caught fire in 1990, my original degree went up in flames. My replacement diploma, signed by then-president McComas, says that I am a Bachelor of Urban Affairs. I kind of like the ring of that. I don't know what it means, but it sounds nicely esoteric.

I earned my Master of Planning degree at the former UVA graduate center in Northern Virginia in 1995. I only found last month from Chris Nelson that the Northern Virginia planning program is now part of VA Tech. By the way, I live and work in Southern California now, so I miss a lot of what goes on in the Old Dominion, although I do seem to read a lot about that new governor.

I also have a second masters from the London School of Economics. Since leaving Blacksburg, I have worked in local government in Westmoreland County, Virginia; worked for the World Bank in Yemen; worked as an Economic Development Fellow with the International Economic Development Council; worked as a community planning and economic development consultant in Michigan; taught English in Yemen; and now I am the Senior Economist with The Planning CenterDC&E in Santa Ana (the capital of Orange County), California.

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New SPIA Publication

From SPIA Director Anne Khademian: Announcing the new SPIA On-Line publication

The School for Public and International Affairs (SPIA) is pleased to announce the launch of SPIA On-Line (http://www.news.spia.vt.edu/), a publication to keep you abreast of the research, teaching and engagement efforts of our programs, faculty, and students, and the accomplishments and activities of our alumni.

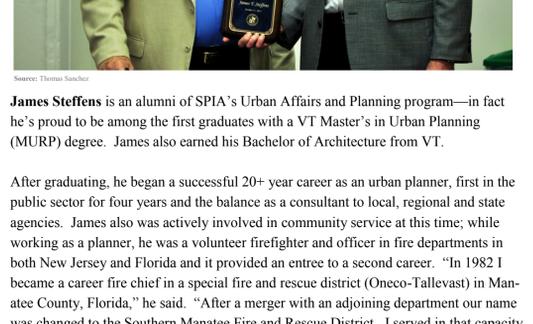
I hope you enjoy reading about the people and activities of SPIA. Look for our next edition of SPIA On-Line in a few months! To subscribe for updates, please click on this link. We look forward to your feedback and suggestions!

All the best, Anne

Anne M. Khademian
Director
School of Public and International Affairs
College of Architecture and Urban Studies
Virginia Tech

Alumni Profile: James Steffens

By Beth Offenbacher



James Steffens is an alumni of SPIA's Urban Affairs and Planning program—in fact he's proud to be among the first graduates with a VT Master's in Urban Planning (MURP) degree. James also earned his Bachelor of Architecture from VT.

After graduating, he began a successful 20+ year career as an urban planner, first in the public sector for four years and the balance as a consultant to local, regional and state agencies. James also was actively involved in community service at this time; while working as a planner, he was a volunteer firefighter and officer in fire departments in both New Jersey and Florida and it provided an entree to a second career. "In 1982 I became a career fire chief in a special fire and rescue district (Oneco-Tallevast) in Manatee County, Florida," he said. "After a merger with an adjoining department our name was changed to the Southern Manatee Fire and Rescue District. I served in that capacity until 1992 when I retired and expanded my consulting operation for fire and emergency service agencies into a full time operation."

In addition to expanding his consulting efforts, James taught at the National Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, MD, focusing on the Executive Fire Officer and Management Science curricula. Although he has curtailed his teaching with NFA in recent years, he still is a full-time consultant at The JTS Association, Inc., which provides managerial, organizational, and training assistance to emergency service agencies both in the US and internationally.

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