
Virginia Tech Institute for Policy & Governance

Quarterly Newsletter

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**From the Director: Tidings Quarterly Reflection:
Learning from Appalachia**



Max Stephenson
Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy
and Governance

One of the privileges we enjoyed at the Institute this past year was working with leaders and citizens of two small middle-Appalachia communities, Pennington Gap, Virginia and Montgomery, West Virginia, as they sought to chart a future course. Both towns are small—approximately 2,000 or so individuals live in each—and both have experienced catastrophic economic decline in recent years. In the case of Pennington Gap, that has come in the guise of the continuing decay of the coal mining industry as a result of mechanization, competition from natural gas, changing markets due to new demand patterns arising from environmental concerns and the fact that much of the easiest to obtain and highest quality Appalachian coal has already been mined. In addition, this small Lee County community has witnessed the waning of the tobacco industry, previously an agricultural mainstay and high value crop.

Montgomery, meanwhile, has also suffered the closure of the coal mines near it that had long ensured its prosperity and this past year lost another foundation with closure of its branch location of West Virginia Tech. Montgomery's branch of that 4-year public higher education institution had been home to some 1,700 students

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Acknowledgements & Accomplishments

On December 8, 2017, **Vanessa Guerra M** passed her proposal defense. She is pursuing a PhD in Environmental Design and Planning (EDP) in the **College of Architecture and Urban Studies**. Her proposal was titled "Analysis of the Resilient Characteristics of Quito's Informal Car-Share (ICS)". Her committee includes: Dr. Tripp Shealy, (VCEMP) Chair, Dr. Thomas Skuzinski, (SPIA), Dr. Max Stephenson, (SPIA) and Dr. Jennifr Day, (University of Melbourne).

Neda Moayerian (PGG) passed her Prelim defense on Monday, November 27. She is ready to advance to the next stage of the PhD program, Proposal Defense. Her Doctoral advisory committee members are: Kwame Harrison (Sociology), Nancy McGhee (Tourism and Hospitality Management), Laura Zanotti (Political Science) and chair, Max Stephenson (Professor of Public and International Affairs and Director of the Institute for Policy and Governance). Congratulations Neda!

Danny White, PGG PhD candidate, passed his proposal defense on Monday, November 13, 2017. The title of his dissertation is: "Sport and Social Capital: Perceptions of Civil Society Organizations in Kigali, Rwanda". His committee includes: Chair, Max Stephenson (Director of IPG), David Kniola (Professor School of Education), John Dooley (CEO of Virginia Tech Foundation), and Jocelyn Widmer (Director for OnlineDegree Programs at U of Florida). Congratulations Danny and best wishes as you progress through the next phase of your PhD work.

It is with great pleasure that the committee for **Lorien MacAuley** announced the successful completion of her dissertation defense today. The title of her dissertation was "On Farm Apprenticeships: Labor Identities and Social Reproduction within Alternative Agri-food Movements". Her committee included: Dr. Kim Niewolny (Chairman) (Professor ALCE), Dr. Thomas Archibald (ALCE), Dr.

Acknowledgements & Accomplishments

Kwame Harrison, (Sociology), Dr. Max Stephenson, (Director IPG).

Congratulations to Dr. Lorien MacAuley for an excellent research project, documentation and presentation!

Kristin Kirk, PhD student in Planning, Globalization and Governance, passed her Prelim on November 17, 2017. Her committee included: Dr. Max Stephenson (Chairman) (IPG), Tom Sanchaz (SPIA), Alan Abrams (Business), Jason Kelly (Political Science) and Christopher Zobel (Business). She also had three articles (related to her research) published. The publications are The International Journal Journal

of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing, Nonprofit Management and Leadership and the Journal of Computer Information Systems. The series empirically examines how nonprofits utilize website technologies, both in an emerging market, Thailand, and in the United States, and question whether there is a framework that can analyze nonprofit websites for quality or benchmarking purposes. The research not only describes the current use, but also builds and analyzes a framework based on a stage model theory. This framework is subsequently tested against a commercial assessment tool to assess how these two evaluation tools relate to each other.

News and Events

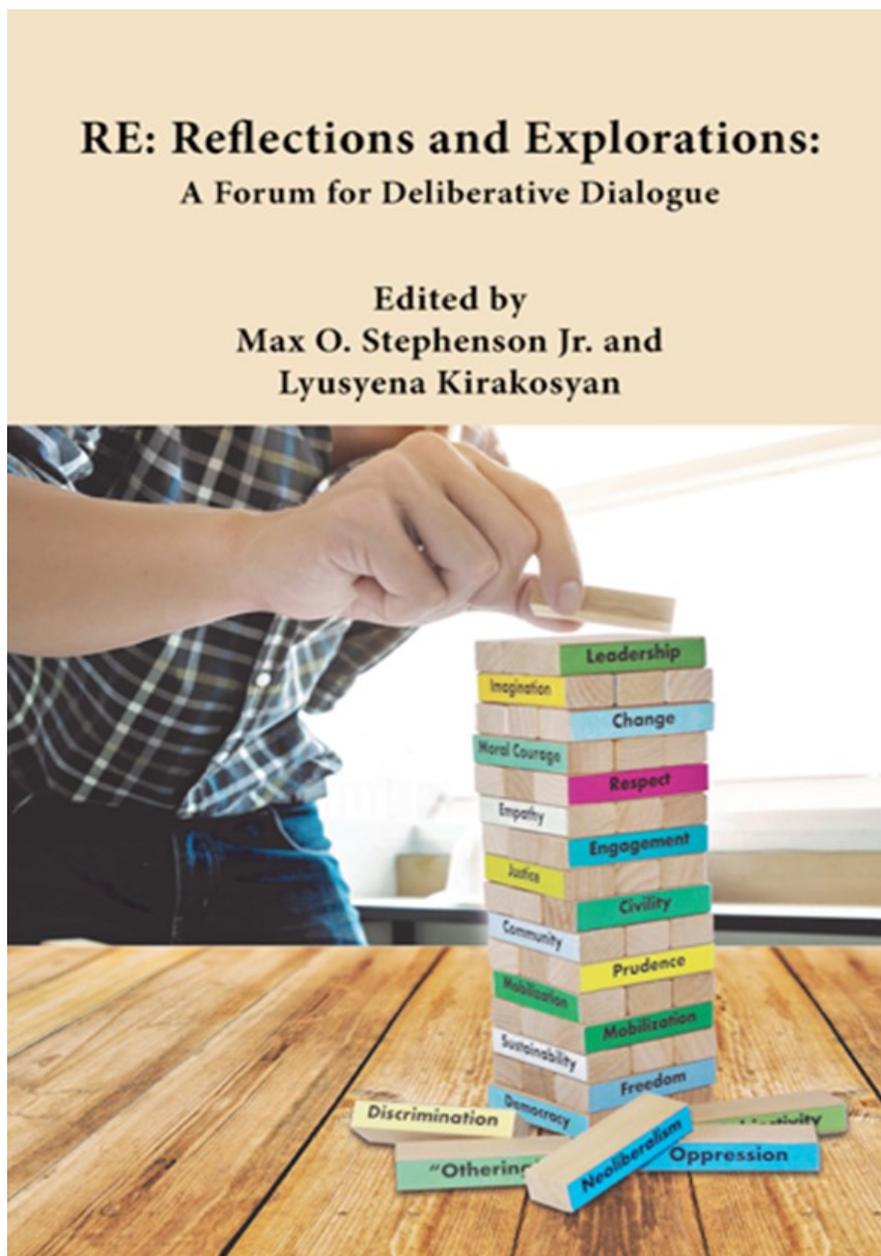


Yunyun Chen and her husband Xiaoyi are happy to announce the birth of the son, Hongkun. He was born on October 25, 2017. The name Hongkun was chosen for him by his elder brother, Hongyi, from the names Yunyun and her husband had prepared. Hongyi loves his little brother :-) as evidenced by the picture. The name of Kun comes from the great mountain named KunLun in China, Hong means deep water, Hongkun also includes the meaning from a famous saying of Confucius, “The wise love water, benevolent prefer the mountain”. Congratulations Yunyun and family!

News and Events (continued)

Colleagues and friends, I am delighted to inform you that the second volume in the *RE: Reflections and Explorations* series has now been published. You may find an electronic version of this new book, edited by myself and Lyusyena Kirakosyan here: <http://doi.org/10.21061/vtipg.re.v2>. We will be holding a reception to celebrate this occasion in early February and will send along notice of that event in due course.

Best wishes, Max



IPG 2017 Holiday Party



IPG held its annual Holiday Party on December 1st from 11:30-1:30 at the Alexander Black House. The IPG Faculty and Staff (pictured above right) prepared a lot of the food. Dr. Max Stephenson, Director of IPG, said a few words of welcome and he announced that he had completed his 250th Soundings Commentary (published on Dec 4th) and the forthcoming publication of the new Volume II of *Re: Reflections and Explorations* essays, published on December 15th ! Richard Blythe, Dean of CAUS also said a few words about the strate-

gic direction of the College and University and how the School of Public and international Affairs and the Institute were integral to their realization. He indicated he believed the College was well poised to extend and deepen its already substantial national and international reputation and that he looked forward to working with the Institute to realize that aspiration.

(picture top left) Max Stephenson (left) and Richard Blythe (right).

Below are some of the younger attendees: Maya Berinzon with her children Isaac and Ada



News and Events - (continued)

Reflections on Peace Corps Service in Nepal



My name is Garland Mason and my partner Ollie and I are about 18 months into our 24 months of work at our permanent site in Nepal. We are living in a small room made of mud and stone in Thapathana, in Parbat District, in the Western Development Region. Our town is just about exactly at the center of the country. The room is part of the family compound of our host mother and father. Their children have all moved to the city or are working abroad, and so it is just them, their nine-year old grandson, Sujan, and us. The community we live in is made up primarily of people belonging to the Magar ethnic minority and people of the Dalit caste (formerly known as the 'untouchable caste'). Our community is almost entirely Hindu and everyone here speaks Nepali as their first language.

We began our work with a major oyster mushroom cultivation project. That effort helped us establish our legitimacy and integrate into the community. In the spring, I organized a six-day leadership training workshop for young women. The program included discussions of women's and children's rights, their right to education and healthcare, and how to assert those rights. We also had trainings on compassion, relaxation, coping with traumatic events, understanding mental illness and how to access mental health resources. Participants learned about women's health, sexual health, menstrual hygiene, contraception and nutrition. I sought to weave an emphasis on critical and creative thinking throughout. Since the training, participants have gone to women's groups meetings throughout the community to share what they have learned.

Another of our projects has centered on genetic improvement in goats. Last spring I was invited to attend a ten-day training on artificial insemination for goats organized by Winrock International. I served as a translator and cultural interpreter for the American presenter and learned about ways intensive management of, and genetic improvement in, goats may be applied within the Nepali context. That experience allowed Ollie and me to apply for a grant from USAID to support genetic improvement in goats in our community. In September, we organized a two-day training on intensive management and genetic improvement and more than 40 people attended each day. In the coming months, we will introduce boer and saanen cross bred goats to our

News and Events - (continued)

community through the use of artificial insemination.

I also serve on the project advisory committee for Peace Corps Nepal. As a member of the committee I assist that organization's staff in adapting project frameworks and goals to reflect as strongly as possible the work Peace Corps volunteers do in Nepal. I help staff evaluate the trainings they carry out, and generally work to help the Corps' overall program run effectively and efficiently. Serving on this committee has been a major source of fulfillment during my service, as work in the community is always fraught with one complication or another.

As I noted above, we have about six months left in our tenure here. In that time, we hope to host a multi-day agriculture training for youth at a government research farm and I will organize another leadership camp for young women this spring. We will also continue working with the goat farmers in our community to help them improve their practices and we have already started getting requests for mushroom trainings as that season approaches.

We have a few weeks of vacation saved up. In December Dana Hogg and Amy Vu (fellow VT ALCE grads) will come visit us here. In January, a former colleague from Green Mountain College is bringing his students here for a cultural anthropology course and we are looking forward to hosting about 20 students from that institution in our community for a couple of days.

As I anticipated, Peace Corps has been an incredible learning experience. It has given me the opportunity to examine my assumptions and evaluate my practices. In particular, I have had to make more compromises in my approaches to development work, and as a result, I think I will emerge with a more realistic perspective on participation and participatory approaches. As a volunteer, I have had the opportunity to experience concepts of development, inequality and social justice that I had previously only read about in academic texts. I am still astounded, and at times experience disbelief at the poverty and injustices exhibited here. And it seems that I am always grappling with my privilege in new ways. Sometimes when I become motion sick on an impossibly crowded bus rattling down a potholed dirt road, I think of how nice it will be to return to the US and drive a car from one place to another, with air conditioning and my own choice of music on the radio, and then I catch myself and consider the immensity of the privilege encapsulated in that thought. I am daily grateful, because as challenging as this experience has been, I know I will emerge from it a more tolerant and patient person with a redoubled motivation to serve as an agent of social change.

News and Events (continued)

Max Stephenson is a member of a new Interdisciplinary Research Team Addressing Aging Friendly Community Policies

VTIPG Director Max Stephenson is a member of an interdisciplinary research team recently selected by the Institute for Society, Culture and the Environment at Virginia Tech for a Policy Strategic Growth Area Planning Grant. The group also includes Eunju Hwang of the Department of Apparel, Housing and Resource Management, Nancy Brossole of the Center for Gerontology and Susan Chen of the Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics. The team will investigate the conditions and capacities necessary for rural communities to engage in aging friendly policies and to evaluate their impacts effectively.



Conference & Print Representation

CityWorks (X)po was held at the Historic Grandin Village in Roanoke Va on Oct 5-7, 2017. The event was a place for a national idea exchange and festival conference for anyone who is passionate about the work of placemaking and creating stronger communities. The Institute for Policy and Governance and Community Voices was well represented with **Vanessa Guerra M** as one of the presenters and three members selected to be Fellows. The Fellows were PhD students: **Lorien MacAuley(ALCE)**, **Lara Nagle(MURP)**, and **Neda Moyerian(PGG)**.

Vanessa's presentation was titled: "Beyond Informality: A new approach to inclusive cities". She pointed out that as cities deal with the effects of climate change and population

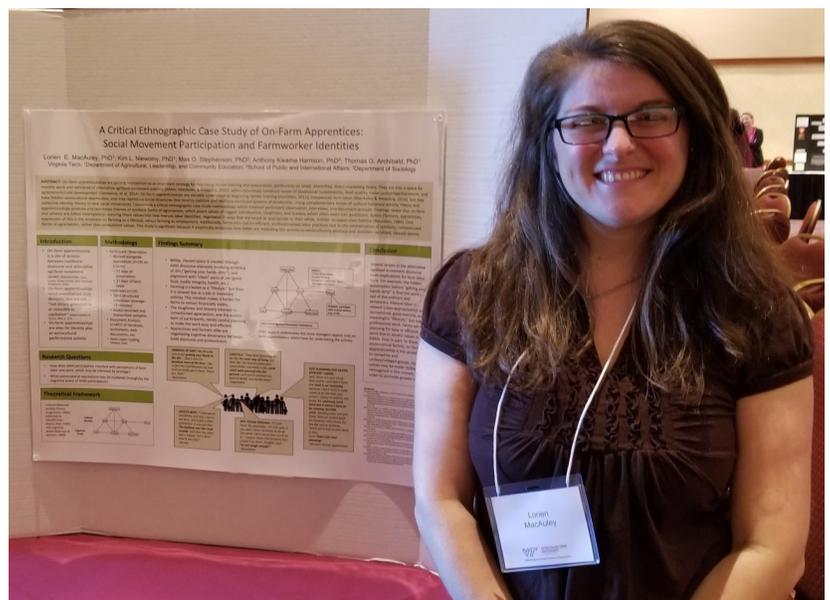
growth, informal practices have become more common over the years. Although these practices are often stereotyped as urban mistakes, acknowledging the potential of the informal sector, and paying attention to what we can learn from it, could lead to the start of a new approach to alleviate poverty, empower isolated communities, and promote sustainable development.

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Neda Moayerian and Max Stephenson Jr had their proposal accepted for the 2018 Appalachian Studies Association Conference. The conference will be held at the Millennium Hotel, April 5-8, in Cincinnati, Ohio. The article title is "Exploring the Connections between Community Cultural Development and Sustainable Tourism in Appalachia".

Conference & Print Representation (Continued)

The Advancing the Human Condition Symposium, an Initiative of Beyond Boundaries and The Equity and Social Disparity in the Human Condition Strategic Growth Area was held on November 28 - 30th at the Inn at VT. Max Stephenson was a discussant for the session on *Story Making as Cultural Work: Exploring Ontological Politics and Social Change in Communities of Struggle*. Christian Matheis was a panel member for the session, *Interrogating what is meant by "Advancing the Human Condition"*. Sara Mattingly-Jordan was a discussant for the panel *Ethics and Engineering* and David Bieri, Ralph Hall, Max Stephenson and Christian Matheis were all participants in the session, *The Beloved Community Initiative: Advancing the Human Condition through Inclusive, Sustainable Economics*. This session was organized jointly by the Beloved Community Initiative and the Policy Strategic Growth Area. There were many panels and discussions throughout both days.

In addition, part of this event included "Emerging Research on the Human Condition: Graduate Student Poster Exhibit". Laura Nelson (pictured left), who is a Project Associate at IPG and a PhD candidate in the Human Development and Family Science Department, presented her poster titled: "Parenting Obstacles for Women with a Substance Use Disorder: Mothers and Service Providers' Perspectives". Dr. Lorien MacAuley (pictured right), recently received her PhD in Agriculture, Leadership and Community Education and is a Community Voices member, also presented. She based her poster on her dissertation; "A Critical Ethnographic Case Study of On-Farm Apprentices: Social Movement Participation and Farmworker Identities".



IPG Project Updates

Envisioning Community Change Possibilities with Montgomery, West Virginia

By Lara Nagle

Masters of Urban and Regional Planning Program

On November 20, we traveled as a team representing the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance and the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development to Montgomery, West Virginia, to present a community development update and written report to town leadership and a working group of interested stakeholders.

The City of Montgomery has experienced the decline of the coal, timber, and railroad industries firsthand and must now redefine its economy to bolster the livelihood of the community. Stakeholders have organized to assess the situation and design a comprehensive plan. Our team from Virginia Tech supported this process first by conducting Montgomery listening sessions in August, where residents identified strengths and challenges endemic to their community, and future visions.

Subsequently in the next few months, we drafted a report to capture the findings from this session, drawing as well from past records of community visioning such as the “Across the Bridge” Montgomery Study Circles completed in 2015. We then analyzed the findings, incorporating case studies, literature, and a variety of resources to provide community development opportunities for Montgomery to consider in the short- and long-term. In particular, we assembled a menu of community action steps in areas such as health, recreation, arts and culture, building physical capacity, and economic development, to promote quality of life improvements for residents.

Following the stakeholder working group session and review of the report on November 20, we shared highlights from the report to the public. The Mayor also presented us with “keys to success” from the City of Montgomery – quite an honor and hopefully a promise of future collaboration.

The Institute Studies the Needs and Possibilities now Characterizing Pennington Gap, Virginia

By Neda Moayerian

PGG PhD program

Located in southwest Virginia, Pennington Gap, a town of roughly 1,800 residents, has been struggling with many socioeconomic issues arising with the decline of coal mining and tobacco production as its two main economic pillars. Similar to many other small towns in the Appalachian region, Pennington Gap now suffers from a relatively high unemployment rate, an opioid crisis among a share of its residents and problems with service/infrastructure provision due to its high level of poverty and continuing population decline.

IPG Project Updates (continued)

While coal mines and tobacco fields no longer serve as primary sources of income in Appalachian towns, popular service industries (e.g. tourism) have not been successful in bringing back previous employment or income levels. In spring and summer 2017 the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) worked with town council members and civic leaders in Pennington Gap to imagine a new future for their community, based on the assets and opportunities of the community.

On August 8th, the Virginia Tech team held a listening session at Pennington Gap's Town Hall and two workshops in its community center to gain a better understanding of the problems, assets and opportunities of the town from its council members, community leaders, residents, business owners, local artists and other stakeholders. During the workshops, the VT team asked the participants what should change in Pennington Gap to make it a livelier place for current and future residents. Afterwards, through group discussions and voting, participants established community priorities for future steps in and a volunteer working group for implementing the projects defined.



The Virginia Tech team identified three peer communities (Elkhorn City, KY; St. Paul, VA; and Clifton Forge, VA) that could provide examples of development initiatives similar to those identified as important by Pennington Gap residents and leaders. The VTIPG team offered an array of possible approaches and strategies for the community's consideration, organized into five major themes: health and education, recreation, arts and culture, physical capacity building and community development. The team specifically focused on providing information about diverse resources (e.g. grants) and partnerships which could be beneficial for realizing change projects in Pennington Gap.

On December 4th, during a second meeting with town council members and other residents and stakeholders, the Institute team and a Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development staff member presented and shared their findings concerning potential steps Pennington Gap residents may consider as they chart their collective future. The VTIPG team will design a workshop in early 2018 to facilitate the process of forming working groups within the community, in order to define, implement and sustain development projects in Pennington Gap.

IPG Project Updates (continued)

The Institute serves as a member of the SPIA-Led 'Beloved Community Initiative'

VTIPG Director Max Stephenson is working closely with project leaders SPIA Professors Ralph Hall and (School Director) Anne Khademian on an effort to explore the implications of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr's vision (the Beloved Community) of an America characterized by justice, equality and opportunity for all of its citizens during a time when such aims are under wholesale attack by some in our society. These individuals and an interdisciplinary group of additional VT faculty members working with them are developing this effort in partnership with faculty from Virginia Union University (VUU) and with Dr. Virgil Wood. Dr. Wood, who is serving as a SPIA Richardson Fellow this year, was a long-time colleague and collaborator of Dr. King and has worked tirelessly for decades for social justice. Dr. Wood and the VT-VUU team have designed and launched an essay competition for Virginia high school students featuring pairs of individuals in-

IPG Sponsored Program Updates

David Moore and Mary Beth Dunkenberger continue providing technical assistance and research capacity to support regional employment efforts. In partnership with Total Action for Progress (TAP) and New River Community Action David's continues to manage the SwiftStart program that serves the Roanoke and New River Valleys with employment system navigation support, facilitation of childcare and obtaining credentials necessary to targeted career paths. The primary goal of Swift Start is to help parents advance in employment.

Mary Beth continues a second year of advising the New River Valley Pathways to Employment program, an employment advancement program for individuals participating in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Pathways to Employment is operated by New River Valley Community Services in collaboration with the local department of social services. Pathways to Employment provides intensive job readiness services that are informed by assessments to identify individual strengths, as well as barriers to employment. Current efforts are focused on the exploration and development of community based supported employment enterprise opportunities that prepare individuals for skilled and living-wage occupations.

Mary Beth Dunkenberger and Liz Allen are working with Montgomery County Department of Social Services to conduct an assessment of the county's Children's Services Act (CSA) program to explain the programmatic, administrative and socioeconomic dynamics that have impacted CSA expenditures and caseloads over the past decade. The research is intended as a pilot effort that may be expanded to a multijurisdictional research effort.



COMMUNITY VOICES

ideas for change • ideas that matter

The Community Voices team is comprised of graduate students, faculty and community members. The team meets each Tuesday at 11 AM at the IPG conference room . They discuss current issues, articles and books of interest. The Community Voices also has a speaker series each semester highlight community leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs working and learning how to engage community in ways that transform creativity into action for change. To date the group has sponsored 42 such events.

Community Voices Fall Series Recap

On October 30th Community Voices presented Amy Brooks, the Program Director and Dramaturg for Roadside Theater; a part of Appalshop of Whitesburg, Kentucky.

Brooks presented a talk speaking to the question: “How can we organize for change together in this moment when we barely seem to inhabit the same planet...much less the same neighborhood, region or country?”

She addressed how the arts and culture may be employed to encourage more equitable development. Amy invited Victoria Ferguson, an elder from the Monacan Nation in Amherst County, to share some thoughts on the traditions of the Monacan people; original inhabitants of the area that is now Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. Ferguson also blessed the event.



Amy Brooks (center) pictured with podcast interviewers Neda Morikawa (PGG) (left) and Vanessa Guerra M (PGG) (right)

Brooks talk was sponsored by: The American Indian and Indigenous Community Center, the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education and the Institute for Policy and Governance sponsored the talk. A Recording of this event may be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikawa/community-voices-amy-brooks-podcast-2017-10-30>

The second Community Voices event of the fall semester occurred on November 6th and featured co-speakers Carolyn Zelikow and Brad Stephens.

Carolyn Zelikow is the Associate Director of National Programs, The Aspen Institute and Program Director and Founder of the Hometown Summit, Tom Tom Founders Festival. Hometown Summit, a forum to advance resilience and thriving in America's small cities launched in April 2017 with more than 450 participants from more than 75 cities.



Brad (front left) and Carolyn (front right) were interviewed for a recorded podcast by Vera Smirnova (PGG)(back left) and Sarah Lyon-Hill (PGG) (back right)

Brad Stephens serves as Director of CoLab in Roanoke and Lead Planner of CityWorks (X)po. He has spent the past several years helping foster the growth of the social change and entrepreneurship community in Roanoke and building innovative community solutions to the region's most pressing challenges. he is always looking for new community development projects that can help improve the places we call home.

The title of their talk was “Exploring the Dynamics of Community.” Each guest described their view of social change and addressed what they took to be the most significant factors that mediate such possibilities.



An interview style forum was used and lead by D'Elia Chandler (pictured right). A recording of this event can be found at: <https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikawa/community-voices-brad-stephens-and-carolyn-zelikow-evening-talk>

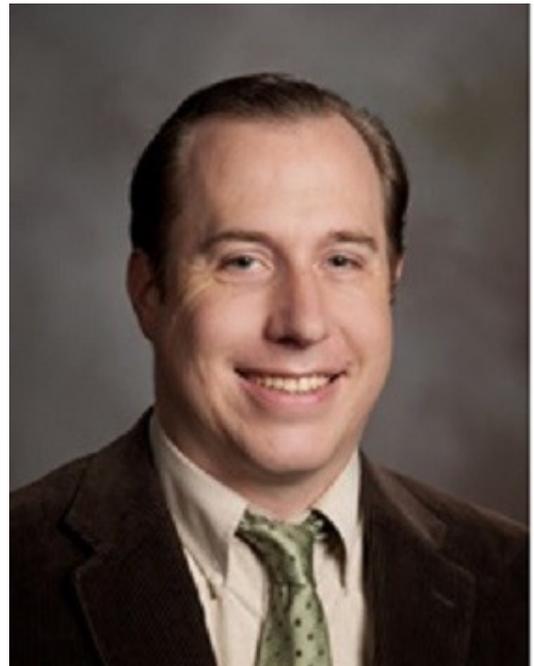
Spring Series—AMY GOLDSTEIN

Community Voices is excited to announce Amy Goldstein as our next speaker. Amy is a two-time Pulitzer winning *Washington Post* journalist and recent author of *Janesville: An American Story*, and she has agreed to speak in the IPG Community Voices series on February 19th.

Faculty Spotlight: Thomas Archibald

Dr. Thomas Archibald joined Virginia Tech in 2013 as an Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. From 2015-2017, he and his family were based in Dakar, Senegal, where he served as the Director of Virginia Tech's USAID/Education and Research in Agriculture project in Senegal.

Tom's research and practice focus on program planning and evaluation in community education. More specifically, he is interested in three overlapping areas of inquiry: (1) Evaluation capacity building (ECB) and evaluative thinking; (2) Evidence-based programs, evidence-based practices, and translational research for



research-practice integration; and (3) Participatory and collaborative research and evaluation. Throughout all three areas, his work is informed by a cross-cutting focus on issues of power, participation, epistemology, and methodology. He believes that participatory, collaborative, community-engaged approaches to non-formal education, research, and community development—all of which are characterized by a sensitivity to epistemological politics—can help advance social justice.

In the domain of ECB, he seeks to strengthen the capacity of educators and other community development practitioners to evaluate their programs. Working with Virginia Cooperative Extension and other community development agencies in the U.S. and in numerous African countries, his goal is to encourage a culture of evaluative thinking, which in turn can yield better learning, adaptive management, and development outcomes.

In his focus on research-practice integration, Tom has examined the practices involved in “bridging the research-practice gap.” Some dominant approaches emphasize “evidence-based programs,” in which “evidence” refers only to that which is produced through a randomized controlled trial (RCT). His research offers new perspectives on the politics of knowledge that enact and are enacted by the “evidence-based” movements.

Tom is excited to have the opportunity to continue to work on positive youth development, social entrepreneurship, and community development in Senegal—he leads a team of colleagues who

Faculty Spotlight: Thomas Archibald

were recently awarded \$4 million from USAID to increase youth engagement in Senegal's economic growth. More specifically, this project will build the capacity and support the institutionalization of sustainable positive youth development and vocational training systems that create dynamic and profitable entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for youth—focusing especially on agricultural value chains and markets.

Very active in service to the field of program evaluation, Tom is on the Editorial Board of *New Directions for Evaluation*, serves on the Board of Directors of the Eastern Evaluation Research Society, and is a Program Co-Chair of the Organizational Learning and Evaluation Capacity Building Topical Interest Group of the American Evaluation Association (AEA). He is a recipient of the 2017 AEA Marcia Guttentag Promising New Evaluator Award, the highest early career award in his field. He earned his Ph.D. from Cornell University in 2013, where he was a Gradu-

Student Spotlight: Laura Nelson



Prior to moving to Blacksburg, Virginia, **Laura Nelson** called the Poconos in Pennsylvania her home. In 2012, she graduated from Shippensburg University with her B.S. in Biology and moved to Blacksburg to pursue a M.S. in Animal and Poultry Science. She loved the opportunities and education I received during my M.S., but she kept returning to the same question: how was her work going to help those outside her immediate orbit? Realizing how important this question was, made her reevaluate her academic trajectory and she made the decision to pursue a Master in Public Health degree at Virginia Tech after defending my M.S. thesis.

Throughout her MPH, she was afforded amazing opportunities to be in the community working

Student Spotlight: Laura Nelson

(continued)

with stakeholders on real community issues. She has helped develop family programming evaluation plans, assessed healthy family programs, and worked on radon and clean water testing across Southwest Virginia. In the first year of her public health degree, she was also an AmeriCorps volunteer with the American Red Cross where we engaged community members on emergency preparedness strategies and fire prevention across Southwest Virginia. Finally, she was able to answer that niggling question in a way that felt meaningful.

It was during her MPH that she was connected with the amazing faculty and researchers at the Institute for Policy and Governance and was given the opportunity to work on a project surrounding prenatal substance use and neonatal abstinence syndrome with a research team at IPG. Little did she know that this work would turn into her academic passion and she would continue to find opportunities with the community to pursue this work. Her research team helped to develop educational tools for mothers with substance use disorders to help them engage in their recovery. Additionally, they worked with community agencies and medical providers to increase cultural awareness and competency for the community they serve.

In 2016, she graduated from the Virginia Tech MPH program with a concentration in both infectious disease and community health education. In order to continue the substance use work, she entered into a PhD in Human Development and Family Science at Virginia Tech. In her PhD research, she has been exploring the unique parenting obstacles mothers with a substance use disorder may face while seeking treatment and hope to continue exploring, from a gendered approach, how the interactions between their social networks, children, and parenting responsibilities are implicated in their treatment and recovery. Her aspiration post PhD is to be in a position where she can help to bridge the gaps between academia and the community to build better interventions through a more evidenced based approach that incorporates the voices of women and mothers in their own intervention, as they truly know their own experiences best.

Max Stephenson's Tidings (continued)

per year and its faculty and employees and their earnings had all helped to support the community's economy. The continued decline of mining alongside the loss of this stable source of employment and retail support has created a cascading series of negative effects for the town.

As a consequence of these trends, which were not created by the residents of these communities, both jurisdictions are now confronting high poverty rates in their remaining populations, decaying private and public infrastructure, a crisis of opioid addiction among a share of their citizens with the attendant difficulties that trend suggests and an outward migration of their young people. Moreover, both are witnessing the steady erosion of their public schools as institutional bastions as enrollment falters and locations close.

Our role as we worked with public and civic leaders from both communities was to help them understand better the character of their challenges and to work with them and with interested citizens to chart a course forward that mirrored the hopes and values of their populations. This process was somewhat different for each community, given the particular assets and ongoing efforts of each, but Institute staff, faculty and graduate students, with the assistance of colleagues from the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development, sought to help the two communities identify their preferred paths and possibilities themselves, rather than to suggest we could or should do so. The leaders of both towns told us that our efforts were very helpful to the major stakeholders of their communities, and that each community now has the information to allow it to pose tradeoffs and consider possible steps to address its circumstances thoughtfully. That is, we helped these town officials and citizens grasp more fully their contextual environments and consider possible ways they might proceed, given the realities and vicissitudes of the conditions they now confront. Our aim was never to tell them what to do, but instead to seek to help them identify alternatives concerning how they might wish to proceed and why.

Reflecting on our work with Pennington Gap and Montgomery, I want to highlight some of the exogenous forces that have shaped and will continue to structure the futures of these two Appalachian communities. Some are historical, others are related to changing market conditions and others have arisen on the basis of how some elements of our political system has reacted to the shaping trends that have placed these communities in the parlous state they now confront. I outline these here, but I recognize that each could easily merit a separate and more detailed analysis of its own and many more items could be added to this list.

- These communities came to exist historically in economic terms because they were located near rivers and rich natural resources, especially coal. For decades, coal provided stable employment for their citizens and more; the income it produced sustained the livelihood and tax base of both towns more generally. That is, these small communities are located where they are so that entrepreneurs could exploit the natural resources located near each to serve the energy and, to a lesser degree in the case of Pennington Gap, the personal consumer demands of a burgeoning nation. This was true into the 1960s, but mining technologies had already become more mechanized, the health dangers of tobacco use had become more widely known and external market conditions had begun to shift markedly during that decade and that pace only quickened in the 1970s and thereafter, resulting in falling employment in these sectors across Appalachia. Today, neither community can call coal mining a principal employer for its remaining population and the leaders of neither town are looking to resource extraction related employment to secure their citizenry's futures.
- The vexing basic question this reality raises, given the fact that the United States economy is

Max Stephenson's Tidings (continued)

driven to so large an extent by autonomous market actors seeking to maximize returns on their investments, is whether these towns can now redefine themselves in a fashion that market actors and consumers in their broader regional economies will support. In this, their small size and difficult straits make their challenge more arduous than it might otherwise be by removing much margin for error and by sharply limiting the resources available to pursue such repositioning. This is to say nothing ill about these leaders or citizens or their characters or capacities, but instead to point up the overwhelming significance of the market dominated realities of the economy in which they must operate. As Nobel Laureate economist Paul Krugman observed recently when examining the regenerative potential of (much larger) small cities (e.g., Rochester, New York with its 210,000 residents):

... If you back up enough it makes sense to think of urban destinies as a random process of wins and losses in which small cities face a relatively high likelihood of gambler's ruin.

... It's going to be an uphill struggle [to maintain the viability of small cities]. In the modern economy, which has cut loose from the land, any particular small city exists only because of historical contingency that sooner or later loses its relevance.

- This difficulty is exacerbated by the challenge that many voters in these communities have known no other way of life than that which coal and, to a lesser degree, tobacco production provided. In such a circumstance and given how quickly that known way of life has evaporated, many citizens in both of the towns with which we worked understandably continue to hope that the coal industry will return to its past vibrancy and that few changes in their ways of thinking and living in the world will be necessary as a result. In this, they have been encouraged by President Trump, who carried both localities by wide margins in the 2016 national election and has argued that coal's decline is the product of unfair foreign competition and undue regulation rather than any structural changes in the market for the commodity. There is no evidence to back this assertion, but many citizens have adopted Trump's stand as a coping mechanism and a way to maintain hope in a difficult situation. For present purposes, it must be said that this scenario makes it thorny politically for Montgomery and Pennington Gap political and civic leaders to seek change. More, it is not altogether implausible that an unwillingness to contemplate an alternative future could completely inhibit both communities from repositioning themselves for economic regeneration. The interested observer should always keep this possibility in mind and, should it occur, seek to understand why citizens chose that course.
- These towns, like many elsewhere across the nation, are confronting a rapidly changing economy during a period of strong vilification of government and governance among many in the nation. While individualism and suspicion of government are hardy perennials in the United States, the idea that public investment and governance itself are little but parasites in our political economy now dominates the perspective of many in the nation's leading political party, the GOP. And that is certainly the case in the regions in which Montgomery and Pennington Gap are located. In this circumstance and given that party's recent national tax action expected to create at least an additional \$1 trillion deficit in federal funding during the next decade, it may be difficult for these towns to obtain the resources necessary to develop the foundations on which to predicate any new vision. This economic and social reality may only

Max Stephenson's Tidings (continued)

reinforce the political difficulty the leaders of these Appalachian communities now confront.

None of this is to contend that these two towns will succeed or fail in their efforts. Like Krugman, I find that impossible to predict. What I can say is that all democratic social change is complex and dependent upon changing otherwise sticky ontological and epistemic assumptions among populations, who may elect to ignore pleas to do so. In the present case, that fact is exacerbated by the reality that the residents of these Appalachian communities have been traumatized by rapid economic shifts in a very short time frame and have also been presented with political claims by national and state leaders that these changes can, in fact, be readily addressed or ignored. Some have heeded that assertion while others have abandoned all hope that positive change is possible; many of these are the drug addicted now so evident in these towns. Both groups make it more difficult for these community's leaders to build and maintain a political consensus for change with others who see the need for such action.

Finally, I can also conclude that all of us engaged in this effort came away from our involvement with the citizens and leaders of both communities with profound respect for the resourcefulness, intelligence, determination and grace with which they are seeking to address the changed circumstances of their towns. If anyone can overcome the difficulties now confronting Montgomery and Pennington Gap, these leaders and their citizens will surely do so. Of that I have no doubt.

Notes

Krugman, Paul. "The Gambler's Ruin of Small Cities (Wonkish)," *The New York Times*, December 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/30/opinion/the-gamblers-ruin-of-small-cities-wonkish.html> Accessed December 30, 2017.



Commentaries & Essays

Soundings - a commentary from VTIPG Director **Max Stephenson**

December 4 - (Max's 250th Soundings Commentary!!) Fear and the Moral Imagination: The Oil and Water of Democratic Self-Governance (<http://soundings.spia.vt.edu/fear-and-the-moral-imagination-the-oil-and-water-of-democratic-self-governance/>)

November 19 - Reflections on Lincoln's Gettysburg Address at Thanksgiving (<http://soundings.spia.vt.edu/reflections-on-lincolns-gettysburg-address-at-thanksgiving/>)

November 6 – On Human Cruelty and Alterity (<http://soundings.spia.vt.edu/on-human-cruelty-and-alterity/>)

October 23 – Reflections on Capacity Building and Community Change (<http://soundings.spia.vt.edu/reflections-on-capacity-building-and-community-change/>)

October 9— Chilling Lessons from the Vietnam War Resonate Today (<http://soundings.spia.vt.edu/chilling-lessons-from-the-vietnam-war-resonate-today/>)

Tidings - a quarterly reflection from VTIPG Director Max Stephenson, now featured as the Director's Letter in our Quarterly Newsletters beginning October 2014.

RE: Reflections & Explorations - Online essay series hosted by VTIPG, written by graduate students across the University to reflect on their ongoing work in governance and policy related concerns.

November 16 - [Trade Agreements and Democracy](#), by Simone Franzi, (PGG PhD student).

November 13—: [Youth as a Social Construct](#), by Nada Berrada, PhD student, ASPECT.

November 2—[Strategic Use of Media in Mobilizing – Khunti Diaries](#), by Pallavi Raonka, PhD candidate, Sociology.

October 26—[“Disabled Femininities” in Paralympic Sport: Exploring the Narratives of Brazilian Female Paralympians](#)¹, by Guest Scholars Lyusyena Kirakosyan and Sam Geijer.

October 12—[Planning for Communication with Non-English Speakers in Disaster Situations](#), by Joanne Tang, Master student in Public Administration.

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