

## From the Director: *Tidings* Quarterly Reflection “Liberal Democracy Confronts a Winter of Discontent”

We track major trends with implications for governance here at the Institute and so have been most interested in one of the central puzzles of the 2016 presidential election campaign: the willingness of Donald Trump’s supporters to rationalize, shrug off or ignore his frequent violations of long-standing democratic norms, including his personally scandalous behavior and his refusal to share any information concerning his financial situation. Trump voters continued to support him despite his attacks on war heroes, his open misogyny and clear, if not overt, appeals to racism, and the fact that he was caught on tape bragging about his assaults on women. He also attacked his election opponents with schoolyard-style epithets in an unprecedented undermining of long accepted norms of civility in political campaigns. However strained election contests have become in the past, candidates felt obliged to honor those norms of respect and consideration. Trump ignored all pleas for decorum and civility. Meanwhile, his rhetoric was long on grandiose promises and short on details. His claims were also often ugly, particularly those that scapegoated immigrants for “stealing” American’s jobs and for costing U.S. citizens money for social support services. More, Trump openly and obviously lied, repeatedly, grossly overstating the level of crime in the United States as well as unemployment in the nation. He also assailed the international order the United States had labored with many other Western nations decades to create as “too expensive” and called for pulling back on American commitments



**Max Stephenson**

Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy & Governance

to the European Union and Japan and South Korea (among other nations) in the name of his isolationist “America First” position.

His supporters routinely explained this behavior as Trump’s effort to “talk straight” and to cut through “political correctness.” It was, in fact, no such thing, but instead an open attack on liberal democracy by exploiting the fears of those whose votes he set out to attract. One need not imagine that all of Trump’s supporters are racists or radical white nationalists to argue nonetheless that he ruthlessly took advantage of three broad and continuing

anxieties associated with deeper social and economic trends and realities to gain office:

- Economic anxiety resulting from ongoing globalization and workplace automation as well as relative wage stagnation, especially among white working class high school-educated voters
- Ethnic and racial anxiety arising from demographic shifts that have not yet seen whites lose their absolute position of numerical superiority in the population nationally, but that have nonetheless resulted in changes in the mix of demographic groups at state and local levels. Those shifts have raised concerns about the role of “others” in specific communities and it is those fears and perceptions that Trump exploited during the campaign with his scapegoating of immigrants
- Growing economic inequality between rural and urban populations, as a larger share of the nation’s GDP has come to be produced in the country’s principal metropolitan centers, leaving those residing in other areas feeling worse off in comparative terms and increasingly isolated and resentful.

If these concerns were central to Trump’s appeal for many voters, they were coupled with, and reinforced by, a broader trend in media communications and journalism that has found a major share of such outlets organizing, for some decades now, around specific audiences to secure revenues. Thus, we have the public ratings leader and very profitable Fox News, which has elected to pillory and demonize the Democratic Party and the idea of government in favor of the Republican Party and all things purportedly conservative, while MSNBC has taken a similar stance in favor of progressive causes and the Democratic Party. But, more importantly, this trend has allowed voters to sequester themselves and receive only specific forms of information that reinforce their existing dispositions, biases and norms. Thus, if 41 percent of GOP voters remained fallaciously convinced when responding to an August 2016 survey that former President Obama is not a citizen of the United States because their principal information outlets (and their now President) had often argued the same, they are unlikely to be dissuaded of their error by new information they obtain from the sources that had led them to adopt that view [1]. In addition, many media businesses today gain their audiences not simply from promoting specific ideological valences or beliefs, but also by actively campaigning against American institutions and political actors, irrespective of their stands, so as to garner listener and viewer outrage and thereby ratings and revenues.

These major shifts in media organization and the news industry and ongoing economic and demographic change have been accompanied by a continuing radicalization of the Republican Party, which has chosen not to support Americans dislocated by globalization, but instead to work to deny them health and other benefits and to press for additional tax cuts for the nation’s most wealthy. The upshot of the combined effects of these trends taken together has created an American citizenry that is “increasingly critical of liberal democracy itself.” [2] The percentage of millennials, for example, who believe that it is “essential” to live in a democracy has fallen to just 30 percent in recent polls [3]. Likewise, an October 2016 survey found that 46 percent of Americans responding reported that they had “never had” or had “lost” faith in United States democracy [4]. These beliefs allowed Trump to campaign against an ill-defined “corrupt establishment” and claim that only he could address citizen anxieties. As he did so, he challenged the nation’s most basic democratic norms, and he continues to do so. He also repeatedly warmly embraced Vladimir Putin and his corrupt autocratic government and even held the Russian up as a model of leadership. Trump’s supporters cheered him for doing so.

Trump’s willingness to lie to the public repeatedly concerning immigration and immigrants and crime

and his predecessor, among many other matters, points to a politics of social anxiety that

... uses the power of the majority to confront perceived or actual elites in the media, courts, and the civil service; disregards the rights of unpopular minorities; and attacks the institutional roadblocks such as independent courts as illegitimate impediments to the popular will [5].

President Trump's continuing attacks on the courts, immigrants and the free press neatly evoke the accuracy and timeliness of this argument.

If these signs are deeply concerning for the health and continued viability of America's long stable democracy, it is not immediately clear how they might be overcome. Consider the following current realities of our nation's politics:

- The House of Representatives is strongly gerrymandered along party lines and the leaders of the Republican majority in that body have made it clear they are not inclined to challenge President Trump so they can attain their primary agenda of rolling back health insurance for millions of Americans and providing tax reductions to the nation's most wealthy individuals. Gerrymandering has sharply polarized House members along partisan lines. All members are afraid to stray far from primary voters' perceptual orthodoxy, however detached from reality those perceptions may be, for fear of losing their electoral base. It is difficult in such circumstances to contemplate working with others across the political aisle.
- Trump supporters have also proven themselves to be energetically engaged in supporting the President by actively discounting and discountenancing information that contradicts their views of him and of world conditions. Experts have labeled this behavior "identity protective cognition." [6] Voters today also routinely engage with the views of media sources with which they already agree (confirmation bias) in order to gain their information concerning politics. The phenomena of identity protective cognition and confirmation bias together help to explain why so many Trump supporters were willing simply to ignore his aberrant behavior during the campaign and continue to support him, notwithstanding his often erratic behavior during his brief tenure in the White House.
- Finally, as noted above, many American voters are already disposed to support a "strong leader" to address their disquiet concerning continuing social and economic change, imagining that a more autocratic chief executive could "set matters right." This is, of course, precisely what Trump contended in his campaign: that he alone could secure needed change.

These realities suggest that reestablishing conditions in which Americans of all beliefs can reason together to address the shared challenges our society now confronts is unlikely to be easy. In any case, it will not simply be a matter of providing "the facts" to those "others" who do not understand, since so many are already ill disposed to listen to anyone with differing views. This said, in truth, there are few other options available to accomplish the goal of shared democratic deliberation, other than civil conversation, even as so many, including the President, attack that aspiration. In consequence, all of those wishing to counter the current negative trends undermining self-governance and democracy here in America and other liberal democracies must work harder than ever to listen carefully and to share information as clearly and frequently as necessary so all concerned can grapple with the trends now evident. For our part, we here at the Institute

will continue to pursue our research and outreach efforts with just such in mind. Indeed, the current trend toward the deconsolidation of democratic governance in the United States provides a compelling reminder of the vital role of universities in our national life. We hope to live up to that challenge here at VTIPG in what are sure to be difficult days and months ahead.



Max Stephenson Jr.  
Professor of Public and International Affairs  
Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy & Governance

## Notes

- [1] J. D. Durkin, "New Poll Shows that 41% of Republicans *Still* Don't Think Obama was Born in the U.S.," *Mediate*, August 11, 2016, <http://www.mediaite.com/online/new-poll-shows-that-41-of-republicans-still-dont-think-obama-was-born-in-the-u-s/>, Accessed March 8, 2017.
- [2] Robert S. Foa and Yascha Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), p.5.
- [3] Foa and Mounk, "The Signs of Deconsolidation," p.6.
- [4] Foa and Mounk, p.7.
- [5] Foa and Mounk, p. 13.
- [6] Dan Kahan, "'Fake News'-enh. 'Alternate Facts Presidency'-watch out!," Cultural Cognition Project at Yale Law School, February 20, 2017, <http://www.culturalcognition.net/blog/2017/2/20/fake-news-enh-alternative-facts-presidency-watch-out-talk-su.html>, Accessed March 3, 2017.

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## Opportunities

**Call for Proposals:** The 2017 APPAM Fall Research Conference, to be held November 2-4, 2017 in Chicago, IL is accepting proposals that emphasize the importance of measurement in public policy analysis, discuss how data is used to evaluate policy and performance, and demonstrate how different data or measures affect results. This year's conference theme is "Measurement Matters: Better Data for Better Decisions."

The deadline for submissions is **April 5, 2017**. For more details please visit:

<http://www.appam.org/events/fall-research-conference/events/2017fall-research-conference/>



**Call for Proposal Submissions** The Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) now is accepting workshop paper and panel proposals for presentation at its 30th Annual Meeting, organized by the Korean Academic Council on the United Nations System (KACUNS), to be held June 15–17, 2017 at Sookmyung Women's University, Seoul, Korea.

Applications are due **April 10, 2017**. Please find further details including submission guidelines here: <http://acuns.org/2017-annual-meeting-call-for-papers-and-submission-guidelines/>



**Call for Proposal Submissions** The Nonprofit Academic Center Council (NACC) has announced their 2017 Biennial Conference. The title of the conference is "Nonprofit and Philanthropy Parables and Cases: What We Learn from the Stories We Tell". The event will be held July 31- August 2, 2017 at Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. Topics for conversation include instruction, pedagogy, research and substantive issues in education and administration.

Proposals must be submitted for initial review by **April 28, 2017**. Proposals will be received and reviewed according to a rolling acceptance. Contributors will be notified if their proposal has been accepted within two weeks of their submission.

For more details please visit:

<http://www.nonprofit-academic-centers-council.org/nacc-biennial-conference-2017/>



<http://www.ipg.vt.edu/>

Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) builds strategic relationships between the university and community by linking academic research and outreach efforts to address significant public policy issues. VTIPG, a university level institute, was created to blend theory with practice by a variety of policy-related services.

## Conference & Print Representation

**Max Stephenson's** chapter *The Theory and Practice of International Humanitarian Relief Coordination* has been published in the [Palgrave Handbook of Inter-Organizational Relation in the World Politics](#). (2017).

**Max Stephenson's** recent review titled *Martin Barber, Blinded by Humanity: Inside the UN's Humanitarian Operations* has been published in VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations, [Vol. 28, Issue 1](#).

**Max Stephenson** and **Laura Zanotti** (Political Science; VTIPG Affiliated Faculty) had their [article Exploring the Intersection of Theory and Practice of Arts for Peacebuilding](#) published by the Global Society.

**Natalie Patterson** (MURP) had her paper accepted for presentation at this year's [Public Administration Theory Network Conference](#) to be held June 1-4, 2017 in Laramie, Wyoming. She will be presenting

on the findings of her thesis research titled *Creating Participatory Space Through Partnership*, which will look at a cohousing community and related ministry in North Carolina, and how the partnership between these organizations creates capacity and opportunity for individuals with disabilities to demonstrate democratic agency.

**Laura Zanotti** had her article entitled *Reorienting IR: Ontological Entanglement, Agency, and Ethics* published in International Studies Review, a quarterly peer-reviewed academic journal published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association.

**Max Stephenson** and **Laura Zanotti's** peer reviewed article *Sport, Peace and Development and Social Theory: An Overview* was published in Routledge Handbook on Sport, Peace and Development.

## Acknowledgements & Accomplishments

On February 25th **Mary Beth Keenan**, AmericCorps coordinator at IPG, and her husband, John departed for a service immersion trip to Peru. During a 10 week period they will live and serve in solidarity with the Sisters of Bon Secours and the people of the town of Huacho, in the Ancash Region of Peru. They will focus on understanding and witnessing the Peruvian way of life, while contributing to the ongoing work on water quality, sanitation, and youth development. They are the first North American young adults to make such a trip and hope to cultivate relationships and open the door for future trips.

**Max Stephenson** recently reviewed a round of proposals for The Japan Foundation [Center for Global Partnership](#). The Center for Global Partnership was established in 1991 to promote collaboration between the people of Japan, the United States, and beyond in order to address issues of global concern.



**Mary Beth Keenan and David Moore (VTIPG Senior Research Associate)**

# Upcoming Policy and Governance Related Events

**Monday, April 10, 2017**

12:00pm-1:00pm

Graduate Life Center, Room C

*The Independency of the International Civil Servant: A Duty or an Option?*

Returning Community Voices speaker **Francesco Manca** (Independent Political Analyst, Former (ret.) Deputy Director for the Political and Civil Affairs Office of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) will be on campus for a roundtable luncheon and discussion: *The Independency of the International Civil Servant: A Duty or an Option?*

**Monday, April 10, 2017**

5:30pm

Solitude Room | Inn at Virginia Tech

*Ecologies of Injustice*

Please join in on Monday, April 10th for *Ecologies of Injustice* -- a panel discussion hosted by The Global Forum on Urban and Regional Resilience.

This panel discussion brings together scholars at Virginia Tech whose work intersects the concerns of environmental justice, with community members, and interested individuals to increase our understanding of the diffuse ways that environmental injustice is experienced in our contemporary world. The conversation encompasses political, economic, social, and environmental factors that precipitate disproportionate exposure to environmental risk or access to resources and is designed to build bridges across the Virginia Tech campus and greater-Blacksburg community.

The topics addressed include: food justice and labor, technological domination, regulatory and legal frameworks, and artistic spaces for environmental resistance

Co-sponsors include: Office of International Research, Education, and Development; ASPECT; Department of History; Department of Political Science; Department of Science and Technology in Society; Environmental Coalition; Landscape Architecture Program; Coalition for Justice; School of Public and International Affairs; Department of Sociology; the Center for Leadership in Global Sustainability; the Office of Inclusion and Diversity; and the Institute for Society, Culture, and the Environment.

Please direct any questions to Jennifer Lawrence, [jennlaw@vt.edu](mailto:jennlaw@vt.edu) or 540-231-4458.

**Saturday, April 22, 2017**

9:00am-1:00pm

The Inn at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

*Employment Discrimination and Employment Practices*

This workshop - in collaboration with the Employment/Income Gap Issue Group of the Dialogue on Race - will address racial disparities in employment opportunities nationally and in Montgomery County



**January 25: Ramón Zepeda**  
*"Theater in the Fields"*

VTIPG-Community Voices hosted Ramón Zepeda, Program Director for Student Action with Farmworkers from Durham North Carolina, ). Originally from Jalisco, Mexico, Ramón shared his immigration story, his experience with labor organizing and his work using community-based theater with farmworkers. His inspirational presentations and radio interview addressed the capacity of the arts to enliven individuals' sense of agency and possibility and to seed conditions for social change, the complexities of immigration and farm work in the United States and the challenges of policy advocacy. SAF operates a paid summer internship program for bi-lingual students (in English and Spanish). To find out more information about Zepeda and SAF please visit <https://www.saf-unite.org/>.



**Ramón Zepeda, Anna Erwin (PGG), and Dr. Max Stephenson (Director, VTIPG)**

## February 21 Guest Speakers: Jeanette Abi-Nader and Kim Niewolny

Community Voices had the pleasure of hosting Jeanette Abi-Nader and Kim Niewolny for two interactive public events at the Virginia Tech Graduate Life Center on Wednesday, February 22nd. Both speakers share a passion for food justice and participatory community actions.

Jeanette Abi-Nader is currently the Director of the City Schoolyard Garden in Charlottesville, Virginia. Previously, she worked for the national food justice non-profit, the Community Food Security Coalition (CFSC) which was instrumental in the passing of the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, a reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act. Kim Niewolny is an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. Her scholarship centers on the role of power and equity in community education and development praxis with a specific focus on social justice and food systems



### Roundtable luncheon with Jeanette Abi-Nader and Kim Niewolny

At the Roundtable Luncheon, Jeanette and Kim asked attendees to describe what the phrase “food justice” means to them. Answers varied broadly from a few key words such as “choice”, “access” and “nutrition” to more lengthy commentaries on the favoring of corporate interests over community interests by the Department of Agriculture and local government. Jeanette and Kim used these responses as a base for engaging the evening audience with their lecture, “Exploring Whole Measures in Community Food Systems”. Kim and Jeanette began by inviting audience members to jot down a few words about their local food systems in the New River Valley and match it with a poster prompt of their choice hanging around the room. This visual learning activity immediately connected individuals at the lecture through shared thoughts and feelings. Jeanette and Kim continued by speaking personally to their professional and academic trajectories and how activism evolved as inseparable from their respective careers. The lecture closed with an empowering communal sharing of words collected during the luncheon and spoken during the evening. Community Voices members, Lorien MaCauley, Pallavi Raonka and Heather Lyne also interviewed Jeanette the podcast, Trustees Without Borders. Trustees Without Borders is a podcast production of Community Voices, operated by Andy Morikowa. Andy Morikowa is a Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance Fellow and the former Executive Director of the Community Foundation of the New River Valley. Jeanette spoke to the intersections of race, gender and agriculture; food access; domestic and international strategies for change; permaculture; local initiatives in Charlottesville and implementing the “Whole Measures for Community Food Systems”. A recording of the podcast may be found at <https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikowa>.

*Thank you to Heather Lyne for providing this feature!*

## March 23: Turkish Journalists Visit Virginia Tech Campus, Talk about Recent Government Crackdown

On March 23, 2017, two Turkish journalists visited the Virginia Tech Campus talking to students, faculty, and employees about recent events in Turkey, which has recently seen a sweeping crackdown on democratic institutions, most visibly the free press. Under the auspices of the Institute for Policy and Governance and Community Voices, Mahir Zeynalov, regular contributor to Al Arabiya and Huffington Post, and Abdulhamit Bilici, former editor in chief of Zaman, spoke to their audiences in a roundtable and an evening event. In between they answered the questions of ASPECT PhD students Alexander Stubberfield and Mario Khreiche in an interview for the Trustees Without Borders podcast.



**Alex Stubberfield, Mahir Zeynalov, Abdulhamit Bilici, and Mario Khreiche**

The evening event at the Graduate Life Center highlighted the gravity of the situation of a country which not too long ago vied for membership in the European Union. Exiled under president Tayyip Erdoğan, Zeynalov and Bilici gave first-hand accounts of government shutdowns of media organizations, confiscations, and the arrests of journalists and public servants, among which are military officials and judges. Aside from their alarming account on the current situation, they provided valuable perspectives into Turkey's most recent past. To shed light on Erdoğan's appeal, Bilici elaborated on the president's former appointment as mayor of Istanbul, his four-month stint in prison, and his successful anti-establishment campaign. Their visit came just a few weeks before the Turkish people decide in a referendum whether Erdoğan should be granted additional powers to further steer Turkey towards an autocratic regime. You may listen to the Trustees Without Borders podcast following the link below, and follow the two on Twitter @MahirZeynalov and @ahamitbilici.

<https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikawa/trustees-without-borders-hamid-bilici-and-mahir-zeynalov-2017-03-23>

*Thank you to Mario Khreiche for providing this feature!*

## Recent Events

**February 23** **Dr. Derek Alderman** (University of Tennessee) and **Dr. Steve Hanna** (University of Mary Washington) gave a public talk on *Race, Memory, and Southern Heritage: The Politics of Doing Justice to the Enslaved at Plantation Museums*.

**February 24** The Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Virginia Tech hosted the [PPE Distinguished Public Lecture](#), welcoming Professor **Martha Nussbaum** (University of Chicago) who lectured on *Anger and Revolutionary Justice*.

**March 1-2** Implementing Lean for Operational Excellence took place in Roanoke, VA. Implementing Lean for Operational Excellence is a cross industry conference hosted by Virginia Tech, The City of Roanoke, and Roanoke County. At this conference, speakers from all over the U.S. share their knowledge about implementing lean principles, changing culture, tackling leadership challenges, and implementing continuous improvement projects. Find more info at: <http://www.cpe.vt.edu/ilean/>

**March 9-12** The 2017 [Appalachian Studies Association Conference](#): Extreme Appalachia took place, highlights including keynote address from **Dr. James Hansen** (director, Program on Climate Science, Awareness and Solutions, Columbia University). During the conference, a group from VTIPG's Community Voices held a panel discussion, with convener **Max Stephenson** (Director, VTIPG) and contributors **Lorien E. MacAuley** (Agricultural Leadership, and Community Education), **Anna Erwin** (PGG), and **Jeremy Elliott-Engel** (Agricultural Leadership, and Community Education). See feature following Recent Events section, *Community Voices discusses power, planning, and process, at the Appalachian Studies Conference*.

**March 14** A panel discussion on the topic of *Community Narratives: Lived Experiences of Diversity* took place as a part of the Principles of Community Week at Virginia Tech. This initiative sought to spark conversations and create an ongoing dialogue

in response to the question: *Based on your lived experiences, what does diversity mean in your life?* The event was coordinated by the College of Architecture and Urban Studies Diversity Committee and Virginia Tech's Office for Diversity and Inclusion, and hosted by the Art & Architecture Library.

**March 20** The Middle East Working Group at Virginia Tech presented a multidisciplinary panel discussion entitled *Changing Global Relations: A View From the Middle East*.

**March 21** the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences held a reception and a poster exhibit, celebrating the international partnerships of the faculty of that department. The exhibit ran from March 21-29. The theme was "*Partnerships for a Global Land-Grant: The Liberal Arts and Human Sciences Perspective*". **Laura Zanotti**, **Max Stephenson** and **Nancy McGhee** submitted a poster on the Voluntas article on Haiti that they produced last year.

**March 30** Presentation and discussion held by **Ms. Zaynab Alabed** (English teacher from Aleppo, Syria). The title of the event was *The state of women in Syria: Past, present, and future* and was hosted by Women and Gender in International Development (WGD) of the Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIREd) at Virginia Tech

**March 31 - April 1** The 2017 ASPECT Conference took place at Virginia Tech. This year's conference theme was *Aesthetics, Politics, and Ethnicity in Fractured Times*. The event consisted of panel presentations and discussions on a multitude of topics including Populism and Cosmopolitanism, Spaces of Cyberpolitics, Cultural Representations in Contemporary Media, Feminism and Otherness, Race in America, Politics of the Environment, and more. **Michael Shapiro** (Professor of Political Science, University of Hawai'i-Manoa) delivered the plenary address titled *When the Earth Moves: Toward a Political Sublime*.

## Recent Events: Features

### Dr. Virgil Wood Interview

Dr. Virgil Wood came to Virginia Tech as part of the SPIA's conference and the Uplifting Black Men conference held on Friday March 24, 2017. Dr. Wood is Pastor Emeritus from Pond St. Baptist in Providence, RI. As a church leader, educator, and civil rights activist, he has committed much of his life's work to the struggle for economic and spiritual development among the nation's disadvantaged. Ralph Hall, UAP Associate Professor in SPIA, invited Dr. Max Stephenson, Director at VT Institute for Policy and Governance, an opportunity to interview Dr. Wood to talk about his life's work and what lies ahead. In addition to Dr. Stephenson, the interviews was conducted by Rebecca Powell-Doherty, Postdoctoral Fellow and Research Assistant and Ben Grove, Director of Development, VA Cooperative Extension and Associate Dir of Development, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The podcast was recorded on March 23rd at IPG conference room by Andy Morikawa, Senior VTIPG Fellow. The interview can be heard in its entirety at the following link: <https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikawa/twb-virgil-wood-2017-03-23>.

Rebecca: I recently had the pleasure to interview Dr. Virgil Wood for the Trustees Without Borders podcast. Dr. Wood was a friend and contemporary of Martin Luther King, Jr. and continues the work begun during the height of the civil rights movement, with an emphasis on economic justice. My 'take aways' from the interview are many, but I would like to specifically highlight an idea that Dr. Wood called the jubilee. The jubilee is Dr. Wood's assertion that we must set aside ideas of merely tolerating each other in favour of truly celebrating one another! It isn't enough, he says, to simply allow others to exist, but we have to engage with one another in a way that celebrates and elevates the (perhaps as yet undiscovered) greatness in each of us. He wove this concept into much of our hour-long discussion, and I am encouraged to explore the idea further, as it applies to everything from personal relationships to healthcare and politics. More generally, I am grateful for having had the opportunity to sit with and learn from such an extraordinary individual.

Ben: As it was for Rebecca, spending time with Dr. Wood is an experience I will not soon forget. From our conversation, I will keep Dr. Wood's commitment to young people as a way to ensure that the collective 'we' continues to get better as an important lesson. Additionally, his advice to take time to be in the presence of others, to develop relationships and community, and to invest the time needed to find common ground is as important today as it was when he began his work many years ago. Sometimes it is a privilege just to be in the company of someone. To have the opportunity to listen and to learn from their lived experience. My sincere thanks to Trustees Without Borders for facilitating such a rewarding interview.



**pictured, left to right:  
(top) Rebecca Powell-Doherty, Ben Grove  
(bottom) Max Stephenson, Virgil Wood**

## Recent Events: Features

### Community Voices discusses power, planning, and process, at the Appalachian Studies Conference

The Appalachian Studies Association (ASA) Conference allows an annual interdisciplinary platform on which to explore the unique issues and aspects of life, equity, and justice in Appalachia. This year, we were fortunate that the conference was held at Virginia Tech, which allowed us to host a panel discussion that highlighted Community Voices methodology of open forums for dialogue with community members, engaging leaders to share stories and insights about their approaches to community development.



#### ASA Conference panel participants Jeremy Elliot-Engel, Anna Erwin, Lorien MacAuley, Max Stephenson

Community Voices speakers are often candid and probing in their dialogues on the issues of the day, seasoned as they are by their work with community. The dialogue approach allows participants to marry practice with theory to uncover the praxis inherent in their work. This approach can illuminate hidden assumptions, hegemonic power differentials, and other ripples that appear when the best-laid theories of change get applied to “boots on the ground” action.

The panel at the ASA conference, convened by Max Stephenson, PhD, illuminated how the dialogue-on-praxis approach can work. Lorien MacAuley discussed her work in Beards Fork, WV, recounting when the mountaintop removal coal mine came to town, and what Gaventa’s theories of power, powerlessness, and quiescence have to say on the matter. Jeremy Elliot-Engel spoke on his work in Noel, MO, to examine how a diverse mix of refugees changed the dynamics of a rural town, and how they were brought together at the planning table. Anna Erwin then explained how Community Voices speakers examine their work, and how the richness of the discussion that typically follows illuminates and examines hidden assumptions and ideologies, a process with the potential to break such patterns of powerlessness and quiescence.

The panel wrapped up with a discussion on participatory governance, mutual engagement, and social learning, and the resulting potential to shift paradigms and transform dominant frames. In the end, in this panel, we considered how several theoretical frames can be helpful to see how deep engagement on community change issues, such as those promoted in Community Voices discussions, can effectively disrupt the pattern of consciousness, and set the stage for epistemic consciousness and potential social change.

Thank you to Lorien MacAuley for providing this feature!

## Faculty Spotlight: Denise Simmons



**Denise Simmons**

Denise R. Simmons joined the Myers-Lawson School of Construction and the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering as an Assistant Professor in 2013. She is also an affiliate faculty member in the Department of Engineering Education and an affiliate research faculty member in the School of Education's Educational Research & Evaluation Program. She is the 2016 recipient of Virginia Tech's College of Engineering Dean's Award for Outstanding New Assistant Professor and the Black Graduate Student Organization's Lisa Tabor Award for Community Service. Using deep insights from a fourteen-year industry career and her strengths as a systems thinker, Denise is now developing and disseminating empirically-grounded models and strategies for improved human competence, motivation, and learning as it relates to the civil engineering profession and the construction industry.

Denise enjoys working with both undergraduate and graduate students. She currently supports an interdisciplinary group of four undergraduate researchers and one graduate researcher with support from an Institute for Critical Technology and Applied Science

(ICTAS) Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) grant on a project examining personal resilience of civil and construction engineering undergraduate and graduate students. Denise oversees the Simmons Research Lab ([www.denisersimmons.com](http://www.denisersimmons.com)), which is home to a dynamic, interdisciplinary mix of five undergraduates, nine graduate students, and soon a post-doctoral researcher from four colleges and eight departments at Virginia Tech who work together to explore engineering and construction labor and personnel issues. Denise teaches undergraduate courses in civil engineering and graduate courses in construction covering topics like construction workforce policy and communicating research to the public. Denise's direct connection to SPIA is her work on graduate advisory committees as students explore the intersection of policy, people, and the civil engineering profession or the construction industry.

In service related areas, Denise serves on the Future Faculty Advisory Board and the Myers-Lawson School of Construction's Workforce Community of Practice; as a mentor to several Virginia Tech students; in re-occurring panelist or guest speaker roles for several Virginia Tech and Clemson University programs and classes; as an invited speaker at other institutions; and on proposal review panels for the National Science Foundation. She is the lead co-editor for a special collection on diversity and inclusion appearing in the *Journal of Professional Issues in Engineering Education and Practice*, an American Society of Civil Engineers journal. She is on hiatus on service activities related to women in construction and leadership development.

Denise holds a B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. in civil engineering and a graduate certificate in engineering education—all from Clemson University. Until 2012, she was the director of the Savannah River Environmental Sciences Field Station. She is a registered professional engineer, project management professional, and LEED accredited professional. "Loving Life" is Denise's mantra; Oh from the movie *Home*, is her favorite character; and her twitter handles are @DeniseRSimmons and @JoyfulProfessor. As a proud member of the Virginia Tech community, she strives every day to accomplish the charge of its motto *Ut Prosim* in the spirit of community, diversity, and excellence.

## Student Spotlight: D'Elia Chandler

I am originally from Alexandria, VA, but have lived in Blacksburg and have been part of the Virginia Tech community for the last seven years. I graduated in 2014 with a B.A. in English and Political Science. While pursuing my degree, I had the opportunity to study in both Kolkata, India and Canterbury, England. When I returned to Virginia Tech, I became a peer advisor for Education Abroad. I learned so much about myself and about other cultures throughout the world through travel and I wanted to ensure that other students had the information and knowledge to pursue their own adventures.



**D'Elia Chandler**

While participating in the Hokies on the Hill program, I interned for Congressman Jim Moran (VA-8) working predominantly on education and health issues. This experience fueled my passion for politics. During my last semester as an undergraduate, I was enrolled in the Master of Public and International Affairs program at Virginia Tech. In this program my focus was on international development, nongovernmental organization management and leadership, and international collaborations. I served as the General Assembly Fellow for the 2014-2015 academic year and spent two months in Richmond, VA working with the Virginia Tech Director of State Relations during the General Assembly session. Afterward I finished my Master's degree in May 2015 and presented a major paper entitled "Who Speaks for the Comfort Women? Euphemization and Political Manipulations of World War II Forced Sexual Laborers."

I currently serve as the Assistant Director of Government Relations at Virginia. In my role, I help facilitate communications between the university community and elected officials and government entities at the state and federal levels. Our team helps monitor legislative issues and activities in Richmond and Washington, works with other colleges and universities in support of higher education, and provides information and analysis to decision makers within government and the university.

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In addition, I am taking an environmental health class through the Master of Public Health program, involved with Community Voices, and part of a team of graduate students that helped establish the *Community Change* journal at Virginia Tech, through the Institute of Policy and Governance. *Community Change* is an online, peer-reviewed, graduate student journal that seeks to explore multiple approaches to democratic community development and change. This interdisciplinary journal examines the practices, processes, and individual and collective struggles that produce change at all levels of society. Our first issue will be published in April.

## Blogs & Commentaries

**Soundings** - a [commentary](#) from VTIPG Director **Max Stephenson**

March 27 - [The White House as Puzzle Palace of Demagoguery and Lies](#)

March 13 - [Pondering a Once Shared Covenant, Preaching Limitless Individualism](#)

February 27 - [“Democratic Deconsolidation,” Freedom of the Press and the Primacy of Politics](#)

February 13 - [Lies, Legitimacy and Democratic Truths](#)

January 30 - [On the Misuse of Rhetoric and its Consequences for Democracy](#)

January 17 - [Bullying, Derision and Democracy Make Poor Bedfellows](#)

**Tidings** - a [quarterly reflection](#) from VTIPG Director **Max Stephenson**, now featured as the Director’s Letter in our Quarterly Newsletters beginning October 2014.

Read **Tidings** from previous quarterly newsletter, January 2017 – [Revisiting the Central Challenge of Democratic Self-Governance](#)

**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.

March 30 - [Is Climate Change real? Greenhouse Gases, Climate Science and the Human Outlook](#)  
by **Kannikha Kolandaivelu** (Department of Geosciences)

March 23 - [Empires and Barbarians: The EU and Violence at its Margins](#)  
by **Johannes Grow** (ASPECT)

March 2 - [“Fake News” in Informational Ecology](#)  
by **Alex Stubberfield** (ASPECT)

February 27 - [Politics, Prediction and the Rise of Donald Trump Introduction](#)  
by **Amiel Bernal** (ASPECT)

February 16 - [What Machine Kills Fascists? A Critical Reflection on the Political Power of Sound in the Trump Era](#)  
by **Jordan Laney** (ASPECT)

February 7 - [Musings on The Human-Ecology Imaginary](#)  
by **Rachael Kennedy** (Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education)

**SPECTRA** - SPECTRA is a graduate student-run, peer reviewed scholarly journal hosted at Virginia Tech. The journal features work of an interdisciplinary nature and is designed to provide an academic forum to explore controversial topics and take intellectual risks.

Check out the latest issue here: <https://spectrajournal.org/SPECTRA/issue/view/20/>

### Nathan in China

**Nathan Corso** (Public & International Affairs) recently completed Peace Corps Pre-Service Training (PST), which lasted about 3 months, and will now be teaching oral English, audio-visual English, and a western culture class this first semester at [Southwest University](#), located in the Chongqing area of China. He has started a blog which we look forward to reading when he is able to update!

<https://nathancorso.wordpress.com/>