



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
VIRGINIA TECH.

SPIA Community November Update

Dear SPIA Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni:

I hope everyone had a safe and enjoyable Thanksgiving break. This month the country witnessed a historic presidential election marked by record rates of voter turnout, an unusual level of acrimony, and predictions that did not materialize. Just like the COVID-19 pandemic, the election once again demonstrated the value proposition of our school of public policy, where students and faculty can analyze the local and global reverberations of important events. In particular, I want to highlight the contributions of Professor Karen Hult in supporting our understanding of the election (see below).

I would like to remind students:

- **Web Drop/Add begins for Spring Semester 2021 on December 5.** You can learn about the 70 courses SPIA is offering next term [here](#).
- **The Fall VT Commencement ceremony will begin on Friday, December 18 at 6:00 p.m.** and can be accessed from the [university homepage](#). Additional details can be found at the university's [Commencement page](#).

In this newsletter, we share some interesting data about the School's alumni, highlight one of our most successful certificate programs, cast a spotlight on two successful current and former students, inform you of a new research grant, and acknowledge some of our recent donors.

We have reached the last stretch of the Fall semester when many projects and exams are due and everyone is searching for that extra ounce of energy to get to the finishing line. I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,
Mehrzaad Boroujerdi
SPIA Director



We're on Instagram now! [@VTSPIA](#)

Special Courses Spotlight

VT SPIA Director Mehrzad Boroujerdi is leading a special studies program on national security. The course is a one-week intensive, designed as an executive leadership program. Students will earn 3 graduate credits, which can count as electives in their degree program. [Learn more.](#)



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National Security Executive Leadership Program

March 22-26, 2021 (Online)
For Mid-Level National Security Professionals

www.cpe.vt.edu/nationalsecurity

By participating in U.S. Congressional Oversight in Action 2021, you will engage directly with policymakers in executive branch agencies, think tanks, associations, lobbyists, news media, and congressional offices focused on government oversight and accountability. This 3-week, 3-credit program is designed to kickstart your career in public policy. [Learn more.](#)



US Congressional Oversight in Action 2021

- ONLINE INTENSIVE
- WINTER SESSION (3 credits)
- ENGAGE DIRECTLY WITH POLICYMAKERS, LOBBYISTS, NEWS MEDIA & MORE

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Faculty and Student News

[Ralph Buehler](#) (Professor, UAP) gave the opening keynote address on how to make bicycling feasible and attractive for everyone at the [Texas Trails and Active Transportation Conference](#). He also gave an invited presentation about roadway intersection design for cyclists and pedestrians at the Universität Kassel in Germany, and presented his research on micromobility on the VT campus, as well as on pedestrian and cyclist safety at the Annual Meeting Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP), and the TRB Virtual Forum on Sustainability and Emerging Transportation Technology.

[Mahtot Gebresselassie](#) (PhD Candidate, PGG) was selected by the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials for the WSP USA Women in Leadership Scholarship. WSP USA is one of the world's leading engineering and professional services firms. She also presented her study on the travel behaviors of wheelchair users at the 60th annual conference of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning in October.

Congratulations to **Fan Mo** (MURP, 2019) who was hired as a GIS Specialist in the Botetourt County Technology Services Department. In this role, she will create and maintain ArcGIS content across a variety of departments in Botetourt County (Virginia), and support the teaching of GIS skills to staff.

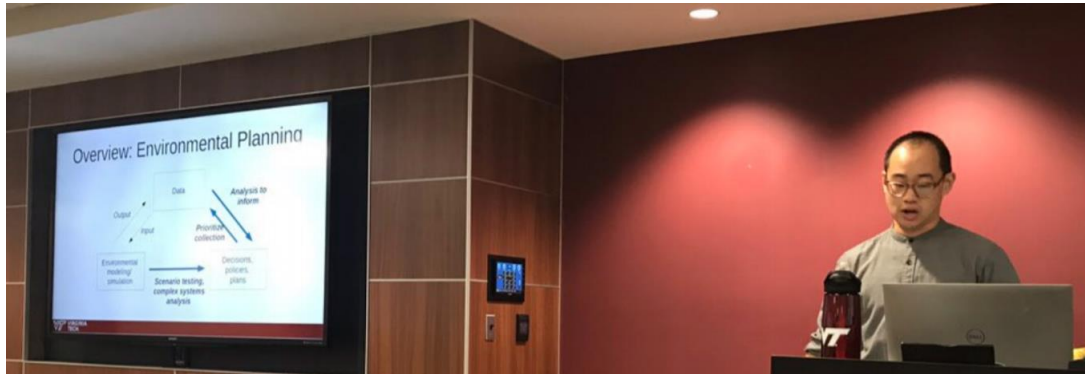
[Karen Hult](#) (Professor, CPAP), who is a member of the White House Transition Project advisory board, was interviewed repeatedly during the election season by various media outlets including [Aljazeera](#), [Augusta Free Press](#), [Washington Journal](#), and [WDBJ7](#).

[Daniel Mekibib](#) (PhD student and Director of the Alexandria Workforce Development Center) and [Eunju Namkung](#) (MPA & MURP, 2020) spoke at the Northeast Conference on Public Administration (November 6-7) on "Transitioning to Virtual Delivery of Job Readiness Programs."

[Stephanie Smith](#) (Associate Professor, CPAP) shared preliminary insights from her research capturing ways in which civil society organizations' agendas for global health are shifting in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic at the annual conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (virtual, November 11-13). She also shared her expertise on global health policy and civil society roles as a panelist during the Global Issues and Transnational Actors Colloquium.

[Gerard Toal](#) (Professor, GIA) authored an article in Washington Post's Monkey Cage entitled "[Five ways the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will change the map.](#)"

Faculty Spotlight



Dr. [Theodore Lim](#) (Assistant Professor - UAP) published an article in *Environmental Modelling & Software*, "[Model emulators and complexity management at the environmental science-action interface](#)," in which he shows how the process of modeling with stakeholders needs to consider not only how well the model performs, but also how well it can function as a platform for communication and coordination, and how it is perceived by stakeholders. In response to the publication, one lead modeler at the Chesapeake Bay Watershed remarked, "This paper is really fantastic! It will be tremendously helpful when we are communicating with future collaborators about how we operate and why we operate that way. I'm going to put it right up front in the documentation."

With co-author, [Dr. Fushcia Hoover](#) (National Socio-Environmental Synthesis Center), Dr. Lim also published an article in *Socio-Ecological Practice Research*, titled "[Examining privilege and power in US urban parks and open space during the double crises of antiblack racism and COVID-19](#)." In it, they provide a stepwise approach to addressing anti-Black racism in urban green/public spaces that take us beyond recognizing distributional inequity. They draw on many examples from COVID + protests from Summer 2020.

Lastly, Dr. Lim received a \$5,000 grant from the GO Virginia Developing a Destination for Talent Initiative for his project to incorporate drone-mapping of urban heat islands in Roanoke into the Smart and Sustainable Cities and Environmental Planning and Policy majors' curriculum. Students will be working with the City of Roanoke's Sustainability Office to produce high-resolution thermal imagery to engage communities in urban heat island mitigation planning.

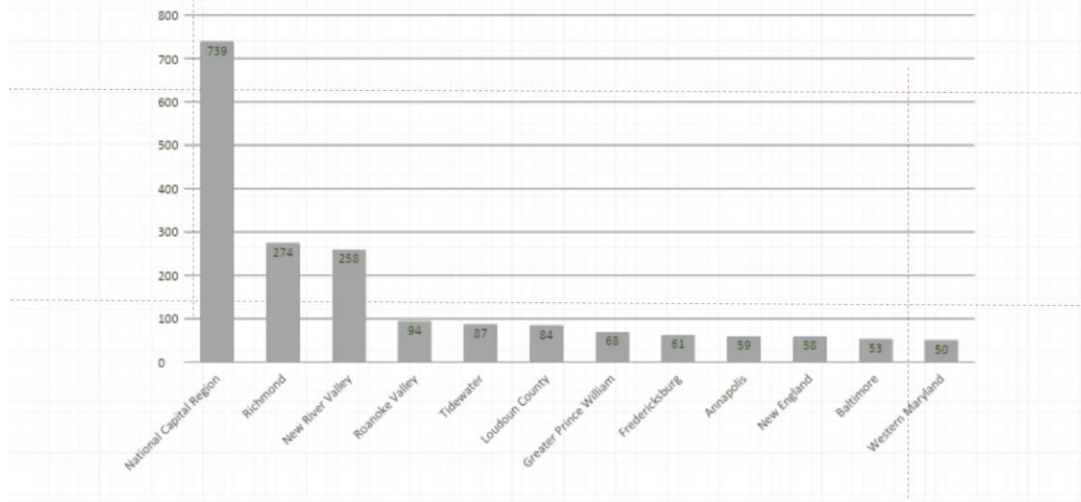
SPIA Alumni Data

SPIA has over 3,544 alumni, who account for 23% of all alumni of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies (CAUS). (SPIA is a school of CAUS.) A great majority of SPIA alumni are CPAP or UAP majors.

SPIA alumni reside across the nation, but there is a particularly strong community in the Washington D.C. Metro area. 53% of our alumni reside in the Commonwealth of Virginia followed by the adjacent states of North Carolina and Maryland at second and third. Almost 21% of all SPIA alumni live in the Washington Metropolitan Area, followed by Richmond and New River Valley.

We are a global & diverse community. SPIA alumni live in 26 different countries, ranging from Bolivia to China. 25% of our alumni are non-white, and 45% are female. Finally, 45% of our alumni graduated before 2000 and 55% after.

SPIA Alumni by Chapter



Find more data on alumni [here](#).

New Research Grant

The SPIA Richmond campus has been awarded a new research grant in the amount of \$194,000. This sponsored research constitutes a 3-year partnership with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and SPIA-Richmond in support of exploration, analysis, and recommendations for strengthening current efforts and discovering new approaches related to DCR's work towards a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization. The research engages with a variety of employees who are both direct service professionals – such as state park law enforcement officers – and executive professionals, such as the DCR Deputy Directors for Government and Community Relations and for Administration and Finance.

Program Profile

The Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management

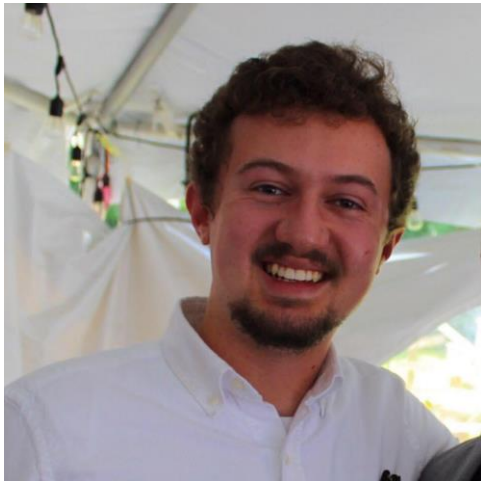
The Virginia Tech Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP), in partnership with the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA), offers a graduate certificate program in [local government management](#) that provides the next generation of local government managers and leaders with the tools to advance their careers and to provide exceptional leadership within the communities where they work. The central goal of the program is to offer graduate-level training in local government management that both prepares pre-career students for capable public service at

the local level and enhances the capacities of existing local government employees who aspire to be town, city, or county managers or assistant/deputy managers. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has identified leadership development as one of the most important issues that local governments will face in the coming decade.

The certificate program consists of four 3-credit hour courses, for a total of twelve hours of graduate coursework. Students are exposed to a full spectrum of local government issues, service delivery options, and management tools. The analysis of a real-life, local government case study is central to each classroom experience. Case studies are used within the courses to emphasize the relationship between the political and management worlds that all local government managers must understand and navigate in order to be successful. All courses are taught by experienced, highly qualified Virginia local government practitioners in a hybrid online delivery method. Utilizing virtual classroom capabilities, classes are taught simultaneously around the state, giving more students the opportunity to participate in the program and learn about the variety of communities in Virginia.

For more information, please contact Stephanie Davis, sddavis@vt.edu, or attend an information session. **December 15, 2020:** 12pm-1pm. Access via Zoom: <https://virginiatech.zoom.us/j/93713028301>

Undergraduate Student Spotlight



Nick Armitage, a graduating senior in the Smart and Sustainable Cities program as well as the Landscape Architecture program, was recently selected as the recipient of the 2020 Phi Kappa Phi Medallion Award. He is a member of Virginia Tech's chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), and regularly attends guest lectures, workshops, and meetings with the organization. Nick is interested in how planners can best work as liaisons between communities and designers to ensure that implemented infrastructure is representative of regional values and needs.

In research with Professor Theodore Lim, Nick looked deeper into questions surrounding community engagement and environmental design, and climate change solutions. He has an ongoing project focused on designing and implementing systems for bioenergy and carbon capture and storage in

rural communities. This research aims to bring policymakers, designers, and constituents together on common ground. Nick's hope is that he can continue conducting research with Professor Lim after his graduation, adding greater context gained from professional work.

Nick had two full-time summer internships with Dominion Energy in which he worked with biofuel and energy infrastructure in both project management and business development roles. After graduation, he will join Dominion Energy full-time to work as a Project Designer for electric distribution projects.

Alumni Spotlight



Marc Fialkoff is a nuclear security research associate with the Transportation Security Group in the National Security Sciences Directorate at Oak Ridge National Laboratory (ORNL) in Tennessee. Marc's research focuses on the intersection of transportation planning and the law for secure transport of nuclear and radioactive materials. In 2019, Marc served as a consultant to the International Atomic Energy Agency on the effort to support member states in developing regulatory infrastructure for nuclear security. Working with international experts, Marc led development of a methodology for crafting transport security regulations.

Marc graduated from Virginia Tech in 2017 with his doctorate in Planning, Governance, and Globalization (UEDP Track). His dissertation focused on evaluating the Jones Act waiver process and how relaxing the Jones Act would increase the number of trucks and trains on different parts of the transportation network in the aftermath of a disaster. This research was supported by a collaboration between the School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) and the Critical Infrastructure Team at ORNL to study the relationship between law, transportation systems, and network analysis. Within days of his dissertation defense, Marc was interviewed by *The Atlantic* as part of the national debate on whether to waive the Jones Act to support recovery efforts in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria. During his time at Virginia Tech, Marc was also an instructor and adjunct professor, teaching courses on public policy implementation, environmental law, and an elective course on nuclear waste planning.

Prior to his doctoral work, Marc earned a law degree from the Roger Williams University School of Law. He earned a master's degree in transport planning while a Fulbright scholar to the Institute of Transport Studies at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom.

A Big Thanks to Supporters of VT SPIA!

SPIA thanks the following individuals for their donations to the school during the months of October and November:

- **Dr. and Mrs. Daniel P. Boden**
- **Dr. Kim E. Fox**
- **Dr. Walter W. Kovalick Jr.**
- **Ms. Lauren K. McKeague**
- **Ms. Vicky L. Moore**
- **Mr. and Ms. Eoin J. Wrafter**
- **Mr. Robert W. McClintock Jr.**
- **Mrs. Erin G. Trone**
- **Mr. Matthew S. Worner**

Worth Pondering

- [Covid-19 has shone a light on racial disparities in health](#)
- [Giving up on politics is often tempting. It is also risky](#)
- [How to Build Community in a Zoom Class with Personal Essays](#)
- [Can These Degree Programs, Under Assault for a Decade, Survive a Pandemic?](#)
- [The Women in Economics Index 2020](#)
- [Where are the world's most expensive cities?](#)
- [The painter and the zebra-hunter: What presidents do after leaving office](#)



