



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
VIRGINIA TECH.

## SPIA Community July Update

Dear SPIA Students, Faculty, and Staff:

This summer a number of changes have taken place at SPIA. The term of Professor Giselle Datz as GIA's program chair has ended and that of professor Karen Hult as program chair of CPAP will end on August 10. I thank them for their wonderful service.

Professor Ariel Ahram is the new program chair for GIA, and CPAP will now be run by three program co-chairs. Professor [Robin Lemaire](#) will serve as the chair of the MPA program, Professor [Stephanie Smith](#) will chair the Ph.D. program, and Professor [Joe Rees](#) will chair the CPAP Executive Committee.

Furthermore, two of our SPIA colleagues in Richmond have taken on additional leadership roles at the College of Architecture and Urban Studies (CAUS). Dean Blythe has appointed [Leisha LaRiviere](#) as the Director of Strategic Planning, and [Cecily Rodriguez](#) as the Director of Diversity and Inclusion at CAUS. I thank all these colleagues who have stepped forward to take on these leadership roles at this critical time.

Meanwhile, Leigh Bower, SPIA's Undergraduate Program Assistant & Graduate Coordinator, will be retiring from the university on July 31. We are currently accepting [applications](#) to fill this position in Blacksburg. On behalf of everyone at the school, I thank Leigh for her years of service and wish her a well-deserved retirement.

Beginning with this issue of our monthly newsletter, we will profile one of our many degree programs or certificates. We have started with Middle East Politics and Society, which is SPIA's newest certificate program.

I want to encourage our current students and alumni to please share with me ([mehrzad@vt.edu](mailto:mehrzad@vt.edu)) news of your accomplishments (publications, grants, new jobs, etc.) so that we can share the information through this platform.

Sincerely,  
Mehrzad Boroujerdi  
Director, VT SPIA

**SPIA Leadership 2020-2021**

Mehrzad Boroujerdi	SPIA School Director	<a href="mailto:mehrzad@vt.edu">mehrzad@vt.edu</a>
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Max Stephenson	Dir. Institute for Policy & Governance	<a href="mailto:mstephen@vt.edu">mstephen@vt.edu</a>

## Faculty and Student News

Mehrzad Boroujerdi's latest [book](#) was the subject of a book review forum with five contributions in [Iranian Studies](#) 53, nos. 3-4 (May-August 2020), pp. 675-684.

[Ralph Buehler](#) (Professor, UAP) was quoted in [Boston Herald](#) and [Mass Transit](#) on the surge of bike sales across the country.

[Stephanie Davis](#) (Collegiate Assistant Professor, CPAP) published "Deepening Interlocal Partnerships: The Case of Revenue-sharing Infrastructure Agreements," *State and Local Government Review* (2020), and "COVID-19 Financial Impacts on Virginia Local Governments: A Report to Support Local Government Decision Making," *Virginia Town and City Magazine* (June 2020), pp. 28-29. Furthermore, she conducted 9 one-hour weekly webinars for over 140 local governments in Virginia. This has led to a wealth of resources for local governments including the [SPIA website resource page](#). Dr. Davis also held a one-day adjunct faculty retreat with our local government certificate instructors to discuss a variety of projects including national exposure for the local government certificate and the potential to create an online textbook for local government administration.

[Mahtot Gebresselassie](#) (Ph.D. Candidate, PGG) was selected as the recipient of the American Public Transportation Foundation's (APTF) *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Scholarship* in recognition of her doctoral research on the wheelchair accessibility of Uber and Lyft. APTF is the charitable affiliate of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA). She also participated

in a two-day E-seminar for Ph.D. candidates organized by the Association of European Schools of Planning.

[Ralph Hall](#) (Associate Professor, UAP) and his colleagues published "[Addressing Inequality: The First Step Beyond COVID-19 and Towards Sustainability](#)," *Sustainability* 2020, 12(13). Ralph was also quoted in "Why environmentalists should embrace universal basic income" in *Salon* (July 2, 2020).

[Laura Jensen](#) (Associate Professor, CPAP) and L Maria Ingram (Ph.D. Candidate, CPAP) co-authored "[The utility of narrative voices in the federal procurement contract](#)," *Journal of Strategic Contracting and Negotiation* 2020, 4 (1-2), pp. 58-74.

Daniel M. White (PGG doctoral candidate) successfully defended his dissertation on July 8, 2020, entitled, "Sport and Social Capital: Perceptions of Sport for Development Organization Leaders' in Kigali, Rwanda." Max Stephenson served as chair of his doctoral committee.

Xavier Harmony (Ph.D. student, PGG) was selected as the 2020 recipient of the James "Jim" Cowen [Scholarship](#) from the American Public Transportation Foundation. This scholarship, which recognizes scholars pursuing studies in transit planning or development, will help support Xavier as he works towards his dissertation research focusing on understanding how politics influences transit planning. This scholarship is one of a small number of named scholarships offered by APTF annually.



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**Institute for Policy and Governance (IPG)**

July 1 marked the 14<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Institute for Policy and Governance (IPG). So far, 36 individuals closely associated with IPG have complete their doctorate since IPG was founded. IPG has also brought in millions of dollars in research grants. We congratulate Professor Max Stephenson, the institute's founding director, and his colleagues for the remarkable work that they have done at IPG all these years and wish them more success in the coming years.

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## Program Profile

The Middle East Politics and Society (MEPS) is among the newest graduate certificates available at Virginia Tech, having begun only in 2018. MEPS builds upon the university's considerable breadth and depth in Middle East studies. Virginia Tech is one of only a handful of universities in the country to offer an undergraduate degree in Arabic. Beyond the classroom, Virginia Tech encourages exchange and collaboration opportunities in the region through its intensive Arabic language and culture summer program in Oman, the partnership between Virginia Tech's Bradley Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering and the Arab Academy for Science and Technology in Egypt, and the study abroad agreement between the Virginia Tech's Masters in Public and International Affairs program and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

MEPS focuses on the area spanning from North Africa to Egypt, across the eastern Mediterranean, and through the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Often called the cradle of world religions, this region is the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Today the region contains an incredible diversity and richness of languages and cultures, but also complicated histories of colonialism and significant economic and political challenges. The MEPS certificate aims to give graduate students training in history, politics, culture, and economics to reach understanding of the Middle East's place in contemporary world affairs. The certificate is ideal for anyone wishing to gain knowledge of the region and apply it to careers in international affairs, business, consulting, and diplomacy.

Ariel Ahram, associate professor in the School of Public and International Affairs in Arlington, is the MEPS coordinator. Ahram has written extensively on Middle East security affairs, including *War and Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa* (Polity, 2020), and directs a Carnegie Corporation-funded project examining the prospects for conflict mitigation and resolution in Yemen, Iraq, Syria, and Libya. He teaches courses on Middle East geopolitics and on energy and environmental security. Several dozen faculty members teaching in Public and International Affairs, Political Science, History, Religion and Culture, Languages and Literature, and Economics all support the certificate. The MEPS certificate requires nine graduate credits hours and is accessible to students in Blacksburg, Arlington, or online. For further detail, see the [VT graduate school](#).

### Worth Pondering

- [Advice to Those Starting a Ph.D. Program in the Fall](#)
- [Applying for Competitive Dissertation Fellowships: 5 Key Tips](#)
- [\*\*Mounting Faculty Concerns about Fall\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Role of Remote Learning in College's Decisions about Fall\*\*](#)
- [ZIP Codes and Equity Gaps](#)

