

# Master of Public Administration Alumni Newsletter Spring 2024



## Director's Update

This spring 2024 edition of the MPA Alumni Newsletter at Northern Arizona University covers the recent activities, achievements, and updates on our students, faculty, and the larger MPA community. This spring, we are graduating 28 MPA students and two Graduate Certificate students, who are pursuing impactful careers in a range of communities and public and nonprofit organizations. Four MPA students attended the Arizona City and County Management Association (ACMA) conference held in January in Sedona. Our esteemed MPA alum, Mr. Dan Musselman, and graduating students, Eric Wise and Rachael Brickner, who are receiving the 2024 awards for exceptional public service and academic excellence, will be recognized at a Department of Politics and International Affairs celebration event at 4:30 pm on May 9 in Flagstaff (duBois Center).

Please check out the pages throughout this newsletter for other activities and details. We would like to hear from you any comments, ideas, and suggestions for further improvements in our newsletter as well as the MPA program in future.

**Udaya R. Wagle, PhD**  
**Professor and Director of the MPA Program**



# Congratulations to Our 2024 MPA Award Winners!

## ***MPA Alumni Public Service Award***

Dan Musselman (MPA '11)



**Dan Musselman**

Chief of Police, Flagstaff Police Department

Mr. Dan Musselman grew up in Phoenix, Arizona. He received a Criminal Justice degree from Northern Arizona University in 1991. Dan enjoyed what Flagstaff had to offer: rich in diversity, placing high value on education, and no shortage of outdoor adventures. Dan served in the US Army Reserve and began his career with the Coconino County Sheriff's Office. He later joined the Flagstaff Police Department, where he was appointed the Chief of Police in 2020. Over his 30-plus-year career, he has received many awards and commendations including the Flagstaff Police Department Meritorious Service Award, Exchange Club Officer of the Year Award, and City Managers Excellence Award.

Ms. Joanne Keene, Deputy City Manager of Flagstaff, shares this about him: "Chief Musselman prides himself on mentoring future leaders and is thankful for the many who have mentored him throughout his career. He particularly acknowledges his strong support system within the City of Flagstaff, city leadership, and his peers who have helped his growth over his long career. Chief Musselman also acknowledges his family for their strong support."

His accomplishments at the Flagstaff Police Department in his own words: "We have made substantial investments into public safety, too numerous to list, which will continue to have positive future impacts. We invested in all-wheel drive hybrid and electric patrol vehicles, reduced property and violent crime rates, improved compensation for our members, and created additional wellness and training opportunities. In partnership with our supportive community, we established a non-law enforcement response for crisis calls, stood up the CARE unit, and started a local police academy."

Dan completed his Master of Public Administration degree from Northern Arizona University in 2011. He remains in contact with many of his program cohorts and professors. Throughout his career, Dan sought out NAU students for internships, was a guest speaker in many classes, and assisted with NAU student career building events. Dan is married to his wife Kim, and they have two adult children, Deret and Tristen.

The MPA community is honored to recognize Flagstaff Police Chief Dan Musselman with the MPA Alumni Public Service Award for his exceptional record of public service and leadership.

## ***MPA Awards for Academic Excellence (2024 MPA Graduates)***

Eric Wise



Rachael Brickner



## Four MPA Students at ACMA Conference in Sedona



In picture: MPA students Alejandro Martinez, Carlos Vargas, Latoya Muse, and Jessica Kittleson with Kari Kent from ACMA and Dr. Sara Rinfret (MPA faculty and Associate Vice Provost for Faculty Affairs)

For the first time in the MPA program, four students including Alejandro Martinez, Carlos Vargas, Latoya Muse, and Jessica Kittleson attended the Arizona City/County Management Association (ACMA) winter conference held in Sedona in January (24-26), 2024. Attended by over 300 public service professionals, academics, and students from throughout the state, this practitioner-conference included presentations on all things local about public service from financial management and leadership pipeline to the current economic outlook and productive use of generative AI. It also included numerous events focused on networking, recruitment, and professional development. The MPA Program Director Dr. Udaya Wagle and MPA faculty and Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs Dr. Sara Rinfret provided an update on the MPA program as well as an NAU initiative on practitioner-in-residence that seeks to connect academic programs and their students at the university focused on public service to their accomplished alumni from throughout the state.

The MPA program recognizes the generous support from ACMA which in part made it possible to provide this magnificent professional development opportunity to our students.

# Natalia Estrada at NASPAA Simulation Event in San Diego, CA



MPA student Natalia Estrada attended the NASPAA Simulation Competition event held at San Diego State University on March 2, 2024. This is an annual event organized by the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), providing students an opportunity to compete and network in an immersive learning environment while using a computer simulation designed for public service education. This year's Host Nations Simulation event sought to "challenge and teach students to deliver effective and equitable policies, consider the diverse needs of various populations, interpret data to evaluate and reorient policy decisions, practice inclusive decision-making and navigate challenging and asymmetrical intergovernmental relations" (<https://www.naspaa.org/innovative-teaching/student-simulation-competition>). Here is a reflective synopsis Natalia shared

describing her experience at the event.

"My experience with the NASPAA Conference was valuable in that it gave me a valuable experience on teamwork and deadlines in a professional atmosphere. I enjoyed being able to discuss feasible solutions and conflicts that dealt with issues that could happen and are happening in the real world. I also thought it was great practice for understanding budgeting, funding mechanisms, priorities in international affairs and negotiating resources. Teams within the conference were placed into groups of four or five and were assigned positions for each "country" they represented. The positions were Prime Minister, ATG Delegate, Home Office Secretary, Labor, and Health and Human Services. Some groups with four members had a person with two positions. I was given ATG Delegate which meant that my responsibility was monitoring international affairs, understanding how our country's actions affect other neighboring countries and negotiating pathways for safe and humane immigration during an active refugee crisis. We had five rounds of this, and the first three rounds were 30 minutes long, the second were 20 minutes. Afterwards we were given an hour and 15 minutes to develop a strategic plan and memo (2-3 pages) to discuss our country's strategy for handling the refugee crisis, and how our statistics add up when creating opportunity, housing, access and cooperation. We also had to create a presentation in this time summarizing our memo.

I would say the most difficult item was writing a succinct and accurate memo in less than three pages. There was a lot of information to cover and limiting that to 2 or 3 pages was a good practice for real world public affairs. Overall, I think this event was a great example for bringing schools together and hope more students will consider this opportunity in the future as it helps with organizational development and critical thinking. Plus, it was a lot of fun!"

# Congratulations to Our Spring 2024 Graduates!

## Master of Public Administration

Rachael Brickner

Brandon Brown

Erica Brown

Christopher Centanni

Alex Chin

Emilio Cruz

Natalia Estrada

Erin Fillmore

Amelia Griffin

Stephen Grover

Raymond Hagen

Sarah Kwong

Melissa Larios

Alejandro Martinez

Madilynn Melodia

Sabrina Nelsen

Brittainy Nelson

Nancy Ney

Rachel Pearson

Roger Peck

Nicole Ripley

Glorianna Sauer

Tina Sleeper

Michael Terry

Chase Walman

Troy Wiora

Eric Wise

Daniel Wojcik

## Graduate Certificate in Public Administration

Codye Boutin

Tyler Conlon

# Spring 2024 Graduate Spotlights (in their own words)

My MPA experience at NAU has been really interesting and exciting. Though I don't currently work in the public sector, my military experience and comprehensive background have led me to pursue a master's degree in public administration because I plan to one day design company policies that reinforce diversity in the workplace. The MPA program has taught me how to formulate and analyze policies while considering ethical decision-making and developing conflict-resolution strategies. I've also learned more leadership development skills and diverse approaches to impact and help the community. Overall, the MPA program has taught me the importance of policies and humility and the skills I need to be an effective leader within the private and public sectors.



Brandon Brown  
Mechanical Engineer Technician  
Intel Corporation  
Chandler, AZ

After dedicating eight years to serving the state government and spending three years in higher education at a public research university, I discovered my passion for working with the public. Serving the community has given me life purpose and fulfillment and has inspired me to pursue a public administration degree through NAU's MPA program. My studies have deepened my understanding of public policy, administration management, and leadership, allowing me to make an even more significant impact in the lives of those I serve. I am proud to apply my knowledge and experience to continue serving the public with dedication and excellence.



Erica Brown  
Human Resources Specialist Sr.  
Arizona State University, AZ

Throughout the MPA program, I challenged myself to explore my 'why': my personal values, professional experiences, and willingness to learn more about what motivates me and makes me uncomfortable. I have been able to connect deeper with myself, my colleagues, and the patrons that I serve. I have widened my skillset, allowing me to gain confidence in discharging my responsibilities within municipal government. Now in a position to oversee a department administrative system, I serve as a technical advisor to executive leadership, understanding the necessity of an effective policy process and systems design inclusive of communication, collaboration, and evaluation for continuous improvement. Faculty members have consistently challenged us to seek truth and speak truth to power as it relates to the ability to solve problems, serve the community, and help those unable to help themselves. I challenge current or incoming MPA students to do the same: seek to learn more about yourself and be open to understanding others by looking at your personal values and your 'why.'



Rachael Brickner  
Community Health and  
Human Services  
Administrative Manager  
City of Tempe, AZ

# Spring 2024 Graduate Spotlights (in their own words)

I am graduating with the MPA degree and planning to work towards earning a Graduate Certificate in Indigenous Tribal Nation-Building, Leadership, Management and Administration. I have worked in Human Resources, organizational development, DEI, non-profit media and social welfare programs in Northern California. I participated in the 2024 NASPAA Simulation Competition in San Diego with various other graduate students across the nation. Currently, I am working with the Tó Naneesdizi (Tuba City) local government planning staff to obtain a designated property for the Diné/Navajo Nation and create a community sports complex to improve quality of life for residential communities. I am originally from California's Inland Empire and have lived in Northern California for more than a decade. After graduating, I plan to continue my work with Tó Naneesdizi (Tuba City) and then further career in local county government before applying for Ph.D. programs in Sociology or Social Policy.



Natalia Estrada  
Student Intern  
Tó Naneesdizi (Tuba City), CA

As a Senior Planner for the City of Yuma, I understand the unique challenges of public administration. The NAU MPA program has fully prepared me to take on these challenges. In addition, this program has provided me with the skillset required to become a successful public service leader. This diverse program focuses on topics such as ethics, effective leadership, public policy analysis, and financial management – all of which are critical to implementing change that benefits the community. This program is challenging yet rewarding, and one piece of advice I would like to offer is to be patient with yourself. Continue to work towards your goals on your own timeline, and you will be so proud of your accomplishments when you see the finish line!



Amelia Griffin  
Senior Planner  
City of Yuma, AZ

Throughout my journey in the Master of Public Administration program, I have developed a thorough understanding of public policy, organizational management, and effective leadership. My academic journey has been greatly supported by the strengths I developed from the MPA curriculum, which have provided a strong foundation for tackling different areas of my educational and career endeavors. The MPA program has helped me develop the skills and abilities needed to navigate the complex world of public service. To current and incoming MPA students, I recommend continuously seeking real-world experiences and building a network of mentors and peers.



Madilynn Melodia  
Data and Technology Analyst  
Division of Human Resources  
The University of Arizona, AZ

# Spring 2024 Graduate Spotlights (in their own words)

Embarking on the MPA journey was a profound and enlightening experience, offering invaluable insights into the intricate realms of governance, policy formulation, and public service. The MPA degree equipped me with essential skills vital for navigating the multifaceted landscape of public administration, leadership, analysis, and ethical decision-making. I immersed myself in rigorous coursework, case studies, and hands-on experiences, deepening my comprehension of public policy, organizational management, and key socio-political dynamics. To current and prospective MPA students, my advice is to foster collaborative spirits, embrace diverse perspectives, and seek experiential learning opportunities. Engaging with faculty mentors, cultivating connections, and upholding the principles of integrity, equity, and accountability can go a long way.



Alejandro Martinez  
Finance Director  
City of Douglas, AZ

My NAU MPA experience has been thought-provoking and valuable. The various case studies, insights about the policy process and strategies for strengthening management skills are among the impactful lessons that are already being put to work. I'm proud of working for public entities for the bulk of my career; there's real fulfillment and history in these professions. My advice for incoming students is to stay on top of the reading and to sincerely engage in online/in-person discussions with classmates.



Nicole Ripley  
Asst Vice President  
Media Relations & Str. Comm.  
Arizona State University, AZ

During the program, I implemented a lot from the organizational behavior class as a supervisor. I serve in three different roles over the last three years, with the latest promotion bringing me into daily interaction with politics and the policy process. I have been able to apply my understanding of how the pillars of public administration influence and affect each other into my presentations to elected officials. I have learned so much from the program and many faculty members who helped me learn political science, really challenged me to question and think critically, and opened my eyes to the importance of speaking truth to power. I'm grateful to all the professors and to my classmates for being amazing partners in this journey.



Tina Sleeper  
Water Resources Manager  
City of Tempe, AZ

My journey with the Tempe MPA cohort through NAU has been challenging and rewarding. I have learned and grown so much, both personally and as a professional. The MPA program has given me a higher-level perspective of organizational operations and best practices when administering public policies. Last year I was able to implement what I have learned in my first supervisory role, and I look forward to future leadership opportunities as I continue to build upon the skills I have learned in graduate school. I would advise prospective students to just go for it! I have had an excellent experience, and you will, too!



Glorianna Sauer  
Investigator/Polygraph Examiner  
Recruiting and Hiring Unit  
Tempe Police Department's, AZ

# Public Service Career Resources

US Federal Government: <https://www.usajobs.gov/>

State of Arizona: <https://www.azstatejobs.gov/jobs/search>

Coconino County: <https://www.coconino.az.gov/843/Job-Openings>

Maricopa County: [https://maricopa.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/MC\\_External](https://maricopa.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/MC_External)

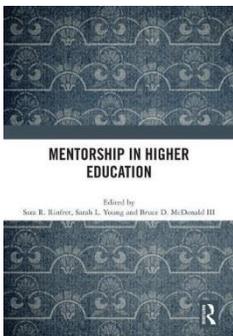
Pima county: <https://www.pima.gov/707/Recruitment-Selection-Current-Job-Openin>

City of Phoenix: <https://www.phoenix.gov/hr/current-jobs#>

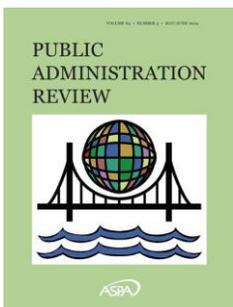
City of Tucson: [https://tucsonaz.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/Tucson\\_Talent](https://tucsonaz.wd1.myworkdayjobs.com/Tucson_Talent)

Government jobs nationwide: <https://www.governmentjobs.com/>

## Faculty Publications



Congratulations to Dr. Sara R. Rinfret for publishing her jointly edited (with Sarah L. Young, and Bruce D. McDonald III) book titled “*Mentorship in Higher Education*” (forthcoming from Routledge)!



Congratulations to Dr. Aleksey Kolpakov for his forthcoming coauthored (with Alka Sapat and Ann-Margaret Esnard) article titled “Explaining the longitudinal dynamics of international collaboration in disaster recovery: Friends, partners, or foes?” in *Public Administration Review* (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13813>).