

# MPA Student & Alumni Newsletter

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Department of Political Science  
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## DIRECTOR'S WELCOME

By *Fatih Demiroz, PhD*

Welcome to the third issue of the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter. Dr. Wang has prepared a fantastic issue for you, and before you go through the rest of the Newsletter, I would like to share some exciting news and updates.

First, the MPA faculty is growing. Dr. Aisha Ahmadu will join our program as an Assistant Professor in Fall 2022. She received her Ph.D. in Public Administration from Mississippi State University. Her teaching and research interests concentrate on public budgeting and finance, and she will primarily contribute to our program in these areas.

Second, two new courses will be added to the MPA curriculum. The first course is "Managing Complex Policy Problems," which I taught as "Special Topics in Public Administration" in the summer 2021 semester. The second course is "Managing Nonprofit Organizations," taught by Dr. Lim. Dr. Lim will teach this course as "Special Topics in Public Administration" in Fall 2022, and the course will be offered with its official title in the future.

Finally, the SHSU MPA Program was one of the sponsors of the 2022 Texas Emergency Management Conference in San Antonio. Dr. Tom Haase, Dr. Weniiun Wang, and I represented our program at the conference. We had the opportunity to meet with our alumni and current students. I would like to thank everybody who stopped by our booth.

Before ending my message, I would like to remind you that despite most COVID restrictions being over and as we get back to normal, the virus will likely continue to impact our lives. So please take care of yourself and your family. I wish you all a safe, healthy, and happy rest of the year.

I look forward to meeting you again in the next issue of our Newsletter.

## ALUMNI INSIGHT: A Reflection on My MPA Journey

By Khenley Harvell (MPA '21)



*Khenley Harvell serves as an Emergency Management Planner for the Response and Recovery Unit of the Center of Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Department at Texas Department of State Health Services. She currently holds the position of State Lead for Project Public Health Ready, which in collaboration with the CDC, is a criteria-based training and recognition program that assesses local health department capacity and capability to plan for, respond to, and recover from public health emergencies.*

### First Steps

I did it. I took my first step toward the future and finally applied to SHSU's MPA program. And guess what? I was admitted. As I started my first week, I began to panic. The workload seemed impossible and the readings incomprehensible. Various thoughts ran through my head. Do they really think that I, or anyone, could get through all this? Are the other students worried as well? Perhaps it is just me who feels this way? Maybe I am not ready for this and should've just stuck to the path. I could not escape the thought that I was going to fail.

Although I could have let these feelings overwhelm me, I decided to have an open mind and allowed myself to test my intellectual boundaries. Although the readings were challenging, I looked for guidance from my professors who, in turn, became my mentors. For those of you who are just starting the MPA program, my first piece of advice would be to use the MPA faculty to your advantage while you are in graduate school. The faculty have a wealth of knowledge and are working to build a sense of community amongst the students. As mentors, they aim to set their students up for success by providing you with the tools and guidance you need to reach your potential.

## Motivation and Insights

After I got a grasp on the overall “graduate student” thing, I became proud of myself, until I wasn’t. I soon encountered my next barrier: inferiority. Communicating with other highly intellectual and experienced students, who seemed to be able to do the assignments, made me feel inadequate. I was concerned that my professional experience simply did not compare. I felt that there was nothing I could offer that someone else hadn’t already excelled at.

Not wanting to let this feeling stop me, I turned it into motivation. To make this shift in perspective, I had to realize that my classmates and I were all on different paths. Instead of telling myself that they had more to offer than I did, I decided to use the time I had with my classmates as an opportunity to learn about the world from their perspectives, perspectives that I would not have received outside of the MPA program. Soon, I also began to understand that I needed to apply myself and treat every assignment like my job depended on it. When you’re someone like me, who was trying to enter the professional field as a fresh graduate, it’s important to accept that you may have to put in extra work to make yourself competitive in the job market. By treating every assignment with equal importance and urgency, I acquired insights into which projects came naturally to me and which areas of focus were worth pursuing outside of the program.

***“Work hard. Ask questions. Apply yourself. You will get there.”***

## From Student to Professional

As I neared my final semester, doubt began to creep back in. I found I was nervous as I started the job application process. Through the guidance of my professors, motivation from my peers, and sheer determination, I was able to narrow in on what I wanted to do after graduation. However, I found that I had once again started to question myself. How are organizations going to know how much work I put in? What if they think I am average? What if I could have done more?

I soon realized I had to do two things. First, I needed to whole-heartedly believe in myself and my abilities. Second, I needed to apply the knowledge I had spent two years acquiring in the MPA program. I went about submitting job applications and found that I had been invited to interview with the Texas Department of State Health Services as an Emergency Response and Recovery Planner. I decided to push all self-doubt out the window and believe that I not only had the ability, but that I could also prove that I would be an asset to their team. It only took that one interview - along with the tools learned from the MPA program, the support of my professors (and their helpful recommendations), and motivation from my peers - to land the job that would be the start of my dream career. Although you may be struggling to see your path, just stay the course. Work hard. Ask questions. Apply yourself. You will get there. I promise.

## Faculty Spotlight: Aisha Amadu, PhD

*Dr. Aisha Ahmadu will join the Master of Public Administration Program in August 2022 as an Assistant Professor. Her research interests focus on disaster science, resource allocation, public finance, and federalism. She earned a PhD in Public Policy and Administration from Mississippi State University, an MBA at New Mexico State University, and a BA in International Studies and Accounting from Midwestern State University. Before becoming an academic, she worked as a researcher and community organizer for a non-governmental agency that provided vocational training and microfinance services in Nigeria.*

Dr. Ahmadu agreed to answer a few questions for the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter.

**Q: Why did you decide to become an educator?**

There were several reasons behind my decision to pursue an academic career. First, given my passion for teaching and mentorship, I knew that academia would provide me the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the academic and professional success of students. I get a sense of fulfillment knowing that I get to play a role in training students for careers in public service. Second, being an educator allows me to pursue my passion for research in public administration, seek ways to improve society, and make contributions to policy and management practices.

**Q: How did you find your passion in public administration?**

I developed an interest in public administration and policy while I worked as a researcher and a trustee board member for the Community Empowerment and Development Initiative (CEDI), a non-governmental agency that provides vocational training programs and microfinance to small business start-ups owned by youths and individuals with a disability. The versatility of the field of public administration gives me the opportunity to contribute to improving fiscal and redistribution policies at different tiers of government through research and policy formulation. The field of public administration also enables me to promote social responsibility and equity within society.





***Q: What is your teaching philosophy?***

My teaching philosophy is to foster a learning environment for students with diverse backgrounds so that they can achieve their potential, become independent thinkers, and be exemplary public service professionals. My teaching philosophy relies on four principles. I encourage students to think critically and independently. I use active learning strategies to improve learning. I create a diverse learning environment where students feel comfortable articulating ideas, are open-minded, and respect the views of their peers who may share different perspectives. And, lastly, I encourage students to see learning as a continuous process that goes beyond the classroom. I encourage students to learn more than just the facts, but to think about the utility of their course to society, and how they can contribute viable ideas that bring about positive developments.

***Q: What do you do when you aren't working on your classes or research?***

When I'm not teaching or doing research, I enjoy a couple of leisure activities, including reading books related to financial management from which I draw inspiration and excitement for teaching and research related to public budgets. I also love hiking, sightseeing, traveling, and spending time with my family.

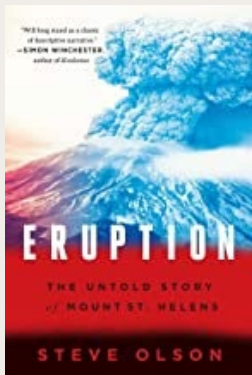
## KNOWLEDGE SPOTLIGHT

By *Thomas W. Haase, PhD*

This section of the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter focuses on the publication of book summaries that fall within the interests of MPA students and alumni. This section also includes a curated list of recently published (or soon to be published) books. If you would like to write a short summary (~400 words) or a longer review (~1500 words) of a recently published book that is relevant to our students and alumni, please contact Dr. Haase at [twh024@shsu.edu](mailto:twh024@shsu.edu).

### Book Summaries

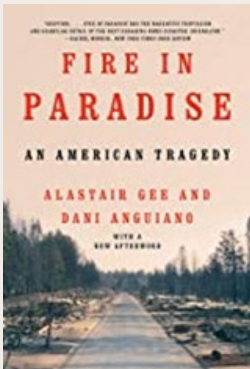
**Olson, Steve. 2017. *Eruption: The Untold Story of Mount St. Helens*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.**



This book provides a detailed history of the Mount St. Helens eruption (May 18, 1980), which killed 57 people. The book combines both the human and geological dimensions of this event. Part of the narrative includes a review of the history of logging, especially the influence of the Weyerhaeuser Company, which owned (and logged) large tracks of land near Mount St. Helens. Additionally, the scientific community was not prepared, and consequently put people in danger (even though the data suggested a large eruption would occur). Scientific agencies were not able to communicate the nature of the risk to either the public (the media was consumed by the drama related to the event) or government agencies (which seemed unprepared to get people off the mountain).

For example, designated danger zones were not accurate given the threat and police roadblocks were largely ineffective (due to the open Weyerhaeuser lands and the logging roads). Also, President Carter was unprepared (distracted by foreign affairs, high inflation, and budget deficits) and the Governor of Washington, Dixie Lee Ray, sought to deflect the blame away from private interests toward the public (who should have stayed away). After the eruption, there was movement to create a land conservatory for Mount St. Helens, which was eventually signed into law by President Reagan. The book also provides a good introduction to the history of logging in the United States, which was a huge industry (pulling an estimated \$2.5 trillion dollars of wealth from North American forests). The Mount St. Helens event was the beginning of the end for old growth logging in the United States. The event also encouraged the scientific community to study volcanic events, to use technology to monitor volcanic activity, and to do better with information dissemination and warnings.

Gee, Alastair and Dani Anguiano. 2020. *Fire in Paradise: An American Tragedy*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.



This book provides an overview of fire that destroyed Paradise, California (November 8, 2018), which killed 85 people and destroyed 14,000 homes. The fire was started by an electrical failure on Pacific Gas & Electric's (PG&E) transmission tower 27/222, which had stood for more than 100 years. The book outlines how California depended on the use of water dams to generate hydroelectric power to support development. As a result, transmission lines were installed across the state to bring power to the growing cities. In the early 2000's, California deregulated the energy sector. At the time, PG&E had huge debt, so the company shed employees, avoided maintenance, and declared bankruptcy. Records indicated that PG&E caused 1,500 fires between 2014 and 2017.

A state investigation found the company was dysfunctional, reactionary rather than focused on safety, and deferring maintenance for profit. Prior to the fire, the city of Paradise had set up an evacuation route and a reverse 911 system. However, most of the warning calls failed and the evacuation traffic was jammed. It was difficult for emergency services to respond, if at all. Most of the book provides a dramatic description of the event from the perspective of the survivors. The book also provides lessons related to improved warning systems, preparation, and evacuation planning.

## Recent and Forthcoming Publications

Ferguson, Niall. 2021. *Doom: The Politics of Catastrophe*. New York, NY: Penguin Press.

Gaillard, J. C, and Noel Castree. 2022. *The Invention of Disaster: Power and Knowledge in Discourses on Hazard and Vulnerability*. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Hancock, Jonathan Todd. 2021. *Convulsed States: Earthquakes, Prophecy, and the Remaking of Early America*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Hirt, Mary Jane Kuffner. 2021. *The Mount Washington Transit Tunnel Disaster*. Charleston, SC: The History Press.

Kernick, Gill. 2021. *Catastrophe and Systemic Change: Learning from the Grenfell Tower Fire and Other Disasters*. London, UK: London Publishing Partnership.

Minetor, Randi. 2021. *Historic Disasters of New England: Legendary Storms, Twisters, Floods, and Other Catastrophes*. Camden, Maine: Down East Books.

## RECENT MPA GRADUATES

### [Spring 2022]

Lane R. Arrendell  
Allison A. Batte  
Kevin L. Bragg  
Christopher D. Claybrook  
Lee D. Godbold

Charles T. McGinnis  
James B. Weatherby  
Mikaela R. Wodtke  
Ashlee N. Ziegenbein





## **ALUMNI & STUDENT UPDATES**

### **Garret Bubela (MPA '12)**

- Promoted to EMS Director of the City of El Campo, Texas

### **Danielle D. Cordova (MPA '21)**

- Promoted to Department Manager of Public Works for the City of Jersey Village, Texas in May 2022.
- Appointed President of the White Oak Bayou Joint Powers Board



### **Nate Mara (MPA student)**

- Currently the Fire Chief of the Decatur Fire Department. Named the City Manager of the City of Decatur, Texas and will start the new role July 1, 2022

### **Francisco Sánchez, Jr. (MPA '18)**

- Appointed by President Joseph R. Biden as Associate Administrator of the Small Business Administration, overseeing the Office of Disaster Assistance, on Monday, January 10, 2022

### **Jonathan Zitzmann (MPA '20)**

- Police Captain with the Harris County Precinct 4 Constable's Office
- Received MS degree in Applied Criminology at Texas A&M University Commerce in 2020
- Welcomed daughter #2 in February 2021
- Accepted adjunct teaching positions at Texas A&M University Commerce teaching criminal justice courses, Arizona State University teaching criminology courses, and the University of Maryland Global Campus teaching Public Safety Administration courses in 2021

## PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The MPA Program sponsored the 2022 TDEM Conference in San Antonio between June 1 and 2, 2022. MPA faculty, Drs. Fatih Demiroz, Tom Haase, and Wenjiun Wang attended the conference. We had a great time meeting our alumni, as well as current and prospective students. We are proud to see MPA alumni developing and advancing their professional career in the field of emergency management and public services. The conference will be held in Fort Worth in 2023 and we look forward to seeing you there.

Drs. Demiroz and Wang also attended the College Day for Houston Fire Department Firefighters, which was held on June 15, 2022 at the Val Jahnke Training Facility.



## **FACULTY UPDATES**

### **Fatih Demiroz, PhD**

#### Recent publication

- Fatih Demiroz and Esra Akbas. (2022) The Impact of Social Media on Disaster Volunteerism: Evidence from Hurricane Harvey. *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, First published online: <https://doi.org/10.1515/jhsem-2020-0077>.
- Whetstone, Crystal and Fatih Demiroz. (2022). Intersectionality in Disaster Management: Towards Building Resilient Communities. Forthcoming in *Intersectionality and Crisis Management*, Hillary Knepper, Michelle Evans, and Tiffany Henley (eds), Routledge.

#### Awards & Recognitions

- Natural Hazards Review, Outstanding Reviewer for 2021

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### **Thomas W. Haase, JD, PhD**

#### Recent News / Activities

- Project with Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) to conduct an After-Action Review (AAR) of their COVID-19 pandemic response operations. Lee Miller (PI), Professor in the Department of Sociology; Thomas W. Haase (COPI), Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science; Magdalena Denham (COPI), Associate Clinical Professor in the Department of Security Studies; Christine Blackburn (COPI), Assistant Professor in the Department of Security Studies; and Amanda Scarbrough (COPI), Associate Professor in the Department of Population Health
- Participant in the QEP - Engaging Learning Workshop. Sam Houston State University, PACE Center, Walker Educational Center, June 13-16, 2022

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### **Sungdae Lim, PhD**

#### Recent Activities:

- Joined the Institute for Science, Technology and Public Policy (ISTPP) in the Bush School of Government & Public Service at Texas A&M as a research fellow as of May 2022.

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### **Wenjiun Wang, PhD**

#### Awards & Recognitions

- Natural Hazards Review, Outstanding Reviewer for 2021

## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Published twice a year, the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter will provide updates on the MPA program, our faculty and staff, current students, and graduates. To ensure the Newsletter reflects your interests and celebrates your accomplishments, we welcome your contributions in the following areas:

**Personal & Professional Announcements** related to moves, births, marriages, deaths, promotions, career transitions, graduations, certifications, accomplishments, awards, etc.

**Activities and Events** information related to activities and events that you, your organization, or another organization plan to hold or sponsor over the next few months.

**Job Opportunities** announcements related to job opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

**Grant Opportunities** announcements related to grant opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

**Information Briefs** We invite students and alumni to submit information briefs (400-500 words) that covers a topic that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

**Book Summaries or Reviews** We invite students and alumni to submit short summaries (~300 words) or reviews (~1000 words) of a recently published book or report that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

### Submission Deadline

The next issue of the newsletter will be published in June 2022. Submit content to Dr. Wang ([wjwang@shsu.edu](mailto:wjwang@shsu.edu)) by November 15, 2022.



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