

Public Administration Program

Newsletter

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VSU offers both the Master of Public Administration and the Doctor of Public Administration Programs and both can be completed on-line. An outstanding faculty serve the Public Administration program. In addition to holding a terminal degree in their field, many of the faculty members have practical management experience in public and non-governmental organizations.

Application Deadlines

DPA: April 15 for Fall Admission

MPA: July 15 for Fall Admission, November 15 for Spring Admission, April 15 for Summer Admission

**To submit information to future newsletters,
Please click [here](#)**



Job Postings/Career Opportunities

- **Georgia Local Government Marketplace (GLGA) –**
<https://www.glga.org/>
- **American Association of Municipal Executive job board –**
<https://jobs.aame.org/>



Public Administration Faculty Highlights

Dr. Huishan Yang



Dr. Huishan Yang begins serving on the communication committee of the Section for Complexity and Network Studies in the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA) in Fall 2025.

Alumni Highlights



Dr. Phenix Culbertson (DPA, 2024)



Phenix Culbertson, DPA voted as the Chair of Georgia State University's Staff Council whose mission is to provide service and foster effective communication within the University community to make Georgia State the best possible place to work. Staff Council works to facilitate communication of staff issues among all sectors of the university and advises the university president and other campus administrators on other matters that have a major effect on staff. Staff Council plays an important role in shaping the policies and procedures of the university as they relate to staff. [Article Link](#)

Alumni Highlights



Dr. Nathan Willingham (DPA, 2024)

Nathan Willingham, DPA ('24), AICP, Managing Principal of Slaughter & Willingham, PLLC, has been appointed to the Mississippi R-STEP (Reliable Energy Siting through Technical Engagement & Planning) Technical Assistance Advisory Board. The Board supports the U.S. Department of Energy–funded R-STEP program, which strengthens state and local government capacity to plan, site, and permit large-scale renewable energy projects in a manner consistent with local land-use goals and community priorities.

Dr. Willingham's appointment builds directly on applied research and engagement pioneered by Dr. Keith Lee through the Center for South Georgia Regional Impact at Valdosta State University, which translates academic research into practical, locally usable tools. This approach closely aligns with R-STEP's mission to deliver fact-based education, defensible permitting frameworks, and transparent community engagement strategies for renewable energy development.

Dr. Willingham will contribute expertise in comprehensive planning, land-use regulation, and local government administration to provide local governments with tools and a playbook to address questions related to these important developments. His professional work includes ongoing comprehensive planning, ordinance development, and regulatory support for local governments navigating growth pressures, infrastructure investment, and emerging energy markets.

Alumni Highlights



Liz Haley (MPA, 2025)



Elizabeth (Liz) Haley is an MPA student that recently graduated in December 2025 and worked as a graduate assistant for the program during her studies.

On November 6, 2025, she presented two of her papers at the Georgia Political Science Association (GPSA) Conference in St. Simons, Georgia at the Sea Palms Resort. Liz presented her undergrad EU Capstone paper "The Rise and Impact of Right-Wing Populism in Hungary" during the European Studies Panel. Liz previously earned 2nd place for the 2025 VSU David W. Winder Best Undergraduate Paper Award for the Department of

Political Science and 2nd place for the best paper across the university at the 2025 VSU Undergraduate Research Symposium for this paper. She also presented her paper "Children of War, Agents of Peace: Assessing the UN's Response to Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone," a 54-page, 12,000 word paper (without references) that was research and compiled over 8 months. Liz chose this topic while researching the Republic of Sierra Leone in preparation to represent them at the National Model United Nations (NMUN) NYC Conference in April, 2025.

Liz currently serves as the President of the Valdosta Model United Nations (VMUN) team at VSU for the Fall 2025 semester. The following day after GPSA, Liz traveled to Washington to participate at the NMUN DC Conference in November 7-9, 2025, where she represented the Kingdom of Sweden in the International Atomic Energy Agency. VMUN earned the Outstanding Delegation Award representing the Kingdom of Sweden, a first-place award given to the top 5% of universities in attendance. This was only the second time in VMUN history at VSU, with the first being last years 2024 NMUN DC Conference when Liz served as the Vice President for the program.

Liz also traveled to Banff, Canada to participate at the NMUN International Conference in November 24-28, 2025, where she represented the Russian Federation in the UN Environment Assembly as the Head Delegate of Russia.

Alumni Highlights



Shari Johnson (MPA, 2022)

Shari Johnson received a new position as Assistant Registrar at South College in September 2025.

Michael Conger (MPA, 2024)

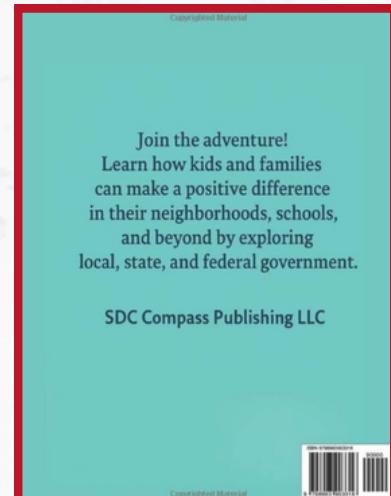
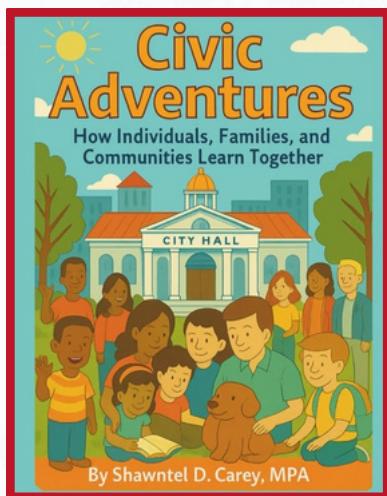
Michael Conger, MPA, has accepted a position with Carrie Steele-Pitts Home as TAGS-BRAVE Recruitment and Development. In this role, he supports TAGS-BRAVE, a statewide program serving teens ages 13–18 who are adopted, in guardianship, or in Georgia's foster care system.

Michael's work spans 12 cities across Georgia, focusing on program recruitment, community engagement, and development efforts that strengthen services for youth and families. His role centers on expanding access, building sustainable partnerships, donor relations, and advancing long-term outcomes for young people navigating permanency and transition.

Alumni Highlights



Shawntel D. Carey (MPA, 2022)



Shawntel D. Carey, MPA published her book, *Civic Adventures: How Individuals, Families, and Communities Learn Together*, in November 2025.

Here is a link to the book: <https://a.co/d/c0VTcwU>

In addition to her publishing work, she has held several public service and advisory roles in Gwinnett County, including appointed and advisory board positions.

A professional portfolio can be viewed here: [**Portfolio Link**](#)

or

LinkedIn profile: [**LinkedIn Link**](#)

Alumni Highlights



Justin Carter (MPA, 2025)



Carter Completed MPA!!!

Mary Beth Bennett (MPA, 2024)

Mary Beth Bennett was promoted to Senior Business Manager at the University of Georgia, Tifton campus in January 2026.

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

Robin Shader

Robin Shader published an article, Are Public Attitudes Changing? Trends in Public Opinion Regarding Access to Sexual Content in Schools and Libraries, in the Fall 2025 Florida Libraries journal.

Here is a link to the journal: [**Journal Link**](#).

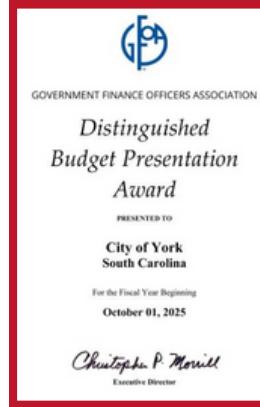
Steve Wright

I accepted a town manager position with the town of Tappahannock, Virginia in September of 2025.

The article may be accessed here: [**Article Link**](#)

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

Dalton Pierce



Dalton Pierce was selected by Gov Business Review as a Top 10 City Manager in the United States for 2025. The recognition is based on visionary leaders who drive efficient, responsive, and innovative local governance. This award also recognizes excellence in public administration, community engagement, and operational excellence, shaping smarter, more sustainable cities that meet the evolving needs of residents while fostering transparency, resilience, and growth.

Here is a link to the award and article: [Article Link](#)

Dalton Pierce, the City Manager of York, SC, achieved the first-ever credit rating for the City. Moody's provided the credit rating of Aa3. For context, an Aa3 rating places York in the upper tier of financially strong municipalities, indicating very low credit risk and boosting confidence among investors, partners, and economic development stakeholders.

Here is a link to the credit rating opinion: [Credit Rating Link](#)

Dalton Pierce, the City Manager of York, SC, earned the Government Finance Officers Association Distinguished Budget Presentation Award for the second consecutive year for FY2025-2026.

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

Charlyene Botley

Charlyene W. Botley began her role as the new Assistant Director of Institutional Advancement at Athens Technical College in Athens, Georgia, on September 16, 2025.

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

Congratulations to our Fall 2025 DPA Graduates!!

Dr. Jodi Harrelson Bazemore

Local County Government Leadership Characteristics in Georgia Counties: To What Extent Does Local County Government Leadership Impact Community Resilience in Georgia Counties?

Dr. Keith Lee, Political Science

Dr. Tony Alexander Cabral

The Impact of Safety Through Seat Belt Enforcement Laws

Dr. Terry Sapp, Political Science

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

**Congratulations to our
Fall 2025 DPA Graduates!!**

Dr. Summer Susanne Dusek

*Adjunct Faculty Development: Building Community and
Sustaining Pedagogical Change*
Dr. Robert Yehl, Political Science

Dr. John McGowan Freeman

*Retention in Increasingly Politicized Bureaucracies: A Study of
Public Library Directors in the State of Georgia*
Dr. Neena Banerjee, Political Science

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

**Congratulations to our
Fall 2025 DPA Graduates!!**

Dr. Shannon Lee McGee

*Comparing the Efficacy of the HOPE Scholarship between
Rural and Urban Students at Regional Comprehensive
Universities in Georgia*

Dr. Keith Lee, Political Science

Dr. Noah Kiel Norris

*Adult Learner Choice in Noncredit Continuing Education: A Mixed
Method Exploration of Choice Factors*

Dr. Joseph Robbins, Political Science

Doctor of Public Administration (DPA) Scholar's Highlights

**Congratulations to our
Fall 2025 DPA Graduates!!**

Dr. Brent C. Wright

*Community College Employee Performance within Forced
Alternative Work Schedules*

Dr. Minsun Song, Political Science

Master of Public Administration (MPA) Scholar's Highlights

Congratulations to our Fall 2025 MPA Graduates!!

SANDRA PATRICE BARRIOS GUITRON

APRIL MICHELLE BRAUDA

SARAH DANIELLE BURCH

JUSTIN ALEXANDER CARTER

KAREN SHARISE ESTES

SACHA RENEE FIELDS

JOSHUA FINN

ELIZABETH ROSE HALEY

RMAHNI KEMP

MADISON BROOKE NEWELL

YEIDI AMANDA PEACOCK

AUSTIN PETERSON

CHASSITY VANESSA SANDERS

JAMIE LEE SHELTON, III

ISAIAH JULIAN STATEN

CHAYLA YAMBRE STEWART

CHIMERE TAYLOR

ERIKA E. THREATTS

CLAIRE WALTON

ARIEL AUDRIANA WEST