

# MPA The Leader Reader

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S CHAIR

# Public Sector Hiring Doesn't Work, and Needs to Change

BY RUSSELL LIDMAN, PH.D., PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR

The public sector will experience a wave of retirements at the federal level in the next few years. There have been over 10,000 retirements annually in supervisory ranks, which is expected to continue through 2018. At this rate, some two-thirds of the higher-level federal positions will need to be filled.



RUSSELL LIDMAN

Data for local units of government, special-purpose districts, and states, mirror this phenomenon in retirements. Baby boomers, those born between 1940 and 1960 are currently retiring and will continue to do so at an increasing rate.

All of this should point to a rosy public sector hiring picture over the long run. Currently many units of government are experiencing a challenging budget picture, which puts a cloud over the short-term. However, it is important to recall an enduring truth — demography is destiny. Over the medium term and beyond, there should be a much healthier public sector hiring pattern.

So why has there not been a boom in public sector hiring? The public sector as a whole has not demonstrated particular capacity in succession planning. Despite the knowledge that retirements were looming, many agencies have done little forward planning. I was at one such agency in state government over a decade ago. We knew retirements were looming. The state

personnel agency demonstrated this by providing unambiguous data. However, there was no meaningful response in the units of the agency responsible for taking action.

More pointedly, the public sector has not distinguished itself in seeking out and employing the most talented, whether at the managerial or

the operational ranks. Laurel McFarland, the Executive Director of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) recently testified before the U.S. Office of Personnel Management on this subject.

She observed, "NASPAA's recent experience with our graduate students and federal hiring has led us unequivocally to declare that normal, competitive hiring is NOT an effective avenue for bringing recent college graduates into the federal workforce. The current system of federal hiring is anything but competitive for graduate students seeking to enter federal service. It is confusing, fragmented, and not aimed at young people who lack "inside" information and work experience. If you want to skip the next generation of federal workers and leaders, keep doing what you're doing. If it's hard to apply, or students see that their peers are all unsuccessful as applicants, they'll go elsewhere. You'll lose the best of this generation forever for federal service, and it

will be hard to get them back later. We are trying to recruit the very best...aren't we?"

NASPAA, of which we are a member, is focusing its efforts on the federal level, where the hiring process is particularly opaque. NASPAA is seeking to change federal hiring, and there are indications of agency and Congressional support for a proposed simplified pathway for graduate students. As at other schools in the Northwest, few SU MPA's work or aim to work in the federal government. However, what NASPAA accomplishes with federal hiring will provide a template for improving the hiring practices at the state and local levels. I hope to join with leadership of other NASPAA member schools in the NW to push for smarter, better, more transparent hiring for future leadership in the public sector. When I leave at the end of the coming year (read succession planning here), I hope my successor will continue this effort.

## MPA Fall Dinner

Please join us on Tuesday evening,

**September 21, 2010**

to meet, mingle, and network with fellow MPA students, faculty, and alumni.

Student Center Room 160 • 6 to 9pm

RSVP to Michelle Anderson at [andersom@seattleu.edu](mailto:andersom@seattleu.edu) or 206.296.5440.

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## MPA Alumni and Student News

**Selam Fesaha ('04)** is the Employment Manager for Pacific Medical Centers Human Resources Department.

**Debbie Dawson ('06)** was appointed President for the National Animal Control Association (NACA). She was elected by secret ballot at NACA's yearly Training Summit in Columbus, Ohio in May. NACA's purpose is to preserve the Human/Animal Bond by insisting on responsible animal ownership.



DEBBIE DAWSON

**John Sheller ('07)** was elected to the board of PCC Natural

Markets in June. He contributes this achievement to the knowledge he gained in the Nonprofit Governance course he took with instructor, Yvonne Harrison, on effective boards.

**Heather Thomas ('07)** moved to Alexandria, VA in June to start a new job as the Public Communications Liaison for the Alexandria Sanitation Authority.

**Amy White ('07)** is the Director of Community Strategies and Engagement for the Pride Foundation.

**Patrick Bell ('09)** moved to Washington, D.C. in March to serve as Director of New Media for the House Republican Conference.

**Lindsay Herbst ('09)** is working for Senator Murray as a Constituent Services Representative in Seattle. She works on constituent services regarding immigration, specifically non-immigrant visas with the Department of State and immigrant visa cases with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

**Victoria Rucker ('10)** is joining the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) team through its Emerging Leaders Program. The HHS Emerging Leaders Program provides interns a unique opportunity to develop enhanced leadership skills in one of the largest federal agencies in the nation. Victoria served as the Associate Director of Seattle University's Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) since its inception in 2004.

*Please share your personal and/or professional updates for the 2011 Spring bulletin by contacting Danielle Potter at [potterd@seattleu.edu](mailto:potterd@seattleu.edu) or 206.296.6143.*

## A Piece of the Pie for Early Learning



PHOTO BY TEGRA-STONE NUES

HANNAH LIDMAN WITH PAOLA MARANAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE AT THE VOICES FOR CHILDREN AWARDS LUNCHEON.

**Hannah Lidman ('06)** started a new job as a Senior Policy and Political Strategist for the League of Women Voters in June. She continues to work in the policy and political realm of early learning education, K-12 finance, the state budget and revenue. During the 2010 legislative session, Hannah, the League of Education Voters, and 50 to 100 legislators passed two bills HB 2731 and SB 6759 that protect early childhood care and education programs.

When asked about her job and commitment to early learning on a warm summer day in Seattle, Hannah related early learning to a piece of pie, "Education is incredibly important and an extremely complex financial investment. We have to look at where the money is going to come from to fill the pie. Once we begin to fill the pie, how do we get people to advocate for early learning in order to get a larger piece of the pie?"

Hannah's capstone project in the MPA program ultimately led to her decision to pursue a career in early learning. Her research project addressed the evolution of early learning policies from 1996 to 2006. At the conclusion of the project, she knew she was committed to making early learning policy a state priority.

Hannah received the 2010 Voices for Children Award at the Children's Alliance annual luncheon in May. The award honors child advocates whose work has improved the lives of Washington children.

Hannah explains, "Early learning is not an easy or soft policy. It straddles so many spheres, such as the role of women and how communities value families. It's an economic policy: what is the return on investment? It's also a transportation policy: how do parents prepare their kids for school? How do they get their children to and from school?" Hannah hopes to one day live in a community where having a family is not a struggle, but an honored part of society.

### Meet the MPA Student Officers 2010-2011

*President:* Mary Mulholland

*Vice President:* Dee Sylve

*Treasurer:* Kyle Matsumoto

*Secretary:* Darcy Cinq-Mars

*Officers at Large:* Moifair Chin, Joshuah Marshall, Andrew Royer, and Jon Schorsch

Visit the MPA Student Association on Facebook

## Professors' Corner

**Phil Barclift, Associate Professor**, will teach Ethics for Public Administration and Ethics for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Organizations in the Winter quarter. Phil is the former director of the Liberal Studies program.

**Yvonne Harrison, Former Associate Professor**, accepted a position at Rockefeller College, University of Albany as Assistant Professor, Department of Public Administration. Yvonne can now be reached at [yharrison@uamail.albany.edu](mailto:yharrison@uamail.albany.edu).

**Jim Sawyer, Associate Professor**, continues work on a project that stemmed from his appointment as Reverend Louis Gaffney S.J. Endowed Chair of Arts and Sciences, 2003-05. The project involves the deconstruction and reframing of economic doctrine, particularly highlighting the role of ideology in contrast with the role of science with policy implications. Three levels or audiences are being addressed.

The first level of the project addressed the community of academic economists, which came to closure with the publication of two major papers during the 2008-09 academic year. The papers were supported through

Jim's leave and appointment as Fulbright-Nord Pas de Calais Regional Council Scholar (2008-09) and Research Associate at Laboratoire de Recherche sur l'Industrie et l'Innovation, L'Université du Littoral Côte d'Opale, Dunkerque, France.

The second level of the project took place in the summer. It addressed a professional audience comprised of non-economists, such as many faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences. A set of short position papers will be broken out from the set of scholarly articles and will continue into Academic Year 2010-2011 with dissemination through one or more Internet sites.

With completion of the second level, the third and final level will be engaged, focusing on dissemination to lay audiences via Internet sites.

**Paul Sommers, Associate Professor**, and two University of Washington colleagues completed an assessment report on Washington State's economic performance. The report for the Washington State Economic Development Commission (EDC) includes data on trends in Washington and comparisons to other states and countries. Twenty-

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## Visiting Assistant Professor for 2010-2011

**Kelly Bay** is an advanced Ph.D. candidate in Political Science from Brown University. She holds an M.A. in Political Science from Brown University and a B.A. in Foreign Affairs with distinction from the University of Virginia. Her current research focuses on citizen participation in development, education politics, and the New Left in Latin America.



KELLY BAY

She is excited for the opportunity to return to Seattle, which she still considers home. Born and raised in Western Washington, Kelly graduated from Lake Stevens High School. She enjoys hiking, snow skiing and surfing, playing soccer and basketball, and the simple pleasures with family and friends.

Kelly will teach PUBM 501 Foundations of Public Administration and PUBM 540 Policy and Program Research.

## Students Help to Improve Board Effectiveness

Former Board President Barbara Wright and 23 Executive and Full Board Committee members from the Seattle Arboretum Foundation discussed the need to conduct a board assessment for several years, but never had the chance to get organized. Until the day Barbara received an email from Professor Yvonne Harrison asking nonprofit boards to participate in a Board Effectiveness Assessment process. For Barbara, the timing was perfect. Barbara states, "Through the years, our board governance went through a lot of changes. Our board was becoming a more sophisticated, high-functioning board, yet not all board members were familiar with good board practices. The assessment was our opportunity to move forward."

The board assessment was part of the Nonprofit Governance course taught by Professor Harrison in the Spring quarter. Participating boards were given a board survey and assigned to a group of MPA students enrolled in the course. Based on course readings, class lectures and discussion, the students analyzed the results of the board survey then reported their findings and provided recommendations.

MPA students Janet Pope, Mary Mulholland, Lauren Hardin, and Brett Turrell were assigned to work with the Arboretum Foundation. Janet comments, "It really takes courage for a board to have an outsider come in and assess. The organization was very open and enthusiastic about the process. Our team observed a session with the Arboretum's Executive Committee (EC) and attended a full board meeting."

The students recommended four main strategies that focused on generative thinking, a concept discussed in the book *Governance as Leadership* by Chait, Ryan and Taylor (2005). Generative thinking 'invites boards to take a fresh look at opportunities and challenges from a broader prospective. By using knowledge, data and board

insight, generative leadership provides long-term impact and meaning to the nonprofit organization by creating a fresh understanding of complex or ambiguous situations. This activity is called "sense-making" or "problem-framing."<sup>1</sup>

The students' recommendations included ideas to manage meetings more efficiently by implementing appropriate technology systems, such as Skype and related video capabilities that would allow all board members the opportunity to share in decision-making. The students also recommended that the minutes from the EC meetings be sent out in advance to help board members better understand the roles of the EC.

During a meeting in May, the board utilized one of the students' recommended strategies for improving board engagement. They formed small groups to discuss what energized and motivated members at meetings and to identify areas for improvement. The small group discussion was so successful that it is now part of the board's culture.

Barbara states, "The feedback and professionalism that we received from the students was fabulous. They really captured the soft spots that needed to be addressed. They provided good education about board governance in an easy to understand way."

Janet adds, "I started the MPA program in 2009 after the program where I worked was cut. I wanted to stay relevant and this class was so helpful in terms of networking and staying current with what is going on in the community."

If you are interested in a framework for generative governance contact Yvonne Harrison at [yharrison@uamail.albany.edu](mailto:yharrison@uamail.albany.edu).

1. [HTTP://WWW.THECENTREPOINT.CA/PDF/BOARD\\_GOV\\_AS\\_LEADERSHIP\\_SUMMARY.PDF](http://www.thecentrepoint.ca/pdf/board_gov_as_leadership_summary.pdf)



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## Service in Action Seminar Series 2010–2011

### **Career Decision-Making and Job-Search Strategies for Nonprofit and Public Service Professionals**

**Presenter:** Career Services, Seattle University  
Friday, October 15, 9am to 4pm

### **Winning the Grant Game: For Beginning and Intermediate Players**

**Presenter:** Karen Porterfield  
Friday, November 5, 9am to 4pm

### **The Future of Nonprofit Leadership**

**Presenter:** Amy Carr  
Friday, January 21, 9am to 4pm

### **Coalition Building Within a Social Justice Framework**

**Presenter:** Office of Multicultural Affairs,  
Seattle University  
Friday, February 25, 9am to 4pm

### **Helping Your People Succeed: Management Skills for Improving Employee Performance**

**Presenter:** Lee Holmer  
Friday, March 25, 9am to 4pm

### **Leveraging Volunteers: An Old Idea for the New Economy**

**Presenter:** Ken Gibson  
Friday, April 22, 9am to 4pm

### **Storytelling for Effective Advocacy**

**Presenter:** Michael Shadow  
Friday, May 13, 9am to 4pm

**General Public:** \$125 (per seminar)  
**SU Student/Alumni/Employee:**

\$100 (per seminar)

**Three or more:** \$100 each

*Price includes lunch. All proceeds benefit the  
MPA/MNPL scholarship fund.*

To access seminar locations, descriptions,  
and registration visit <http://www.seattleu.edu/artsci/mpa/events.aspx> or contact  
Danielle Potter at [potterd@seattleu.edu](mailto:potterd@seattleu.edu)  
or 206.296.6143.

### **PROFESSORS' CORNER**

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two separate indicators were selected for the relevance to the EDC's statewide innovation strategy and grouped into five composite indices. The composites were reduced into a five-part "dashboard" to assess the state's economic performance.

The dashboard shows that Washington is doing better than Virginia, similar to Colorado, but poorly compared to California, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. Looking at the scores on the five composite indices, Washington's dashboard scores are built in a different way than the scores in the closest scoring state, Colorado. This finding, as well as the variations among the five composite indices in the leading states, suggests different models for building an innovation economy.

Paul notes, "Case studies to investigate these different policy approaches would make excellent MPA capstone projects."

The full report is available at the EDC website at [www.wedc.wa.gov/](http://www.wedc.wa.gov/).