

# Faculty Spotlight: Rich Nafziger Bridges Theory with Practice



## **You've had a varied career working on a range of economic development issues. How did you first get started?**

My first position came to me rather unexpectedly. I was on my way to graduate school in New York City to study economics when I ran into a guy who did research on native rights and the extraction of oil and minerals. I ended up working with his organization. We were hired by radical groups to research how local people could benefit more from oil and minerals extracted from their countries. At the time, there was a movement in Latin America and Africa of people who felt taken advantage of by American companies. I can't help but tell an interesting story. I was doing some consulting work with the progressive Prime Minister of Jamaica, Michael Manley. Oil companies had taken control of the country and had created the world's largest petroleum refinery with little benefits to the country. I was asked to find out if they could nationalize the refinery. I found out that the oil company had previously overthrown the government

of a country that had attempted to nationalize their refineries. We decided, rather than nationalize, we would work to negotiate for a better deal. It was fascinating work. We saw how there was an idealism in completely overthrowing the system, but our research showed how that might not work. We looked at how locals could work the system to receive more benefits. It's a lot like what we do at SU. It's learning to identify problems and using research to figure out how to get things done.

## **After working as an economist in public policy for over thirty-five years, what made you decide to move into teaching?**

I had worked a lot in different areas of the policy process, and I wanted to learn from that and discuss lessons with other people and learn from them. I was impressed with students at Seattle University as they always had a focus, to some extent, on social justice. Students want to know how they can make the world a better place and I thought, wow, this is cool, I can work with this.

## **For those wanting to break into or move ahead in the fields of public administration and public policy, what advice do you have?**

Informational interviews. Go out and meet people. People love to talk about what they've done and help make connections. This was the focus of the professional development program I hosted in fall quarter. I brought in guest speakers, including MPA alums that work for children and family services, health policy, and homelessness, to talk about how to look for jobs, what work in the different sectors is like and tips for networking.

**Final thoughts or pieces of advice.**

For faculty, I would say, this is the best job there is. It is such a treat to work with highly motivated students. I learn so much from them. For students, keep in the forefront where you want to go. Keep asking yourself, how does this information fit with where I want to go next. What else do I need to learn or find out? It's so important for staying motivated and making the most of your education.