
Hatfield School's auditor and analyst alumni improve government

BY PROFESSOR BRIAN STIPAK AND BEVIN CLAPPER

MOST M.P.A. STUDENTS aim to become administrators, not analysts, and may reluctantly face taking the required analytic methods sequence, PA 551/552. But there is another group, those who enjoy the nitty-gritty of analysis and go on to become producers of analytic information. Outnumbered by their less analytically-oriented cohorts, they tend towards invisibility and get little recognition. This article tries to rectify that oversight by acknowledging the important positions and work of the many graduates of the M.P.A. program working in wide-ranging analyst jobs throughout government agencies.

One of the areas that many analytic-oriented M.P.A. graduates have found work over the years is in the field of performance auditing. For example, Nicole Miller, Tenzinn Choephel, and Alexandra Fercak work in performance auditing at the Oregon Secretary of State's Office. Nicole, Senior Auditor in the Audits Division, recently analyzed costs for contracted versus in-house ODOT engineering services and identified potential savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The local performance audit agencies have had especially close connections with the PSU M.P.A. program, hiring many of our graduates over the years such as Beth Woodward who currently works for the City of Portland Audit Services Division. The current Multnomah County Auditor, Laverne Griffin-Valade is one of our M.P.A. graduates. Senior auditors at the City and County Auditors offices have contributed often by speaking with M.P.A. classes, and some have taught classes, including the former and the current Audit Directors for the City of Portland, Dick Tracy and Drummond Kahn.

We asked Portland City Auditor, and past Multnomah County Auditor, Gary Blackmer why he has often hired PSU M.P.A. graduates for auditor positions. Gary first cited PSU's motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City", and then talked about how "PSU students know how to use information to improve management" and "come with a large toolkit to diagnose problems".

Sharon Meross, currently the Performance Measurement Program Manager at Portland Development Commission, started as a performance auditor in the City Auditor's Office.

She developed a special interest in information systems after working on a best practices audit on the procurement and implementation of information systems. After earning the CIA (certified internal auditor) certification she went on to obtain the CISA (certified information system auditor) certification.

Some M.P.A. students may not realize their capacity for and interest in analysis until that awakens in the required analytic methods classes. Professor Brian Stipak expresses the special gratification he feels as a teacher when he helps awaken some students' interest in doing analysis, which they previously may not have recognized. The story he likes to tell about Sharon is that he had to tell her that she was a "nerd" to get her to apply for the City Auditor's job. She remembers it differently, claiming to have already had that epiphany "when I realized that I could understand Brian".

In this short article we can't list all of the many successful M.P.A. graduates working now in analytical roles to improve government, but they are at all levels of government and even in the profit and nonprofit sectors. And we are still producing them: Bevin Clapper, a soon-to-be M.P.A. graduate, is now completing her PA 509 organizational experience in the Office of the Metro Auditor, and will then be starting a State Auditor 1 position in the Oregon Secretary of State's Audits Division. John Haney, graduating also this term, will be starting a position as a performance auditor with the Secretary of State's Office as well, after having focused on analytic training while in the M.P.A. program, including an internship at the Portland City Auditor's Office.

So if you are analytically-oriented there is a place for you in the PSU M.P.A. program, and there may be a place for you as an analyst in local, state or federal government working to improve government. In the M.P.A. program you can improve your analytical skills through courses on data analysis, program evaluation, operations research, and a range of other analytical courses inside and outside the Hatfield School of Government.

And in the words of professor Brian Stipak, the biggest nerd on the Public Administration faculty, "if you are a nerd but do not yet know it, we can help teach you that too".