PROMISING PRACTICES

2012 Capstone Conference on Graduate Research for Public Officials

Friday, April 13

Knapp-Sanders Building
School of Government
UNC-Chapel Hill
8:30 – 8:40  Welcome  
**Bill Rivenbark, Director**
**Public Administration Program**

8:40 – 9:40  Performance Management  
**Moderator: David Ammons**

Determining Linkages Between Comprehensive Needs Assessment Reports and School Improvement Plans in North Carolina  
— Angel Banks

This analysis contributes to the research on school improvement planning, in that it explores whether a sample of 45 North Carolina public elementary, middle, and high schools that received Comprehensive Needs Assessment recommendations from the NC Department of Public Instruction Comprehensive Needs Assessment team incorporated them into their School Improvement Plans. This paper discusses the recommendations from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment team that schools were most and least likely to address. Further, this paper discusses barriers that may prevent schools from addressing the prescribed recommendations.

Use of Progressive Management Tools in Local Government: An Analysis of Characteristics Associated with Use  
— Manal Khan

Master of Public Administration programs regularly teach students the value and best practices associated with a variety of progressive management tools such as strategic planning, performance measurement, and benchmarking. Professional organizations such as ICMA and ASPA similarly advocate these tools based on their assumed ability to provide various public sector management benefits such as productivity improvements and financial efficiency. This capstone project uses a national sample to examine local government characteristics (including geographic/physical features and political-management activities) that may influence the adoption of such management tools.

From Measurement to Management: A Performance-Based Approach to Improving Municipal Fleet Operations in Burlington, North Carolina  
— Erik Osborne

A comparing of data from the North Carolina Benchmarking Project reveals potential performance deficiencies in the Equipment Services Division in Burlington, North Carolina in comparison with peer cities. Using a simplified variation of corporate style benchmarking, the work processes of the Equipment Services Division were compared with best-in-class peers (benchmarking partners) to identify policy differences that could improve fleet services performance. This report recommends procedural changes in vehicle replacement policies, personnel management, and equipment usage that will improve overall operations, while cutting overall fleet costs.

9:40 – 9:50  Break

9:50 – 11:10  Nonprofit Organizations – Concurrent Session A-1  
**Moderator: Gordon Whitaker**

Shifting Burdens: An Objective Overview of Municipal Options to Gain Revenue from Nonprofit Organizations in North Carolina  
— Neil Dermody

Municipalities and nonprofit organizations have historically partnered for the public good. Notwithstanding nonprofits’ various contributions to their communities, however, increasing numbers of municipalities are starting to seek more revenue from nonprofits to help offset budgetary deficits related to the current recession. This report objectively reviews the various mechanisms legally available to North Carolina municipalities should they decide to seek more revenue from nonprofits. These options include privilege license taxes, user fees, creating voluntary contribution arrangements, and requesting in-kind donations. The report concludes with recommendations for implementation.

Maximizing Social Return on Investment: How North Carolina Can Revise Its Statutory Oversight Requirements to Facilitate Efficient Grant Making to Nonprofit Organizations  
— Casselle Smith

North Carolina dedicates a significant part of its annual budget to grants to nonprofit organizations. However, the state’s current statutory and regulatory scheme does not require the type of oversight necessary to ensure maximum social return on investment from grants to nonprofit organizations. This paper evaluates current statutes affecting oversight of state-funded nonprofits throughout the country and considers how the most effective elements
from those statutes can be applied in North Carolina to facilitate more efficient grant making to nonprofits.

¿Qué pasa si me enfermo? “What if I get sick?”
Examining Foundation Giving to North Carolina Nonprofits in Support of Native Spanish-Speakers’ Healthcare Access — **Amanda Stafford**

To examine foundation support of native Spanish-speakers’ healthcare access in North Carolina, this research looks at grantmaking over the last five years. Many factors impede native Spanish-speakers’ healthcare access, including cultural illiteracy, lack of medical insurance, poverty, and language barriers. This results in social and economic consequences for communities. Although foundations are the resource-holders most likely to support healthcare access for Spanish-speakers, this study finds that relatively few foundations prioritize funding for both healthcare and Latinos/Hispanics/Immigrants. Of those that have these priorities, few have funded in the last five years.

The Effect of Performance Measures in Grants and Contracts with North Carolina Nonprofit Organizations — **Tan Ngo**

In the early 1990s, community-based nonprofit organizations in North Carolina experimented with performance measures. This capstone examines how performance measures written in funding applications and contracts affect managerial decision making for 25 local registered 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organizations in four NC counties: Orange, Durham, Mecklenburg, and Chatham. Recommendations are made to provide guidance to local governments and nonprofit organizations on developing performance measures suited to the individual contracting organization’s structure. These guidelines will help determine the amount of administrative expenses necessary to meet specific outcomes.

9:50 – 11:10  Local Government – Concurrent Session A-2
MODERATOR: **CARL STENBERG**

The Value of Online Resources to North Carolina Public Library Patrons — **Emily Guhde**

As public libraries balance the increasing demand for online resources with budgetary constraints, information about the value of online resources to patrons will help library administrators prioritize their efforts. This study estimates the value of library-provided online resources through an evaluation of library patrons’ willingness to pay. Results indicate limited relationships between respondent-specific variables and patron willingness to pay, but several library-specific variables were found to be significantly related to patron willingness to pay. Recommendations for applying these results to public library administration are discussed.

Big City Revenue Diversity: The Illusion of Fiscal Stability? — **August Carvalho**

Many local governments have diversified their revenue portfolios beyond the property tax over the last several decades as a way of mitigating the negative impact of fluctuation in a single revenue source. Questions have been raised, however, about whether diversification is a beneficial practice because most alternative revenues exhibit higher volatility than the property tax. The purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between revenue diversification and revenue volatility in large US municipalities between 2005 and 2010. A major finding is that, in this population, revenue diversification did not correlate with revenue volatility at all.

The Higher Education Factor: The Role of Higher Education in the Hiring and Promotion Practices in the Fire Service — **Nick Geiss**

Increasing higher education for firefighters is one strategy to respond to new demands and challenges as requirements for working in today’s fire service become more complex. This research examines the use of higher education in the hiring and promotion practices of midsized North Carolina fire departments and fire chiefs’ perceived value of higher education. Findings indicate a gap exists between the use of higher education in hiring and promotion practices.
and fire chiefs’ perception of educational needs. Recommendations are offered to potentially close this perceived gap.

**Determining the Factors that Impact Local Government Leaders’ Attitudes on Regional Collaboration and North Carolina’s Regional Councils — Seth Cutter**

North Carolina’s 16 regional councils, representing 93 percent of local governments in the state, offer a venue for local leaders to discuss issues of common concern. But given enduring fiscal stress, is there room for increased innovation and possibly regional service delivery at these councils? This study’s survey of 236 local leaders finds that regional councils are poised to be more than forums. There is significant local willingness to work regionally, largely influenced by respondents’ frequency of attendance at regional council events.

**11:10 – 12:30**  
**Managing Public Services – Concurrent Session B-1**  
**Moderator: Maureen Berner**

**Getting Better All the Time: The Status of Employee Wellness Programs in North Carolina’s Municipalities — Claire Long**

Wellness programs are designed to nurture employee health, well-being, and productivity. Although organizations are recognizing the benefits of investing in these programs, little is known about what is included under the wide umbrella of “wellness programs.” This study explores what wellness program components North Carolina municipalities offer and what information they collect to evaluate these programs. All municipalities offer some wellness program components, the most common being on-site health screenings and seminars. While 86 percent of municipalities are collecting information on their wellness program, the depth and amount of information varies.

**Benchmarking Service Delivery in Public Assistance Programs: Evaluating and Adapting Innovative Strategies for Implementation — Lindsey Shewmaker**

The traditional process used by the Orange County Department of Social Services to deliver public assistance benefits falls short of optimal efficiency and effectiveness. Nationwide, states and local governments are using innovative practices to better deliver public assistance to families in need. This study uses the principles of best practice benchmarking to examine evidence-based service delivery processes in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program in Washington, Idaho, and New Mexico, and offers recommendations for adaptation and implementation in Orange County, North Carolina.

**A Tool for Evaluating Plan Quality of Local Government Emergency Management Response Plans — Rachel Meyerson**

Because local governments lead disaster response efforts, they must be fully prepared. Preparedness involves developing emergency response plans. Incomplete planning can lead to ineffective response operations. The research in this paper answers the question: What constitutes a high quality local government emergency management response plan? Through an iterative process of synthesizing literature, evaluating existing plans, and collecting expert feedback, an evaluation tool that measures the quality of local government response plans is developed. This research is intended to better inform researchers, practitioners, and policy makers.

**Sink, Swim, or Float? Funding Implications of the Organizational Placement of Lifeguard Services in Local Government — Jake Pflepson**

Local governments commonly operate ocean lifeguard services under one of three management structures: parks and recreation, public safety, or stand-alone departments. This research examines how organizational placement and other variables impact budgetary decisions for lifeguard services, as measured through per employee spending. Organizational placement under public safety, unionization, and the presence of some specialized rescue capabilities were found to significantly and positively impact expenditures. Results assist local governments in considering the implications of placement decisions on budgetary outlays for lifeguard services, though specific local considerations ultimately drive these choices.
11:30 – 12:50  Emerging Issues – Concurrent Session B-2  
**Moderator: John Stephens**

If We Build it, Will They Come? A Mixed-Method Exploration of High Speed Broadband Access and Economic Development — Amy Huffman

High speed broadband internet is often heralded as an effective economic development tool. To realize the purported benefits of broadband services, federal, state and local governments are investing in its expansion. However, the relationship between high speed broadband and the economic health of North Carolina communities is unknown. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, this study explores the relationship between high speed broadband and the economic health and economic development activities in North Carolina. Finally, the study provides recommendations for local governments seeking to utilize broadband as an economic development tool.

Finding Employment: Factors Influencing Self-Sufficiency Rates in the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s Matching Grant Program — Trevor Fleck

Gainful employment is a fundamental milestone for refugees to establish economic self-sufficiency. This research explores organizational characteristics, community characteristics, and job-seeking best practice strategies that could influence refugee economic self-sufficiency rates under the Office of Refugee Resettlement’s Matching Grant program. Findings using 2010 data indicate no correlation among organizational characteristics, community characteristics, or job-seeking best practice strategies and the rate of refugee employment. Future research should employ longitudinal studies examining the influence of individual refugee characteristics on the rate of refugee employment.

Shedding Light on Transparency: An Analysis of the Breadth and Depth of Federal Agency Implementation of the Open Government Initiative in Online Environments — Maureen McCormick

The Open Government Initiative was meant to be one of the signature initiatives of the Obama Administration. This capstone is a high-level analysis of federal agency participation with the Initiative. It quantifies quality of participation and attempts to establish a relationship between certain agency characteristics and enhanced compliance or participation with the Initiative. All federal agencies participating in the Open Government Initiative are considered, regardless of compulsory compliance, entity size, or level. The study found that both agency budget and number of full-time equivalent (FTE) positions affected whether or not an agency chose to participate. Finally, it establishes that some agencies with very limited capacity have participated to some extent with various aspects of the Open Government Initiative.

She’s the Boss: The Use and Efficacy of Career Advancement Strategies for Female City Managers — Emily Leik

Despite relatively equal numbers of men and women represented in mid-level municipal management, only 12 percent of current city managers are female. Much is known about the challenges women face in career advancement, yet there is less clarity on what strategies women use to overcome these challenges. This research examines how female managers use career advancement strategies and their perceived effectiveness. Respondents indicated that there is no “one magic strategy”; rather, employing a diversified set of strategies helped respondents to succeed. Also, strategies need to vary based on career stages.

12:30 – 1:30  Lunch on your own

1:30 – 2:50  Public Administration Law/Law Enforcement – Concurrent Session C-1  
**Moderator: Greg Allison**

Evaluating Pretrial Release Programs: Factors that are Associated with Cost Savings and Maximize Appearance Rates — Brent Troxell

Pretrial release programs give judicial officials a supervised, non-bond option for release of defendants. In North Carolina, less than a third of counties currently use these programs as a pretrial option. This study looks at how these programs differ, how appearance rates are affected by those differences, and whether counties are saving money by using the programs. Results show larger programs need to divert a
smaller percentage of defendants from jail to save money, while high appearance rates are not closely linked to the studied factors.

North Carolina Basic Law Enforcement Training: A Comparative Analysis — Mike Smallwood

The quality and amount of training that law enforcement officers receive can have a direct impact on their ability to correctly and appropriately enforce the law. This study explores different aspects of North Carolina’s Basic Law Enforcement Training, the required training all recruits must complete to become a certified law enforcement officer. These aspects are compared to the basic training programs of neighboring states as well as literature on law enforcement training. This comparison produced several recommendations that may strengthen or improve North Carolina’s basic law enforcement training, including mandated field training and an expanded entrance exam.

Patrol Officers’ Emotional Intelligence as a Predictor of Success — John Rible

Professional organizations interested in identifying “star performers” are comparing Emotional Intelligence (EI) tests with job-related performance measures. Emotional intelligence covers areas such as interpersonal relationships, stress management, and decision making. Patrol officers work under stressful and risky conditions, making EI critical to success. Comparing EI with supervisors’ job performance ratings, this research examines whether there is a correlation between job performance and EI for patrol officers in the Greenville, North Carolina, police department. These findings could impact the recruiting and promotion practices of police departments.

Community-Based and Prison-Based: Examining Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents in North Carolina — Laura Biediger

Today more children face the grave consequences of losing a parent to incarceration. The Children of Incarcerated Parents’ Bill of Rights lists the basic needs of this population. This study examines programs for children of incarcerated parents in North Carolina and compares their programmatic alignment to the Bill of Rights. Of the few opportunities available, there is a clear distinction between community-based programs and prison-based programs. With a limited connection between programs, few, if any, children of incarcerated parents have all their needs met by the Bill of Rights.

Industrial Revenue Bonds in NC Counties: Past Participation, Current Perceptions, and Future Potential — Albert Richardson

In economic development, incentives draw both staunch support and harsh criticism. The industrial revenue bond program is an economic development tool which allows for tax-exempt financing of a relocating or expanding company’s capital cost. This paper aims to understand current perceptions of the program and to uncover potential obstacles for those who want to use industrial revenue bonds in their economic development efforts. The paper concludes with recommendations meant to foster success.

Local Economic Development in North Carolina: Before and After the Great Recession — Sarah Osmer Vinas

This study provides the first look at North Carolina municipal economic development strategies over time, with a focus on how towns have changed their strategies since the Great Recession. It also explores the relationship between local and organizational characteristics and the level of municipal economic development effort. The findings of this study reveal the number and kind of strategies used has not changed significantly between 2006 and 2011. This study also demonstrates that organizational capacity and population influence the level of municipal economic development activities more than socio-economic characteristics.

More Than Face Value: Façade Improvement Grants in North Carolina — Scott Sherill

Façade improvement grants are a common tool for encouraging investment in downtown areas across the state of North Carolina. This project examines the use of best practices from the literature and how those best practices can help to address some of the problems commonly reported by practitioners. The data for this
The Role of Business Improvement Districts in Small Town North Carolina — Matt Dudek

Much has been written about Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in big cities like New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, but how do these organizations work in small towns? This study asks: What role do BIDs play in small town revitalization, and what are the unique challenges and opportunities for BIDs in small towns? It examines how North Carolina’s version of BIDs, Municipal Service Districts or MSDs, work in Brevard, Oxford, and Whiteville. These cities have populations of between 5,000 and 10,000, and are at least thirty minutes from the nearest large metropolitan area.

Preparations for a State Mandate: How Local Governments Prepared for the Falls Lake Rules — Barron Monroe

The Falls Lake Nutrient Management Strategy (FLNMS)—“Falls Lake Rules”—went into effect on January 15, 2011. Implementation will come at a significant cost to the eight municipalities and six counties within the Falls Watershed. Interviews and content analysis indicate that experience with stormwater regulations, use of a stormwater funding mechanism, and access to outside expertise provided local governments greater capacity and stronger commitment, directly impacting their ability to implement a state mandate. This capstone project focuses on how the 14 local governments in the Falls Lake Watershed prepared for implementation.

North Carolina Local Comprehensive Plans: Forty-Year Trends Show Increased Interest in Natural Resource Planning — Christal Perkins

Many North Carolina local governments choose to produce comprehensive plans. Outside of coastal areas, North Carolina state law does not require plans. Yet, the General Assembly has provided several legislative studies of comprehensive planning, along with guides and incentives for local governments preparing comprehensive plans. Additionally, the legislature has made laws intersecting comprehensive planning issues related to natural resources. This study of local plans across 40 years provides insight into different areas of natural resource planning, parallel to state law and initiatives. Recommendations for state, regional, and local interactions are described.

Energy Data Collection: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly — Janelle Beverly

The Department of Energy (DOE) has spent $6.35 billion in Recovery Act funds. These funds support state and local energy programs’ efforts to provide energy efficiency upgrades in order to lessen homeowners’ utility bills and improve the comforts and livability of their homes. The DOE evaluates the impacts of these investments with various reporting metrics, including energy savings. Energy efficiency program managers in North Carolina have reported challenges in collecting energy information from public utilities and homeowners. This study examines four data collection methods that the Durham City/County Sustainability Office employs with 435 homes.


Clients, potential employees, and staff members are pressuring organizations, including human service nonprofits, to increase their environmental stewardship. Acknowledging the financial constraints in the third sector, this study explores which low-cost, green practices the Triangle area’s human service nonprofits use, if any at all. It also begins to explore why these organizations adopt such practices or why they do not. Answering these questions can identify ways for human service nonprofits to improve their environmental stewardship, as well as identify benefits of and drawbacks to adopting low-cost green practices.