No Room for Error
SERVING AS AN ADVANCE LEAD FOR THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES
by Dan Holt ’00

“This won’t be easy to see, sir.”

US forces had experienced a bad week in Iraq. Two devastating roadside bombs had claimed many lives, and some of those who had made it through were in the ICU at Landstuhl Regional Medical Center, not far from Ramstein Air Force Base in southwest Germany. Their injuries were severe, and some of them would not survive. In recognition of their service and heroism, they were about to receive a Purple Heart from their Commander-in-Chief, the President of the United States.

Prior to President Obama’s arrival, I had seen the soldiers and met their doctors. I coordinated with base commanders on everything from the President’s movements to briefing information on each soldier and the best way for the White House photographer to capture the moments that would be some of the proudest of these soldiers’ careers. This was the President’s personal time with wounded warriors; members of the media were not invited.

Advance Team

When the President, Vice President, or First Lady is at a rally speaking to thousands of people, paying a visit to wounded warriors, or overseas participating in a complex State Arrival ceremony (where a head of state is formally welcomed by another

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“A man is but the product of his thoughts; what he thinks, he becomes.”

—Mahatma Gandhi
Twenty alumni have agreed to serve on the 2013 MPA alumni board, including Marcy Onieal, who is serving as president. The goals of the alumni board, which are contained in the bylaws, provide strategic direction for both the board and the MPA program in decision-making. At its February meeting, the board decided to work on strategies to expand alumni engagement, including increasing attendance at the annual conference, to be held November 7–8, 2013, at the School of Government.

Making alumni engagement a top priority could not have come at a better time. The MPA program is currently recruiting for residential and online students. Our applicants often have multiple options as they make decisions about where to attend graduate school. We promote the multiple advantages of pursuing a Carolina MPA:

- Our mission statement of preparing public service leaders
- Engaged faculty members who work directly with public officials
- The option to concentrate in a particular public service area
- The location of the program within the School of Government
- Our strong history of alumni engagement

Our ability to articulate how our alumni are involved in the program, from participating in the application and recruitment process to helping us maintain a high job placement rate, often provides us the edge we need to successfully recruit top applicants into our program.

As additional top-ranked MPA programs move into the online arena, alumni engagement will be a critical recruiting tool for Carolina. We are now competing for online students against other MPA programs including the University of Southern California and Indiana University. Our first cohort of 10 online students began classes on January 15. Applicants for the online program submit the same graduate school application as residential students and participate in a similar interview process. This first online cohort has an average work experience of approximately 10 years, with the majority working in local government administration. During their interviews, many of these applicants mentioned alumni engagement as a reason for wanting to pursue a Carolina MPA degree.

The Alumni Board will ask for your participation in a survey to discover why alumni participate in MPA activities and what challenges prevent participation. The goal is to gain insight on how we might expand alumni engagement in order to strengthen the MPA program overall and support our attempts to recruit top applicants.

I am personally committed to alumni engagement and willing to help the board—and you—in any way I can to strengthen this invaluable dimension of our MPA program.

William C. Rivenbark
rivenbark@sog.unc.edu
919.962.3707

My door is always open. Please visit if you are in Chapel Hill, or contact me anytime with questions or suggestions about our MPA program at rivenbark@sog.unc.edu or 919.962.3707.
government), there is a team of sleep-deprived staffers who are on location for a number of days prior to their arrival. This group of logistical specialists is known as the advance team. Advance team duties are wide-ranging and include budgeting, management of the traveling White House press pool, motorcade logistics, crowd management, and event production that is worthy of national and international press. Advance coordinates heavily with Secret Service on security issues and briefs the President upon arrival to ensure he has all the information he needs for the current commitment.

I have served in this role during each of the last three presidential campaigns (Kerry/Edwards ’04, Obama/Biden ’08, and Obama/Biden ’12) and in an official capacity for the White House as well. After the 2009 inauguration, I traveled full-time for the White House and have done so incrementally since, when I can get away from my desk.

This role has taken me all over the country and all over the world. While my current appointment with the Administration allows me to sleep in my own bed and sit at a desk more often than not, I always welcome the challenges of the campaign season or a call from the White House asking me to assist with an upcoming trip.

MPA Experience Provides Foundation

In this work, my MPA coursework has provided a frame of reference for me more times than I can count. Creating team cohesion in a high-stress environment with a “zero error” policy presents challenges, and my organizational management coursework frequently serves as a guide. As the principal White House contact on the ground for host organizations, regional or international governments, foreign embassies, and the US Secret Service, the advance lead is ultimately responsible for everything that goes right or wrong during a White House visit. Using my MPA communications training to focus on shared objectives helps defuse situations that are, by nature, somewhat adversarial. But the times I find myself digging most deeply into my MPA experience is in navigating complications that are detrimental to the success of a visit and seem, to all those involved, to have no clear solution at all. The many “workplace scenario” discussions with my MPA classmates have served as a road map through hours of tense negotiation on many occasions. But no matter how tense things may have been, the ability to focus on successes and express appreciation to all those involved is critical to preserving relationships for the White House and for future teams.

“This Won't be Easy to See, Sir”

The day President Obama arrived at the Medical Center at Landstuhl was one of the most difficult of my career. We had worked non-stop for five days surrounded by the stark loss of human life that those at the hospital are faced with every day, a reality that I had been barely aware of in my day-to-day life. The human remains plane—transporting the bodies of those soldiers who did not survive the attacks—was arriving that morning as well. As the President stepped toward the door of the ICU, knowing what he was about to see, he stopped for a moment to prepare himself and looked at me. The impulse to provide any additional information disappeared in the gravity of the situation, and I found myself saying, “This won’t be easy to see, sir.”

My team had given their all to ensure that these dedicated wounded warriors were able to spend meaningful time with their Commander-in-Chief.

The most gratifying moment of this visit, as with any other, was stepping out of the motorcade to watch Air Force One depart for its next stop, knowing that the President’s visit had been a success. If I could have offered a word of thanks to my MPA professors in that moment, I would certainly have done so.

Dan Holt is director of scheduling and advance/strategic advisor for CEO Engagement for the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). CNCS is a federal agency that engages more than four million Americans in service through Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and the Social Innovation Fund, in addition to leading President Obama’s national call to service initiative, United We Serve. Holt contracts with the offices of the President, Vice President, or First Lady to serve on an advance team or as advance lead when his full-time job allows. “CNCS likes for me to serve in this capacity when possible,” says Holt, “as it strengthens our White House relationships.”
A Conversation with Faculty Member Whitney Afonso

by Brian A. Farkas ’13

Whitney Afonso joined the MPA program and the School of Government in July 2012. Prior to that time, she taught in the Department of Public Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia and at the Bush School of Government and Public Administration at Texas A&M University. Afonso grew up primarily in Texas in a military family. She holds a BA in political science from Vanderbilt University and an MA in economics and PhD in public administration and policy from the University of Georgia.

Brian Farkas (BF): How did you end up at UNC-Chapel Hill?

Whitney Afonso (WA): Touring the School of Government was incredible, but it was a conversation with Professor David Ammons about how to approach research that clarified UNC as the place for me. Research is not just finding or confirming that there are relationships between variables; as a researcher, you have the ability to find relationships that matter and can be changed. When I talked with Professor Ammons about some of my research, he asked what variables I could identify over which practitioners have control. While that may seem obvious, much of the work in our field examines factors such as demographics that are beyond the control of decision-makers. I knew I wanted to work where people thought like this.

BF: What is your research area?

WA: My research areas focus generally on public administration, public budgeting and finance, and local government finance. Growing up in a military household, many federal, state, and local laws had a direct effect on my family and our way of life. Those experiences, combined with my academic exposure to economics, helped refine my interest in the financial component of public administration.

BF: What will you teach in the MPA program?

WA: I am teaching the Public Financial Management class beginning this spring.

BF: What other work will you be doing for the School of Government?

WA: Previously, I have presented research at a number of annual conferences about how the choice of revenue streams by state and local governments affect government and citizen behavior. These conferences included the National Tax Association, the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management, the American Society for Public Administration, and the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management. I will continue to build upon that work at the School of Government, always keeping in mind how the research can serve practitioners.

BF: What is your favorite thing about teaching? What is the most gratifying thing you can hear from a student?

WA: My favorite thing about teaching is the opportunity to take a group of students and get them excited about something they were not enthusiastic about before. Building off that idea, learning that a group of students has discussed what they learned outside the classroom, without my facilitation, is probably the most gratifying thing for me. Hearing students say, “We were talking about this particular issue the other day” shows a real openness to learning new things and reassures me that I am making an impact.
TRUE CAROLINA BLUE: WREN DAVIDSON
by Brian A. Farkas ’13

Growing up, Wren Davison traveled the United States with her family, exploring the country during summer vacations and sharing unforgettable experiences. Road trips to California, Maine, and Florida made a lasting impression, exposing her to the diversity of American life and influencing her worldview. “My parents did a great job of instilling a passion for social justice and understanding for all human beings,” she said.

Davison earned her undergraduate degree from Knox College, a small liberal arts school in Galesburg, Illinois. Senator Barack Obama was the featured speaker at her 2005 graduation ceremony.

Following graduation, Davison was accepted into Teach For America (TFA) and given a two-year placement in eastern North Carolina. It was during this time that her passion emerged for public causes that help to change people’s lives. While expressing an admiration for the work of public school teachers, she saw that her students were in desperate need of services that extend outside of the classroom and that address poverty and family issues.

After remaining at her TFA placement school an extra year in order to secure a North Carolina teaching license and subsequently teaching an additional two years in Durham County, Davison explored ways in which she could blend her passion for helping children with her desire to improve public-sector administrative leadership. “Ultimately, I wanted to be able to fully understand how to provide the best services possible to those in need,” she said, “and the Carolina MPA program offered that opportunity.”

As a dual-degree student, Davison is also earning her Master of Social Work at UNC. “My experiences and interests seemed to naturally direct me to the dual-degree program,” she said. “Working in a profession that impacts people’s lives positively is the most fulfilling choice for me.”

Beyond her academic efforts, Davison currently works with Chatham County Together, a nonprofit organization that provides mentoring services for at-risk youth in Siler City. Her responsibilities include developing a strategic social media plan, updating and revising organizational policies, searching for grants, and helping youth transition from Chatham County Together to Communities in Schools of Chatham County.

“I want to work for an organization that helps people,” said Davison. “Most importantly, I want to find a position and an organization that will allow me to cultivate my professional skills so that I can learn and grow.” In the short-term, she would like to work in the nonprofit sector as an administrator, with the goal of one day leading a nonprofit organization.

Wren Davison is the 2012–2013 Betsy Ross Howe Stafford Scholarship recipient.
2012 Donors Make a Difference

The MPA program gratefully acknowledges alumni and friends listed below who have contributed to another successful year. Your generosity allows us to continue to offer valuable tuition scholarships and services to MPA students. Thank you.

Donors are distinguished in two categories of giving. The “A” Honor Roll recognizes donors whose cumulative giving has crossed a threshold of $5,000. “Sustained Givers” are donors whose cumulative giving has reached a threshold of $500.

“A” Honor Roll

These donors have taken a leadership role in supporting the MPA program’s mission to prepare public service leaders. Those names shown in bold will be added to the plaque located in the MPA suite.

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Sustained Givers

Our thanks goes to those individuals who give consistently to the MPA program. The donors listed below join a group of prior donors recognized on the “Sustained Givers” plaque located in the MPA Program suite.

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Your Gift Matters

The individuals below have demonstrated a commitment to providing a quality graduate education to future public service leaders by making an annual gift.

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Club ’66 Members

Named for the year the MPA program was founded, and an option donors have used for more than 20 years, Club ’66 offers a way to give through automatic monthly drafts from a checking account or credit card to a scholarship of the donor’s choosing. Thank you, Club ’66 members, for your support.

Steve Allred ’74
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Terry Waterfield ’08
Hardin Watkins Jr. ’88
Kenneth Woodcock ’97
Lee Worsley Jr. ’97
Jonathan Yeomans ’09
MPA Faculty News

David Ammons has been elected to the Executive Council and also as treasurer of the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (NASPAA).

Maureen Berner and Johanna Foster ’05 and others co-authored an article, “Comparing Types of Local Public Health Agencies in North Carolina,” which was published in the Journal of Public Health Management and Practice in December 2012.


Willow Jacobson and Shannon Tufts co-authored an article, “To Post or Not to Post: Employee Rights and Social Media,” which was published in the March 2013 issue of Review of Public Personnel Administration.

Now Seeking Nominations

**Donald Hayman Distinguished Public Service Award**

The Donald Hayman Distinguished Public Service Award is given to individuals who consistently exemplify high standards of service to the public and/or the organizations they serve. This award has been presented only seven times in the last 21 years. Nominees must be graduates of the Carolina MPA program or otherwise associated with the MPA program or the School of Government. The deadline for nominations is July 1, 2013. The award recipient will be announced at the 2013 Public Administration Conference on November 7–8 at the School of Government. For details and nomination information, visit www.mpa.unc.edu/node/187.

**Prior recipients of this award:**
Harry Jones, 2012  
Donald Hayman, 2008  
Stephen Allred, 2007  
Deil S. Wright, 2001  
Calvin (Cal) Horton, 1998  
Richard Stevens, 1997  
Gordon Whitaker, 1993

**MPA Alumni Association Board**

If you would like to serve on the 2014 MPA Alumni Association Board, please contact Jean Coble at 919.962.0426 or coble@sog.unc.edu by July 1, 2013. To review responsibilities of board members, read the bylaws at www.mpa.unc.edu/node/189.

Carolina MPA on YouTube

The video of Secretary of the US Navy Ray Mabus, who delivered the Deil S. Wright Lecture at the 2012 Public Administration Conference, is now posted to our YouTube site. View Secretary Mabus’ full address at www.youtube.com/uncmpa.
Life Events

On the Move

Ellie Blake ’09 accepted a position as training coordinator with the Raleigh Human Resources Department in the Division of Organization Development and Training.

Molly Boyle ’12 is project development and case coordinator with the North Carolina Center on Actual Innocence in Durham.

Wilson Kyung Ik Cho ’06 will serve as a consul at the Korean Consulate General in New York for two years, supporting Korean local governments’ international activities in America.

Neil Dermody ’12 joined the Jewish Healthcare Foundation of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a policy analyst and program associate.

Emily Guhde ’12 is online services librarian with NC Live, North Carolina’s statewide online library service.

Dan Holt ’00 is director of scheduling and advance/strategic advisor for CEO engagement with the Corporation for National and Community Service in Washington.

Joy Jackson ’09 is admissions director for MPA@UNC and has returned to the Knapp-Sanders Building in Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Katie Loovis ’00 is director of US community partnerships and stakeholder engagement for GlaxoSmithKline in Washington, DC.

Joe McKinney ’89 is executive director of the National Association of Development Organizations located in Washington, DC.

Barron Monroe ’12 is a budget analyst for Catawba County, North Carolina.

Tim Morgan ’90 has been elected vice chairperson of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education and as a member of the North Carolina School Board Association Board of Directors.

Christal Perkins ’12 is a planner for energy and environment and waste reduction partners administrator at Triangle J Council of Governments in Durham, North Carolina.

Jake Pflepsen ’12 is a state park peace officer in training with the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

Julian Prosser ’68 retired from the City of Raleigh at the end of 2012.

John Rible ’12 joined Target as a human resources manager in New Jersey and will be assigned an office posting once training is complete.

Susan Robertson ’81 began serving as city administrator of Sun Valley, Idaho, in January 2013.

Matt Roylance ’97 is deputy director of Parks, Recreation, and Open Space for Wake County, North Carolina.

Lindsey Shewmaker ’12 is a human services planner with the Orange County Department of Social Services in Hillsborough, North Carolina.

Caroline Smith ’02 is a budget analyst for Arapahoe County, which borders Denver, Colorado.

Amanda Stafford ’12 is a foundations/grant writer with Charlotte Rescue Mission in North Carolina.

Amy Strecker ’09 is a communications specialist with Duke Energy Corporation in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Weiping Yang ’06 is a human resources specialist with the City of Tustin, California.
Weddings

Dan Holt ’00 married Katherine Croft on May 19, 2012, in Middleburg, Virginia.

Heather Martin ’01 married Rodney Yoder on February 16, 2013, in Kauai, Hawaii. The flower girl was Eleanor Wyatt, daughter of Kirsten ’02 and Kent Wyatt ’02.

Francinia McKeithan ’09 married Brandon Henry on December 1, 2012.

In Memoriam


Betty Benbow Sanders ’73 passed away on December 23, 2012.

New Arrivals

Justin Amos ’06 and wife Misty Holebrooks Amos announce the birth of Natalie Elizabeth Amos on October 30, 2012.

Ryan Fehrman ’02 and Robyn Fehrman ’02 welcomed Miles Emerson Fehrman to their family on December 7, 2012.


Kate Shem ’06 and husband Ray Shem welcomed their second child, William Wade Shem, on November 19, 2012.


Carolina MPA On the Road

Cal Horton ’71 is spreading the news about Carolina MPA in Arizona, where he lives in retirement. His license plate is a “good symbol of continuing commitment, a subtle reminder and connection,” he says.

If you have an MPA license plate, post a photo on Facebook (Carolina MPA) or e-mail your photo to Jean Coble at coble@sog.unc.edu.
Save the Date

MAY 11, 2013

MPA GRADUATION
School of Government, UNC-Chapel Hill
"The Courage of Long Accomplishment"

MPA alumnus Chris Morrill, city manager of Roanoke, Virginia, will serve as this year’s graduation speaker. Prior to being appointed Roanoke’s city manager in 2010, Morrill served as assistant city manager in Savannah, Georgia. He is currently president of the Government Finance Officers Association (GFAO).

AUGUST 24, 2013

FALL KICK-OFF EVENT
School of Government, UNC-Chapel Hill
Connect with old friends and visit with current students at the annual kick-off to the academic year. For more information, contact Jean Coble at 919.962.0426 or coble@sog.unc.edu.

NOVEMBER 7-8, 2013

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CONFERENCE
School of Government, UNC-Chapel Hill
Conference co-chairs Erin Schwie Langston ’03 and Heather Drennan ’03 are working with the planning committee to make sure this year’s conference provides the opportunity to acquire new information and reenergize your MPA public service batteries.