



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
VIRGINIA TECH.

## April 2022 Newsletter

As we enter the last couple of weeks of the Spring semester, I know how hectic life becomes for students, faculty, and staff (completing papers, taking exams, correcting student work, writing letters of recommendation, graduation ceremonies, etc.). Please take a deep breath as you tackle the myriad projects and hefty tasks on your “to do” list. After all, your physical well-being and mental health should be your foremost concern. So, engage in some *amour propre* if you are feeling timorous or dreary at this moment in time.

I invite you to read the content of this month's newsletter. And please inform us of your accomplishments so that we can share the uplifting news with the entire SPIA community.

Good luck to you all,

Mehrzad Boroujerdi  
SPIA Director

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### Alumni and Student News

[Bertha Anderson](#) (CPAP Ph.D. alumna, 2017) received the [Department of Homeland Security Secretary's Award for Innovation](#) at the 2022 Secretary's Awards Ceremony. This award recognizes teams that employ a strategic and enterprise-wide approach to strengthening the DHS mission and its operations. As a result of the collaborative efforts between [#uscis](#) and the [#CISOmbudsman](#), her team improved online immigration benefit resources and customer service.

[Tom Beekhuysen](#) (MPIA student) won a graduate fellowship from the American Academy of Diplomacy.

[Shukriya Mahmooddey Bradost](#) (PGG Doctoral Candidate) was a panelist at “The Political Struggles of Kurds: Regional, National, and Subnational Dynamics” [conference](#) organized by the Johns Hopkins University Middle East and North Africa Club (April 18).

[Catherine Grayson](#), who is graduating in May with a B.A. in Public and Urban Affairs (major in Environmental Policy and Planning, and minors in Landscape Architecture and Smart and Sustainable Cities), is heading to the University of Amsterdam for a Research Master's in Urban Studies. She will be enrolling in the Graduate School of Social and Behavioral Sciences and plans to research human interaction/behavior in the built environment.

[Isidoro Hazbun](#) (MPA student and conservationist) was interviewed on a conservation careers website in an [article](#) showing how he helped bring solar panels to Colombia and Suriname. Isidoro is Manager of Public Affairs and Programs Support at [The Amazon Conservation Team \(ACT\)](#).

[Rachel Inman](#) (Smart and Sustainable Cities major) recently accepted an internship with the [Virginia Tech Data Science for the Public Good Program](#) for Summer 2022.

[Neda Moayerian](#) (PGG Ph.D. alumna, 2020) has received a formal appointment as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Urban Planning at Tehran University.

[Emma Wilson](#) (Environmental Policy and Planning Senior) will be attending the University of Richmond School of Law next year.

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## Faculty and Staff News

In April, [Ariel Ahram](#) (GIA) lectured at Hamilton College in New York on war, fragmentation, and the possibilities of peace in the Middle East. He also presented a paper, co-authored with Prof. Bridget Coggins from UCSB, entitled "Looting, Hawking, and the Rebel Resource Curse" at the International Studies Association conference in Nashville.

[David Bieri](#) (UAP), in a TV [interview](#) Fox 5 DC, discussed the economic implications of the Biden Administration's renewed extension of the moratorium on federally-backed student loans. In another TV [interview](#) for FOX 5 DC, he commented on Treasury Secretary Yellen's watershed speech on the regulation of crypto assets and other blockchain-based investments, such as Bitcoin and stablecoins. In this speech, Yellen outlined the first steps of President Biden's so-called "Executive Order on Crypto" which defines a national policy for digital assets.

[Mehrzad Boroujerdi](#) (SPIA Director) received the 2022 [Vartan Gregorian Research Grant](#) (\$25,000) from the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund for his project entitled "Plight of Threatened Afghan and Iranian Scholars." He also served as the discussant for a [book talk](#) organized by the UCLA Center for Near Eastern Studies (April 4).

[David Bredenkamp](#) (CPAP), [Matt Dull](#) (CPAP), [Amady Sogodogo](#) (CPAP graduate student), and [Leisha LaRiviere](#) (SPIA Associate Director – Richmond) presented a paper (based on stories from front liners in behavioral and developmental health – psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, and direct support associates) at the Midwest Political Science Association in Chicago in April.

[Ralph Buehler](#) (UAP) presented his research on [bike parking](#) at the [UAB Barcelona](#) bike parking workshop. He was also invited to present his international comparative research on [bicycling](#) at [McGill University](#).

[Kelly Crist](#) (Manager of SPIA Faculty and Student Affairs) received the 2022 CAUS Outstanding Administrative & Professional Faculty/Staff Award. Congratulations, Kelly, for this well-deserved award.

[Stephanie Davis](#) (CPAP) wrote an [article](#) in the international magazine *Public Management*. She also published "How small communities can leverage strategic planning for ARPA funds" in the March 2022 issue of *Virginia Town and City*.

[Leisha LaRiviere](#) (SPIA Associate Director – Richmond) and Principal Investigator were awarded a

\$250,000 sponsored research grant from the Virginia Center for Behavioral Rehabilitation. The center is one of 20 civil commitment facilities for violent sexual predators in the U.S. Based on a participatory action research approach (embedded scholars), the Richmond project team will work to research, develop, and guide strategies for organizational performance and to engage employees in developing organizational values.

[Chad Levinson](#) (GIA) received a Kluge Fellowship from the Library of Congress. He also did an [interview](#) with KYMN Radio on the role that think tanks play in driving U.S. national security policy and actions.

[Theo Lim](#) (UAP) is a co-chair of the APIDA (Asian Pacific Islander Desi American) Faculty Caucus. In this role he has worked closely with the director of the Asian Cultural Engagement Center (primarily a student-serving center run out of the Office of Inclusion and Diversity). Theo has been invited to become the 2022-2023 faculty fellow for the center.

[Shalini Misra](#) (UAP) won the 2022 CAUS Certificate for Excellence in Scholarship. Congratulations, Shalini.

[Stephanie Smith](#) (CPAP) delivered an invited talk on how her research on global health policy helps to interpret the COVID-19 pandemic to an international audience on April 11th. She was invited to speak by the Health Systems Global SHAPES (Social Science Approaches for Research and Engagement in Health Policy and Systems) Thematic Working Group. Stephanie also shared preliminary results of a study offering insights on health agenda setting dynamics for privileged and marginalized target populations at the International Studies Association Annual Convention in Nashville, TN (March 30).

[Gerard Toal](#) (GIA) published an article about the Ukraine war in [Irish Times](#), and co-authored [another](#) in the *Washington Post*. Gerard was also quoted in another [Washington Post](#) article.

[Yang Zhang](#) (UAP) won the 2022 CAUS Ut Prosim award. Congratulations, Yang.

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## Student Profile: Meredith Beavers

I did not find urban planning; it found me. I was majoring in Political Science when I saw a wrapped bus advertising "Smart and Sustainable Cities," and, eager to learn more, I scheduled an advising session. Following a conversation with Chris LaPlante, I added SSC and began my journey as a dual degree student. From my first SPIA class, I was able to bridge both disciplines and bring a unique perspective to my planning classes. Studying urban planning means learning about the urban environment and the many different types of people and systems that play a role in cities.

I find it fitting that my VT Smart & Sustainable Cities classroom experience has been unique and diverse, similar to a city itself. Regularly, I interact with different types of people in my SPIA classes. I learned about urban infrastructure sitting next to a classmate whose second major was public health, researched local supply chains alongside green engineering and GIS minors, and strategized collaborative planning methods with a classmate passionate about economics. My involvement throughout undergrad has been unique too, from my dual degree combination to a study abroad in Switzerland and Ethiopia, to founding a service non-profit organization. These diverse experiences, coupled with faculty and peer interactions at VT, have allowed me to grow. When classes went online during the pandemic, I took a semester-long co-op at a regional planning commission, which continued into an additional year of interning. I applied my classroom knowledge to real-world scenarios and my passion for service by utilizing equitable and

inclusive planning practices.

My Virginia Tech classes and experiences inspired me to continue learning. I applied to multiple urban planning master's programs, but the Architecture School at the University of Virginia stood out to me. UVA's faculty research topics, historic preservation certificate, and emphasis on visual aids to communicate ideas were some of the many features that attracted me to their program. Although I do not know the specifics of the selection process, based on my application experience, UVA was interested in well-rounded individuals who could address their academic and community contributions. This spring, I became the first non-UVA student accepted into their Master of Urban + Environmental Planning +1 program. My acceptance is a result of careful course selection at Virginia Tech as well as additional course planning guidance from the UVA Advisor to fill requirements.

While my acceptance into the +1 program wasn't traditional and was something I sought out individually, it is exciting to see that this is an opportunity that will become more accessible in the coming years. I am honored to serve as a trailblazer for the future partnership between Virginia Tech and the University of Virginia Urban Planning programs. As I begin a new chapter at UVA's Architecture School, I express my gratitude to Virginia Tech and SPIA for pushing me to explore, ask questions, and learn from others.

**Meredith Beavers**



**Hokie Focus**



During the Hokie Focus event held by VT (April 9-10), SPIA faculty and staff met with admitted undergraduate students who have not yet made their final decision. It was great to interact with these students and their parents.

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## Featuring Alumni Max Vandervliet

**Max Vandervliet** is a two-time Virginia Tech graduate (2015 & 2018). His decision to pursue a Master's in Urban & Regional Planning (MURP) from Virginia Tech's School of Public and International Affairs (SPIA) was based on his rewarding experience as a SPIA undergrad in addition to an ability to leverage his elective credits through the MPA program. Ultimately, this hybrid approach set Max up to conjoin his technical aptitude as a city planner with fine-tuned government administration and public sector management skills.

After completing the MURP program, Max moved to New York where he joined J. Caldwell & Associates and, later, Nelson, Pope & Voorhis as a Planning Associate and Senior Planner, respectively. During his time in the private sector, Max focused on planning, economic development, and general management consulting for New York City/State agencies.

More recently, Max has joined the public sector to work as a Director for a government agency with the City of New York. In this role, he leads a combined staff and board of over 50 while conducting planning and government administration. He attributes his success to both the hard and soft skills learned while pursuing his undergraduate and graduate degrees at SPIA.



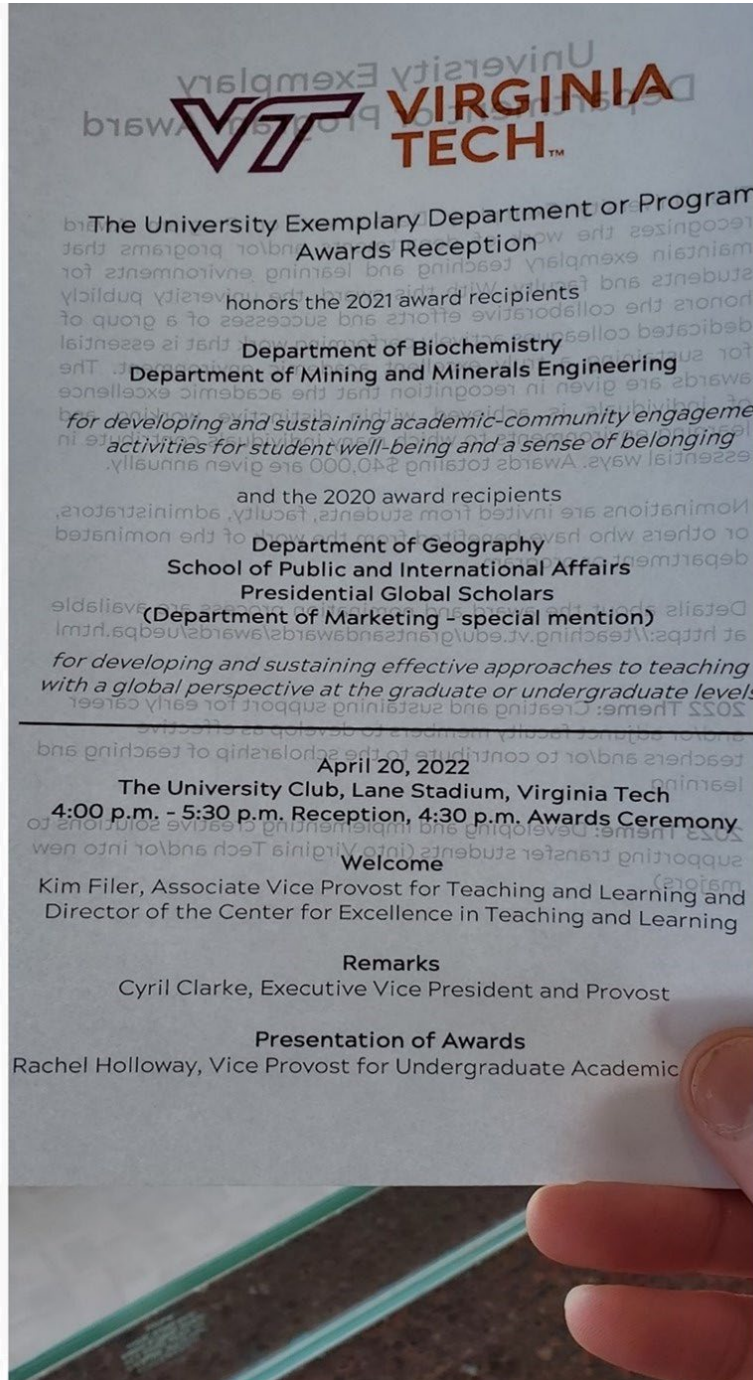


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## Check These Out

- List of SPIA's Fall 2022 courses available [here](#).
- List of upcoming information sessions in May available [here](#).
- SPIA's 2021 Annual Report available [here](#).
- SPIA's job board available [here](#).

- Profiles of many of our graduate students available [here](#).
- Professor Steve Hankey (second from left seating row) in the [photo](#) of VT faculty who have received prestigious early career awards.
- Info session on Fulbright Program Application Strategies with Prof. Kris Wernstedt (April 29; 12:30-1:30 on <https://tinyurl.com/2x9hsz99>).
- SPIA receiving its 2020 University Exemplary Department or Program Award (postponed due to Covid) at a reception (below).





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## Gifts to SPIA

We would like to thank the following donors for their recent contributions to SPIA:

Ms. **Ashley E. DeBiase**  
Mrs. **Evelyn V. McGill**  
Mr. and Mrs. **Minnis E. Ridenour**  
Mr. **Matthew S. Worner**  
Dr. **Richard Zakour** and Dr. **Colleen A. Woodard**

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## Worth Pondering

- [A.I. Is Mastering Language. Should We Trust What it Says?](#)
- [Higher Ed Added More Than 9,000 Master's-Degree Programs in Less Than a Decade](#)
- [Inflation Jumps—Professor Pay Doesn't](#)
- [Why Is the Wartime Press Corps So Hawkish?](#)
- [Rents are rising everywhere](#)
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