August 2021 Newsletter

Dear Students, Staff, and Faculty,

This semester SPIA is delighted to welcome 58 new graduate students, 26 new incoming undergraduate first-year and transfer students, and 26 students transferring into SSC or EPP programs from other majors at VT.

We enjoyed meeting many of these new faces during SPIA's various orientation sessions and stand ready to help as they acculturate to Virginia Tech and SPIA. I want to thank SPIA staff **Elia Amegashie**, **Natalia Gutierrez-Smith**, **Chris LaPlante**, **Han Le**, **Tyler Wedrosky** (student), and Professors **Ariel Ahram, Ralph Buehler**, **Ralph Hall**, **Stephanie Davis**, **Diane Zahm** and others with helping to organize the orientations in Blacksburg and Arlington for our incoming students (see pictures below).

As we transition back to in-person classes, I respectfully ask everyone to continue observing our health protocols with the rise in Delta variant cases.

Please note that spia-announcements-g@vt.edu is our main listserv for information sharing. If you are not on this distribution list and yet wish to be added, please send an email to **Marcel Worphy Pambo** (marcelworphy@vt.edu). Similarly, if your contact information has changed or if you would like to be removed from this list, please contact **Marcel**.

Additionally, I ask all our alumni, students, faculty, and staff to please send me information about their accomplishments (awards, media citations, publications, conference presentations, new positions). We will do our best to publicize them.

Sincerely,

Mehrzad Boroujerdi
SPIA Director

2021 Orientation

SPIA's New Tagline

Thanks to all who voted, we have a new tagline for SPIA: "Empowering Future Leaders to Shape the World's Communities through Public Service." This tagline nicely captures what the school is all about. Check it out on our website.

Current Student News

Mahtot Gebresselassie (PhD candidate in Planning, Governance, and Globalization) successfully defended her dissertation entitled "Wheelchair Accessibility of Transportation Hailed Through the Uber and Lyft Apps." Her dissertation committee members were **Tom Sanchez**, **Ralph Buehler**, **David Bieri**, **Ashley Shew**, and **Aaron Steinfeld**. She will be starting a Postdoctoral Research Associate position at Carnegie Mellon University in September to do more work on Uber and Lyft and transportation equity. Congratulations, Dr. **Gebresselaissie**!

Andrea Briceno Mosquera (CPAP Doctoral Candidate) successfully defended her dissertation, "Impact of Administrative Burdens on Undocumented Youth Access to Higher Education and Benefits from In-State Resident Tuition." Her committee included Professors **Laura Jensen**, **Ray Zuniga**, **Chase Catalano**, **Nathan Hall**, and **Karen Hult**. Congratulations, Dr. **Briceno Mosquera**!

Jordan Frijas's (MPA Candidate) participation in the 2021 Governor's Fellows Program was covered in this story.

David Okereke (CPAP PhD Candidate) was chosen to participate in the 2021 Graduate Diversity Scholars and Leaders Professional Development Program of ARNOVA
(Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action).

Kaidi Wang (PhD candidate in Planning, Governance, and Globalization) successfully defended her dissertation entitled "The Dynamics of the Impacts of Automated Vehicles: Urban Form, Mode Choice, and Energy Demand Distribution" on July 30, 2021. Her committee included **Ralph Buehler**, **Ralph Hall**, **Wenwen Zhang** (Rutgers University), **Theo Lim**, and **T. Donna Chen** (University of Virginia). Congratulations, **Dr. Wang**!

Davon Woodard (PhD candidate in Planning, Governance, and Globalization) successfully defended his dissertation on August 13. His committee included **Tom Sanchez**, **Kris Wernstedt**, **Giselle Datz** and external members **Aly Karam** and **Aditya Prakash**. Congratulations, Dr. **Woodard**!

Faculty News

Mehrzad Boroujerdi (SPIA Director) was quoted in the New York Times regarding Iran's new president and on NPR about Afghanistan's next likely ruler. He was also interviewed about Afghanistan on WDBJ7 TV in Blacksburg.

Ralph Buehler (UAP Professor) gave invited presentations on his new book Cycling for Sustainable Cities at the Technical University of Dresden, Germany; for the Active Transportation Coalition in Toronto, Canada; and for Active Transportation in Chicago, USA. He also gave invited presentations on pedestrian safety for the Northern Virginia Regional Commission and on sustainable transport at the Technical University of Denmark in Copenhagen, Denmark. **Buehler** also participated as a subject matter expert on active travel in a meeting of the World Health Organization in Geneva, Switzerland.

Stephanie Davis (Collegiate Assistant Professor, CPAP) will be serving on the Government Finance Officer Association's newly created Education Advisory Council as one of two academic advisors beginning in October 2021.

Ralph Hall (UAP Associate Professor and SPIA Associate Director), **Yehyun An** and **Taekwan Yoon** (Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements) published an article entitled "The Complex Relationship between Capacity and Infrastructure Project Delivery: The Case of the Indian National Urban Renewal Mission" in Sustainability 2021, 13(16).

Lyusyena Kirakosyan (Affiliated Research Faculty, IPG) published "Negotiating Multiple Identities of Brazilian Paralympians" in Social Sciences (2021).

Tom Sanchez (UAP Professor); Theo Lim (UAP Assistant Professor); and VT colleagues **Christopher L. North** (Computer Science), **Alec Smith** (Economics), and **Petra Hurtado** (American Planning Association) received an NSF grant for a cutting-edge project entitled "The Potential for Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Urban Planning." They will be partnering with the Arlington County Planning Department and the American Planning Association on this project.

Todd Schenk (Associate Professor, UAP) received his CAUS certificate for Excellence in Outreach Award during the Extended Leadership meeting of the College of Architecture.

Aumni News

Dr. Jake Keyel (PGG, 2019) has accepted an appointment as a Collegiate Assistant Professor, VT Honors College, Calhoun Discovery Program, for 2021–2022.

Dr. Rosa Krewson (CPAP alum) and Dr. Lorita Daniels (CPAP alum) published an article in Washington Post's Monkey Cage.

Dr. Anna Erwin (PGG alumni, 2017) recently received a USDA NIFA-AFRI postdoctoral fellowship through their Education and Workforce Development program.
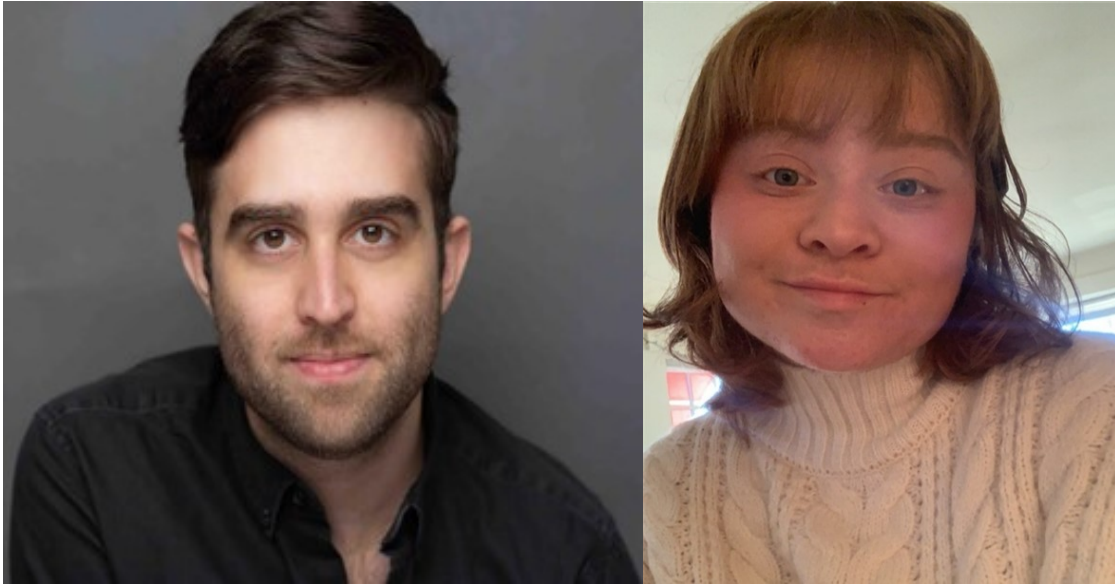
Staff News

Kelly Crist (Manager of SPIA faculty and Student Affairs) gave birth to **Sloan Crist Miller**. We send Kelly, her husband, and baby, **Sloan**, our best wishes.

SPIA has hired two new temporary staff for this semester. **Mark Blane** (mark@vt.edu) is filling in

for **Kelly Crist** as the school's Manager of Faculty and Student Affairs until she returns.

Sarah Parker (sparker3@vt.edu) is going to fill in for **Natalia Gutierrez-Smith** as our Administrative Operations Coordinator when **Natalia** goes on maternity leave next month.

National Security Executive Leadership Program

SPIA will offer the second iteration of the National Security Executive Leadership course virtually November 1 to 5, 2021. This for credit course is open to VT graduate students as well as national security professionals from government and private sector. See here for the relevant information.

Featuring Current Student Gopi Krishna Bhamidipati

Gopi Krishna Bhamidipati (gopib@vt.edu) is a PhD candidate in the Planning, Governance, and Globalization (PGG) Program at SPIA. His academic interests are essentially related to India-West Asia Affairs, specifically focusing on India's relations with Israel and Iran.

Prior to enrolling at SPIA, Gopi was a journalist working in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where he covered local and international news at various TV, radio and print organizations for over 10 years. In Dubai, he split his time working as a news producer, reporter, and presenter. While working as a radio news announcer in Sharjah, he presented international news daily in Hindi and Urdu, catering to the local diaspora population. During his time in the UAE, he transitioned to becoming a full-time communications professional working for various local public and private entities including the UAE Ministry of Interior, and companies in the oil and entertainment industries. In India, Gopi switched roles to become a news producer, while continuing to contribute content for various television programs.

Gopi Krishna has two master's degrees, an M.A. in Mass Communications from the Osmania University in Hyderabad, Telangana, and a degree in Broadcast Journalism from the International School of Business and Media (ISBM), Pune, India.

Featuring Cecily Peeples Rodriguez

For 30 years, **Cecily Peeples Rodriguez** (crodrig1@vt.edu) has been developing, implementing, and evaluating policies and programs that address equity and access in the human services sector. Currently, she is responsible for developing and implementing interventions designed to advance social equity in public sector management. She is one of several members of the SPIA-Richmond team that works to shape and manage state government and non-profit research initiatives and program evaluations. Current projects include curriculum development and knowledge transfer for a national behavioral health interpreter training program; a project with the National Hispanic/Latino Mental Health Technology Transfer Center on behavioral health and wellness in agricultural communities; the design and implementation of a racial equity review program at the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation; and a diversity, equity, and inclusion evaluation and planning project with the American Research Center in Egypt. Along with her duties as the manager for applied research, she also teaches courses related to social equity and policy evaluation at Virginia Tech's Center for Public Administration and Policy. Cecily recently wrapped up her year-long appointment as the Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion for the College of Architecture and Urban Studies

She came to Virginia Tech from the US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) where she was the Director of Refugee Health Services Division. She was responsible for executive leadership of grant and contract-related planning; implementation of new state health and wellness programs; and the development, management and oversight of program budgets totaling more than $30 million annually.

During previous service with the Commonwealth of Virginia, **Cecily** was the Director of the Office of Health Equity Advancement and Workforce Development at the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). There, she led the agency's response to inequities in state behavioral health and developmental services. She was responsible for developing and implementing numerous programs and initiatives designed to increase health equity in the state system of care.

In her free time, she serves as the Vice President of Communications at the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) Richmond Region Council #4614; a board member of the Health Brigade, a Latinx serving health clinic; a member of the Virginia Medical Reserve Corps; and a member of the advisory committee of the National Network for the Elimination of Disparities (NNED). She has a degree in political science with a minor in international relations from Virginia Commonwealth University and a Master's in Public Administration from Virginia Tech.

Cecily will be teaching a course on diversity and inclusion for SPIA during the Spring 2022 semester.

Worth Pondering

- [Beyond human endurance](#)
- [Police shootings continue daily, despite a pandemic, protests and pushes for reform](#)
- [The prospects for developing countries are not what they once were](#)
- [Think tanks' impact on policy in a rapidly changing world](#)
- [The Pandemic and Political Order](#)
- [The perfectionism trap](#)
- [Carbon dioxide is by far the most important driver of climate change](#)
- [Census release shows America is more diverse and more multiracial than ever](#)

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