



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
VIRGINIA TECH.

SPIA Community January Update

Dear SPIA Students, Faculty and Staff:

Happy new year! I hope your Spring semester is off to a great start.

First and foremost, welcome to our newest VT SPIA students! You have just entered into a robust network of students, faculty and alumni. I invite you to take advantage of all that we offer, and, as always, never be shy to reach out to me or others. We're glad to serve each other at SPIA!

In fact, it's that time of year again when we seek nominations for one outstanding undergraduate alum and one outstanding graduate alum for the [VT SPIA Hall of Fame](#). Do you know any SPIA alumni that should be recognized for their achievements and service? Please submit nominations by **Feb 29**. The criteria on which SPIA's Alumni Council will evaluate the nominations can be found on the [form to nominate](#).

Professor Karen Hult has moved from being co-chair of the Center for Public Administration and Policy (CPAP) to serving as the sole **Chair of CPAP this spring and summer**. I thank Karen for her willingness to serve in this capacity. Please be sure to see further faculty, staff and student news below.

There is also a number of dynamic, new programs and events taking place at SPIA. VT's Policy Destination Area is currently developing a new program called **Science, Technology & Engineering in Policy (STEP)**. Building on the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, this program will provide science, technology, engineering, mathematics and health (STEM-H) graduate students with an understanding of and competencies in various dimensions of public policy. More info below.



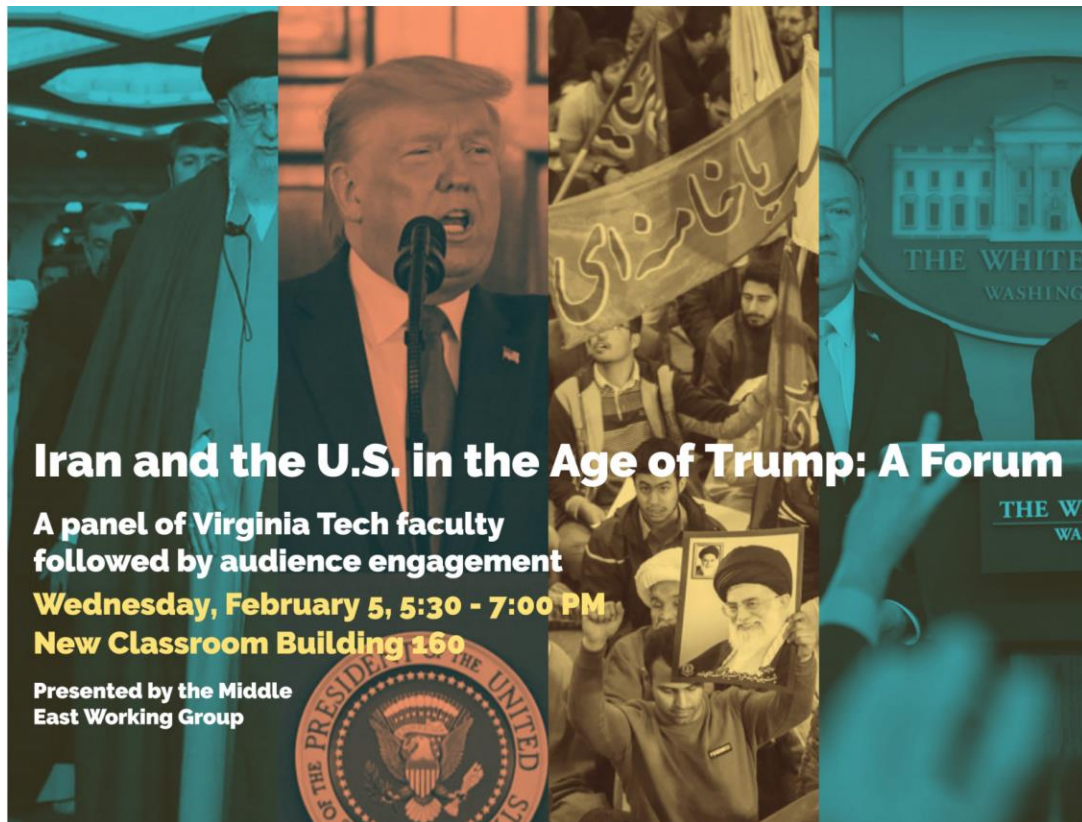
For two weeks in January 2020, nine Virginia Tech students participated in **Washington Experience: U.S. Congressional Oversight in Action**, a winter session seminar. They were immersed in the DC ecosystem of professionals in government, think tanks, news media, and congressional offices from Hart and Dirksen Senate Office Buildings to the new O'Neill House Office Building. [See more photos.](#)

Sincerely,
Mehrzad Boroujerdi
Director, VT SPIA

Faculty & Student News

Professor Ariel Ahram did an interview with [WHUR Howard Radio](#) on the US-Iran escalation, and published a [piece](#) discussing the way electoral reforms in Iraq might buttress political stability.

Director Mehrzad Boroujerdi [wrote an op-ed](#) piece on the ramifications of the killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani and commented on US-Iran relations in interviews with a host of Persian-language media outlets as well as [ABC](#), [BBC Radio 4](#), [CTV News](#), [The Economist](#), [NPR](#), and an [Egyptian news site](#). He will also take part in a forum on US-Iranian relations in Blacksburg on February 5 at 5:30 pm.



Professor Ralph Buehler's work on Americans' active transportation habits (based on the results of a study of National Household Travel Surveys 2001 and 2017) was covered by [VT News](#) and other [media outlets](#).

Professors Ralph Hall and Diane Zahm have kindly agreed to lead SPIA's academic program review this year.

Professor Shalini Misra and her co-editor published [Communication in Transdisciplinary Teams](#). This edited volume highlights a range of conceptual and pragmatic dimensions of communication in transdisciplinary collaborative settings in diverse contexts and conditions. Congratulations!

Congratulations to [John McCoy](#) (CPAP graduate, Fall 2019) for earning the local government early career service certificate!

Staff News

Julie Hudson, operations manager for our Arlington Campus, has left VT to work at a sister institution. Julie capably organized SPIA's move from Alexandria to Arlington without any problem, and was our "trouble shooter" in Northern Virginia. We will miss Julie and wish her the best in her new position.



This year a good number of SPIA staff are retiring and we want to acknowledge them and thank them each for their years of service to the university and the school. Krystal Wright came to UAP in 1985 from Virginia Tech's Bursar's office. Since the formation of SPIA as a hard school in 2003, she has been SPIA's manager of faculty affairs as well as the graduate coordinator for the doctoral program in Planning, Governance and Globalization (PGG) for many years. Krystal will retire in May 2020 and we can't thank her enough for her 35 years of service.

Upcoming Meetings

The next few weeks are going to be busy for SPIA in terms of meetings. Here is a list of important meetings:

- Jan. 28: CAUS HR Director, Roslyn Garrison, meeting faculty and staff in Arlington (10-12 pm, VTRC 6-051)
- Jan. 30: Director meeting with staff in Blacksburg & Arlington (2-4 pm; AA200, VTRC 6-051)
- Jan. 31: VP & Dean Karen DePauw on site realignment in NRC (10:30-11:30; Falls Church, NVC Room 214)
- Feb. 4: SPIA Faculty meeting (11:30-1:00; VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 5: Director meeting with Assistant Professors in Blacksburg (9:30-10:30 am; AA112)
- Feb. 5: PGG Admissions Committee meeting (11:30-1:30; AA 200, VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 6: Director's coffee/donuts meeting with graduate students in Blacksburg (10-11:30; Thomas Conner House)
- Feb. 6: Director's lunch meeting with undergraduate students in Blacksburg (12:00-1:15; AA 2nd Floor)
- Feb. 7: SPIA Executive Committee meeting (11:30-1:30 pm; AA 200, VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 10: Program Chairs meeting (10:00-11:00, VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 13: Director meeting with Assistant Professors in Arlington (2:30-3:45; VTRC 6-042)
- Feb. 18: Dean Blyth meeting with faculty and staff in Arlington (10-11 am, VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 18: Dean Blyth meeting with students in Arlington (11:30-12:30 pm, VTRC 6-051)
- Feb. 25: Dean Blyth meeting with faculty and staff in Blacksburg (9:00-10:30; AA 111)

New Program Profile

Science, Technology & Engineering in Policy (STEP)

VT's Policy Destination Area is currently developing a new program called Science, Technology & Engineering in Policy (STEP). Building on the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, this program will provide science, technology, engineering, mathematics and health (STEM-H) graduate students with an understanding of and competencies in various dimensions of public policy. Particular emphasis will be placed on enhancing their collaborative capacities to work in multi-and interdisciplinary teams to achieve more effective, efficient and equitable policies and policy implementation outcomes.

The program will develop participants' abilities to engage with complex public problems, recognizing that they are social *and* technical in nature. The program is primarily intended for students that have an interest in working in or with the public sector, including in non-profits, government-facing industries and/or on academic pursuits at the science-policy interface. It is initially going through governance as a graduate certificate, but the ambition is to create a larger program with student and faculty fellowships, complementary seminar and speaker series, and a strong sense of community. Longer-term, the program may develop other offerings, including mid-career professional development courses and/or a new degree program. The initial 10-credit (minimum) is built around three courses - *Policy Gateway: Introduction to Policy and Decision Making in Scientific Domains*, *Complex Decision Making I: Reflective Practice and Stakeholder Engagement in Scientific Domains*, and *Complex Decision Making II: Tools and Approaches to Decision Making*, plus participation in the seminar series.

Various SPIA faculty have been intensively involved in the development of this program, including Policy DA co-chair Karen Hult, stakeholder Max Stephenson, and stakeholder and curriculum committee chair Todd Schenk. Schenk is expected to serve as the inaugural director of the program.

Washington Experience: US Congressional Oversight in Action

SPIA 3984/5984

Matthew Dull and James Harder, co-instructors

For two weeks in January 2020 nine Virginia Tech students participated in *Washington Experience: U.S. Congressional Oversight in Action*, a winter session seminar that takes participants behind the headlines to meet with and learn directly from the many varieties of professionals engaged in government oversight. Working from SPIA's new classrooms at the Virginia Tech Research Center in Arlington, these intrepid VT students met with more than 60 professionals representing 30 organizations - often traveling by Metro to offices across Capitol Hill, K Street, Dupont Circle, Foggy Bottom, and Rosslyn.

For two weeks, seminar participants were immersed in the DC ecosystem of professionals in government, think tanks, news media, and congressional offices from Hart and Dirksen Senate Office Buildings to the new O'Neill House Office Building.

Here are a few highlights:

- Participants attended a hearing of the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress and Chair Kilmer recognized the Virginia Tech group in his introductory remarks and following the hearing Chair Kilmer and Vice Chair Graves met and took questions from Virginia Tech students.

- At the Government Accountability Office, VT SPIA alumni organized mentoring sessions creating one-on-one encounters with GAO analysts investigating critical questions of government at the request of Congress.
- Participants learned about the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) and open-records laws from investigative reporters from the Washington Post, Politico, and NBC News and oversight advocates at American Oversight and the National Security Archive.
- Participants learned about inspectors general (IGs) from the experts who train them - and met with NASA's IG and senior members of his staff.
- Participants attended a public symposium on congressional oversight hosted by SPIA at the VTRC in Arlington. During the event Friday, January 10, participants engaged with attendees from the Congressional Research Service, Congressional Management Foundation, Demand Progress, Johns Hopkins University, George Washington University, Catholic University Law School, R Street Institute, Levin Center at Wayne Law, and other organizations.

Throughout the course students were challenged to put their curricular knowledge into action by examining how policy themes like transparency, partisanship, political power, public interest, and the role of the media operate in practice. Students used verbal and written reflection to observe, critique, generalize and develop next steps of inquiry. In their final assignments students produced a recommendation to a member of Congress for an investigative hearing into a topic in their area of choice. Final assignment examined topics like the role of artificial intelligence in defense operations, citizenship questions on the 2020 Census, college affordability, and oversight of the opioid epidemic. Congressional oversight is a robust and interdisciplinary field that provides students with a rich environment to pursue new knowledge, hone professional skills, and develop relationships that can lead to internships and employment in public policy careers.

