



SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS
VIRGINIA TECH.

SPIA Community September Update

Dear SPIA Students, Faculty, Staff, and Alumni:

This month, the faculty and staff at SPIA have been involved in preparing a major report (over 120 pages) for the University's Office of Analytics & Institutional Effectiveness. This was a herculean effort that required us "to look under the hood" to document where we stand and what our future aspirations should be. I want to thank every one of my colleagues who contributed to this report in one way or another. SPIA has now undertaken an important step toward articulating its strategic plan.

In this month's newsletter, you can read about the latest achievements of our alumni, students, and faculty, as well as learn about our staff changes. With this issue, we will also start a new section entitled "Student Spotlight" where we will highlight the work of current or recent graduates.

If you have had any questions regarding anything SPIA-related, join me for an upcoming "[Ask Me Anything](#)" session via Zoom on October 23, noon EDT.

Sincerely,
Mehrzaad Boroujerdi
Director, VT SPIA

Upcoming Events

AMA Session

w/ SPIA Director Mehrzad Boroujerdi



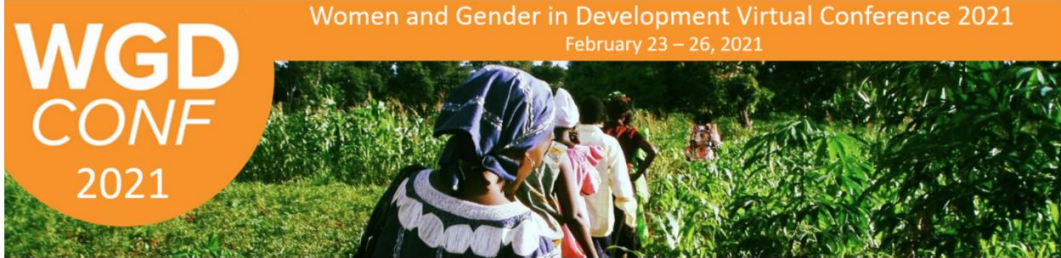
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"Ask Me Anything" via Zoom
October 23, Noon - 1 p.m. EDT

Spread the #Hokie Pride

Know anyone interested in applying to SPIA? We are hosting several [virtual informational sessions](#). Those who attend are able to directly ask their questions to the chair of each program.

- **Urban Affairs & Planning:** [9/30](#), [10/20](#), [11/10](#)
- **Government & International Affairs:** [10/6](#), [10/28](#), [11/17](#)
- **Center for Public Administration & Policy:** [10/7](#), [11/4](#), [12/2](#)



Women and Gender in Development Virtual Conference 2021

Out of the theory & into the field

A dialogue on gendered approaches to inclusive rural development

FEBRUARY 23 - 26, 2021

Faculty and Student News

[Caitlin Adams](#) (Senior student, Environmental Policy and Planning) received SPIA's Public Administration Award/Scholarship for the current 2020-21 academic year.

[Ariel Ahram](#) (Associate Professor, GIA) published [War and Conflict in the Middle East and North Africa](#) (Polity, 2020).

[David Bieri](#) (Associate Professor, UAP) weighed in on the best and worst places to [rent](#) in America.

[Mehrzaad Boroujerdi](#) (SPIA Director) gave an invited [presentation](#) online: "Political Elite in Post-revolutionary Iran," The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (September 17). He was also mentioned in an [article](#) in Asia Times.

[Ralph Buehler](#) (Professor, UAP) gave two invited presentations virtually: "Bicycling for Sustainable Cities" at the Humboldt University in Berlin, Germany and "Bicycle Infrastructure for More Cycling" at Wuppertal University, Germany.

[Ralph Hall](#) (Associate Professor, UAP) and [Khushboo Gupta](#) (PhD, PGG, 2019 and current junior fellow at the National Institute of Urban Affairs) published "[Exploring Smart City Project Implementation Risks in the Cities of Kakinada and Kanpur](#)," in *Journal of Urban Technology*.

[Anne Khademian](#), former director of SPIA and current Presidential Fellow at VT, was [chosen](#) as the new executive director of The Universities at Shady Grove. In that role, she will also serve as the University System of Maryland's Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. We extend our congratulations to Anne and thank her for seventeen years of distinguished service to the school and the university.

Sabith Khan (PhD, PGG) received the Virginia A. Hodgkinson Research Book Prize of Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action for his first book entitled [*Islamic Education in the United States and the Evolution of Muslim Nonprofit Institutions.*](#)

Andria Merabishv (PGG) successfully defended his PhD dissertation “The Politics of Border Walls in Hungary, Georgia & Israel” on September 22. His committee was composed of Professors **Giselle Datz**, **Joel Peters**, and **Gerad Toal**. Congratulations Dr. Merabishv.

Gerard Toal (Professor, GIA) and his two co-authors published an essay entitled “[Is Belarus in the Midst of a Generational Upheaval?](#)” in Global Voices.

Staff News

[Heather Parrish](#), Executive Assistant and Media Support staff at SPIA’s [Institute for Policy and Governance](#), exhibited the kind of altruism that is hard to outdo when she donated a kidney to a co-worker. Read about it [here](#).



Myriam Lechuga, SPIA’s Graduate Student Coordinator based in Arlington, retired this month after serving the school for seventeen years. Myriam, with her gregarious character and competent skills, will be missed by faculty, students, and co-workers alike. We wish her a fantastic retirement.

SPIA welcomes **Natalia Gutierrez Smith** as our new

Administrative Operations Manager. Natalia is coming to us from Boston and will be based at the Blacksburg campus. She says: "I am thrilled to be joining SPIA and engaging in the work to support the program's goals and initiatives. I have admired Virginia Tech for many years and am so excited to now be a part of this community and even more excited to be a part of the school that is educating tomorrow's leaders. I look forward to meeting everyone throughout my first year, whether virtual or in-person!"



Award Spotlight



Receiving a grant from the prestigious National Science Foundation (NSF) is considered a major accomplishment in the life of any scholar. Winning two such awards back to back is a rarity and yet that is exactly what SPIA Professor [Todd Schenk](#) accomplished this month. Here are descriptions of the two grants:

1st Grant. Virtually all of our pressing environmental challenges are both interdisciplinary and inherently socio-political. Recognizing this, the NSF's Growing Convergence Research (GCR) program is focused on "solving vexing research problems, in particular, complex problems focusing on societal needs. It entails integrating knowledge, methods, and expertise from different disciplines and forming novel frameworks to catalyze scientific discovery and innovation."

Professor Schenk (Assistant Professor, UAP) is a co-PI on a recently awarded NSF GCR grant on *Common Pool Resource Theory as a Scalable Framework for Catalyzing Stakeholder-Driven Solutions to the Freshwater Salinization Syndrome*. The VT-led \$2 million grant is tackling this major challenge that is threatening water quality, ecosystems, and drinking water supplies across the country and around the world. The research team will test a potentially generalizable approach to reverse inland freshwater salinization that relies on local agencies and other stakeholders--in partnership with engineers, hydrologists, social scientists, and policymakers--to craft locally tailored, bottom-up solutions to this growing problem.

The test case for the study will be the Occoquan Reservoir, a drinking water supply for nearly two million people in Northern Virginia. The reservoir is salinizing and to better understand the underlying

causes, the researchers will focus on two major salt sources: effluent from a wastewater treatment plant and deicer use in upstream watersheds. Through convergence research, education, and outreach they will identify mechanisms that promote collaboration between stakeholders to effectively manage the salt budget of this regionally important drinking water supply. Lessons learned will be upscaled nationally and globally in partnership with the Water Research Foundation.

2nd Grant: In the face of climate change and other perturbations, species habitats and ranges are shifting at an increasing rate. Unfortunately, our institutional arrangements designed to safeguard biodiversity are not set up to manage such ecosystem shifts. Furthermore, institutional change can be slow, inhibiting the flexibility of policy-making and management in practice.

Professor Todd Schenk is a co-PI on a recently awarded National Science Foundation *Dynamics of Integrated Socio-Environmental Systems (CNH2-S)* grant that will tackle these issues. The project is called *Scrambled responsibilities - species conservation and collaborative governance in an era of global change*. The \$731,165 grant (\$169,666 for VT) is being led by faculty at the University of Tennessee Knoxville, with Schenk the sole VT co-PI.

The project will explore how governance arrangements can become more nimble in the face of ecological change and species migration, adapting with newfound speed and dexterity to protect biodiversity in an era where global change is upending existing management responsibilities. New collaborations must be forged, responsibilities for particular species traded, limited resources reallocated, and management actions future-proofed against uncertainty.

This project will predict future biodiversity change, evaluate how governance systems can most effectively respond, and provide new methodologies to help do so. Our coupled systems approach models the biophysical system, including climate change, land-use change, and species responses, and responses to those changes by the polycentric governance systems involved in species protection. We will provide policy recommendations for a region critical to U.S. biodiversity, and tools and approaches that apply more generally.

Student Spotlight

Neda Moayerian joined the Planning, Governance and Globalization program in Virginia Tech's School of Public and International Affairs as a Ph.D. student in 2015. In her doctoral dissertation, undertaken with Dr. Max Stephenson as her adviser and mentor, she explored the connections between community cultural development and the sustainability of tourism in a Central Appalachian coal community that has suffered rapid economic and social decline in recent decades. As an avid member of the Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) Community Change Collaborative (CCC), Neda has participated in that groups' weekly subject discussions and scholarly forums. She also has interviewed some of the program's guest speakers for its podcast series profiling professionals, working here and abroad and representing diverse policy domains, interested in securing social and economic change



in their communities. Her involvement with CCC's community-based research projects in Southwest Virginia and West Virginia has provided her hands-on experience in community facilitation, community strategic planning and collaborative governance processes. After serving as a graduate assistant with VTIPG from 2015-2018, she joined the Virginia Tech Office of Economic Development (OED) in a similar role in May 2018, where she had the opportunity to participate in several impact evaluation projects and workforce and economic development feasibility studies.

Neda completed her Ph.D. in the spring of 2020 and currently serves as a Postdoctoral Research Associate at VTIPG and OED. In a collaborative project between the Institute and OED, an evaluation of drug courts' impact in the region, she assists with conducting interviews of key stakeholders. She is also co-authoring three articles addressing individual and collective agency in Brazil's Favelas, the impact of the Syrian immigration/refugee crisis on neighboring nations and community cultural development as a social change strategy in Central Appalachia. She is also helping to plan an international symposium bringing scholars of decoloniality and decolonization into dialogue in spring 2021, co-sponsored by VTIPG. The principal organizers of that program, Professors Desiree Poets and Laura Zanotti of the Department of Political Science, and Max Stephenson of SPIA and VTIPG, plan to publish the articles presented at the symposium in a special issue of the journal, *Antipode*, for which the three are also serving as editors.

Neda holds a bachelor of science degree in Urban Planning from the Art University of Tehran (2011) and a master's degree in Urban Management from the University of Tehran (2014). During her residence in Blacksburg, she has met new friends from the U.S. and around the globe, enjoyed hiking on gorgeous trails, and attending cultural events at the Moss Art Center.

Winter Term Course: Congressional Oversight in Action 2021 (UAP/PSCI 4624)

The 2021 Winter Term Washington Experience: US Congressional Oversight in Action (UAP 4624 - CRN: 40353 and PSCI 4624 - CRN: 40354) is a unique 3-week, 3-credit seminar designed to introduce Virginia Tech students to the politics and practice of congressional oversight. This seminar immerses participants in the D.C. ecosystem of professionals, creating opportunities for students to interact with executive branch agencies, think tanks, associations, lobbying firms, news media, and congressional offices focused on government oversight and accountability. Over three packed weeks in January 2020, participants in last year's Congressional Oversight in Action seminar met with more than 60 professionals representing 30 organizations.

In response to the pandemic, the Congressional Oversight in Action 2021 Winter Term seminar will move **online**. This Winter Term seminar will meet via Zoom weekdays from 1pm to 5pm Monday, December 28, 2020 to Friday, January 15, 2021. Students will engage with experts across a wide variety of organizations and agencies; participate in lectures, seminars, and mentoring; and collaborate with other students on an original research project and congressional briefing. The online format will offer the same intensive learning experiences and personal engagement with policymakers that have characterized the seminar experience in previous years in a virtual format that will not require relocating to the D.C.-area for three weeks.

Interested in participating in the 2021 Wintermester Washington Experience: Congressional Oversight

in Action? [Complete this short online form.](#) Or email seminar co-instructors: **Matt Dull** (mdull@vt.edu) and **James Harder** (jharder@vt.edu).

Worth Pondering

- [Covid-19 has forced a radical shift in working habits](#)
- [Future of the Academic Workforce](#)
- [Review: Markets, Minds, and Money: Why America Leads the World in University Research](#)
- [The Global God Divide](#)
- [Voltaire Spread Darkness, Not Enlightenment. France Should Stop Worshipping Him](#)
- [Will Schools and Universities Ever Return to Normal?](#)
- [Will the Liberal Order Survive? The History of an Idea](#)

