



## MULTIDISCIPLINARY GROUP TACKLES PROJECTS IN GHANA

Before departing for the Romney Institute's annual study abroad in Ghana this April, Marriott School students were given a challenge: see with African eyes and hear with African ears.

The twenty-five students, a multidisciplinary team from the MPA, MBA, and MAcc programs, took that task to heart, spending three weeks working on various management projects in the African nation. This was the largest cohort to ever participate in the annual trip, which was started in 2004.

"I worked with an orphanage called Ghana Make a Difference," says Rachel Henrie, a second-year MAcc student. "We helped revise the organization's accounting system. It impacted me to know that what I'm studying can be a really good opportunity to serve people."

MPA students tackled a human-resource-management project with the orphanage while the MBA team took on a consulting project with Game, a Walmart subsidiary. Other projects included assisting a hospital with cash flow issues, helping a school determine cost in revenues, and working with an NGO that promotes environmentally friendly business practices.



MPA Students Kokailey Djanie, Kevin Sonico, and Lila Madariaga visiting a Ghanaian school.

"There was a lot of collaboration in the evenings between the students when they talked about their projects," says Rex Facer, an MPA professor and this year's trip leader. "Bridging across programs helped students know that everyone has a different set of skills that are very valuable."

The projects were a success for everyone involved. The organizations gathered information that allowed them to better accomplish their missions, and the students gained real-world experience while learning from their Ghanaian counterparts.

"What struck me the most was how industrious the people are," says second-year MPA student Robert Porter. "They don't have a lot to start out with, but they

take what resources they have and make the most out of it."

Though the teams were busy working with clients during the week, they embraced the culture of Ghana on the weekends. Every Sunday the students met with Ghanaian members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, allowing them to get to know the locals on a more personal level.

"Some of those experiences were the most profound because we got to see people for who they really are and see the things they deeply care about," Facer says. "It shapes the way you view and interact with people when you realize we're all part of the same family."



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# From the Associate Director



Fall (my favorite season) brings the start of another school year and the opportunity to get to know incoming students. In the new MPA cohort, eighteen of the forty-nine students have four years or more of work experience.

This experience significantly impacts classroom learning. The cohort is 55 percent female. Nearly 45 percent did their undergraduate degree somewhere other than BYU's Provo campus, and 43 percent come from minority backgrounds. These numbers get me excited about the diverse networks and connections that will develop among the students and impact their future careers. The executive MPA cohort includes four students from BYU-Idaho who join the classroom through virtual remote classroom access. The technology makes for nearly seamless collaboration. We hope that more participants from BYU-Idaho will join our program as those students' increased management skills are noticed and appreciated.

Steve Carlson, a product line manager in BYU's Office of Information Technology, was tasked this summer with getting the BYU-I and EMPA Salt Lake Center classrooms connected. His skills contributed to making sure all the technology worked between the two classrooms. To be an example to his children and to keep his mind engaged, Steve applied to the EMPA program. Now a few weeks into his first semester, Steve is discovering a different life path than the one he had originally considered. He wrote, "I feel grateful to be part of an awesome group and to be taught by Dr. Thompson. There aren't too many classes that you can spend four hours in and feel like you could still keep going. I have experienced some great growth already in Dr. Thompson's class."

Katie Bair has two years of full-time work experience and is now part of the MPA program. She comes from a large, close-knit family (parents, six siblings, five in-laws, and nineteen nieces and nephews). Her mom is from Aguascalientes, Mexico, and her dad is from Sacramento, California. She grew up in a predominately Latino community and went to church in a Spanish-speaking

ward even though she spoke very little Spanish. She had a happy childhood in the midst of hectic Los Angeles and gained an appreciation for differing opinions and diverse cultures. Her first official job was as a cashier at BYU's CougarEAT. She served a mission to Chile, taught at the MTC in both Provo and in Mexico, and was assistant to the director of the BYU performing group Living Legends. After graduating from BYU's recreation management program, Katie worked for Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation creating and running adaptive programs for people with disabilities. She plans to emphasize in nonprofit management and build community arts programs that share multicultural traditions, values, histories, and religious beliefs.

Among the more than two hundred enrolled MPA and EMPA students, there is so much energy, passion, preparation, and goodness. Students and alumni continue to contribute their unique skills to connect people and enhance quality of life. We welcome the new students and appreciate all who are contributing to the institute's mission and legacy.

Sincerely,

Catherine Cooper  
Associate Director

If you would like to receive the MPA Outreach newsletter electronically, please let us know by emailing us at [mpaalumni@byu.edu](mailto:mpaalumni@byu.edu).

## OUTREACH

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# MATH CAMP ADDS UP TO SUCCESS

This summer twenty-seven incoming MPA and EMPA students got together for camp—but instead of bringing out canoes and tents, they reached for calculators and graph paper.

“The official title of the class is Essential Mathematics for Public and Non-profit Management, but we call it Math Camp because it sounds more fun,” says Eva Witesman, Math Camp founder and MPA professor.

The Romney Institute has offered the class for six years to prepare students for the heavily quantitative MPA and EMPA programs. In the week before orientation, the course covers topics ranging from basic algebra to introductory calculus. Students choose whether or not to take the class, but those who do say it gives them the ability to go into the MPA program with confidence.

Despite the challenge of dusting off memories of square roots and equations, Witesman says she helps students have fun getting to know each other in a low-stress environment.

“It was a good refresher,” says Nick Estrada, a first-year MPA student. “Now I have the resources and know how to solve these problems.”

Estrada, who worked for five years as a translator after finishing his undergradu-

ate degree, says the format of the class helped him feel comfortable with math concepts he hasn’t used for several years. Students start each day with topical discussions and practice problems and then work to solve problems with classmates to test out new skills.

“Many of our students come to us because of their passion for helping people—not their passion for math,” Witesman says. “We want all of our students to be prepared to get the most out of our program, so we use Math Camp to level the playing field.”

Witesman was inspired by a similar class at Indiana University when she created BYU’s class in 2009. She adjusts the curriculum every year according to feedback from professors, ensuring that students receive the right prep for each class. For many students it is their first class at BYU, and they say it’s fun to see the unique way BYU approaches education.

“Not only are we getting the math skills, but we’re also getting the spiritual side of things,” says MPA student Kelly



Peterson, who received her undergraduate degree from Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

Most of all, students say the class helped them feel comfortable going into a new program with confidence. Lauren Arnold, a first-year MPA student, says she had been worried that she wouldn’t be skilled enough when compared to her classmates.

“Meeting my peers and realizing I wasn’t alone was really valuable,” she says. “Seeing all of our different backgrounds and what we want to achieve got me ready for the semester.”

## Witesman, cont. from p. 8

we determine how they are different, how does that influence the way we manage those sectors?”

Witesman’s research has resulted in a few dozen published papers as well as taking her across the United States, Europe, and Asia for more than fifty professional presentations. Most recently, Witesman spoke at the National Governor’s Association annual meeting in New Orleans, where her presentation focused on creating a culture of data-informed practice in government organizations.

Between research, teaching, and traveling to presentations, Witesman finds time to nurture a few hobbies. Her students would tell you that she’s a CrossFit guru who enjoys making and breaking her own weightlifting records. But her softer side comes through in her art—she creates religious-themed paintings, some of which have been shown in the Springville Museum of Art. She utilizes that specific skill set by serving on the board of a new nonprofit founded by LDS artist J. Kirk Richards. In fact, Witesman knows better than most that making a difference comes at the sweet spot where technical knowledge and hard work intersect with passion.

# Institute News

## ORIENTATION PREPARES STUDENTS FOR LEARNING

Students clad in dark suits, slacks, and skirts shuffle into order, trying to make sure everyone's visible for the class photo. It's the first day of MPA New Student Orientation, and no one is quite sure how to act. Within the next week these strangers will share their goals, face their fears, and become tight-knit teams, but for now they're just a crowd of people taking a picture.

"I felt like I was going into the unknown," says EMPA student Christy Burnett about her first day at orientation. "But a lot of things about orientation calmed my fears."

Activities such as a ropes course, career prep sessions, and alumni panels helped new MPA and EMPA students learn what to expect throughout the program and beyond. New students were divided into the teams they will be working with for the whole semester, and everyone got to know their cohort.

"At the end of orientation we want students to know what their role is, what our role is, and have a good overview of what's ahead," says Catherine Cooper, associate director of the Romney Institute. "It's informational and inspiring. I hope people come away with the sense that they're supposed to be here."

One of the first events for the MPA and EMPA students was watching a video about the institute's namesake, former Michigan governor George Romney. Students learned about his public service and volunteerism and then discussed how they could follow his example. Their next big activity was braving

CLAS Ropes Course in Provo with the students' newly designated teams.

The course required students to perform activities like walking across a balance beam forty feet in the air and leaping from tall towers to reach a target. Each activity on the course brought students together and showed them the meaning of working together.

"That leap of faith was one of the absolute scariest things I've ever done, but I felt like a million bucks afterward," Burnett says. "The course set the stage for us to work as a team, pull together, and have a great experience."

The MPA students also had the chance to brush up on their job search skills and network in career prep sessions that included résumé reviews, a business etiquette class, and a conversation with an alumni panel.

At the end of the sessions, students had solid skills to help them with their internship search and contacts to help them along the way.

To wrap up the week, professors Jim Stice and Jeffery Thompson spoke about the expectations that come with grad school and the MPA program. For Brent Daire, a first-year MPA student, hearing their advice helped him see his purpose and catch a vision for the things he can accomplish while studying at BYU.

"We're here for a spiritual learning opportunity as much as a secular learning opportunity," Daire says. "It reminded me that as I harmonize those two aspects of my life, I can get the skills I need, meet the right people, and seize the opportunity to develop myself into a more effective disciple."



EMPA orientation activity at CLAS Ropes. From left: Carl Canlas, Marc Ellison, Lisa Cutler, Troy Galbraith, Kenney Davis, Rich Kuchinsky, Denise Villamar, David Smyth, and Pam Esera.



# FLYING INTO FIRST YEAR: MPA ORIENTATION INCLUDES NEW ADVENTURE TRIP



Haley Beckstrand, a first-year MPA student, ziplines at Sundance.

Looking out at wide valleys and steep mountain peaks, Ted Jackson took a deep breath and stepped into thin air.

One wire, strung out thousands of feet over tree-filled valleys, held him aloft as he flew down the mountainside.

Jackson, a first-year MPA student, is terrified of heights. But since he rode the zipline side-by-side with a classmate, he was able to overcome that fear and had a surprisingly good time.

"It was exhilarating! I felt like I was flying," he says.

Overcoming fears was just one aspect of this year's MPA Adventure Trip. Instead of the program's annual rafting voyage in Wyoming, this year the Romney Institute held a weekend retreat in Provo's very own Wasatch Mountains. The trip included floating down the Provo River, staying in BYU's Timp Lodge, and ziplining at Sundance Resort.

"Just twenty minutes away from BYU

we have some of the most beautiful mountains and terrain in the world," says Kip Smith, the Romney Institute's branding and marketing manager. "We wanted to get our students involved with local events and also out of their comfort zones. That's what our program is about: learning new things and becoming something better than we are."

Smith spearheaded the change in event and locale and hopes that in the future the program can switch up the trip so students get a different experience each year. Both first- and second-year students are encouraged to attend, as are Romney Institute faculty and staff. The result is a fun, inclusive weekend that allows everyone to get to know each other outside of the classroom.

"Seeing the professors in that situation made me more confident to speak up in class," says first-year student Katie Bair. "They're just people, and we got to know them as people and have fun with them."

The adventure kicked off Friday afternoon with floating down the Provo River

on tubes and kayaks. Gliding past cottages and fly fishers, students helped each other avoid capsizing as they made their way downstream. After floating the river, students and professors went to Timp Lodge, where they had time to play sports, eat dinner, and engage in fierce lip-sync battles.

On Saturday, groups had time to zipline and hike before meeting up for a barbecue at a nearby park.

Mackenzie Wood, a first-year MPA student, says her favorite part of the weekend was ziplining and getting to know the second-year students. This year more second-year students than ever before were able to attend the retreat since it was so close to campus.

"I got to hear their take on the program as well as their advice on how to do well," Wood says. "It helped me know that I can make it through the program."

Wood and her fellow students are looking forward to more than just making it through the program, and after the adventure weekend, they've got the support circle to help them succeed.



Mackenzie Wood, Andrea Cannon, and Abby Weidmer playing jump rope during the MPA Sundance Adventure trip.

# Student News

## AD-LIBBING TO THE TOP



A third-year JD/MPA student, Zach Atherton, second from right, performs on stage with members of ImprovBroadway.

Dreams of roaring crowds and bright lights drew fifteen-year-old Zach Atherton to where he stood—nervous in front of his entire high school, performing in his first improv show. He'd seen enough episodes of “Whose Line is it Anyway?” to love the art, and this was his chance to make it big.

He waited for his golden opportunity, delivered his best material (something about diabetes), and paused for a reaction. The audience sat stone-faced.

“I knew that I loved it because instead of being discouraged, I was obsessed with never being that bad again,” he says.

Now a third-year JD/MPA student, Atherton's determination is nothing to laugh at. After building a reputation for himself in improv, last year he established his own company, ImprovBroadway, in

Orem, Utah. His passions are varied, but Atherton says he hopes to balance public service, law, and comedy by using aspects of each in his future career.

“The principles of improv—like accepting what your partner says then expanding on it—can be used in the workplace to make it fun and productive,” he says.

He taught that principle to Marriott School administrators in a professional improv workshop earlier this year. He has also used his improv skills while working at many internships of his own.

After completing a bachelor's in English and theater, Atherton interned for Provo City both as a public relations and law intern while working on his JD/MPA. While interning for assistant

city attorney Gary Millward, Atherton performed research and drafted memos to help represent the city in legal issues. Millward says Atherton was not only a motivated worker but also was fun to be around.

“Given his gregarious personality and reasoned approach to legal analysis, I think that he has few limits with respect to what he could accomplish either as a lawyer or as a public servant,” Millward says.

Atherton has always wanted to be an attorney, which led him to apply to BYU's law program in 2013. He was admitted for Fall 2014 and ended up having an extra year before he would start the program. He looked into applying for a joint degree and chose the MPA for its focus on public service and teamwork.

“The MPA rang true to me when I read the description,” he says. “And now that I'm in the program, I love it. I'm immersed in the team effort.”

Atherton says he's still unsure exactly where he wants his career to take him, but he's hoping to either follow in Millward's footsteps as a city attorney or continue with improv and theater management. As long as he can build on his skills while working with people and being creative, he'll be happy.

“I'm keeping my doors open,” he says. “Everything I love is in a niche market that's hard to get into, so when an opportunity comes I'll take it and run.”



# Alumni News

## WRITING MORE THAN BUDGETS

Matt Michaelis was shocked when he won an American Songwriting Award—not only because he was new to penning music but also because his winning composition, “Serenity, the Rabid Whale,” has a unique title, to say the least.

“When I found out I had won my category, I emailed three times to ask if they had the right guy,” he says. “If I had known the song would do so well, I would have picked another name.”

Michaelis, a 2006 MPA grad and finance director for the city of Gridley, California, won the 2014 award for the instrumental category. His song juxtaposes soothing and raucous guitar riffs, which is what inspired the piece’s whimsical title.

Michaelis’s interest in music developed when he was a little kid taking piano lessons, and it grew into a passion as he looked for a creative outlet in college. Throughout his career in city finance, he continued to hone his talent for performing and recently branched out to writing his own compositions.

He’s faced a few setbacks in his musical pursuits, including injured vocal chords and surgery, but he says the challenges have helped him grow in all aspects of his life.

“My songwriting journey has given me a confidence in my career to be patient in adversity and believe in myself,” he says.

Winning the songwriting award last year was a huge confidence booster, and he’s continuing to write music and enter contests. His song “Mayhem in the Cock-

pit” was also nominated for the 2015 best instrumental piece. While he didn’t win the top award this year, Michaelis says he hopes to keep improving.

“I think I have a lot of things I want to say and emotions I want to convey, and finding the right chords and lyrics to express what’s going on inside is the challenge,” he says.

In addition to writing music on his own, Michaelis joined the band Garden Highway when he moved to California to start his job in Gridley. As the band’s guitarist, he’s seen the group gain recognition and played for hundreds of dancing fans. Although his music and career seem to be polar opposites, he says the creative process is the same whether he’s writing a budget or a song.

“The more I clear my mind, believe in myself, and be positive, the better product I can produce,” he says. “That’s when I feel the most creative. It reminds me of

building a budget from start to finish.”

Away from the strings, Matt enjoys spending time with his wife, Autumn, and their five sons. He says raising five boys under the age of eleven is exciting, and he hopes to share his passion for music with them.

“Everybody jokes that we have a perfect basketball team, but my internal wish is that we have a boy band.”



Matt Michaelis, an MPA alum, jams with his band, Garden Highway.



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*"It isn't a great nation that breeds a great people.  
It is a great people that build a great nation."  
—George W. Romney*



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## EVA WITESMAN: AT THE INTERSECTION OF WORK AND PASSION

When asked about her professional achievements, Eva Witesman answers like a true teacher.

"It really has nothing to do with what I do, but rather what my students do," Witesman says. "The ability to prepare people to influence organizations is a huge privilege. To be in a position where I'm teaching future public and nonprofit leaders—that is by far my greatest accomplishment. I love hearing how students are using things I've taught them to make people's lives better."

And Witesman has made quite an impact with both students and colleagues since she came to BYU in 2009.

"Professor Witesman is one of the most passionate, energetic colleagues I've ever had," says Jeffery Thompson, director of the Romney Institute of Public Management. "She's revolutionized our program by

creating opportunities for our students to do hands-on work with community partners as part of their coursework."

This real-world interaction is a key component of Witesman's teaching philosophy. Students are paired with public or nonprofit organizations to execute either statistical analyses or the development of outcome evaluation plans. To facilitate these opportunities, Witesman has worked with more than seventy organizations, which has provided her with a myriad of professional consulting opportunities. She's done regular consulting for the State of Utah within the Governor's Office of Management and Budget.

"They hire me as a central resource that other departments can also use," Witesman says. "It's super fun. I look at whether or not public agencies are achieving the



purpose for which they were created."

Witesman also wears many hats at the Marriott School. While her classes focus on statistics, program evaluation, and nonprofit fundraising, her research takes a different direction. The self-proclaimed sector theorist studies a few main questions.

"Why do we have a public sector? Why do we have a nonprofit sector? And, once

*Witesman, cont. p. 3*