

MPA

2023-24 MPA ANNUAL REPORT ■ BYU MARRIOTT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS





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◀ MPA students **Rebecca Richards** and **Rachel Sumsion** joined thousands of philanthropists in Toronto at the 2024 AFP ICON conference—a hub for knowledge exchange, networking, and professional development in the fundraising industry.

Front cover: A group of MPA students traveled to Washington, DC, in February of 2024 to tour agencies and organizations and to network with alums in the public and nonprofit sectors.

MPA 2023-24 Year at a Glance



August

Kick-starting Success

The EMPA and MPA programs brought new students together to prepare for the coming year. Held on campus and in southern Utah, new student orientation helped the classes forge bonds as they shared meals, met faculty, and tackled team-building activities.

November

A Taste of Home

For the students who feasted together at the multicultural Friendsgiving hosted by the MPA Association (MPAA) on November 15, it felt like going home for the holidays.



December

The More the Merrier

International students gathered at MPA director Rob Christensen's home for a festive holiday dinner.

ROMNEY INSTITUTE of PUBLIC SERVICE & ETHICS

VISION
We aspire to lift the world through Christlike leadership in public service.

MISSION
We develop public service leaders of faith, intellect, integrity, and charity.

VALUES

Faith in Christ	Respect for All
Integrity in Action	Service to Community
Love, Agency, and Accountability	Excellence and Generosity

GUIDING PRINCIPLE
Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve

January

New Horizons

After months of writing, revising, and collaborating, the Romney Institute rolled out the new MPA Vision, Mission, and Values to the wider MPA community.



March

Vision Board

At its annual spring meeting, the Romney Institute Executive Board welcomed new members, discussed curriculum and accreditation, and listened to student presentations on fundraising.

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

OCTOBER

NOVEMBER

DECEMBER

JANUARY

FEBRUARY

MARCH

APRIL



September

Lone Star Leadership

Students traveled to Austin, Texas, to attend the International City/County Management Association conference—the world's largest gathering of professionals working in local government management.

October

From Costumes to Career Advice

Always a Halloween hot spot, the Tanner Building thrummed with MPA students in costumes. At the fall meeting for the Romney Institute Advisory Board, the student mentoring sessions were a highlight for everyone.



February

Capital Connections

A group of students spent a week in Washington, DC, visiting potential employers and meeting alumni who work in the area. In Provo, Amanda Rutherford received the Gary C. Cornia Award for her research on educational policy and equity in government.

April

Going Forth to Serve

MPA students joined philanthropists from around the world at the Association of Fundraising Professionals ICON conference in Toronto. Also, Habitat for Humanity CEO Jonathan Reckford reflected on service as he accepted the 2024 Administrator of the Year Award. As April closed, graduating students set out to go forth to serve.



GROWING BRIGHTER & BRIGHTER

The New MPA Vision, Mission, and Values

BY LENA MAY HARPER PRIMOSCH

On a mountainside near the city of Capernaum, Jesus sat before a group of His disciples. “Ye are the light of the world,” He told them. And then He admonished, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”¹

This charge to illuminate the world through good works is foundational to the BYU George W. Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics, where students, faculty, and staff strive to cultivate Christlike attributes through public service. Consequently, Christ’s legacy of service is now at the heart of a new vision, mission, and values (VMV) statement for BYU Marriott’s MPA program.

“We are clearly centered in using the Savior as the model to teach,” says MPA director **Rob Christensen**. “In the statement, we tried to capture the values that He lived and embodied,” thereby reinforcing the program’s longtime commitment to Christlike service. The new VMV empowers students, alumni, faculty, and staff to bring more light to the world.

A NEW GUIDING STAR

At BYU’s centennial celebration in 1975, President Spencer W. Kimball instructed the campus community to shine a “unique light . . . into the educational world.”² It’s one of many BYU-specific injunctions

from that address that have motivated the university to move to higher ground over the past half century.

As part of those efforts, BYU began honing its brand to focus more intently on its mission “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.”³ Recognizing the power of this mission, BYU Marriott dean **Brigitte Madrian** saw a need within the college to have a similar guiding light. In 2021 she led a team in creating a vision, mission, and values statement, pointing BYU Marriott to the bigger why of its purpose.

The college’s new VMV stirred something in Christensen. He saw the impact it was having and wanted something similar to delineate the core values and aspirations of the MPA program, including how the program aligned with the college.

Using the BYU Marriott VMV as a foundation and a road map, Christensen began involving stakeholders. During one MPA Executive Advisory Board (EAB) meeting, the room buzzed with energy as groups of three or four members huddled together, pouring over assigned sections of the BYU Marriott VMV. They examined each word. They dissected the phrasing. And they discussed ideas borne of their own professional and student experiences.

“We were intentional in how we tried to craft supportive but distinctive language,” recalls **Laura Kaloi** (MPA ’97), who chairs the EAB and is a copartner at



PHOTO BY IROPBA/ADOBE STOCK

the Washington, DC, consultancy firm Stride Policy Solutions. Kaloi continues, “We wanted to make sure it would appeal to everybody and that no matter your age, your gender, or your career path, you would see yourself in the statement.”

That was only the beginning. The Alumni Advisory Board also added their suggestions. Dean Madrian offered her thoughts, and faculty, staff, and students gave their feedback in turn. “It would be difficult to tell you exactly who added what,” Christensen recalls. It was a collaborative and evolutionary process.

In November 2023, after nearly two years, the MPA’s VMV was finalized and implemented. The completed document sharpens and highlights how the MPA program is both reinforcing and making a distinct contribution to the missions of the university and BYU Marriott.

Reflecting on her own work experience in California’s Department of Finance, **Koreen van Ravenhorst**, a 2002 MPA grad and EAB member, foresees the VMV’s benefits: “When people have these

core values, over time they embody those things; they become what they strive for.” And she can see those transformations happening in the program as students and personnel take the new vision, mission, and values to heart.

INCREASING IN LIGHT

At the beginning of summer 2024, Christensen sat down with a prospective MPA student and handed him a copy of the program’s new VMV. “This is what sets a BYU MPA apart,” Christensen said. “We don’t think there’s a better example in the world of a public servant than the Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the kind of education you’ll get here.” The young man immediately understood what BYU Marriott’s MPA was about.

“This document allows us to be really clear and intentional about how we are different from other universities and programs,” Christensen says.

The MPA program is discovering additional ways to follow its new guiding star. The VMV guides administrators as they make admission and scholarship

decisions. And in their spring 2024 meeting, the EAB reexamined the statement, this time discussing how to apply it in the upcoming accreditation process and how to “show the world that the VMV can absolutely be connected to our curriculum and how we prepare MPA students,” Kaloi says.

The values are also the foundation of a new set of student awards, presented in spring 2024 to six students nominated by their peers. Christensen says, “These awards go beyond GPA to how the students embody the values of the MPA program.”

For example, the MPA student who won the award for Excellence and Generosity (**Max Moore**), was nominated not only for his diligence in the classroom but also for reaching out to those who were struggling in the program, helping them achieve the same excellence. The nomination stated: “His generosity never belittles or diminishes; it always encourages and empowers.” Christensen says this is “the kind of person who we want to say is a BYU Marriott MPA student.”

Countless similar stories confirm the caliber of MPA students. In his role heading up the program’s accreditation self-study during the past year, MPA professor **David Matkin** has seen how the program cultivates individuals of exceptional character and integrity.

As part of the self-study, Matkin brought paper and pencils to a faculty meeting and asked the professors to enumerate how they knew whether the MPA program was successful. The student team helping him with the analysis was surprised that faculty responses

didn’t focus on job titles, professional status, or salaries. “That wasn’t what drew our imaginations,” Matkin says. “Most of the comments were in line with building leaders of faith, integrity, and charity. Life happiness and strength in the gospel are the foundation on which the technical and managerial skills are placed.” All of which is reflected in the new vision, mission, and values.

BRIGHTENING A LEGACY

As the BYU MPA program embraces the values in its new VMV, its light is sure to grow “brighter and brighter.”⁴ By anchoring its identity and aspirations in Christlike service, the Romney Institute ensures that its graduates are not only skilled professionals but also compassionate disciple-leaders dedicated to lifting and serving their communities, following the Savior’s directive to illuminate the world. Ultimately, the VMV is a testament to the program’s enduring legacy. “We are standing on the shoulders of giants,” Matkin says. It’s a legacy of light.

NOTES

1. Matthew 5:14, 16.
2. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.
3. BYU Mission Statement (4 November 1981).
4. Doctrine and Covenants 50:24.
5. See Moroni 7:47.
6. Stewart L. Grow, *My Autobiography* (1986), L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, 129; see also Kevin J. Worthen, “Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve,” BYU commencement address, 16 August 2018.

“We don’t think there’s a better example in the world of a public servant than the Savior, Jesus Christ. This is the kind of education you’ll get here.”

PHOTO BY NATE EDWARDS/RYU PHOTO



ROMNEY INSTITUTE of PUBLIC SERVICE & ETHICS

VISION

We aspire to lift the world through Christlike leadership in public service.

MISSION

We develop public service leaders of faith, intellect, integrity, and charity.

VALUES

Faith in Christ

We value deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ. Our faith gives us the capacity to envision a better future, the confidence to make that future happen, and the courage to act in the face of challenges.

Integrity in Action

We value integrity and hold ourselves to the highest moral and ethical standards. Acting with integrity builds trust, strengthens character, and focuses our ambitions on things of eternal consequence.

Love, Agency, and Accountability

As Christ-centered leaders we value the eternal principles of love, agency, and accountability to cultivate and guide core relationships with God, self, others, and our stewardship.

Respect for All

We value respect for all individuals as children of God and recognize the inherent worth, divine potential, and agency of each person. A climate of respect, inclusion, and belonging enhances our learning, facilitates collaboration, and encourages personal growth.

Service to Community

We value community and community building because the higher purpose of our work is to bless others and to build the kingdom of God.

Excellence and Generosity

We value both excellence and generosity in serving. These Christlike attributes work together to magnify our influence and motivate us to continually improve in all of our pursuits, including learning, teaching, researching, managing, and leading.

GUIDING PRINCIPLE

Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve

We prioritize lifelong learning and service to others. We evaluate our decisions and actions by the iMPact they have on the experiences, preparation, character, emotional well-being, and spiritual growth of those we actively teach, serve, and love.

What's New? Shedding Light on the MPA and BYU Marriott VMVs

The MPA's vision, mission, and values (VMV) statement draws extensively from BYU Marriott's VMV; it also differs in important ways. Here's a look at the changes.

VISION

Christ is at the forefront of the BYU Marriott vision, and that's right where MPA stakeholders felt He should be in the MPA vision. "The Savior is an integral part of who we are and what we want to become," says MPA director Robert Christensen. "Jesus is the answer to everything, including how we do a better MPA program."

Consequently, the vision stayed the same—with two important modifications. *Public service* was added to connect it specifically to the program, and the word *transform* was changed to *lift*. "We want to be part of the transformation that Christ can do, and we'll do so by lifting," Christensen says about the change. "We go forth to lift and to serve, often helping those who are in greatest need."

MISSION

Along with adding *public service*, the MPA mission replaced *character* with *integrity* and added the word *charity*. "We felt like *integrity* better captures the idea of wholeness and the ethics aspect of our department," says Christensen. And although the word *charity* isn't common in the business world, "our alumni work in jobs serving God's children who are among the most vulnerable," he says. "Charity—the pure love of Christ—captures that."⁵

VALUES

Three of the BYU Marriott values—*Faith in Christ*, *Respect for All*, and *Integrity in Action*—remained the same. Two values were added, and one was modified.

- *Service to Community*. Since service is integral to the MPA program and the work **Eva Witesman** and other MPA professors are doing in BYU Marriott's Ballard Center for Social Impact, stakeholders felt strongly about including this value.
- *Love, Agency, and Accountability*. This value was inspired by the BYU Sorensen Center for Moral and Ethical Leadership and its Christlike leadership model. Run by **Jeffery Thompson**, a professor in the MPA program, the center has a mission to "lead others through expressing love, honoring agency, and inviting accountability."
- *Excellence and Generosity*. Modifying the BYU Marriott value of excellence to add generosity was important. "We can only excel to the extent to which we are generous to others," Christensen says. "The addition of generosity brings this value back to the Divine."

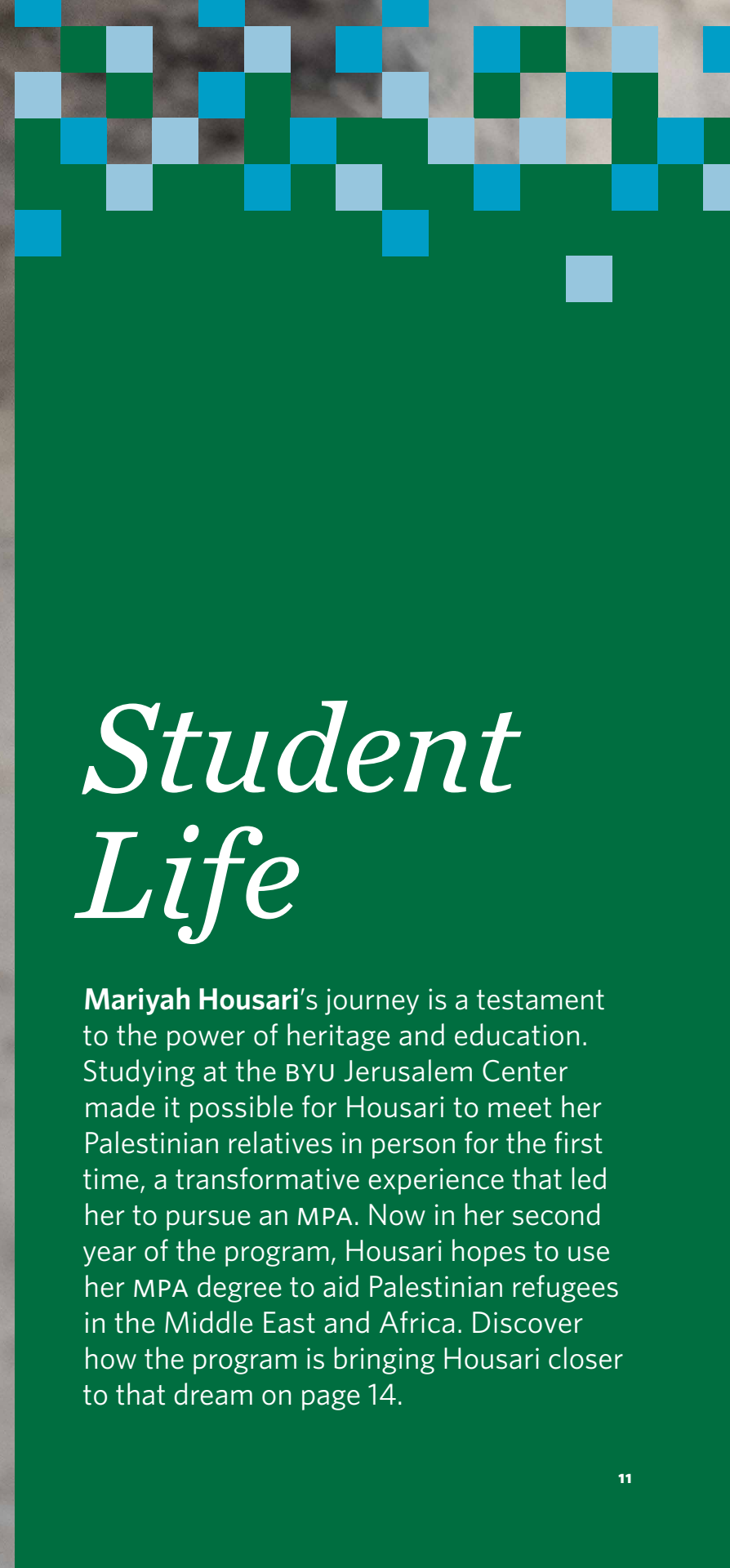
GUIDING PRINCIPLE

The MPA guiding principle—*Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve*—is an MPA-specific iteration of the college's guiding principle, *Centered on Students*. While the well-known phrase is also used by the university, "it has its home in our department," Christensen says, recounting the slogan's genesis story.

When BYU created a new entrance to campus in the 1960s, faculty and others submitted ideas for a motto to be displayed there. The winning phrase was presented by **Stewart L. Grow**, who only a few years earlier (1961) had become head of BYU's first graduate program in public administration.

Grow wrote: "Enter to Learn; Go Forth to Serve is . . . a distillation of my life's philosophy. We are born to gain experience in learning and [we] have both the obligation and the reward of serving. . . . I know of no better way to expand the joy which man should have than to create a world in which all men will be motivated to learn and to serve each other."⁶

The MPA is, at its core, a degree in service. Christensen adds, "This phrase is part of our DNA and has been for 60 years."



Student Life

Mariyah Housari's journey is a testament to the power of heritage and education. Studying at the BYU Jerusalem Center made it possible for Housari to meet her Palestinian relatives in person for the first time, a transformative experience that led her to pursue an MPA. Now in her second year of the program, Housari hopes to use her MPA degree to aid Palestinian refugees in the Middle East and Africa. Discover how the program is bringing Housari closer to that dream on page 14.

Student Report

Class of 2023-24

CATEGORY	MPA	EMPA
Students enrolled	80	72
Average age	29	45
Average GPA	3.66	3.21
Female	70%	67%
Married	36%	81%
BIPOC	15%	14%
Bilingual	59%	44%
Served mission	61%	36%
International	23%	—

Countries Represented

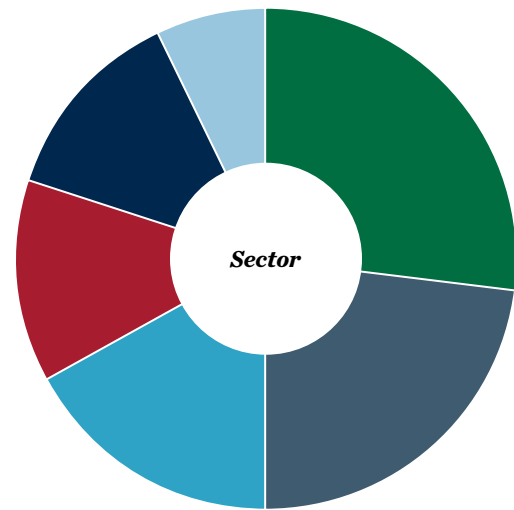
Colombia	Japan
Dominican Republic	New Zealand
Ecuador	Philippines
Fiji	Samoa
Finland	South Africa
Germany	Tonga
Ghana	Uganda
Guatemala	Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

Degree Emphases

Federal government	31%
Local government	23%
Nonprofit	46%

Job Placement— Graduation Year 2023

CLASS OF 2023	MPA
Average salary	\$64,461
Placed by 3 months after graduation	87%
Internship converted to job	19%
Received a job offer before graduating	65%
Received bonus or other compensation with job offer	23%



27%	Private	13%	Federal Govt
23%	Education	13%	Nonprofit
17%	Local Govt	7%	State Govt

MPA Student Turned Orem City Councilor



Jenn Gale has President Russell M. Nelson’s “Peacemakers Needed” talk from the April 2023 general conference playing on repeat. “I’ve listened to it a lot,” she says. “In this day and age, peacemaking is not necessarily top of mind.”

But peacemaking is crucial to Gale, who was elected to the Orem City Council last year while earning her MPA. “I want to be a peacemaker. I want to respect and recognize the good in others and have constructive dialogue. Even in a city that’s operating well, we don’t always agree with everyone—but we can still have peace. That’s my number one goal,” she says. “I’m realizing how much work that takes.”

Although Gale didn’t know it at the time, her journey to the Orem City Council actually began in **Robert Christensen’s** administrative environment class. Gale and her teammates created a constitutional analysis as Orem was considering creating its own school district. After researching the potential split, Gale began advocating for Orem to remain in the Alpine School District.

Although Gale and her classmates picked the school district issue on a whim, the project became the impetus for her city council run. Several people approached Gale during her involvement and suggested she run for city council. “You should probably find somebody else,” she would respond.

“Being on city council wasn’t on my radar,” she continues. But as the comments kept coming, they became harder to dismiss. Gale, who was raising six children, earning her MPA, and coaching the high school mountain biking team for one of her sons, broached the idea with her husband, Adam, who was then serving as a bishop. “I thought he would shoot the idea down,” Gale recalls. “Instead, he said, ‘You know what? I think you should run.’”

Gale’s campaign, which launched in late spring 2023, became a family affair. “We decided that it wasn’t just going to be a mom thing; our family was going to do it together,” she says. The support of

her husband and children made all the difference for Gale. “My family was great,” she says. “They would come to events, hang signs, take down signs—whatever I needed help with.”

In January 2024, Gale started both her four-year term as city councilor and her last semester in the MPA program. This combination reinforced the value of public service in her life. Gale earned her BA in music from BYU and knew she wanted to pursue an advanced degree. “I debated getting an MBA for a long time, but public sector work is more appealing to me,” she says. “I love that BYU’s program is run through the business school.”

Gale was deeply involved in her community long before she ran for office or pursued an MPA. She coached Orem High School’s swim team for two years, chaired the #UpgradeOrem campaign to advocate for a new fitness center and library hall, worked as president of Orem Timpanogos Aquatic Club, and still serves as operations director for Orem Youth Cycling Association. Gale spends her free time reading, mountain biking, and traveling. “If there’s something fun happening, I want to go do it,” she adds.

Despite her noteworthy success, busy schedule, and varied experience, Gale acknowledges that family is at the heart of everything she does. “It’s great to go back to school, and it’s great to be on the city council, but motherhood is super important to me,” Gale says. “I believe you can make motherhood your focus and your priority and still do other things. As I’ve taken on these new endeavors, I have tried to do it with my family at the forefront.”

Coming Full Circle



In 1948, **Mariyah Housari's** grandparents fled from their home in the Levantine city of Jaffa (modern day Tel Aviv-Yafo) to Ramallah in the West Bank. Twenty years later, Housari's father left Palestine for a brighter future in the United States. Housari, an MPA student at BYU Marriott, brings her family history full circle as she prepares for a career aiding modern-day Palestinian refugees.

Growing up in Surprise, Arizona, Housari heard stories from her father about his life in Palestine.

However, it wasn't until she studied abroad at the BYU Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies that she met relatives on her father's side in person. "Aside from my church mission, it was the most life-changing, impactful experience I've ever had because of the relationships I developed and strengthened with extended family," Housari recalls.

Spending time at the BYU Jerusalem Center helped Housari realize she wanted to focus her career on humanitarian efforts. As she took classes in Middle Eastern studies and Arabic, she began to think about her future career. "All of the jobs I was interested in required an MPA degree, so I decided I needed to pursue one," Housari explains. "My desire to serve in humanitarian causes in the Middle East and Africa is what led me to where I am now."

The first year of the program helped Housari develop her decision-making skills and learn more about becoming an ethical public servant. "The program is preparing me for my career by teaching me how to determine the impact of my decisions," she explains. "Preparing now to make tough decisions will help me when I'm faced with challenging situations in my career."

As Housari begins her second year in the program, she looks forward to expanding her knowledge and increasing her impact. "I've learned about the wrestle between legal, managerial, and political values and the importance of finding the balance between them in any given situation," she shares. "We are responsible for bringing the greatest benefit to the communities we serve. We must be responsible decision-makers because our choices will impact the lives of those we represent."

BYU Marriott has been a great fit for Housari because its mission aligns with her desire to serve others and become more Christlike. "The MPA program is preparing me to serve the people I feel so connected to and responsible for in the Middle East," she explains. "God has given me this opportunity to receive an education, and I carry the responsibility to serve those who do not have the same freedoms and rights that I do."

A Springboard for Public Service

Growing up in the suburbs of Chicago, **Ezra Nair** often accompanied his mother to local polling stations and HOA meetings. Now Nair carries on his mother's commitment to public service in his role as Utah County's first-ever county administrator. Whether he's balancing budgets or arranging fire services for unincorporated areas, Nair draws on the skills he gained from the executive MPA (EMPA) program to oversee and serve the county.

Nair graduated from BYU with a bachelor's degree in sociology and a passion for working in people-oriented organizations. After graduation, he managed local political campaigns, which helped him become the senior policy advisor to Utah County Commissioners Tanner Ainge and Amelia Powers Gardner.

Working for Utah County allowed Nair to blend his passion for serving people with his interest in local government, but following elected officials from position to position didn't guarantee him job security beyond a four-year term. Nair considered getting an MPA to help him create a long-lasting career in public service, and after hearing a student give a glowing recommendation of BYU Marriott's EMPA program, Nair submitted his application and was soon accepted to the Romney Institute.

Even though Nair had already worked in local government, he was eager to learn from the EMPA program's high-caliber faculty, challenging course materials, and unique structure. "Right from the get-go, you're put into teams, you learn about team dynamics, and you learn about how to run effective meetings," says Nair. "These skills are really important, and they're really unique to the program."

The skills Nair gained in the EMPA program were put into action sooner than he expected. During his second semester, Nair was offered a full-time position as Vineyard City manager. Nair took the position and worked hard to juggle multiple responsibilities. "My wife was incredibly supportive," Nair says. "There were a lot of long nights studying, working late, and balancing work and family."

After Nair had earned his degree and worked at Vineyard City for nearly two years, he was encouraged to apply for the newly created Utah County administrator position. Initially, Nair was reluctant to consider leaving Vineyard, where he had found his stride as a city manager. But the commissioners he previously worked with inspired Nair to apply.

Nair submitted his brushed-up résumé, completed the interview process, and was offered the job. As Nair considered the offer, he



realized he might be ready for a new learning opportunity. "I knew I could do a lot of good at the county, being the first person in the role. It would be exciting to build up something new," he recalls.

Since assuming his role in 2023, Nair has enjoyed the daily variety and challenges that accompany his position. But no matter what each day brings, Nair feels grounded by a greater purpose: to lift and elevate his community. "The job that I have is to serve the public—to help people feel proud of where they live and to enjoy their lives and time with their families and friends," he says. "That's what we try to do here."

BYU Marriott MPA Scholars

BYU Marriott MPA students and faculty are distinguished by their exceptional dedication, leadership, and public service experience. They excel inside the classroom and beyond. These awards—many of which are made possible by generous donors—celebrate the contributions of outstanding MPA scholars.



Catherine Cooper Good Works Award

Gerhard van Scheltema



From left, Brianna Merling and Erica Jensen

Doyle W. Buckwalter Award

Erica Jensen Brianna Merling



From left, Dan Heist and Alexa Ballard

MPA Professor of the Year Award

Dan Heist



From left, Gloria Wheeler and Elizabeth Mumford

Gloria E. Wheeler Good Works Award

Elizabeth Mumford



From left, Christopher Yadon, Rebecca Weidner, Rebecca Doucette, Elizabeth Mumford, Jennifer Gale

Lennis M. Knighton Award

Rebecca Doucette Elizabeth Mumford Christopher Yadon
Jennifer Gale Rebecca Weidner



From left: Elle Compton, Max Moore, Kenji Sugahara, Rob Christensen, Bradley Day, Kaylee Hepburn

Mission, Vision, Values Awards

Faith in Christ—Mariyah Housari
Integrity in Action—Kenji Sugahara
Love, Agency, and Accountability—Kaylee Hepburn
Respect for All—Elle Compton
Service to Community—Bradley Day
Excellence and Generosity—Max Moore



Stewart L. Grow Award

Malissa Fifita



Garth N. Jones Writing Award

Mariyah Housari



From left, Rob Christensen, Whitney Fitzgerald, Stela Martinez, Abbie Sanders, Lindsey Walker Eftin, Rebecca Richards, Ryan Cheney, Erica Jensen, Sarah Kidd, Hallie Gerland Matis, Dean Brigitte Madrian

Karl N. Snow Award

Erick Bravo	Erica Jensen	Skylar Ogden
Ryan Cheney	Sarah Kidd	Rebecca Richards
Lindsey Walker Eftin	Stela Martinez	Abbie Sanders
Whitney Fitzgerald	Hallie Gerland Matis	



Faculty & Staff Spotlights

When **Vicki Okerlund** retired in January 2024, it marked the end of a remarkable 24-year tenure as the MPA program's director of alumni relations. From creating a comprehensive alumni database to fostering deep connections within the MPA community, Okerlund helped locate and unite more than 4,000 graduates across the nation into one big family. Learn more about Okerlund's legacy of Christ-centered leadership and service on page 22.



Faculty Involvement

Publications & Citizenship Activities

Brad Agle

- Coauthor: *The Bishop Book: Experiences of Bishops in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Their Own Words* (2024)
- Coauthor: “From Profit Maximization to Social Welfare Maximization: Reclaiming the Purpose of American Business Education,” *Futures*

Rob Christensen

- President: Public Management Research Association (PMRA)
- Recipient: 2023 Kooiman Best Paper Award for “A Systematic Literature Review of City Competitiveness: A 30-Year Assessment and Future Agenda for Public Administration,” *Public Management Review*

Liz Dixon

- Presenter: “Enhancing Multi-Section Advanced Writing Courses with Library Resources,” 2024 Lilly International Teaching and Learning Conference
- Editor: Management Communication 320 textbook, BYU Open

Dan Heist

- Coauthor: “The National Study on Donor Advised Funds,” DAF Research Collaborative
- Recipient: Association of Fundraising Professionals \$24,800 grant

David Matkin

- Coauthor: “Misleading Motives: Incentives for Accounting Bias in Not-for-Profit Pension Plans,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*

Aaron Miller

- Producer, interviewer, and writer: *How to Help* podcast and newsletter
- Guest speaker: *Faith Matters* and *Let's Get Real* podcasts

Brad Owens

- Coauthor: “The Humbling Effect of Significant Relationships: A Field Experiment Examining the Effect of Significant-Other Activation on Leaders’ Expressed Humility,” *Organization Science*
- Recipient: John Templeton Foundation \$250,000 grant

Travis Ruddle

- Committee member: Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
- Facilitator: 2024 US Primary and General Election Data focus groups

Kurt Sandholtz

- Instructor: Honors 310: Foundations of Interdisciplinary Leadership
- Recipient: Professor Ad Honorem by Madrid Polytechnic University

Chris Silvia

- Coauthor: “The Value of Being Nonprofit: A New Look at Hansmann’s Contract Failure Theory,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (with Eva Witesman and Curtis Child)
- Committee member and panel chair: 2024 Public Management Research Conference

Jeff Thompson

- Director: Sorensen Center for Moral and Ethical Leadership

Breck Wightman

- Author: “Holding Out for a Hero: Linking Hiring Duration and Managerial Fit,” *Public Administration Review*
- Coauthor: “A Systematic Review of Person-Environment Fit in the Public Sector: Theorizing a Multidimensional Model,” *Public Administration Review*

Eva Witesman

- Coauthor: *Reimagining Nonprofits: Sector Theory for the 21st Century* (2024)
- Division chair: Academy of Management—Public and Nonprofit

Intention Turned to Action



When Aaron Miller talks to students about success in business, he says that future business leaders should focus less on climbing the corporate ladder and more on having a positive impact in the world. As an enthusiastic teaching professor in the MPA program, Miller equips students with the skills they need to put their ideas into action in the ever-changing business world.

Miller didn’t always have his heart set on teaching. He had originally planned to be a lawyer, but he decided to get his MPA and JD concurrently through a partnership with BYU Marriott and BYU Law. “After I graduated with my MPA, the program asked me to come back and teach a nonprofit law and finance class,” Miller says. “I loved teaching more than I thought I would.”

Seventeen years after being asked to teach his first class, he’s

still teaching MPA students. One of Miller’s favorite aspects of teaching is giving students new skills to use after graduation. “Our students come away with a really rich skill set,” Miller says proudly. “They have quantitative, qualitative, leadership, and communication skills that help them go into the world to have a positive impact.”

While he hopes for global impact, Miller still focuses on individuals. “I absolutely love our students,” he continues. “I think they are some of the best people in the world.” His students’ careers take them all around the world, as evidenced by the photos adorning his office. Former students continue to send Miller updates about their lives and careers, such as wedding announcements and photos of them at their current jobs.

Miller hopes his students will make the world a better place through their careers. “What I

want for them is to have more reach and find more job opportunities where they can really have a deep impact,” Miller explains. “And that’s what they want too.”

Although students want to do good through their careers, Miller knows that it can be hard for students to know where to start. “One of my skills is helping people bridge the gap between their good intentions and their good actions,” Miller says. “We all want to help, but a lot of us fail not because we lack good intentions. It’s because we lack skills to translate intentions to actions.”

Moving forward, Miller hopes that his students will drive change in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. “Traditionally, we’ve had a nonprofit sector full of do-gooders and a business sector full of profit maximizers,” he says. “Over the past 20 years, these two sectors have been blending.” Miller wants his MPA students to help close the gap so that more professionals are motivated to make a positive impact—no matter what type of organization they work in.



From the Ground Up: Building an Alumni Network



In January 2024, **Vicki Okerlund** retired after 24 years as the MPA program's director of alumni relations. From creating an alumni network to forging one-on-one relationships with individuals in the MPA community, Okerlund built a legacy of Christ-centered leadership and unwavering determination.

"I have a new position I want to create for you," **Bob J. Parsons**, former chair of the Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics, said to Okerlund when he reached out to her in 2000. "I think you'd be perfect."

Okerlund was one of Parsons's former students, and after graduating from the MPA program in 1991, she worked as an associate in healthcare research. Familiar with her skill set, Parsons wanted to

bring Okerlund on to increase the MPA program's outreach.

Upon accepting the role, Okerlund was given the monumental task of building a database of MPA alumni. "When I started in 2000," Okerlund says, "I had no idea who the MPA alumni were or how many alumni we had."

Since email wasn't widely used at the time, Okerlund and her team of student employees relied on phone numbers and mailing addresses to contact former MPA students. She spent the first year of her new job compiling information—going through old graduation programs, picking the brains of retired MPA professors, and contacting known graduates. By the end of 2001, Okerlund had compiled a database of 1,800 MPA alumni.

Although the process was long and tedious, Okerlund was inspired by a greater purpose to build the same camaraderie and connection she had felt with her graduating class in the new MPA alumni network. "You enter and leave the program feeling so connected," she says. "I wanted to put that feeling back into the alumni."

Okerlund's hard work in organizing events, coordinating newsletters, participating in faculty dinners, and appointing alumni representatives has helped grow the alumni family into a national network that now includes more than 4,000 graduates.

"Whenever students went on career trips, I hosted a dinner to pull the alumni together," Okerlund recalls. These events gave students a professional support system and enabled alumni to become mentors. "It's very important that students know they're part of a bigger family."

This big family has come together not only to lift each other but also to lift their communities. To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the MPA program in 2015, MPA alumni participated in a nationwide day of public service. From San Antonio to Washington, DC, MPA alumni and students gathered to clean up their communities. Since then, uniting in service has become an annual tradition for the MPA community.

While growing the MPA alumni network during the past 24 years has been challenging, Okerlund reflects on her work with pride. "I have loved what I have done," she says, "and I look back and I say, 'Okay. You did it, Vicki. You did what Bob Parsons asked you to do.' I just hope that the alumni will stay connected."

As the program's first alumni relations director and an example of compassionate connection, Okerlund has built an alumni network that spans generations of MPA graduates.

"It's been a good ride," Okerlund says with a smile.



Recruiting for Results

In her role as the recruiting and events manager, **Savannah Heath** draws on her skill and passion for helping students achieve their educational goals.

Heath graduated from BYU in 2021 with a bachelor's degree in Spanish, which became a springboard for new opportunities. "I started working for BYU-Pathway in marketing," she explains. "It was really neat to help people who wanted to provide for their family and get a better education but didn't know that BYU-Pathway could help them do that."

Heath's experience with BYU-Pathway sparked her interest in working at BYU Marriott. She realized that she could use her recruiting and marketing skills to help people interested in public service careers get the education they need. One way Heath

raises awareness of the MPA program to prospective students is by reaching out to nonprofits and public agencies to find out if any employees in their organizations are interested in enhancing their careers through a master's degree.

Heath also organizes events that allow students to connect with each other and with the broader MPA community. New student orientation, which includes a rafting and canyoneering experience, is just one of the events that creates a sense of belonging and forges bonds between students.

Through recruiting new students and planning events, Heath's primary goal is to help launch and support public servants. She notes, "I'm really excited to help people learn about the resources available to them so they can learn and make an impact in the world."

Energizing Alumni Engagement

As the program's new alumni relations manager, **Jeanette Carden** focuses on growing and nurturing the alumni community, and she brings a wealth of work and life experience to that effort.

After graduating from BYU with a bachelor's degree in communications, Carden spent nearly 17 years working internationally. Carden was drawn to BYU Marriott because of its distinct presence. "BYU Marriott is doing amazing work in the world, and now I get to support the school and our future leaders," she notes.

Carden looks forward to hearing from alumni and learning about the unique impact each graduate is making. "I want to be able to get to know them so they feel comfortable with me and can share stories with me," she explains.

The journeys of the MPA alumni continue to impress and inspire Carden, so she's working on showcasing more of their stories. "We want to highlight all the wonderful things they're doing, because we know they're out there changing the world," she says. Carden knows there are many alums she has yet to meet, so she jokingly encourages alumni "to share their stories or to tattle on a friend."

Carden looks forward to putting her skills into practice for the Romney Institute. She hopes to advance the school's vision, mission, and values. As she does, Carden aims to capitalize on the program's positive environment and ensure that each student and alum feels supported. Carden says, "That's the number one priority—that they feel valued and cherished."



Unifying for a Higher Purpose

While teaching courses on statistics, social impact, and prosocial business strategy, MPA professor **Eva Witesman** emphasizes the importance of unity among students and organizations.

Witesman's first job out of college was at Waterford Institute, a nonprofit organization that develops educational software for children. A manager named Ty Mullen impressed Witesman by how he revolutionized the way she and her colleagues interacted and performed. "Ty allowed for the employees to connect as people and not just workers," Witesman recalls. "It felt like magic, and I wanted to learn the secrets that allowed Ty to empower us in our work."

Witesman started looking for master's programs that would teach her how to transform organizations just like Mullen had done. "That's how I found out what an MPA was," she says. She earned an MPA from Indiana University Bloomington and continued her studies to receive a PhD in policy analysis.

David Hart, the search committee chair for the MPA program, remembers interviewing and observing Witesman when she applied for a faculty position at BYU Marriott. "We were super excited to get a quantitatively oriented person who we knew would

do well in the classroom, and we were also very impressed by her research trajectory," Hart explains. "We all saw that she would be an excellent fit in a very tight-knit and collegial program."

Now a seasoned faculty member, Witesman helps BYU Marriott students have the best experience possible. "We run the MPA program as a team and try to have consensus when we're making tweaks and changes," Witesman says. "It's really important to us that what we teach is tethered directly to the skills students are going to need at work."

Also serving as head of the MPA Student Experiences Committee, Witesman interviews MPA students to find what curricular and instructional adjustments should be made. "We want to understand their experiences, including what they love about the program and what they consider to be rough spots," she says. Understanding the MPA student experience is integral to her goals as a professor.

Witesman solidifies core concepts for students by building on the teachings of her fellow professors. "I learn what's going on in other classes, and I have students use the tools they're learning there in my class too," she explains. For example, another MPA professor teaches the Tuckman model, which explains how teams develop and collaborate more effectively over time. Witesman reinforces this model with her own students.

MPA students participate in events and projects that foster interpersonal connections and fuel cooperation. "Every cohort that comes through has its own personality," Witesman explains. "We try to facilitate each cohort's unique personality so the students learn leadership skills, such as creating a healthy culture and fostering teamwork within a diverse group."

Witesman's expertise on unity and collaboration benefits not only her students but also external entities, including government organizations, nonprofits, and businesses. "My personal mission is to bring the major institutions of the world closer to Zion," she explains.

"Gathering diverse people to interact in unity is my vision," Witesman says. "That's why I'm here. That's what fires me up every day."

A Local Government Advocate

At the retirement reception honoring his 42 years in local government, **Wayne Parker** announced his new affiliate faculty position as the first-ever city manager in residence for the Romney Institute.

"The MPA program is doing amazing things right now," says Parker, who spent 20 years as Provo's chief administrative officer. "This is a great opportunity to give back." In this two-year volunteer position for the Romney Institute, which Parker began in fall 2023, he supports the MPA's local government emphasis through interactions with faculty, alumni, students, and prospective students. "It's good to bring a practitioner's perspective to the table, especially for larger issues such as curriculum," he says.

Specifically, Parker has strengthened ties between students and professional organizations such as the Utah City/County Management Association, advised the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) student chapter, mentored students, and organized an ethics case competition between BYU and Southern Utah University. He also shares his experiences through guest lecturing.

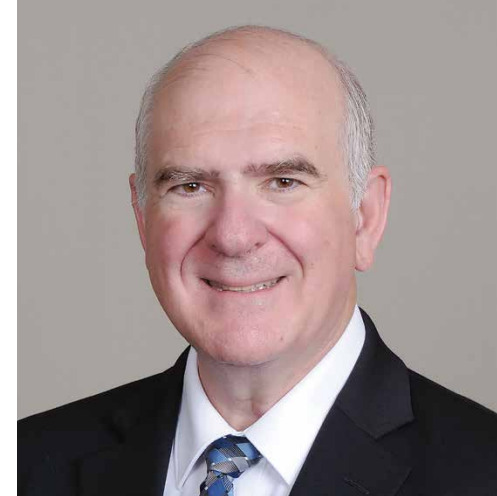
As the MPA program approaches accreditation, which happens every seven years, Parker's 10 years of experience as a site visitor for NASPAA, the public administration program accrediting agency, is coming in handy. "I've seen lots

of different programs and faculty, so I'll be able to bring context and continuity to the accreditation effort," he says.

Parker, who earned his MPA from BYU Marriott in 1981, has fond memories of his time as an MPA student and continues to value his relationships with his former professors. He also got a taste of administrative work as a graduate assistant to the program director when he helped implement an executive MPA program in Ogden, Utah. Although the program ran for only five years, it provided Parker with unique experiences. "I helped recruit faculty and make sure students were engaged," he recalls.

Nowadays, Parker says, many MPA students are interested in nonprofits because the students perceive the government as overly bureaucratic. Parker discovered, however, that working in government offered him just as many opportunities to alleviate poverty. "Local government is not very bureaucratic at all," he adds. "There's a lot of flexibility. Elected officials are generally great to work with; they're motivated to make their communities better."

Serving as his high school's class president and attending the American Legion California Boys State program piqued Parker's interest in government as a teenager. Upon earning his MPA, he worked for local governments in Missouri and Kansas before returning to the Beehive State to



work for the city of Roy and then for the Utah Governor's Office of Management and Budget.

In addition to his position at the Romney Institute, Parker now serves as the mountain plains regional director for ICMA, the first ICMA regional director from Utah. In this role, which he began in March 2024, Parker engages with members and associations across 14 states to foster collaboration, drive innovation, and strengthen local government leadership.

For Parker, volunteering with the Romney Institute and working part-time with the ICMA have been a soft landing since retiring. "These positions let me keep my hand in the business without dealing with the harder parts of a job, and I just get to enjoy the more fun parts," he notes.

Parker and his wife, Julie, have 5 children and 13 grandchildren.





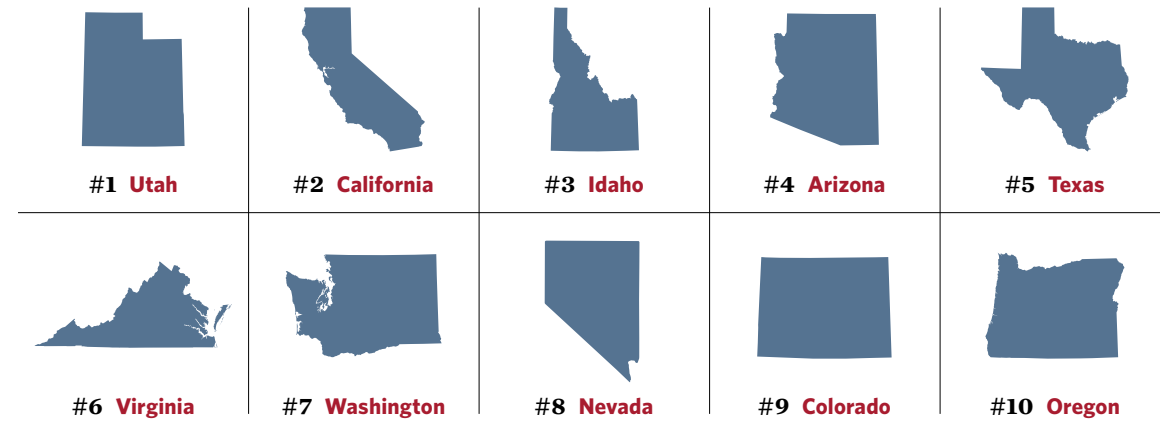
Alumni Updates

When **Justin Weiss** underwent heart surgery as a teenager, he made a promise. Honoring that promise led Weiss to the Church, to BYU, and eventually to his career in public service. Approaching life with an open heart has helped Weiss embrace new opportunities, including becoming an author and a beekeeper. Read more about how Weiss has been true to his promise, whether managing a city or mitigating a family crisis, on page 30.



Alumni Report

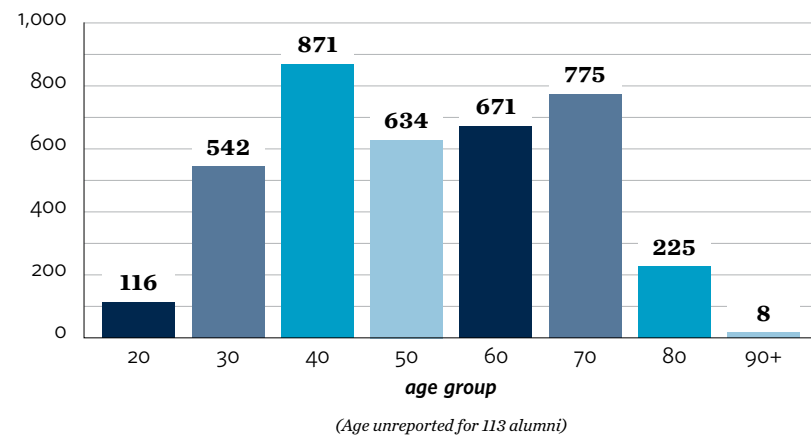
Top States Where Alumni Live



Top International Countries Where Alumni Live



Number of Living Alumni by Age



Alumni Stats

Total living alumni

3,955

Number of women

1,181

Number of men

2,774

Number of alumni living internationally

96

From Patient to Healer: MPA Alumnus of the Year

After a trampoline accident left **Dale Hull** paralyzed from the shoulders down, he could no longer work as a physician. “I felt like I’d lost all my value,” Hull said at a banquet where the Romney Institute honored him as the 2023 MPA Alumnus of the Year. “I didn’t feel like a husband, a father, a physician, or even a worthy human being.”

Hull’s road to recovery was long, but it also positioned him for new opportunities. “I think when you experience a catastrophic event, it’s really important to think about your choices,” he explained.

During the grueling two-and-a-half years after his accident, Hull worked to gain back as much movement as possible with the help of his physical therapist, Jan Black. “It’s a tough journey, regardless of who you are. There were dark days for me,” Hull revealed.

Working with Black helped Hull find new hope for himself, and it increased his awareness of the challenges those with similar injuries face. “There were many individuals who also had experienced paralysis. They wanted, needed, and deserved more specialized therapy. Yet it wasn’t readily available,” Hull explained.

As a result, Hull and Black sat down and wrote a business plan for a nonprofit spinal cord injury center, Neuroworx, which launched in 2004. As demand increased, the organization quickly grew. Hull and Black sought a larger rental space for the influx of employees and patients.

Soon Hull realized that he needed to increase his knowledge of nonprofit management and expand his skillset. His nephew introduced him to **Jeff Thompson**, then an associate professor in BYU Marriott’s MPA program. “I was intrigued,” Hull said. “Jeff Thompson helped me conclude that the executive MPA program was a great fit for what I needed.”

Hull enrolled in 2009 and gained the skills he needed. “The faculty was knowledgeable, personable, and always willing to listen,” Hull said. “The program was just the right mix of theory and practicality; it was an excellent education.” Earning an MPA also



renewed Hull’s self-esteem. He said, “It gave me personal confidence that I can go into a boardroom, committee, or legislative session and be able to represent our organization in a compelling way.”

Neuroworx is now in its 20th year of providing specialized physical, occupational, and speech therapy to adults and children experiencing paralysis. Through Hull’s efforts, the nonprofit has provided rehabilitative services, regardless of cost, to several thousand individuals.

“As I lay on my backyard trampoline completely paralyzed from the shoulders down, I never could have imagined a moment such as this,” he said upon receiving the award. “Surreal seems an inappropriate word. It is abundantly clear that one never knows exactly how a journey will evolve.”

The Power of an Open Heart

Approaching life with an open heart and mind has guided EMPA alum **Justin Weiss** through unexpected hardships and triumphs.

Weiss's welcoming and tolerant mindset took root in his childhood. "My dad is Jewish, and my mom is Catholic, and no, that's not the beginning of a joke," Weiss quips. "Growing up in an interfaith home, we had a lot of love and respect for members of all different types of faiths." This acceptance was one of the foundations that later motivated Weiss to find and join a religious community.

The main catalyst that sparked Weiss's spiritual journey, however, was his heart surgery as a teenager. A heart condition called Wolff-Parkinson-White (WPW) syndrome caused Weiss's heart to beat too rapidly. Before going under anesthesia for the procedure, Weiss reflected on his own mortality. "I asked God to protect me and promised that, in return, I would dedicate my life to Him," Weiss says.

After recovering from the intense surgery, Weiss kept his promise. When some friends who were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

Saints invited Weiss to attend a youth conference, he accepted. The testimonies offered by other teenagers touched Weiss's heart, and he was baptized a few weeks later. As he neared the end of high school, his friends encouraged him to consider attending BYU.

"Even though I had no idea what BYU was, I learned more about it and realized it was a great option," Weiss says. He began in the summer of 2003 and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Spanish in 2010. He then entered BYU Marriott's EMPA program with the goal of becoming a city manager. "Basically, you are the CEO of a city, and you try your best to enrich the lives of citizens by practicing business principles in the public field," Weiss explains. "Serving resonated with me because I could take my skills and help the community."

Weiss graduated in 2013 and accepted a job in Fate, Texas, as an assistant to the city manager. Just a year later, though, events in his family shifted his focus. "My sister had committed suicide that year, and I had lost my brother in a car accident a couple of years before that," Weiss shares. "There were a lot of traumatizing events going on in my life, so I veered and stepped away." Weiss wanted a fresh work environment, so he became a health care administrator at a nearby skilled nursing facility.

After some time away, Weiss was ready to consider returning to work for the city. "There was a new mayor and city manager, and I was in a better place," he says. Weiss assumed his previous role and was later promoted to assistant city manager. Then he shifted to part-time work so he could spend more time with his family and pursue other endeavors, including two new hobbies—beekeeping and book writing.

While Weiss was learning how to raise bees, his son was learning the alphabet. So Weiss wrote and published a book titled *B is for Beekeeping: An Alphabet Book*. "It exceeded all of my expectations," Weiss admits.

Weiss's ability to maintain an open heart and mind have shaped his path and will continue to shape his future. "I love learning and trying new things because I enjoy figuring things out," Weiss comments. "That makes me happy."



Drawn to Data



As an art student walking around BYU campus with clay-splattered pants, **Laurel Galli-Graves** never imagined that a few years later she would be analyzing data for the US Department of Defense (DoD). In fact, before she began BYU Marriott's MPA program, she had never written a single line of code and didn't know what a data scientist's job was. Now, as a US Digital Corps Data Science Fellow, Galli-Graves helps further the public good by combining her artistic creativity, her passion for public service, and her love of analytics and machine learning.

Studying art at BYU was a natural choice for Galli-Graves, who grew up painting and making sculptures out of recyclables. "The

art faculty at BYU helped me think critically about the world around me and translate that into work that would not only be visually interesting but would also spark important and difficult dialogue."

After her graduation in 2019, her focus on art shifted. "I really love making art, and I continue to do it," Galli-Graves says, "but I don't feel drawn to it as a business." She realized she wanted a career centered on helping people, which led her to pursue an MPA.

The MPA program introduced Galli-Graves to new possible paths, including the field of data science. As she took classes that blended information systems with public administration, she discovered that her art background was a huge asset. "Data science and art are similar in the sense that there's not one right answer," she explains. "From an artist's perspective, data science is very creative because of the out-of-the-box thinking required to solve a real-world problem."

As Galli-Graves neared the completion of her MPA, the US Digital Corps and its data science and analytics track caught her eye. The US Digital Corps is a highly competitive two-year full-time fellowship for early-career technology professionals, and these paid fellows serve across the federal government. She attended every available webinar to increase her chances of being

accepted. "I had no plan B," she admits, "unless you count applying next year if I wasn't accepted that year."

Galli-Graves was accepted to the program and ultimately received a job offer from the US Digital Corps. "It's an amazing and interesting fellowship because as federal workers, our customers are everyone in the country," she says.

In her role at the Defense Technical Information Center (DTIC), Galli-Graves filters information from the DoD and relays relevant data to other experts. "Essentially, we want to be the primary search engine and analytics source for researchers receiving DoD funding," she explains.

Galli-Graves employs large language models and other text analytic and visualization techniques to help DTIC sift through massive amounts of data and deliver better insights to users. "There's a huge opportunity for the federal government to use machine learning ethically and morally to make systems work better, and that's what I want to do in my future," she adds.

As Galli-Graves continues to bring her artistic perspective to her data science role at the DoD, she illustrates the limitless possibilities that arise when passion and practicality unite for a greater purpose. Galli-Graves's professional journey showcases the power of blending creativity with a commitment to the public good.



1982

Barbara Hood explored a variety of professions after graduating with her MPA from BYU Marriott in 1982. She began her career as an English teacher, then worked

as a journalist, a paralegal, an Austrian chef’s apprentice, and a restaurant manager—all in the name of curiosity. Hood’s hunger for new experiences eventually led her to become CEO of the central Washington service area for the formerly named Providence Healthcare System. After retiring in 1999, Hood volunteered with Project Mercy in Ethiopia for six years, overseeing hospital development and securing grants for healthcare training. She and her husband, Richard, currently reside in Louisville, Kentucky, where she enjoys cooking, reading, doing Pilates, and tutoring children with dyslexia. She still travels the world and maintains the connections she forged with friends in Ethiopia, Israel, Canada, and Ecuador. Hood declares, “In all my travels, work, and places I have lived, I have never had a bad experience!”



2009

Jake Hsu set the stage for a global career by pursuing international internships as a student and graduating from BYU with degrees in Chinese and English in 2006.

After receiving his MPA from BYU Marriott in 2009, Hsu began his career as the first associate director for the Chinese Flagship Program in Nanjing, China. Since then, Hsu has continued to connect with others globally. In 2022, Hsu began working for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Taiwan as the area talent selection manager for the Church’s Asia Area Human Resources Department. One of Hsu’s many responsibilities involves overseeing the Church’s recruitment cycle across 22 countries. While managing such a large area is a giant responsibility, Hsu considers marrying his wife, Dahyun, and raising their four children to be his greatest accomplishment.



2011

Rachel Goodwin began her academic teaching career as an adjunct professor at BYU Marriott after earning her MPA in 2011. Five years later, Goodwin

embarked on a PhD program in organizational behavior at the University of Utah, which she completed in 2021. From 2020 to 2022, Goodwin served as a Harvard Research Fellow in the Women and Public Policy Program. Currently, she is an assistant professor at Syracuse University, where she teaches management courses and publishes in prominent academic journals to share her research on workplace issues concerning gender, leadership, and morality. She is an avid promoter of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Goodwin’s innovative research is informed by her former career in the performing arts, particularly ballet and professional theater. She lives in New York with her husband, Gavin, and their three children. Goodwin enjoys a wide breadth of hobbies, including skiing, gardening, composing music, and volunteering in her community.



2021

Jacob Neptune credits BYU Marriott’s MPA program for the dawning of his successful career in the Foreign Service. Neptune graduated with his MPA in 2021

after pursuing a bachelor’s degree in political science at BYU–Hawaii and completing several internships with the United States Department of State. Following his education, Neptune worked as a performance auditor for the Arizona Auditor General, after which he was offered a coveted position as a US Foreign Service officer. He and his wife, Keagan, live with their two children in Montevideo, Uruguay, for his first tour with the Department of State. His responsibilities include adjudicating visas and assisting American citizens abroad in emergency situations such as arrests, hospitalizations, and major accidents. Outside of work, Neptune enjoys fly-fishing, baking, surfing, and birding.

Seasons of Life

MPA alumna **Anastasia Jespersen** has learned that life has seasons. “You just have to consider where you are and what your priorities are at that time in your life,” she says.

After Jespersen completed a bachelor’s degree in accounting from George Mason University in Fairfax County, Virginia, she moved to Provo to earn her MPA at Brigham Young University. “The program itself really helped me to see what was possible,” she says. “It was a time in my life when I needed some direction, and my peers and professors in the program were amazing examples.”

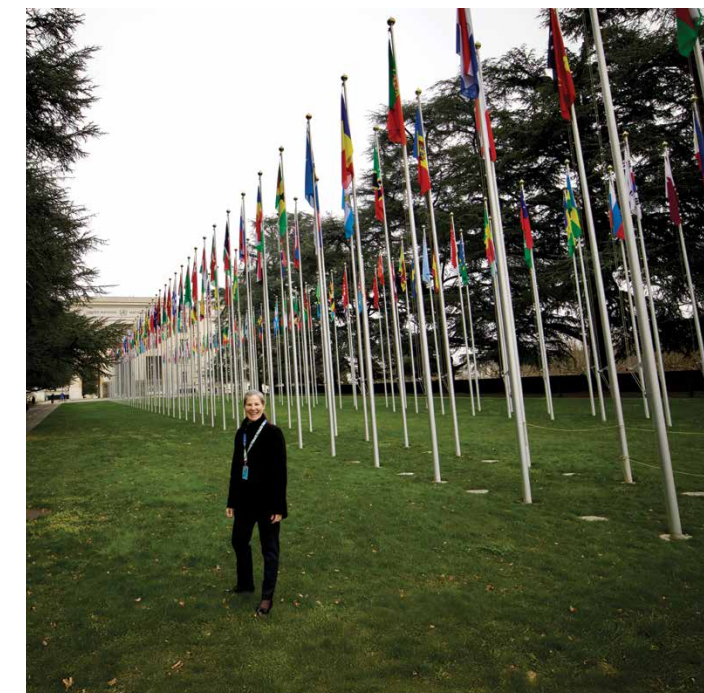
In 1991, Jespersen graduated from the MPA program and got married in the same week. Her husband, Paul, often travelled for work, so they decided together that she would put her professional career on hold to be at home as they started a family.

“I worked extensively with parent-teacher associations and on different boards for the school district and community in a consulting capacity,” she says. “My degrees prepared me to be able to do those things. I frequently pulled from what I had learned in the MPA program and my bachelor’s degree in accounting.”

When her youngest child graduated from high school, Jespersen felt that it was time to move forward in other ways. “There are different seasons of life,” she says. “I absolutely loved being at home with my kids when they were young, and I love working now. I wouldn’t say that’s right for everyone, but it was right for me.”

She prayed for inspiration on what to do in the next season of her life. “I had a very clear answer that I needed to go to the BYU J. Reuben Clark Law School,” Jespersen says. With a strong letter of recommendation from one of her MPA professors, Jespersen’s application was accepted, and she began law school.

It took some time for Jespersen to gain clarity on how studying law would shape her future. “I loved being in law school, but I wasn’t certain what I would do with the degree until I connected with the G20 Interfaith Forum (IF20).” IF20 is a small but well-connected international organization that works



with members of different faiths in countries around the world to discuss global concerns. The IF20 president invited Jespersen to join the team and told her, “The Lord brings the right people at the right time—you see it happen over and over again.”

Since IF20 is a global organization, Jespersen’s work schedule varies wildly from day to day, stretching into the early or late hours to accommodate different time zones. Sometimes she is planning a conference in another country; other times she is processing reimbursements or networking with international contacts. “Despite how crazy my work is, I love doing it,” she says.

There have been many seasons in Jespersen’s life: attending grad school as a single adult, volunteering in her community as a stay-at-home mom, earning a law degree as an empty nester, and now working full-time. Jespersen says, “No matter where you are in life, it’s important to be involved in your community and in making an impact on what’s important to you.”



Romney Institute Highlights

Jonathan Reckford's path to becoming CEO of Habitat for Humanity International held unexpected turns. At the Romney Institute's 2024 Administrator of the Year Award honoring Reckford, he recounted the pivotal moments of his journey from Wall Street to India to a new life rooted in global service. Reckford, who now helms a non-profit operating in all 50 states and more than 70 countries, shares his inspiring story on page 39.

Looking Behind the Bill: The 2024 Cornia Award Winner

The Romney Institute presented the 2024 Gary C. Cornia Award to Amanda Rutherford, a professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University (IU) and a scholar in the field of public administration.

The Cornia Award recognizes exemplary scholars in public management and is named after former Romney Institute director and BYU Marriott dean Gary C. Cornia. Presented with the award at a luncheon held in February, Rutherford was recognized for her research on educational policy and equity in government.

With more than a decade of experience in academia and a PhD in political science from Texas A&M, Rutherford has a unique approach to the study of public administration. “As a political scientist, I think a lot about the people who make decisions,” she says. Rutherford points out that knowing who crafts policy and knowing how policies are enacted are two different things. She explains, “The policymakers are not the ones who say, ‘How do we make it happen?’”

As Rutherford studies educational policies and institutions, she unpacks how laws are implemented into school systems and how they affect students. “There

are a lot of people who bring policy to life, for better and for worse,” she says.

Rutherford has a diverse array of research interests, including political control, performance accountability, bureaucratic careers, and executive decision-making. Her most recent book, *Race and Public Administration*, examines the role of race, equity, and representation within bureaucracy. Her research has been featured in several journals, including the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Public Administration Review*, and the *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration*.

Rutherford teaches introductory classes for undergraduate, graduate, and PhD students at IU. As an associate professor, she splits her time between research and teaching: two responsibilities that she feels complement each other. “I’m one of the first public administration professors these students meet at each level,” Rutherford says. “They bring a refreshing new perspective into the field.”

In November 2023, Rutherford and two of her students copublished “US School-Based Law Enforcement,” a report that examines survey responses from security officers in the US education system.



The report, sponsored by the IU Racial Justice Research Fund, gathers statistics and data about the training standards and roles of school-based law enforcement, which the authors hope will help policymakers standardize student safety regulations in the future.

With nearly a decade of teaching under her belt, Rutherford has forged professional relationships with students and staff across various universities. At the Cornia Award ceremony, Rutherford joked, “There are a lot of Indiana graduates of some sort in the room. I can’t take credit for all of them, but I’ll take credit for some.”

The luncheon at BYU reunited old friends and long-time colleagues in celebration of Rutherford’s work. “It really is full circle,” Rutherford says. “There are people who I have looked up to here working alongside people who I’ve mentored. How special is that?”

MPA Executive Board Welcomes New Members

The Romney Institute Executive Board is comprised of professionals who generously give of their time to nurture, guide, and build the MPA community at BYU Marriott.

During the annual meeting this past spring, the board welcomed Hani Al Madhoun and Sue Mika as the two newest members of the group. Outgoing board members Kent Burton and William Hansen concluded their term of service.

“Our dynamic board is uniquely qualified and committed to mentoring MPA students as well as supporting faculty and staff in our shared goal to prepare exceptional public sector leaders,” says Laura Kaloi, chair of the Romney Institute Executive Board.

Kaloi looks forward to another year of growth and progress for the Romney Institute, and she appreciates the time and talents each board member contributes to that effort. “We are proud of our roots and connections to the MPA program,” she says, “and I know each board member will persist in contributing to its great success.”

2024 MPA Executive Board

Laura Kaloi, *Advisory Board Chair*

Hani Al Madhoun

Anthony Bates

Mike Bennett

Barett Christensen

Rick Collins

J. Scott Darrington

Alex Eaton

Wes Mashburn

Sue Mika

Kelly Pfof

Craig Romney

Nick Starn

Koreen H. van Ravenhorst



From left: Wes Mashburn, Rick Collins, Barett Christensen, J. Scott Darrington, Laura Kaloi, Sue Mika, Mike Bennett, Craig Romney, and Kelly Pfof.

Ethics, Family, and Faith



The Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics hosted Senator Mitt Romney and his wife, Ann, as they shared advice with MPA students preparing for careers in the public sector. The Romneys drew on their years working in government positions and with nonprofit organizations as they answered questions on topics ranging from personal ethics to marriage in the public eye.

Throughout his career, Romney has held himself to high standards of conduct. He believes commitment to principles is what the

Romney legacy is built upon. “My father, George W. Romney, was known for having an unwavering devotion to the things that mattered most to him,” Romney said. “Anytime I have strayed from my conscience, it has been a burden. You can sleep better at night when you live by your principles.”

Romney emphasized the importance of ethics, both for organizations and for public servants. “It’s remarkable that the character of one person can impact other people,” he said. “Stay true to personal ethics and political figures with

good character, because policies come and go.”

Two of the things the Romneys are most committed to—no matter what professional endeavor they might be pursuing—are faith and family. “Mitt actually supports me all of the time,” Ann Romney said. “He values his family and his marriage. Half of the country loves him and half of it hates him, but I’m proud of him because he makes decisions based on his heart.”

In response to a question about what makes an organization effective and successful, Ann Romney offered advice from her experience with nonprofits. “I’ve had many opportunities to review the nonprofits we support, and the most successful nonprofits are those with an eternal commitment to knowing that everyone is a child of God,” she explained. “That knowledge carries their mission in such an extraordinary way.”

Romney also shared how the couple balances their many professional responsibilities alongside their personal lives. For example, he set work boundaries so he could have a healthy balance between the two. “I decided to take Sundays off from working long ago, and the cloud of stress was gone as I devoted myself to what mattered most: faith and family,” he shared.

“If you define success as money or promotions, you won’t feel successful,” Romney advised. “Most of success lies in serendipity, so measure your success through things that are in your control.”

Jonathan Reckford: The 2024 Administrator of the Year

Habitat for Humanity International CEO Jonathan Reckford received the 2024 Administrator of the Year Award from the Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics. Though Reckford has found his vocation in public service, his journey to becoming the CEO of one of the largest charitable organizations in the United States was unconventional—and longer than one might expect.

Reckford’s journey began when he was a child, learning from the example of his grandmother Millicent Fenwick, a New Jersey congresswoman and staunch civil rights activist. “She encouraged me at a young age to care for the lost and left out in the world,” Reckford says.

Wishing to follow his grandmother into public service, Reckford planned to go to law school. “I thought that’s what you did to go into politics,” he says. Reckford soon realized that he wasn’t interested in practicing law, so he talked his way into a financial analyst position on Wall Street. But he still felt like something was missing. “I was working all the time and was not living my personal values,” he recalls. “I learned a ton, but I was not happy.”

Reckford spent the next few years searching for purpose and pursuing new opportunities—including living in South Korea, earning an MBA, and working for big-name companies such as Disney and Best Buy. In 2002, caught in the middle of a merger, Reckford stepped down from his career in the private sector.

Soon after, Reckford took a mission trip to India, where he worked with the Bhangi people—one of the poorest, most marginalized groups in the country. Serving in India changed Reckford’s life as he felt touched by the power of “divine irritation”—a phrase coined by Clarence Jordan, the spiritual father of Habitat for Humanity. “It’s when God fills you with such a sense of urgency that you simply cannot look

away,” Reckford explains. “It’s an overpowering call to respond.”

Reckford returned to the US with a new sense of purpose and a passion for addressing global poverty issues. As he waited for the right position to come along, Reckford spent more time with his family and volunteered vigorously in his community, using his corporate skills to help local churches grow. When the local Presbyterian church offered Reckford the role of executive pastor, he decided to accept it—even though many advised him not to.

Two years into his position at the Presbyterian church, Reckford was offered the job as CEO of Habitat for Humanity—the kind of position he had been waiting and preparing for all along, whether he knew it or not. “I often say you can see God’s fingerprints so much more clearly in the rearview mirror,” Reckford says. “The time I spent waiting and serving my church was the perfect complement to all my corporate work to be ready for Habitat.”

As he accepted the 2024 Administrator of the Year Award, Reckford encouraged BYU Marriott students and faculty to look for their moment of divine inspiration: “Focus on your character, choose the right role models, and relish the joy of discovering your purpose, no matter how long it takes or where it takes you. As the pastor Henry Blackaby taught, *If you’re not sure what to do, look for where God is at work and go join Him there.*”



Capital Investment

“You know, I could see myself living here,” an MPA student said to **Staci Carroll**, MPA program career director, as they trekked through the nation’s capital on a crisp February day.

The comment came during a four-day MPA networking trip with 14 first- and second-year students who toured organizations, talked with professionals, and tasted life in Washington, DC. The itinerary was packed, but the opportunities for students to network—and to envision their futures—were wide open.

Chaperoned by Carroll and MPA program manager **Karee Brown**, students went out early each morning and zipped around on the metro to visit four organizations each day on average. In about half of these tours, BYU alums—often MPA grads—generously came to meet the group, assist with security checks, customize the experience, and answer questions.

“They were so invested in helping individual students,” Carroll says of these alums. “Everybody had great information.”

One highlight of the trip was an alumni dinner hosted by **Laura Kaloi**, Romney Institute Advisory Board Chair. The event provided an intimate setting in which students could genuinely connect with a dozen DC-based alumni and their spouses. “The students really showed up—and the alumni showed up for them,” Carroll says.

The commitment and effort alums invested helped students

realize what it means to be an MPA graduate. “I am grateful not only to the individuals who met with us but also to those who arranged and contributed in countless ways to invest in us as MPA students,” says **Bradley Day**, a second-year MPA student from Glendale, California. “I look forward to paying my experiences forward for the next generations of changemaking BYU MPA students.”

For international student **Rahel Meyer**, the experience took her a step closer to her dream of working for the United Nations. “This trip was undoubtedly the most enriching experience I’ve had during my educational journey,” she says. “The networking opportunities on this trip were particularly significant. I’ve established connections with at least nine professionals who have generously offered assistance in finding internships or in conducting informal interviews.”

The trip sparked transformative experiences for others as well. One student had a lightbulb moment during the USDA tour and proclaimed to her peers, “I think I want to work for the USDA.” Another student had her eyes opened to the world of think tanks. She kept in touch with the connections she made and eventually landed interviews at two think tanks the group visited.

These wins resonate for Carroll, who designed this year’s itinerary precisely with these outcomes in mind. “I was trying to inspire the students to see beyond what they



already knew. That included a new city, the federal government, nonprofits, and think tanks—paths that they really hadn’t considered before.”

Although the cost of the annual DC trip is offset by a small travel grant, both travelers and hosts sacrifice considerable time and energy to make the experience possible. But it’s an investment that has more than paid off for this year’s participants, who came home with new contacts and new possibilities for their futures.

Organizations Visited:

- American Enterprise Institute
- Church Public Affairs
- US Department of Education
- US Department of Labor
- Federal Bureau of Investigation
- US Government Accountability Office
- Philanthropy Roundtable
- US Department of State
- US Agency for Global Media
- US International Finance Corporation
- US Department of Agriculture

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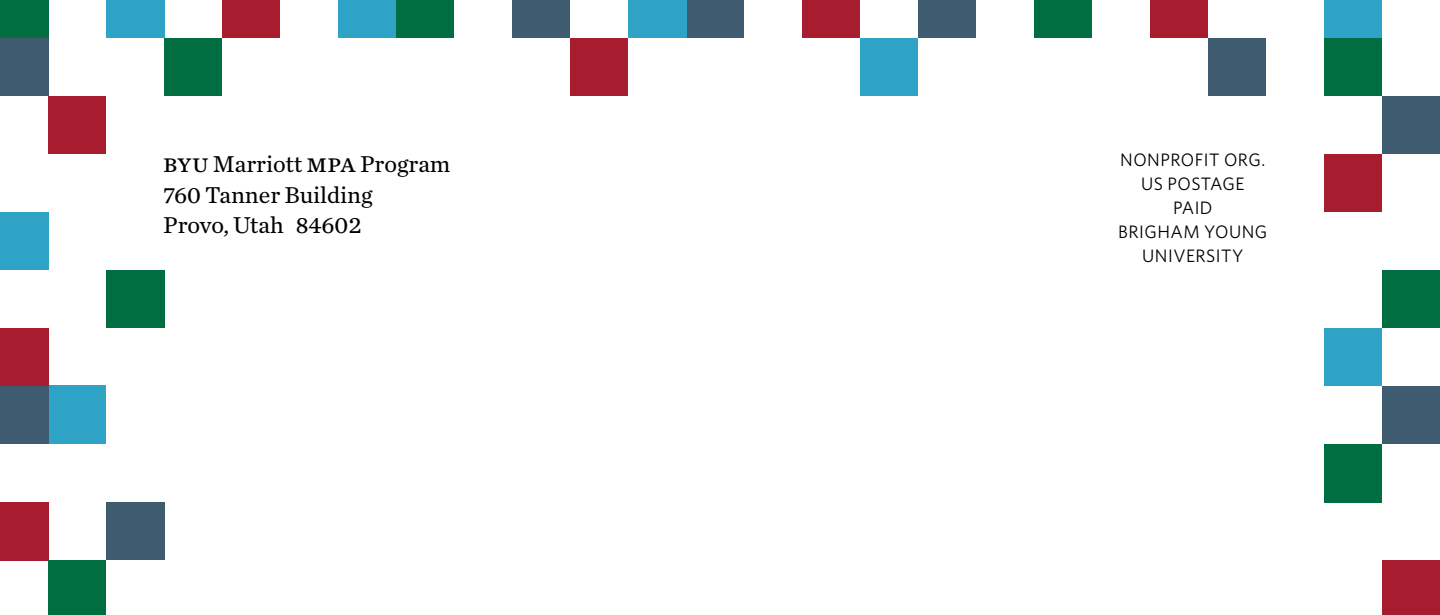
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