

MPA Student & Alumni Newsletter

December 2025

Department of Political Science
Sam Houston State University
www.shsu.edu/mpa

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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

By Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Welcome to the Fall 2025 edition of the SHSU MPA Newsletter. As we approach the holiday season and anticipate the coming year, I am pleased to share several important highlights and recent developments within our program.

NASPAA Accreditation Exploration

This year marks a period of significant progress for the SHSU MPA Program. We are actively exploring accreditation through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), which is recognized as the global standard in public service education. NASPAA represents the highest level of accreditation for programs in public administration, affairs, policy, and nonprofit management, both in the United States and internationally. In October, Dr. Sungdae Lim and I participated in the annual NASPAA Conference and the Accreditation Institute Workshop to kick off the accreditation process. Our goal is to submit our eligibility application in the spring. If everything goes smoothly, the entire process is expected to take two to three years, or possibly less.

Benefits of NASPAA Accreditation

NASPAA establishes rigorous standards for graduate-level public administration education, and we are confident that our program aligns with those standards. Achieving NASPAA accreditation will allow us to demonstrate the quality of our program to a broader audience. Accreditation will connect us to a global network of graduate programs that are committed to

similar standards of excellence. Additionally, it will serve as a testament to the caliber of our program, as well as to our students and alumni.

Anticipated Changes and Transparency

The process of NASPAA accreditation will inevitably lead to changes in the administration of our program. While many of these changes will be administrative and occur behind the scenes, aspects such as the curriculum, course content, and other visible elements of the program will also benefit positively from the accreditation process. We are committed to keeping our community informed as these changes take place.

New Graduate Certificate

I am excited to announce our plans to introduce a new graduate certificate in Public and Nonprofit Management. This certificate is designed for individuals who may not be ready to pursue a master's degree but are interested in continuing their education and advancing their careers within the public and nonprofit sectors. The curriculum for the certificate will draw upon courses currently offered in the MPA program, and we hope it will create a pathway to the MPA degree while also contributing to program enrollment.

Appreciation and Community Engagement

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Wang for preparing this issue of the newsletter, and to our dedicated MPA faculty and staff for their consistent commitment to the success of our students and the program.

We always appreciate hearing from our community members, whether you have started a new job, received a promotion, or accomplished a personal or professional milestone. If your agency is hiring or offering internships, we encourage you to share these opportunities with us so that we can pass them along to our students and alumni network.

Thank you for being a valued member of the SHSU MPA community. I look forward to staying connected with you and sharing more updates in our next issue.

Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Director, Master of Public Administration Program
Sam Houston State University

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

So You Want to Be the Chief? *One Leader's Unexpected Journey*

By Mike Legoudes, Jr. (MPA '19)

In this issue, we spotlight Mike Legoudes, Jr., who brings nearly 30 years of diverse experience in Emergency Medical Services, Fire, and Emergency Management. Mike recently retired as Assistant Fire Chief after 24 years with the City of Conroe, Texas Fire Department, and now serves as Fire Chief for the City of Richmond, Texas. His reflection below traces the unexpected turns of his career, the influence of his education, and the value of embracing each opportunity along the way.



An Unexpected Turning Point

A year ago, if someone had asked whether I would ever leave the City of Conroe Fire Department, my answer would have been simple: “No.” My plan was to continue serving for another seven to ten years and then retire. After more than eight years as Assistant Fire Chief, I hoped the opportunity would eventually arise to become Fire Chief and lead the department I had grown in. If that opportunity never came, I would have been comfortable finishing my career in my existing role.

Events between July 25 and December 12, 2024 changed my outlook entirely. When Conroe’s long-serving Fire Chief retired in July, I was appointed Interim Fire Chief. For the next five months, I had the privilege of leading the

department I loved: collaborating with our members, communicating openly with stakeholders, and making decisions that reflected our mission and shared values. Feedback from employees, city leadership, and elected officials was positive, and many expressed supports for my permanent appointment.

That expectation shifted on December 12, 2024, when I attended a public City Council meeting and learned that I had not been selected for the role. I remained in the Interim position until January 6, 2025, when the newly appointed Fire Chief arrived. It was not the outcome I anticipated, but it ultimately set the stage for a new direction.

A Life Shaped by Service

My commitment to public service began early. I am a second-generation firefighter, following in the footsteps of my father, who spent 45 years in emergency services. He served as a Captain for the West University Place Fire Department, Director of Operations for the Kingwood Area Emergency Medical Services Association, and Assistant Fire Chief for the City of Humble Fire Department. He was my mentor, and I have always been proud to share his name. The “Jr.” at the end of my signature honors him now that he has passed. Although he had opportunities to serve as Fire Chief, he never sought the position.

My own path began in 1994 as a volunteer firefighter with the Kingwood Volunteer Fire Department, a volunteer EMT with KAEMSA, and a part-time dispatcher for Kingwood Emergency Services. These early experiences confirmed what I already suspected: there was nothing I wanted more than a career in the Fire Service. That chapter ended abruptly in January 1996 when the City of Houston annexed Kingwood.

*... there was nothing I wanted more than
a career in the Fire Service.*

Building a Career Step by Step

In 1997 I accepted a part-time position with the Montgomery County Hospital District (MCHD) as a dispatcher. My time with MCHD eventually spanned nearly eleven years, supporting me through my bachelor’s degree and my early years at the City of Conroe. Along the way, I worked both part-time and full-time, earned my Intermediate EMT and Licensed Paramedic certifications, and gained vital

experience in dispatch and field paramedicine. Because MCHD handled dispatch for the Conroe Fire Department, I developed an appreciation for that department's professionalism.

In July 2001 I was hired as a Firefighter for the Conroe Fire Department. Over the next six years, I focused on developing my skills, seeking training, and preparing for promotional exams. In 2007 I scored high enough on the Lieutenant exam to be offered a promotion to the Fire Marshal's Office. While this was not the career path I envisioned, I accepted the opportunity and spent the next three years learning and applying fire prevention principles, including inspections, investigations, and public education.

In June 2010 I was promoted to Deputy Chief and appointed Fire Marshal, continuing the work I had begun in the Prevention division. By the time I completed my nine total years in the Fire Marshal's Office, I had also begun the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. This four-year master's level program demanded extensive coursework and applied research, which I completed in October 2015. In May 2016 I started the SHSU MPA program, graduating in 2019.

In September 2016 I was appointed Assistant Fire Chief, gaining direct oversight of Operations, Prevention, Training, and Administration. I would remain in this position for nine years, including my five-month term as Interim Fire Chief.

Mike Legoudes's Career Milestone

- 1994 Began service as a volunteer firefighter and EMT, Kingwood
 - 1997 Communications Officer/Paramedic, Montgomery County Hospital District EMS
 - 2001 Firefighter, Conroe Fire Department
 - 2007 Lieutenant/Deputy Fire Marshal, Conroe Fire Department
 - 2010 Deputy Chief/Fire Marshal, Conroe Fire Department
 - 2015 Completed Executive Fire Officer (EFO) Program, National Fire Academy
 - 2016 Assistant Fire Chief, Conroe Fire Department
 - 2019 Completed MPA Program, Sam Houston State University
 - 2024 Interim Fire Chief, Conroe Fire Department
 - 2025 Fire Chief, Richmond Fire Department
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Leadership Through Unconventional Paths

To say that my career path has been unconventional would be an understatement. Many firefighters enter the profession eager for operational work, responding to fires and other emergencies. While I began on that path, much of my career unfolded in less traditional areas: Communications, Prevention, Training, Law Enforcement, Emergency Management, Emergency Medical Services, and Administration.

I have no regrets about these unexpected turns. Had I never taken the Prevention assignment in 2007, I doubt I would be where I am today. The practical experience, training, and education I gained over those years uniquely prepared me for success in my new role in Richmond. Even within my first few weeks in Richmond, I saw immediately how my varied background would make a difference, whether in conversations about training, operational readiness, community risk reduction, personnel

issues, or communications. Every step, unplanned though it was, became one of the best things that could have happened for my development. I ultimately chose Richmond because it offered opportunities to apply the concepts I have learned over three decades in a setting ready for growth and new ideas.

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The MPA Connection: Conceptual Skills in Practice

I would be remiss not to mention the value of my education at SHSU. The MPA program gave me knowledge and perspective essential for the responsibilities of a Fire Chief. My professional experience provided the technical and interpersonal skills necessary for leadership, but the MPA program strengthened my conceptual skills: the ability to understand how the Fire Department fits into the broader framework of city operations. These skills allow me to collaborate more effectively and address complex issues as part of a unified organization.

The MPA program gave me the conceptual tools to see the Fire Department as one piece of a larger city system.

Looking Forward: Lessons for Emerging Public Leaders

If the past year has taught me anything, it is that a great deal can change in a short time. The 30 years leading up to this moment helped me weather personal and professional challenges, remain open to new possibilities, and rediscover excitement for the future.

My advice to others in public service is simple: consider every opportunity, even the ones that seem unconventional. You never know what they may lead to. It would have been easy to turn down difficult or less desirable assignments. It would have been easier to avoid stepping into the role of Fire Chief. But I am profoundly grateful for the opportunities I've had and energized by the chance to lead the Richmond Fire Department into its next chapter. My focus now is on investing in our people, refining processes where needed, and preparing the department for the challenges and opportunities ahead. The end goal is an elite level of service delivery for our citizens. Challenges will come, but I feel well prepared.

For those beginning their public service career, remember that your path may not be linear or traditional, but every experience builds the foundation for future leadership opportunities. Don't overlook the opportunities in front of you. You never know what's next.

... consider every opportunity, even the ones that seem unconventional. You never know what they may lead to.

FACULTY INSIGHT

Why Do Hazard Mitigation Plans Fall Short? What Can We Do About It?

By Peiyao Li, PhD

Hazard Mitigation Plans

As many of you know from your professional experience, natural hazards are becoming more frequent and severe. Whether it's floods, hurricanes, wildfires, or severe storms, communities are facing a growing list of risks that require long-term, thoughtful solutions. Hazard mitigation has become one of the most important tools for reducing losses and strengthening local resilience. Since the Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000, more than \$20 billion in federal and local funds has been invested in more than 32,000 mitigation activities nationwide.

To access this funding, FEMA requires local governments to develop and update hazard mitigation plans every five years. Ideally, these plans serve as clear roadmaps: outlining community goals, assessing local hazard risks, and identifying actionable strategies that will make neighborhoods safer. A strong plan should be specific, strategic, and closely aligned with local needs. Yet, as many practitioners know firsthand, reality can be more complicated.



Source : Adobe Stock

Research Question and Design

Because these plans play such a big role in keeping communities safe, we wanted to better understand how well these plans function in practice. Are they truly strategic? Do they reflect local priorities? And do they guide communities toward meaningful risk reduction?

To explore these questions, my co-authors and I analyzed 64 parish hazard mitigation plans across Louisiana. This is a state where the stakes are high: frequent hurricanes, chronic flooding, and vulnerable infrastructure mean that disaster risks are part of everyday life. We reviewed 7,729 proposed mitigation actions and 312 strategic goals to answer three key questions:

1. Which types of mitigation actions receive the most attention from local governments?
2. Do proposed actions align with local community needs, especially when comparing coastal and inland parishes?
3. Do local governments articulate clear, comprehensive, and strategic mitigation plans?

Key Findings

Finding #1 Plans Are Packed with Projects, but Strategy Is Often Missing

Most plans read like long wish lists rather than strategic roadmaps. Actions are often included primarily to satisfy FEMA requirements and are written broadly enough to include any potential mitigation project that might receive funding. More specifically, we found in these plans:

- *Goals are very broad and hard to measure.* Local governments often use general statements such as “improve preparedness” and “reduce losses” as their goals. While such broad goals make it easy to match them with nearly any mitigation action, they also make it difficult to establish specific metrics or develop targeted strategic actions that clearly support the intended outcomes.
- *Actions rarely include clear priorities or timelines.* Instead of showing which projects should happen first or how long each might take, actions often appear in simple table formats with little detail. As a result, some projects remain in the plan for years without moving forward.
- *Plans don’t always reflect local realities.* Because the goals are so general, they could apply almost anywhere. This makes it harder for the proposed actions to match a community’s actual risks, capacity, or most pressing needs.

Finding #2 Heavy Emphasis on Buildings and Infrastructure

A second trend we noticed is a strong focus on physical projects. More than half of all proposed actions involve things like elevating structures, retrofitting buildings, buying out flood-prone properties, or installing generators. Flood-related measures, such as structure elevation, property acquisition or demolition, and wind retrofits, appear especially frequently. Meanwhile, we found far

fewer plans that include green infrastructure, land-use changes, building code updates, or other regulatory tools.

We also saw many repetitive entries such as “elevation, acquisition-demolition, acquisition-relocation, and reconstruction of repetitive-loss properties,” which appear across numerous parishes’ plans regardless of local differences.

One major reason for this pattern is familiar to many of you: *communities tend to repeat the types of projects FEMA has funded before*. Because these projects have been successful in past grant cycles, they feel like safer options to include. While this approach increases the likelihood of funding, it can unintentionally limit innovation. Once previously funded projects have addressed part of a community’s risk, the remaining vulnerabilities may look different. Ideally, new mitigation actions would adapt to those changing conditions rather than replicate projects that have already been completed.

Finding #3 Plans Look Strikingly Similar Across Parishes

Perhaps one of the most surprising findings was how similar the plans looked across the state. In those plans, we do not find significant differences between parishes located in coastal and inland zones, although it is obvious that coastal and inland parishes show different economic status, hazard profiles, and associated losses. Such similarities suggest that planning is driven by compliance rather than by a local strategy.

In those plans, we find no significant differences between coastal and inland parishes, despite clear differences in their economic conditions, hazard profiles, and associated losses.

Root of the Problem: Why Does This Happen?

We identified several reasons why hazard mitigation plans often look repetitive, generic, or only loosely tailored to local needs:

- *FEMA’s “comprehensive range” requirement*. To comply with these requirements and ensure that any potential fundable projects are included, local governments often frame their actions and goals in broad, abstract terms instead of developing targeted, priority-driven strategies.

- *Communities often stick to what worked before.* Jurisdictions often copy previously funded projects for safety. FEMA-approved plans from prior cycles serve as “successful” examples, creating a path-dependent process in which managers replicate or slightly modify earlier actions. This approach reduces workload and increases the likelihood of getting plans approved and funded, but it also limits the effectiveness in addressing evolving risks.
- *Consultant-driven planning.* Consultants, combined with limited staff capacity and tight timelines, often shape plan content. Many local governments contract private firms to prepare their hazard mitigation plans. Consultants often rely on standardized templates or repeat similar mitigation actions across multiple jurisdictions. In Louisiana, for example, several parish plans produced by the same company contain nearly identical goals and action lists.

To increase the likelihood of approval and funding, communities often replicate previously successful, consultant-driven mitigation actions, resulting in plans that prioritize compliance over locally tailored strategies.

What Can Public Administrators Do?

Based on what we found, there are several practical steps public administrators can take to improve the usefulness and strategic value of hazard mitigation plans:

- *Align goals and actions with local hazard assessments.* Instead of proposing goals such as reducing disaster losses, it is necessary to identify which neighborhoods or populations are most at risk and propose targeted, community-specific actions.
- *Include measurable actions with clear timelines.* Rather than listing dozens of actions in a simple table, plans should specify measurable indicators for evaluating progress and define how success will be assessed. In addition, actions should be prioritized based on community vulnerability and urgency, rather than being presented as equally important.
- *Strengthen non-structural strategies.* Community outreach, planning, public education, and capacity-building can enhance community resilience. While retrofitting, reconstruction, elevation, and property acquisition remain important, plans should also include more initiatives focused on public awareness, planning, maintenance, and long-term capacity building.

- *Take advantage of updated FEMA guidance.* FEMA's new guidance focuses on fairness, climate-smart choices, and community voices. That means plans can now be more targeted and meaningful.

Hazard mitigation plans become more strategic and useful when goals, actions, and timelines are clearly aligned with local risks, vulnerabilities, and community priorities.

Looking Ahead

Hazard mitigation is one of the most cost-effective and impactful investments local governments can make. Yet our findings show that many communities still face challenges in creating strategic, actionable plans that reflect their unique needs. The good news is that these challenges are solvable. With thoughtful planning, stronger connections to local risk assessments, and leadership from practitioners like you, people who understand both the practical realities and the long-term goals, we can encourage more effective mitigation strategies that truly support community resilience.

Interested in learning more about this study?

If you have questions or would like to discuss the implications of this research for your community or organization, feel free to reach out to [Dr. Peiyao Li](#). To explore the full findings and methodology behind this study, you can read the article:

Gall, M., Li, P., & Friedland, C. J. (2024). Strategic hazard mitigation planning. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 114, 104923. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2024.104923>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Peiyao Li joined the MPA Program in August 2024. Her research centers on disaster resilience, with an emphasis on the role of individuals and nonprofits in this process. She has published articles in the *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *Public Administration and Development*, *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, and *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*.

RECENT MPA GRADUATES

[Summer 2025]

Boyle, Ashlea A.

Nwokorie, Jessica C.

[Fall 2025]

Carroll, John T.

Charles Serna, Francisco A.

Cummings, Sean C.

Irvine, Jared M.

Jarman, Ozzie C.

Krueger, Eugene F.

Lambeth, Mary C.



ALUMNI & STUDENT UPDATES

Cliffton Karnes (MPA '17)

Appointed Brown County Emergency Management Coordinator by the Brown County, Texas Commissioners Court effective 10/1/25.

Francisco Sanchez (MPA '18)

Named Senior Advisor for Economic Development at Hagerty Consulting, the nation's leading emergency management and disaster recovery consulting firm. He joins the firm after serving as Associate Administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration's Office of Disaster Recovery & Resilience, where he led a major modernization effort and oversaw nearly \$15 billion in disaster lending nationwide. With more than two decades of experience in disaster response, economic recovery, and resilience planning, Sánchez will support governments and organizations across the country in advancing economic recovery initiatives, navigating federal disaster assistance, and building long-term resilience.

Daniel Kramer (MPA '19)

Promoted to the newly created role of Assistant Chief of Operations at Caldwell County ESD 5 in October 2025. In this position, he will help lead and shape the growing organization, building on its mission to serve the Caldwell County community. Kramer credited the leadership of Chief Cean Charles, the dedication of the ESD 5 team, and the support of his family as he begins this next chapter in public service.

Mike Legoudes, Jr. (MPA '19)

Appointed Fire Chief for the City of Richmond in October 2025 following his retirement from the Conroe Fire Department, where he previously served as Assistant Fire Chief, he continues to provide leadership in fire and emergency services for the Richmond community.

Eloy Vega (MPA '19)

advanced to doctoral candidacy in Fire and Emergency Management Administration at Oklahoma State University after successfully defending his dissertation proposal. His research examines the ethical, governance, and safety implications of artificial intelligence deployment in Texas fire and emergency management organizations, and he recently presented on AI ethics and safety in the fire service at the FireFusion 2025 conference in Charleston, South Carolina.

Jonathan Zitzmann (MPA '20)

appointed Chief Deputy of the Montgomery County Sheriff's Office in January 2025, overseeing agency operations for more than 1,100 employees, a 1,300-bed county jail, and law enforcement services for nearly 800,000 residents. Since completing his MPA at Sam Houston State University, he has earned additional master's degrees in Applied Criminology and Political Science and teaches as an adjunct instructor at SHSU and other institutions. Jonathan and his wife are proud parents of three young daughters.

FACULTY UPDATES



Aisha S. Ahmadu, PhD

Dr. Ahmadu's research focuses on disaster science, public budgeting, infrastructure, and federalism. Dr. Ahmadu's research focuses on disaster science, public budgeting, infrastructure, and federalism. She is currently studying the impact of financial disclosure standards and institutional bricolage on practices across 133 countries to strengthen fiscal transparency. In addition, Dr. Ahmadu is investigating how socioeconomic factors influence long-term debt issuance in localities to support sustainable public works funding decisions. She has published in leading public administration journals, including *Public Administration Review (PAR)*, *The American Review of Public Administration (ARPA)*, *Public Administration Quarterly (PAQ)*, and *Public Integrity*.



Robin Bittick, PhD

Dr. Bittick's interests include public administration, political philosophy, and U.S. national security. He teaches courses on Ethics in Government and Organization Theory and Behavior. His current research examines the intersection of religion and politics, particularly theology's influence on political objectives, as well as institutional credibility and complexity theory in public administration. Dr. Bittick has published in journals including *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, *Public Integrity*, and *Public Administration Quarterly*.



Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Dr. Demiroz's research centers on public management, complex socio-technical systems, and state-society relations, with particular attention to democratic administration, accountability, and bureaucratic responsibility. He teaches courses in Public Management, Human Resource Management, Governing Complex Policy Problems, and Public Administration. His current scholarship includes a series of articles examining the concept of the deep state, including one recently published in September, with additional manuscripts underway.



Peiyao Li, PhD

Dr. Peiyao Li's research focuses on nonprofit engagement in the context of disaster resilience. She is currently the principal investigator of a funded project exploring nonprofit strategies for mitigating the risks involved in deploying volunteers during disaster response. In addition, Dr. Li recently contributed an entry on Resilience to the IPSA Companion to Political Science, summarizing major scholarly discussions on the concept across different disciplines.



Sungdae Lim, PhD

Dr. Lim specializes in leadership, innovation, and social equity in public and nonprofit management. His recent research uses 11 years of data from the Korean Public Performance and Management survey to analyze political and social effects on turnover intentions among Korean public servants. He co-authored an article in *Public Administration Review* titled "Focusing on the Individual in Cross-Sectoral Collaboration," examining how leader characteristics improve decision-making in cross-sector collaborations using data from Lebanese mayors and nonprofit executives.



Wenjiun Wang, PhD

Dr. Wang specializes in emergency management, coordination, and decision-making. Her recent research explores planning activities and the boundary-spanning roles of emergency managers. She recently co-edited and published *The Elgar Encyclopedia of Nonprofit Management, Leadership, and Governance*. This comprehensive resource features contributions from over 200 renowned experts and serves as an authoritative guide for those interested in the rapidly expanding nonprofit sector.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Published twice a year, the MPA Student and Alumni Newsletter provides updates on the MPA program, our faculty and staff, current students, and alumni. To ensure the Newsletter reflects your interests and celebrates your accomplishments, we welcome your contributions in the following areas:

Personal & Professional Announcements related to moves, births, marriages, deaths, promotions, career transitions, graduations, certifications, accomplishments, awards, etc.

Activities and Events information related to activities and events that you, your organization, or another organization plan to hold or sponsor over the next few months.

Job Opportunities announcements related to job opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

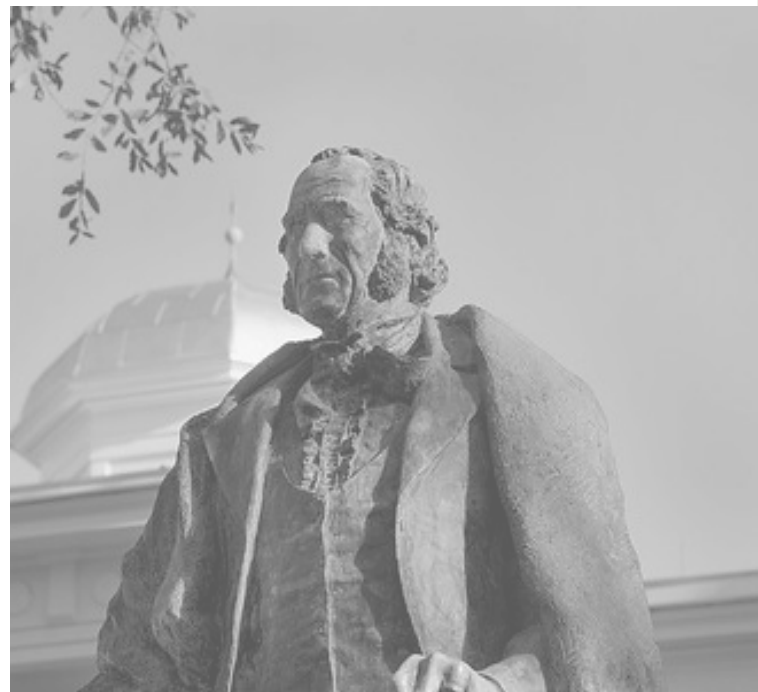
Grant Opportunities announcements related to grant opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

Information Briefs We invite students and alumni to submit information briefs (400-500 words) that covers a topic that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

Book Summaries or Reviews We invite students and alumni to submit short summaries (~300 words) or reviews (~1000 words) of a recently published book or report that would be of interest to our student and alumni community.

Submission Deadline

The next issue of the newsletter will be published in June 2026. Submit content to Dr. Wang (wjwang@shsu.edu) by May 15, 2026.



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