

MPA Student & Alumni Newsletter

June 2026

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

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

1. Director's Message
2. Alumni Spotlight
3. Faculty Insight
4. Recent Graduates
5. Alumni & Student Updates
6. Faculty Updates
7. Call for Submissions

Director's Message | Summer 2026

By *Sungdae Lim, PhD*

Welcome to the Summer 2026 edition of the SHSU MPA Newsletter. As the Interim Director of the MPA Program, I am pleased to share several important updates with you.

Leadership Transition

Dr. Demiroz has recently accepted an offer to serve as Director of the MPA program at Kennesaw State University. While we wish him great success in this exciting new chapter, his departure is a significant loss for our program. I have assumed the role of Interim Director and remain committed to maintaining the program's excellence and supporting our students' continued success. I encourage you to join me in extending your best wishes to Dr. Demiroz as he begins this new chapter.

NASPAA Accreditation in Progress

We are actively pursuing accreditation from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA), the global standard in public affairs education. Last October, I attended the NASPAA Global Annual Conference and Accreditation Institute Workshop to initiate this process. Our faculty are working diligently to submit our application for review in August.

Although the initial accreditation process may take up to two years, maintaining accreditation will be an ongoing commitment. Achieving NASPAA accreditation will benefit our program by

aligning it with global standards, enhancing its reputation, and connecting us to the global network of leading public affairs programs. It will also serve as a reflection of the quality of our program and the accomplishments of our students and alumni.

New Graduate Certificate: Public and Nonprofit Management

We are currently developing a new Graduate Certificate in Public and Nonprofit Management. This certificate program is designed for individuals who may not yet be ready to pursue a full master's degree but wish to advance their knowledge and careers in the public and nonprofit sectors. We look forward to announcing its official launch soon.

MPA 4+1 Program

We are also introducing a new MPA 4+1 pathway for SHSU undergraduate students. This program will allow qualified students to begin graduate coursework during their senior year and complete the remaining MPA requirements in their fifth year. Upon completion, students will graduate with both a bachelor's degree and an MPA and will be well prepared for careers in public service. We anticipate launching this pathway in Spring 2027, with detailed program information to be released in Fall 2026.

Appreciation and Community Engagement

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Ahmadu for preparing this issue of the newsletter, and to our dedicated faculty and staff for their continued commitment to student and program success.

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.

Sungdae Lim, PhD

Director, Master of Public Administration Program

Sam Houston State University

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Building Safer Schools through Experience and Purpose One Leader's Journey in Public Service and School Safety

By Hillary Webb (MPA '21)

In this issue, we spotlight Hillary Webb, a Sam Houston State University alumna now serving as School Safety Coordinator for Killeen ISD. Hillary's career began in education before moving into emergency management and public safety. She credits the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program at Sam Houston State University for guiding her transition into school safety and student health. Today, she supports the security and well-being of more than 44,000 students across the district.



How an Unexpected Career Path Led to Public Service

I grew up in Marshall, a small community in Northeast Texas, surrounded by the world of public service. My mother worked in education, moving from assistant principal to principal and eventually into district administration, which exposed me to school resource officers and local firefighters from an early age. I spent my childhood listening to them discuss their cases and calls. I knew many people dedicated to civil service, yet I never viewed it as a career path for myself.

*I knew many people dedicated to civil service,
yet I never viewed it as a career path for myself.*

Originally, I planned to pursue veterinary medicine, but over time I began reconsidering that path and moved in a different direction. I completed my degree in marketing and advertising, but after graduating during the post 9/11 period, I found that most of the available jobs were in sales, and that did not fit who I was or what I wanted to do. I transitioned into teaching through an accelerated certification program. I started teaching computer technology at the junior high school where my mom once served as principal.

Around the same time, I became more involved in emergency services. I earned my EMT certification, volunteered with fire departments, worked with law enforcement connections, and contributed to emergency management planning efforts. Gradually, I found myself being drawn more toward emergency management and public safety, especially school safety. Over time, I began serving on campus and district safety committees and became increasingly focused on how schools can create safe environments that support learning. Eventually, I moved into school safety and emergency management roles and was offered two positions: Emergency Management Coordinator and School Safety Specialist with Killeen ISD. Killeen provided the perfect environment to pursue the work I am passionate about, and I am honored to lead safety operations for such a large and diverse community.

Why the MPA Was the Right Move for Me

I pursued a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in emergency management. This was important to me because I had applied for many emergency management coordinator and specialist positions with cities and other organizations. I had a wealth of volunteer experience and had even written an emergency management plan; however, because that experience was volunteer-based and my bachelor's degree was in marketing rather than emergency management, I felt my background was not always viewed as having the professional weight required for these positions. I knew I needed something more to show what I could do.

I chose Sam Houston State because it was local and offered exactly what I needed. The program provided a foundation in public administration along with emergency management content that directly supported the work I was already doing. Earning my MPA gave me a better shot professionally, and it has absolutely strengthened my ability to do the work I do now.

Earning my MPA gave me a better shot professionally, and it has absolutely strengthened my ability to do the work I do now.

Beyond the Classroom: Lessons that Guide My Daily Work

Looking back on my MPA journey, two courses in particular stand out as having a lasting impact on my work today. One was Intro to Public Administration. I was fascinated by learning the history behind the field and realizing just how far back it goes, essentially to the time of Alexander the Great. What amazed me most was seeing how public administration evolved over centuries into the systems we know today and understanding why different forms of governance exist, from mayor-council structures to city manager systems. This exposure gave me a deeper appreciation for how organizations and public institutions function.

Another course that really stood out to me was Organizational Theory and Behavior. It continues to be relevant in my current role because I work with a wide range of personalities. The course helped me think more intentionally about leadership styles and how organizations function across different levels. I also think a lot about Disaster Resilience. One of the biggest lessons I took from that course is that resilience is not just about bouncing back, it is about coming back stronger. In school safety, we cannot prevent everything, especially when human behavior is involved, but we can strengthen communication, improve preparation, and build systems that are more resilient over time. That perspective has shaped how I approach incidents and improvements in my district, especially when it comes to coordination between campuses, administrators, and law enforcement partners across multiple jurisdictions.

What a Week in School Safety Looks Like



Hillary and her colleagues celebrating an award from Communities in Schools of Greater Central Texas.

One of my biggest responsibilities is school safety and compliance, which makes up a major part of my work. I am usually in the office by 6:45 am because we are a large district with more than fifty campuses, and there is always the possibility that safety concerns may need attention early in the day.

“Sometimes you do not realize the impact you have until years later. Those experiences remind me that you never really know who you are influencing or how your work may shape someone’s path.”

Right now, compliance is a major focus. We recently went through the Texas Education Agency District Vulnerability Assessment, which is a detailed review of campus safety and facilities. I helped coordinate preparation for that process, and we received positive feedback for best practices given the size of our district. I am now tracking corrective actions and sharing progress updates with district leadership.

A typical week also includes sending updates to campuses and safety specialists, including reminders about drills, door checks, weather conditions, and other issues they need to be aware of. I try to begin those updates with positive recognition, such as celebrating campuses that performed well during audits. I also support training efforts, assist with updates to emergency operations plans, and help maintain clear communication across campuses. One accomplishment that stands out to me is our emergency operations plan. It is a large and detailed document that we update annually. This year, it was approved the first time it was submitted, which felt very rewarding because of the level of detail involved.

A large part of my role is making sure people have what they need and removing obstacles so they can do their work effectively. I also think a lot about students I have taught and worked with over the years. I have had students become EMT certified, go on to medical school, and pursue careers in accounting and business because of early exposure in my classes. Sometimes you do not realize the impact you have until years later. Those experiences remind me that you never really know who you are influencing or how your work may shape someone’s path.

Challenges in a Large and Dynamic District

The size of the district is one of the biggest challenges. We have more than 50 campuses, including schools on Fort Hood, which brings a high level of mobility for both students and staff. Families relocate, teachers transfer midyear, and that constant movement creates challenges in consistency.

Another challenge is working with many different personality types across campuses. Some staff members are highly experienced, others are new, and some are resistant to change. My approach is not to change what people are doing, but to help improve it, which usually works, though it still requires careful navigation.

There is also the challenge of constantly changing compliance requirements. School safety is constantly changing, and new state mandates often come with limited time and resources for implementation. This makes the work complex but also keeps it dynamic and rewarding.

Final Reflection: A Message to Students and Alumni

I would like to encourage students to stay open to change and to learning new things about themselves throughout the MPA program. You may not discover something entirely new, but you will likely refine how you think and how you approach problems.

If you are a working student, apply what you are learning directly to your organization. Look at how things operate and think about how concepts like organizational behavior and teamwork show up in real environments. You can use those lessons to help build stronger collaboration and a more effective workplace.

Another important point is being willing to see how change affects both you and your organization. Resilience is about coming back stronger, not just recovering. Even when challenges happen, there is an opportunity to improve systems and make them better for the future. Most importantly, stay open to how learning can continue to shape you long after the program ends. It does not stop at graduation.

Do your research and engage with what you are learning. Do not stop at the minimum requirements. Sometimes one article or one idea can completely shift your perspective. Continue the dialogue in your classes and stay engaged with others because you never know when someone will share something that changes how you think. Also, do not forget what you learn after you graduate. I still use my coursework, notes, and feedback in my daily work. I use what I learned in statistics to turn data into visuals that help campuses and administrators understand information more clearly.

Lastly, build your network as you go. I have reached out to other districts, learned from their experiences, and built connections that continue to be valuable resources today. So, I would say: put real effort into your learning, build connections, and never be afraid to learn something new. Do not see it as a means to an end. See it as something that continues to shape your work and your growth long after the program.

.....put real effort into your learning, build connections, and never be afraid to learn something new. Do not see it as a means to an end. See it as something that continues to shape your work and your growth long after the program.

FACULTY INSIGHT

Pathways to Innovation in Nonprofits: A Summary and Commentary

By Sungdae Lim, PhD

Why Innovation Matters for Nonprofits:

Nonprofit organizations operate in increasingly competitive and resource-constrained environments, where the ability to adapt is essential for long-term survival. Unlike private firms, nonprofits pursue public value and financial sustainability simultaneously, which makes their approach to innovation distinctively value-driven rather than profit-motivated. Innovation enables nonprofits to adapt to changing environments, stakeholder needs, and resource constraints, ensuring organizational survival and effectiveness. It helps organizations improve services, processes, and outreach while maintaining relevance in competitive and evolving contexts. This adaptive capacity is not incidental; it is rooted in how nonprofits communicate with and respond to the people and institutions around them. Understanding what drives nonprofit innovation therefore matters not just for organizational effectiveness, but for the broader communities these organizations serve.



Source : Adobe Stock

Research Question:

How do different forms of stakeholder communication influence nonprofit innovation, and how is this relationship mediated by nonprofit public value orientations (NPVOs)?

Research Design:

- Data: 2018 survey of U.S. nonprofit executive directors (720 usable responses).
- Method: Structural Equation Modeling (SEM).
- Key variables:
 - Stakeholder communication (board, staff, volunteers, beneficiaries, funders)
 - NPVOs (community-serving and cause-commitment orientations)
 - Organizational innovation (services, processes, marketing)
- Supplemented with organizational data from the National Center for Charitable Statistics.

Key Findings:

Finding #1 External Stakeholders Matter Most

Interactions with funders and volunteers matter when it comes to nonprofit innovation. Nonprofits that maintain strong communication with these external groups are more likely to embrace new ideas and practices, while communication with board members and staff appears to have less influence.

Finding #2 Distinct effects of stakeholders

Not all stakeholders influence nonprofits in the same way. Funders appear to be especially important in helping organizations stay focused on both their mission and the communities they serve. Volunteers also help organizations better understand community needs and concerns. In contrast, communication with board members and staff had a much smaller influence on these organizational priorities.

Finding #3 Organizational Mission Matters for Innovation

Not all organizational values influence innovation in the same way. Nonprofits with a strong commitment to their mission are more likely to introduce new services and improve existing practices. Interestingly, simply having a broad commitment to serving the community was not enough on its own to encourage innovation. Instead, organizations with a clear and focused mission were more likely to pursue new ideas and make substantive changes in how they operate.

Finding #4 The Indirect Effect of Stakeholder Communication on Innovation

It is easy to assume that talking with stakeholders directly leads to innovation, but in practice the process is more indirect, especially when it comes to engagement with funders. When nonprofits stay closely connected with funders, it helps influence how they understand their mission and what they prioritize. This, in turn, creates a sense of direction that supports new ideas and leads to changes in how organizations operate.

In other words, stakeholder conversations matter not just for what is discussed, but for how they influence an organization's values, focus, and understanding of its mission. This shift is what ultimately drives innovation.

Why Does this Matter?

Innovation is not driven mainly by internal communication or governance processes. Instead, it is closely tied to external relationships, especially with the communities' nonprofit's serve and the funders who support them. These relationships play an important role in shaping the values that encourage innovation.

Funders are often associated with monitoring nonprofit performance, with concerns that their involvement may pull organizations away from their core mission. But when engagement goes beyond compliance and includes open, ongoing dialogue about mission and impact, funders can reinforce both community-serving and mission-focused orientations. In this way, communication influences innovation indirectly by shaping organizational values. It is these values, particularly commitment to mission, that ultimately drive innovative behavior.

What Can Nonprofit Leaders Do?

- **Invest in Volunteer Engagement as a Community Intelligence System**

Volunteer communication is closely linked to a stronger focus on serving the community. Nonprofits should create clear and regular ways for volunteers to share what they see, experience, and hear about community needs. Volunteers are often close to the communities the organization serves, giving them perspectives that many nonprofits do not fully use.

- **Cultivate Substantive Dialogue with Funders, not just Transactional Reporting**

Conversations with funders support both community focus and mission commitment. Nonprofits benefit when they treat funders as partners rather than focusing only on required

updates and reports. Organizations should work with funders whose priorities align with their mission and involve them in ongoing conversations about community needs and organizational direction.

- **Innovation starts with a focused mission**

Organizations with a clear sense of purpose are better able to develop new ideas. Leaders should regularly revisit and reinforce the organization's mission and purpose with staff and stakeholders, not just as a formality, but as something that guides action and decision-making.

- **Boards Should Integrate External Stakeholder Feedback into Governance Discussions**

Strong organizations do not rely solely on internal discussions. Seeking input from volunteers, funders, and community partners can help leaders make decisions that reflect both organizational priorities and community needs.

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. Sungdae Lim](#). To explore the full findings and methodology behind this study, you can read the article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2026.2665792>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dr. Sungdae Lim joined the MPA Program in July 2019 as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science. His research focuses on public and nonprofit management, with an emphasis on public service innovation and governance, organizational leadership and theory, social equity, and community engagement. His work has been published in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. Dr. Lim serves as Associate Editor for the Journal of Public Affairs Education and Quality & Quantity, and as an editorial board member for Teaching Public Administration. He is also a Research Fellow at the Institute for Science, Technology, and Public Policy (ISTPP) at Texas A&M University.

RECENT MPA GRADUATES

[Spring 2026]

Daniel, Natalie K.

Gonzales, Andrea V.

Lester, Charles G.

Manning, Ashley W.

Ritch, Kelsey

Thompson, Nathaniel D.



ALUMNI & STUDENT UPDATES

Joshua Carter [MPA '19]

Earned his Doctor of Medicine degree from Texas A&M University Naresh K. Vashisht College of Medicine in May 2026, adding another milestone to a distinguished career devoted to public service. A former U.S. Marine, firefighter, paramedic, and police officer, Carter has consistently sought opportunities to serve others and improve community well-being. Following graduation, he will begin a multi-year family medicine residency program in the Fort Worth area. Looking ahead, Carter intends to establish a permanent medical practice in the Texas Hill Country, where he plans to focus on providing care to rural and underserved populations. Reflecting on his journey, Carter noted that becoming a physician was a surreal achievement, but only one chapter in a life defined by service. He encourages others to stay connected to their purpose and embrace the unexpected paths that often lead to the most meaningful opportunities.

Sam Masiel [MPA '19]

Appointed as the new City Administrator for the City of Shenandoah in March 2026 and officially began the role on April 7. Prior to joining Shenandoah, Masiel served as Assistant City Manager for the City of Huntsville for three years and previously began a municipal career with the City of Conroe. Masiel shared excitement about serving the Shenandoah community, collaborating with city staff, and returning to Montgomery County.

Cynthia Lawson [MPA '24]

Serves as an Adjunct Professor at National University, where they teach master's-level social work students. Over the past several years, they have also published 10 books focused on mental health topics. In addition to their academic and publishing work, they maintain a private practice specializing in mental health services for military personnel and first responders. Their continued dedication to education, scholarship, and clinical care reflects an impressive commitment to supporting mental health and community well-being.

Christopher Weimer [MPA '24]

A Diplomatic Security Special Agent serving his first tour at the New York Field Office. The Diplomatic Security Service (DSS) is the principal law enforcement and security arm of the U.S. Department of State. Its primary mission is to protect diplomatic assets, personnel, and information; and conduct criminal, counterterrorism, and counterintelligence investigations domestically and abroad.

FACULTY UPDATES



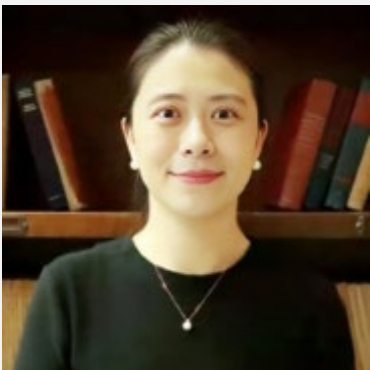
Aisha S. Ahmadu, PhD

Dr. Ahmadu's research focuses on disaster science, public budgeting, infrastructure, and federalism. She is currently investigating the historical development of public infrastructure funding in the U.S. to better understand how public investment priorities and funding approaches have evolved over time and influenced infrastructure development. In addition, Dr. Ahmadu is examining the integration of artificial intelligence into monitoring, evaluation, and impact measurement in program evaluation for an upcoming book chapter in *Artificial Intelligence and Nonprofit Management: Innovation, Ethics, and Impact in Mission-Driven Organizations*.



Robin Marshall Bittick, PhD

Dr. Bittick's interests include public administration, political philosophy, and U.S. national security. He currently teaches the Ethics in Government in the MPA program. His research examines the intersection of religion and politics, as well as institutional credibility and complexity theory in public administration ethics. Dr. Bittick has published in journals including *Emergence: Complexity & Organization*, *Public Integrity*, and *Public Administration Quarterly*. He previously worked for the US Department of Defense, US Air Force, and has been a consultant for several government and non-profit organizations.



Peiyao Li, PhD

Dr. Li's research centers on nonprofit engagement in the context of disaster resilience. Her current work investigates volunteer management in disaster response and first responders' responses to the adoption of AI technologies in the workplace. She also recently contributed a book chapter examining how nonprofit organizations promote community health and provide support to vulnerable populations.



Sungdae Lim, PhD

Dr. Lim's research focuses on leadership, innovation, and social equity in public and nonprofit management. His recent work examines how stakeholder engagement and public value orientations influence innovation in nonprofit organizations, demonstrating how stakeholder communication contributes to mission-driven service delivery and organizational effectiveness. As Interim Director of the Master of Public Administration (MPA) program, Dr. Lim is committed to supporting student success and advancing the intellectual and professional development of future public service leaders.



Wenjiun Wang, PhD

Dr. Wang specializes in emergency management, coordination, and decision-making. Her recent research focuses on planning activities and the boundary-spanning roles of emergency managers. She is currently involved in several research projects, including studies of the emergency management planning process and emergency management practitioners' research needs. These projects aim to bridge the gap between academic research and professional practice in the field of emergency management.

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.

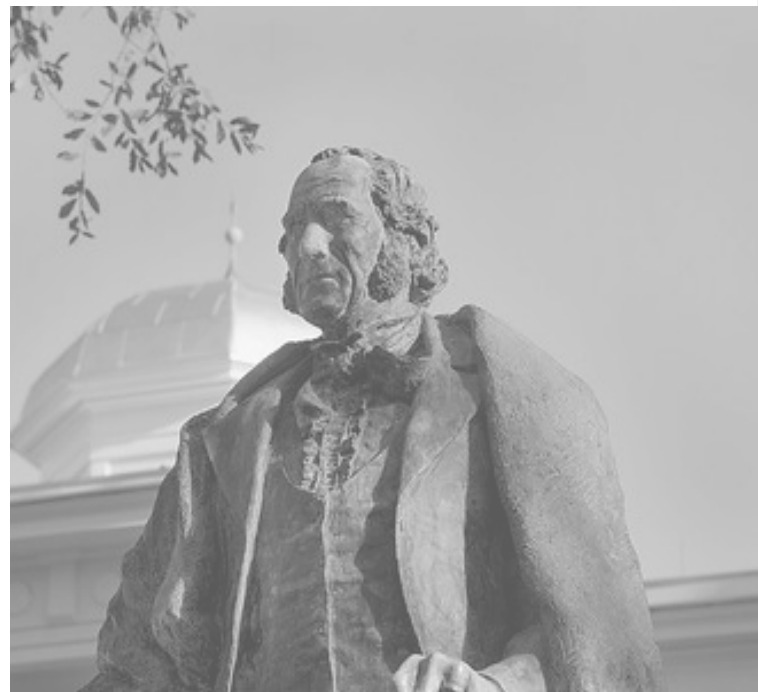
Grant Opportunities announcements related to grant opportunities that you, your organization, or another organization plan to open over the next few months.

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 December 2026. Submit content to Dr. Wang (wjwang@shsu.edu) by November 15, 2026.



Sam Houston
State University

Department of Political Science
1901 Avenue I Box 2149
Huntsville, TX 77341
www.shsu.edu/mpa