

MPA Student & Alumni Newsletter

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Department of Political Science
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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

By Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Welcome to the Summer 2025 edition of the SHSU MPA Newsletter. I hope your summer is off to a great start. Before you explore the updates in this issue, I'd like to share some highlights and developments from the program.

This year, the SHSU MPA Program was proud to serve as an exhibitor at the 2025 Texas Emergency Management Conference, held May 28-30 in Fort Worth. Dr. Wang and

I had the pleasure of representing our program, connecting with current and prospective students, and reconnecting with alumni. It was truly rewarding to see so many of you stop by our booth—we appreciate your continued engagement and support.

The MPA Program also completed a comprehensive program review this year, which included a detailed self-study and an on-site evaluation by an external reviewer. The insights gained from this process have been both informative and inspiring, helping us chart a clearer and more ambitious path forward. I'm excited to share that several significant improvements are on the horizon, and we look forward to announcing them in the coming months.

The MPA Program has rolled out its second concentration in 'management' this year. Although we have not actively advertised the new concentration, there is significant interest in it. I am happy to note that public servants outside of the emergency management world are showing interest in our program.

I'd also like to extend my gratitude to Dr. Wang for preparing this issue of the newsletter, and to our dedicated MPA faculty and staff for their ongoing commitment to the success of our students and program.

As always, we welcome your updates—whether you've started a new job, earned a promotion, or reached a personal or professional milestone. If your agency is hiring or offering internships, we would be happy to share those opportunities with our students and alumni network.

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

Warm regards,

Fatih Demiroz, PhD

Director, Master of Public Administration Program
Sam Houston State University



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Making an Impact: Sam Masiel's Story of Growth, Leadership, and Service

By Lindsay Graham



I had the privilege of interviewing Sam Masiel, the Assistant City Manager for the City of Huntsville. He is also a proud graduate of Sam Houston State University's Master of Public Administration (MPA) Program, Class of 2019. Masiel shared his career path, accomplishments, and the knowledge that helps him serve his community. During his tenure in Huntsville as an Assistant City Manager, he also temporarily served as Interim City Manager for 6 months until the new City Manager was appointed.

The Journey Begins

With almost two decades of municipal government experience, Masiel's non-traditional career path is interesting and inspiring. Masiel began his professional career working for a grocery store when he was just 16 years old. After high school, he went on to Navarro College and later transferred to Sam Houston State University where he completed his undergraduate degree in Business Administration. Masiel continued to work in the grocery industry after he graduated from Sam Houston. Recalling his experience at the time, Masiel noted: "[w]hen I graduated in '02, that was around the time of Enron, so there were a lot of hiring freezes in the Houston area. So, I just ... stuck with what I knew."

While working in the grocery industry, Masiel acquired management and customer service experience that would eventually make him an ideal candidate for a governmental role. While the grocery industry offered him stability and comfort, it was not conducive to the family life that he and his wife envisioned. After years of continued advancement and success, he decided to look for a different career path, one that would enable him to draw upon his leadership and management experiences.

**Public service is
more than a job —
it's a commitment
to community.**

Everything changed when a position opened at the City of Conroe for a Utility Billing Manager. Thanks to his background in management and customer service, Masiel was an ideal candidate. This marked the beginning of a long and rewarding career in municipal government. For the next sixteen years, Masiel climbed the ladder in the City of Conroe and is proud of his accomplishments during his tenure.

Leadership and Growth in a Rapidly Changing Texas

Today, Masiel serves as the Assistant City Manager for the City of Huntsville. His role places him at the intersection of city operations, strategic planning, and leadership support. Masiel described the position as one that requires both technical knowledge and interpersonal skills. “You’re pretty much the right-hand person for the city manager role,” Masiel said. Expanding on this role, he explained: “It’s important that the assistant city manager is someone that’s loyal and trustworthy. You also serve as an advisor because that city manager needs someone to bounce ideas off and provide input.”

Masiel served as Huntsville’s interim city manager between October 2024 to March 2025, after which, he returned to his position as the assistant city manager. This role required him to take command of city operations. Providing additional insights into his experience, Masiel noted: “I always give the analogy of the backup quarterback. You never know when the starting quarterback goes out, and your card gets called. You need to be ready to step in.”

One of Masiel’s memorable leadership moments occurred during the winter storm of 2025, when they decided to close city operations out of concern for public safety. Reflecting on this decision, Masiel noted: “[p]eople might think that’s a simple decision, but it has huge implications. We’ve got to make sure we still have services out there to service the community.

There’s a lot of financial impact as well.” In local

government, he highlights that officials must navigate tough choices, but they need to trust themselves and their staff to make the best decision for the community. Along with public safety, Masiel emphasized that officials also need to consider the safety of their staff and maintain open lines of communication across governmental departments.

You never know when the starting quarterback goes out, and your card gets called. You need to be ready to step in.

Currently, Masiel has the pleasure of being a part of Huntsville's new City Hall project, which was funded by a municipal infrastructure bond initiative passed in 2016. The new building is three-stories, has approximately 40,000 square feet of floor space, and is located at the site of the old city hall. "Huntsville is evolving," Masiel claimed. He continued explaining, "[e]ach floor includes shell space that can build out as the city expands. We are not just thinking about what we need today. We are making sure the city is ready for what's next." The building is designed to consolidate departments and create a civic service hub that is efficient and assessable for community members. "People should not have to bounce between buildings to get their business done. This is about creating a one-stop shop for our residents," Masiel said.

Lessons Learned from the MPA Program

During his time in the City of Conroe, Masiel's former supervisor, and mentor, suggested he obtain his Master's in public administration. "He was like, if you want to stay in this industry and build a good career, it'll behoove you to go back and get a master's in public administration." Masiel noted. At that point in his career, Masiel had already obtained years of public sector experience. However, he agreed with his mentor and began to investigate MPA programs in the area. Masiel recalled, "I looked at a couple different schools and I was like, you know what, I'm comfortable with Sam Houston." He returned to his alma mater and applied for admission to the MPA online program at Sam Houston State University. This program provided Masiel the flexibility he needed to study, work, and remain present in his personal life. In 2019, he completed the program and graduated with his MPA with a concentration in emergency management. Masiel noted, "The program helped me in

*Understanding different
perspectives helps you lead teams
that actually work together.*

decision-making and helps you to see and learn perspectives from others. What I mean by that is, for example, the way that a fire department operates and how their mindset is, it's totally different from say, the engineering department. When you understand perspectives, you can kind of merge that together to get them to connect and understand each other."

Masiel stated he still uses the knowledge he gained during the program. He credits the program for providing him with the foundational concepts and tools that he could apply to what he called real-world cases. The program enhanced his knowledge on decision making, team leadership, and ethics. It also provided him with a greater sense of confidence when communicating with council members.

Masiel made specific reference to his Program Evaluation course, which was taught by Dr. Tom Haase, who has since taken a position at The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. This course, which continues to be offered by the MPA program at Sam Houston, provides the tools needed to assess the performance of public and nonprofit programs. “People want to know what metrics you are using to show that you’re doing good by the community. So, setting those types of performance measures for not only the public, but also having a standard for your organization is very important,” Masiel said.

Words of Wisdom for Aspiring Public Leaders

When asked for his advice to someone who is interested in a leadership position in municipal government, Masiel offered several honest suggestions. He provided insight into how difficult it can often be to navigate through the day-to-day operations of local government. Success requires striking a balance between your integrity and the law. “It’s never going to be black and white,” Masiel explains. “There’s going to be a fine line between what is ethical and what is by the books. You always must manage in the gray.” Balancing multiple levels of leadership and administration can often be difficult, but Masiel advises to aspiring public servants to “develop build a thick skin and always do the right thing.”

Masiel states finding time for oneself is an important aspect to being a proactive public servant. “This job can engulf you, and it can take over,” Masiel said. “You’ve got to be able to separate that and set those boundaries.” For Masiel, he stays connected to family and found a passion for CrossFit. His weekly morning classes help give him a sense of release and focus that helps keep a proper work-life balance. “I’ve been doing it for over 10 years. That is my time. I’m lifting and pushing weights and doing calisthenics. It’s my release,” Masiel said.

Manage in the gray, protect your integrity, and don’t forget to take care of yourself.

Masiel is also committed to supporting the next generation of public servants. Masiel notes, “giving back to the program is great. I love being able to do that.” He emphasizes the importance of getting involved with your community and connecting with your fellow peers.

There are plenty of organizations that one can be involved in. For example, Masiel is currently serving as the President of the Texas City Manager's Association Region 6. "It's a tough profession and it's getting a little bit tougher," he said. "But I like what I'm doing, and we need more of that in the municipal government."

Masiel's optimism and dedication to the public sector is powerful and inspirational for those who are seeking a career in local government. When you hear him talk about public service, you can sense his passion for serving his community. For me, I found this conversation encouraging for my own future in municipal government. For someone who has recently undergone a career transition, much like Masiel's, it has made me hopeful for my future towards a calling of serving my community.

Connect with Sam Masiel

Masiel welcomes anyone interested in pursuing a career in municipal government to get in touch, whether you're just starting out or looking to make a career change. He's happy to share insights, answer questions, and help guide your next steps. You can connect with Masiel through [LinkedIn](#).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lindsay Graham currently resides in Conroe, TX with her husband, son, and parents. After nearly two decades doing administration and accounting, she returned to school, earning her BA in History from Sam Houston State University in 2024. Now pursuing her MA in History and Political Studies, she is passionate about public service and plans to begin a career in local government after graduation.

FACULTY INSIGHT

How do **Natural Disasters, Community Conditions**, and **Federal Dollars** Shape Social Infrastructure Spending in U.S. States?

By Aisha Ahmadu, PhD

When we think of infrastructure, we often focus on economic infrastructure like road networks, transit systems, telecommunications, and utility facilities. However, social infrastructure is another equally important category. These include parks and recreational areas, schools, and housing developments that support daily life and strengthen communities. These investments improve public health and community aesthetics, and expand access to education, employment, and recreation. Parks and recreational spaces increase livability, attract businesses, and raise property values (Powers et al., 2022; Wolch et al., 2014). Public schools boost learning outcomes, strengthen civic life, and improve quality of life (Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). Similarly, community housing initiatives support neighborhood revitalization, expand access to affordable housing, and promote social equity.



Source : https://stockcake.com/i/community-kids-unite_1779478_1250940

This study explores how states allocate resources and what influences those choices to invest in social infrastructure like parks and recreation, education facilities, and public housing. Many studies have shown that different factors influence how governments spend on social infrastructure; however, most of this research focuses on local governments. There has been less attention on how states make these spending decisions, even though states play a major role in infrastructure funding and investments. The study helps fill that gap by looking at the bigger picture, looking at how 49 U.S. states invested in social infrastructure over a 20-year (2000 - 2019) period to better understand what drives their spending choices.

What Counts as Social Infrastructure and Why It Matters?

Infrastructure can be sorted into two broad groups: economic and social (Table 1). This classification shows how different types of infrastructure support the economy and help improve life in communities.

Figure 1 shows state investment in social infrastructure across the U.S. from 2000 to 2019. Spending on educational facilities steadily increased over the years, with slight dips in 2014 and 2015. Investments in parks and recreation, as well as public housing, remained stable for most of the period. However, state expenditure on public housing increased in 2018 and 2019.

To better understand how states invest in social infrastructure relative to their populations, a per capita analysis shows how spending varies across states. Alaska, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, and Hawaii rank among the highest per capita spenders, while Tennessee, Arizona, Nevada, and Georgia fall on the lower end.

When social infrastructure spending is broken down into three key policy areas including parks and recreation, education, and public housing, the states with the highest per capita spending from 2000 to 2019 are shown in Table 2. Hawaii stands out as the only state with a high per capita spending across all three policy areas. Alaska and Delaware also rank high in two of the three categories. Public housing spending is led by northeastern and northwestern states, such as Massachusetts, Vermont, and Washington. States with high per capita spending on parks and recreation is seen in a diverse group of states including Louisiana, South Dakota, and Maryland. In education, high per capita spending is seen in states like Alabama and New Mexico, along with Hawaii and Alaska.

Table 1: Types and components of Infrastructure

ECONOMIC INFRASTRUCTURE	SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
Road networks, highways, bridges	Parks, recreational & cultural facilities
Telecommunication facilities	Healthcare facilities
Transit systems	Education buildings and facilities
Waste management system	Judicial and correctional facilities
Water supply facilities	City halls and other public buildings
Utility systems (electricity and gas supply)	Public housing & community development centers



Figure 1: State Spending on Social Infrastructure (2000 - 2019)

What Drives States to Spend on Social Infrastructure?

The analysis of data in the study shows that natural disaster events, social vulnerability factors, and federal support influence social infrastructure spending, although the findings are more nuanced and complex.

Natural Disasters Don't Just Cause Damage; they Shift Spending Priorities

Severe disaster events, especially those that receive federal disaster declarations can alter government spending priorities. These high-impact events cause damage to communities and force states to increase funding for urgent priorities while cutting spending in other areas due to strained resources. The data analysis in the study shows that, funding for parks and recreation tends to decline after major disaster events, while spending on education and housing is more likely to be protected. This shows that when crises hit, budget cuts often fall on services viewed as less essential. Therefore, advocates for parks and recreational facilities must make a strong case for how these spaces contribute to community resilience and long-term recovery.

Table 2 States with High Spending by Infrastructure Policy Area

STATE	PUBLIC HOUSING	PARKS & RECREATION	EDUCATION
Hawaii	✓	✓	✓
Massachusetts	✓		
Alaska	✓		✓
Vermont	✓		
Washington	✓		
Louisiana		✓	
Delaware		✓	✓
South Dakota		✓	
Maryland		✓	
Alabama			✓
New Mexico			✓

A State's Demographics and Economy Matter

A state's economic and demographic conditions affect how states choose to invest in social infrastructure. Factors like household income, tax revenues, income inequality, and the age distribution of residents influence whether states prioritize spending on education, public housing, or public spaces. States with higher household incomes and stronger sales tax revenues

tend to invest more in infrastructure. On the other hand, inequality and poverty often hinder public investment, particularly in education. Also, a larger youth population is associated with increased spending on education. So, knowing these demographic and economic trends can guide smarter investment decisions.

Federal Support Helps, but its Benefits are not always Evenly Distributed

Federal transfers to states boost investment in social infrastructure; however, the impact is not uniform across all sectors. The study finds that federal aid significantly increases funding for public education but has little to no effect on spending for parks and recreation or public housing. This reflects the priorities of both federal and state governments, which often treat education as a top funding concern especially when additional fiscal resources become available. These findings align with the principle of fiscal federalism, which emphasizes how federal support helps states meet key needs. For policymakers, this underscores the importance of aligning local infrastructure goals with available federal funding opportunities.

Politics and Priorities: Who's in Charge Makes a Difference

Political leadership influences which public services are prioritized and how resources are distributed. Liberal leaning (Democratic) voters tend to support increased overall infrastructure spending, particularly in areas like parks and recreation, education, and housing. This reflects the broader tendency of liberal-leaning governments to generally support government involvement in social programs and infrastructure. Similarly, one of my studies, which focused on economic infrastructure published in 2024, has shown that states with more Republican members in the House of Representatives often support infrastructure investment to facilitate business growth. Hence, while the motive for supporting infrastructure expenditure may differ, it is possible for both political parties to support infrastructure as in the bipartisan support for the \$1.2 trillion IIJA (Goodsell, 2023; Zhang & Batjargal, 2022).

What Should Local and State Leaders Take Away?

State and local leaders should recognize that social infrastructure, especially parks and recreation, education, and public housing development are shaped by a combination of economic conditions, political priorities, and crisis events. During difficult times, parks and recreation are often vulnerable to funding cuts, while education and housing are more protected. Public leaders can prepare by seeking alternative funding sources, like charitable partnerships, to support less prioritized areas. In addition, public managers can align local needs with available state and federal funding and advocate for more balanced investment across all types of social infrastructure.

Limitations and Opportunities for Further Research

Like other studies, this research has limitations. While the study shows that disaster punctuating events, social vulnerability conditions, and federal support help explain how states invest in social infrastructure, it doesn't capture every possible factor. For instance, the study doesn't examine the role of charitable organizations or private foundations in funding these projects. Also, it would be interesting for future studies to replicate the study at the local level to understand how local governments complement state policy on social infrastructure.

Final Thought: Resilience Requires Investment

As the study shows, building resilient communities requires more than just investing in economic infrastructure, it also requires investing in social infrastructure. State investments in social infrastructure are shaped by a mix of economic and demographic conditions, political priorities, natural disasters, and federal aid. There is no one-size-fits-all formula, but understanding these factors can help local and state leaders make smarter, more resilient choices. Ultimately, prioritizing social infrastructure is an investment in people, neighborhoods, and the future of our communities.

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. Aisha Ahmadu](#). To explore the full findings and methodology behind this study, you can read the article:

Ahmadu, A. S., & Nukpezah, J. A. (2025). Determinants of Social Infrastructure Spending Among U.S. States. *Public Works Management & Policy*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1087724X251341924>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Aisha Ahmadu joined the MPA Program in August 2022. Her research interests focus on disaster science, resource allocation, public finance, and federalism, and she has published articles in *Public Administration Review*, the *American Review of Public Administration*, *Public Administration Quarterly*, *International Journal of Public Administration*, and the *Encyclopedia of Public Administration*, *Public Policy*, and *Governance*. She currently serves on the editorial board of *Public Integrity*.

RECENT MPA GRADUATES

[Spring 2025]

Beasley, Jantsen O.

Clark, Daniel G.

Clark, Ryan W.

Drewry, Keith E.

Hays, Vincent C.

Perez, Daniel

Reyes, Jaime

Skarpa, Miranda A.

Williams, Brandon D.



ALUMNI & STUDENT UPDATES

John Buchanan (MPA '18)

An eight-year U.S. Air Force veteran and former freight conductor for Union Pacific Railroad. John currently resides in the San Antonio area and is seeking opportunities to build a career in the public sector. He has a strong interest in Emergency Management and is eager to connect with alumni. Feel free to reach out to him via [LinkedIn](#).

Kyle Taylor (MPA '18)

Named the 2024 Fire Chief of the Year by the Texas Fire Chiefs Association. This peer-nominated award honors his outstanding leadership and decades of service. Since 2013, he's guided the Kyle Fire Department through major growth while prioritizing safety and community.

Khenley Harvell (MPA '22)

Serves as the Emergency Management and Business Continuity Coordinator for San Jacinto College in Houston, TX. Her office offers internship opportunities. Individuals interested can contact her at Khenley.Harvell@sjcd.edu.

Gary Ashmore (MPA '24)

Accepted a position as an Adjunct Instructor with Lamar State College Orange, where he will begin teaching in Fall 2025 at the TSUS Polk County Center. He will lead courses in business, government, and finance, drawing on 40 years of experience in leadership across business, public administration, and military service. He will continue serving as General Manager of the Lower Trinity Groundwater Conservation District, while also holding leadership roles with several community-based nonprofits.

Cindy Lawson (MPA '24)

Licensed clinical social worker and therapist, authorized to practice in Texas, Washington, South Dakota, and Iowa. She specializes in trauma and resilience and recently launched a virtual mental health practice serving clients across these states, including first responders, law enforcement officers, and military personnel. In addition to her private practice, Cindy is dedicated to community service and is open to volunteering for mental health or crisis response efforts in Texas. If you would like to connect with Cindy or learn more about her work, feel free to reach out via 605-650-2064.

Jason Peacock (MPA '24)

Stepped into his new role as Chief of Police for Gainesville ISD in April 2025. Over the past three years, he served as a school-based officer and played a key role in establishing the Pilot Point ISD Police Department. He began his public safety career in 2002 with the Highland Park Department of Public Safety, where he served as a police officer, firefighter, and paramedic for 20 years before retiring.

FACULTY UPDATES



Aisha S. Ahmadu, PhD

Dr. Ahmadu's research explores disaster science, public budgeting, infrastructure, and federalism. She is currently leading a grant-funded project at SHSU to examine factors affecting property loss during disasters. The study aims to inform policies that mitigate disaster impacts, enhance community resilience, and reduce social vulnerability. Recently, Dr. Ahmadu published an article in *Public Integrity* titled "Democracy, Freedom, and Budget Transparency: A Multinational Analysis." The study highlights the critical role of democracy and freedom, such as disclosure, free speech, and citizen participation, in promoting budget transparency.



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 specializes in disaster resilience and government-society relations, focusing on democratic administration, accountability, and bureaucratic responsibility. He teaches courses in Public Management, Human Resource Management, Governing Complex Policy Problems, and Public Administration. His current work includes a series of articles exploring the concept of the deep state, with one article under review and several others in progress.



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 December 2025. Submit content to Dr. Wang (wjwang@shsu.edu) by November 15, 2025.



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