



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
School of Public Affairs
and Administration



Annual Report

2025-2026

Message from the Dean



Dear colleagues, students, alumni, and friends of SPAA,

The 2025–2026 academic year was a milestone year for the School of Public Affairs and Administration as we celebrated 50 years of public service education at Rutgers–Newark. Reconnecting with generations of alumni, faculty, staff, and partners reaffirmed the principle that has guided us for five decades: public leadership should welcome everyone, prepare everyone, and serve everyone.

This year, that commitment took new forms. We launched the Next Generation Leadership Academy, expanded community partnerships across Newark and New Jersey, hosted the 25th Social Equity Leadership Conference, and created new venues for student civic engagement. Across our programs and initiatives, SPAA remains a place where rigorous scholarship, ethical practice, and community engagement come together.

Our faculty and students continued to distinguish themselves. They earned national fellowships, major research honors, and leadership roles in professional associations, demonstrating the reach and impact of our academic community. We also celebrated important faculty promotions and welcomed outstanding new colleagues who will further strengthen our research and teaching.

These accomplishments belong to the entire SPAA community. I want to express my deepest gratitude to our faculty, staff, students, alumni, and community partners. Your dedication makes SPAA's mission possible.

As we begin our next 50 years, our responsibility is not simply to preserve a proud legacy, but to build on it. The challenges facing government, nonprofit organizations, and communities are changing rapidly. We remain focused on preparing leaders who act with integrity, bridge divides, and turn knowledge into meaningful public impact.

I look forward to what we will accomplish together.

Kaifeng Yang, PhD

Dean & Professor

Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA)

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ON THE COVER

Rutgers-Newark’s Next Generation Leadership Program, established by Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA), seeks to inspire and prepare students to serve their communities and the nation by building practical, collaborative leadership skills.

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50 YEARS OF PUBLIC SERVICE EXCELLENCE

SPAA Celebrates a Milestone Anniversary

SPAA alumni, faculty, staff, and students representing five decades gathered to celebrate, reconnect, and look ahead at a reception on Dec. 4, 2025, in honor of SPAA's 50 years of preparing public service leaders for excellence — the first Master of Public Administration students started at Rutgers-Newark in January 1975. Distinguished speakers representing the school's past, present, and future spoke to SPAA's ongoing impact, and the school's legacy of service.

Dean Kaifeng Yang — himself an alumnus of SPAA having earned his PhD in 2003 — noted that from the beginning, the school has championed access to public service education and practice regardless of background. He described that belief as being a part of the school's legacy: “public service should be accessible to everyone and public leadership should be possible for everybody, and this is what SPAA is recognized for nationally and internationally,” he said.

Rutgers University–Newark Chancellor Tonya Smith-Jackson offered congratulations and noted SPAA's contributions in her remarks, and Shante Palmer, vice chancellor for external and governmental relations at RU-N, shared her personal connection to SPAA as an alumna.

The evening concluded with James Blaney Jr., chief of staff for the City of Newark, NJ and SPAA Alumni Network (SPAAAN) president, presenting two resolutions from the City of Newark's Municipal Council, one to SPAA MPA alumna Ana Olivera for her assistance with SPAAAN, and the other to SPAA to commemorate the school's 50th anniversary.

The reception was the culmination of a year-long celebration during which Rutgers SPAA hosted a series of commemorative events designed to bring together students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the surrounding communities to mark this milestone occasion.



Rutgers SPAA's deans (L to R): Charles Menifield (2017-2022); Marc Holzer (2006-2016); and Kaifeng Yang (since 2024).



Rutgers University–Newark Chancellor Tonya Smith-Jackson.

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS & ADMINISTRATION

CELEBRATING

50Years
OF EXCELLENCE IN PUBLIC SERVICE

SPAA Honors the Class of 2026

On Thursday, May 21, 2026, School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) graduates were honored and recognized as part of Rutgers University–Newark’s 2026 Commencement held at the Prudential Center in Newark, NJ. Jonathan T. Capehart, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, author, and co-anchor of “The Weekend,” delivered the commencement address.



Dean Kaifeng Yang delivered video remarks prior to the ceremony’s start, in which he stated the desire for graduates to be impactful. “But that impact, it’s not only about what they do, it’s also about how they lead,” he said. “We want them to lead with a big heart. A heart filled with equity, a commitment to service, and guided by integrity.”

SPAA Assistant Professor of Professional Practice Briana Huett carried the gonfalon for the school in the processional. Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration graduate Karen Perez was featured as a graduating student of SPAA following the dean’s conferring of degrees.

Preceding the university commencement ceremony, SPAA held a 2026 Graduation Celebration on May 15, where this year’s graduates, inductees into the national honor society for public administration, Pi Alpha Alpha, and the 2026 SPAA Award winners were honored. The keynote speaker was Richard W. Roper, a public policy consultant who has held senior level positions in local, state, regional, and federal government agencies and has had experience in nonprofit organizations, private consulting and in academic research, teaching, and administration.

“You can make a difference if you elect to get in the fray and offer support to those who demonstrate a deep concern about our nation’s future,” said Roper. “Hopefully, what you choose to do will help make America a better place than it’s ever been before.”

A PhD Hooding Ceremony was hosted by the RU-N Graduate School on May 20. Seven PhD students from SPAA graduated as part of the class of 2026.



2026 SPAA AWARDS

Outstanding BA Student Award

- Karen Perez (BA’26)

Outstanding MPA Student Award

- Michael McCarty (MPA’25)
- Sidra Razzaq (MPA’26)

Outstanding PhD Student Award

- Nicolás Lagos (PhD’26)
- Ying Liu (PhD’26)

E. Drexel Godfrey Award

- Jill Segulin (MPA’26)
- George Zapata (MPA’26)

SPAA Faculty Teaching Award

- Suzanne J. Piotrowski

SPAA Faculty Service Award

- Diego Galego

Distinguished Alumni Award for Practitioner Excellence

- Amina Bey (MPA’13)

Distinguished Alumni Award for Academic Excellence

- Patria de Lancer Julnes (PhD’97)

Sharon Stroye SPAA Community Engagement Award

- Richard W. Roper

Gail Daniels SPAA Staff Award

- Shonda Levine-Ouji

Dean’s Public Service Award

- Steven Paul Sala

FACULTY UPDATES



Ricardo Bello-Gomez was promoted to associate professor, after joining SPAA as a full-time faculty member in Fall 2023. He studies public management, intergovernmental relations, and comparative public administration. His

overall research agenda explores the institutional, organizational, and individual factors affecting government performance as well as executive and citizens' perceptions, often focusing on the provision of social services in Latin America.



Michael Dillard was promoted to associate teaching professor. He joined SPAA as a full-time faculty member in Fall 2019 after actively serving and teaching for Rutgers SPAA since he earned his MPA from the school in 2010.

At SPAA, he has been dedicated to the success of the school's BA program, having served as its director and regularly engaging with undergraduate students. His research interests center around non-traditional students, particularly which services and programs are being created that enable them to thrive.



Anneliese Luck joined the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) at Rutgers University–Newark as an assistant professor starting in Fall 2026. A demographer and social epidemiologist, she studies the political and

policy contexts of spatial, racial, and demographic inequalities in population health and mortality — specifically, how health systems, policy environments, and political regimes produce divergent health and mortality outcomes across axes of social stratification, such as race, nativity, sex, and age.



Raúl Gutiérrez Meave joined the School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) at Rutgers University–Newark as an assistant professor starting in Fall 2026. His research examines local governance and urban policy,

with a particular focus on how governments and other actors address shared problems across organizational and jurisdictional boundaries. His work also explores how intergovernmental collaboration, institutional design, and network governance shape the provision of public services, alongside broader questions of urban policy and local government management.



SPAA's New Magazine Builds Community Bridges Across Rutgers-Newark and Beyond

SPAA launched *BRIDGES*, a new magazine that showcases the breadth and depth of civically engaged research, teaching, and practice across the Rutgers-Newark campus and its impact within the Newark community. The magazine aims to help grow new partnerships, strengthen existing ones, and translate the lessons of engagement into richer learning experiences for Rutgers students. By highlighting student activities and offering resources to support their initiatives, the goal is to help them not only to succeed professionally, but to serve as active, thoughtful, and responsible citizens and community partners.

BRIDGES is published by Rutgers School of Public Affairs and Administration (SPAA) with support from the school's Office of Community Engagement and Office of Communications, and is sponsored by the RU-N Chancellor's Office. The magazine welcomes stories, data, insights, reflections, and details about collaborative projects that reflect the spirit of public service and personal responsibility so that they may be highlighted in the publication.

To view issues, visit:

<https://spaa.newark.rutgers.edu/bridges-magazine>

Empowering the Next Generation of Public Leaders at Rutgers-Newark

SPAA Establishes NextGen Leadership Academy for Undergraduates

To better prepare the next generation of public-facing leaders across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors, Rutgers SPAA has established the Next Generation (NextGen) Leadership Academy, a multi-year undergraduate leadership development program, at Rutgers-Newark.



Led by Briana Huett, assistant professor of professional practice at SPAA, the program launched in Fall 2025 with 11 students from across the Newark campus participating in the inaugural cohort. NextGen Leadership joins a national network of 28 universities across 21 states that seeks to inspire and prepare students to serve their communities and the nation by building practical, collaborative leadership skills. Created by the Volcker Alliance, the network currently involves over 1,500 students (and over 950 alumni) who engage in cross-university peer networking; exclusive government, nonprofit, and private internships; and national programming.

While part of this network, the NextGen Leadership program at SPAA is tailored specifically to RU-N students and the Newark community. Students from all majors experience the program as a cohort, where together they engage in exclusive programming focused on exposing them to current community challenges from different stakeholder perspectives, as well as successful and ongoing cross-sector collaborations between Newark and New Jersey government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies.

Through these experiences — coupled with those offered through the national NextGen network — participating students learn to identify and develop leadership skills necessary for creating collaborative solutions, all while being mentored by effective community leaders to help prepare them for their future careers.



RU-N NextGen students participate in a regional event dedicated to connection, collaboration, and professional growth organized by the Volcker Alliance's Next Generation Service Corps and hosted by the Moynihan Center at the City College of New York in Harlem, for students from four NextGen programs across New York and New Jersey.

SPAA and New Jersey Black Women's Collective Partner on Leadership Cohort

The New Jersey Black Women's Collective (NJBWC), in partnership with SPAA, launched the inaugural Leadership Institute cohort at Rutgers-Newark in Spring 2026. The four-month executive leadership experience is designed to support, prepare, and advance Black women leaders committed to serving New Jersey with vision, integrity, and sustainable impact. The goal of the Leadership Institute is to propel participants to the next level. Sessions cover topics such as "Think Like a CFO," "Marketing You," and "Little P on Politics," designed to equip participants with practical skills and insights. Additionally, the cohort includes dedicated coaching sessions to further support personal and professional growth.

The launch was marked with an event at Newark Symphony Hall where NJ Assemblywoman Tennille McCoy, co-founder of NJBWC and chair of the Leadership Institute, shared the mission of NJBWC and Kaifeng Yang spoke on the importance of the partnership. Hanifa Barnes and Kim Brooks, both co-founders of NJBWC and co-chairs of NJBWC Newark, gave an overview of the cohort's objectives, goals, and the importance of collective leadership, and Melody Fogarty and Rita Williams-Bogar introduced themselves as the cohort facilitators. Guest speaker Talia Young, CEO of Newark Symphony Hall, provided insights on leadership and community engagement, her journey, and advice for the cohort.



Kaifeng Yang, dean of Rutgers SPAA (L), and Tennille R. McCoy, co-founder and chair, NJBWC Leadership Institute.

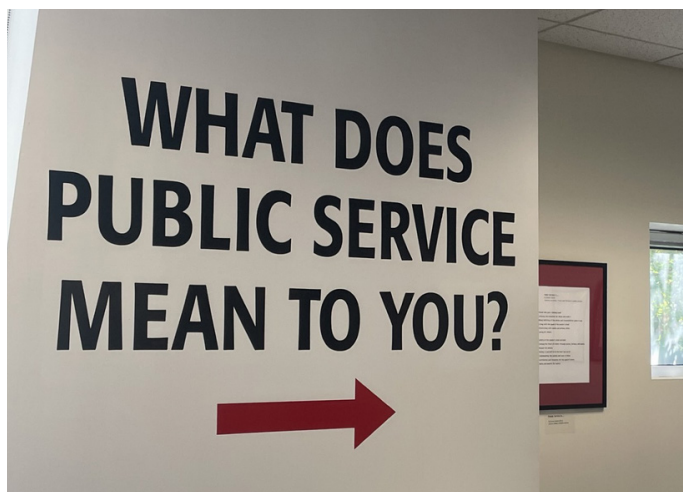


Exhibit Opening: The Voices and Visions of Emerging Public Leaders

An exhibit showcasing the 'poetic voices and visions' of students from the course "The Arts and Culture of Public Service" (2017-2025) opened in the SPAA building in Fall 2025. The poems stand as a testament to the profound impact of public service, ethical leadership, and community care.

The exhibit is funded by a Rutgers University Cultural Programming Grant led by Lois Warner, associate teaching professor at Rutgers SPAA, and instructor for the course.

SPAA Co-Hosts SELC 2026 at Rutgers-Newark as it Marks 25 Years

The 2026 Social Equity Leadership Conference took place from May 28–30, 2026, at Rutgers-Newark, and marked its milestone 25th anniversary with a celebration reception. Co-hosted by SPAA, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (CUNY), and the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Standing Panel on Social Equity in Governance, the theme was “Leading and Learning Toward a Future for All.”

Six tracks focused on areas including public and nonprofit leadership, civil rights, higher education challenges, federal policy impacts, artificial intelligence and data evidence, and global human rights.

Marilyn Rubin, distinguished research fellow at Rutgers SPAA, served as conference co-chair along with Jason Rivera, professor at John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Held annually, SELC brings practitioners, scholars, public servants, policymakers and students together to advance social equity policies and initiatives.



Celebrating the 25th anniversary of SELC (L to R): James-Christian Blockwood, president and CEO, NAPA; Marilyn Rubin, distinguished research fellow, Rutgers SPAA; Kaifeng Yang, dean, Rutgers SPAA; and Jason Rivera, professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.



RU-N Debate Continues Its Legacy of Excellence, Equity, and Civic Engagement

During the 2025–2026 season, the RU-N Debate Team remained active across multiple formats, including British Parliamentary, International Public Debate Association (IPDA), and interpretive events, competing nationally and internationally. Students represented Rutgers-Newark at tournaments such as Hart House at the University of Toronto, Sunset Classics at Point Loma, Louisiana State University, and the University of Rochester, as well as participating in Yaatl Online Debate League (YODL) debates and international competitions, such as the annual Mlimani Open Debate Championship in Tanzania.



The team earned a Top 2 finish in IPDA and a Top 8 placement overall at Sunset Classics, placed 3rd overall in IPDA at LSU, and received top speaker awards at the Brad Smith Memorial. At the International Forensics Association Championship in Athens, Greece, Rutgers debaters earned 2nd and 3rd overall speaker in British Parliamentary, advanced to elimination rounds in IPDA, and reached the semifinals in dramatic interpretation.

Alongside competition, the team continued to take on a leadership role within the activity itself and contribute to the broader debate community. In addition to outreach activities, the team hosted various events, including the “Brick-City” Round Robin and the Social Justice Debates, bringing together top debaters and programs.

The debate team proudly hosted the Social Justice Debates on Oct. 11-12, 2025, at RU-N, bringing together students, faculty, and community members for a spirited exchange of ideas between SPAA and the Center for Legal Justice. The debate topic focused on whether the United States should constitutionalize the right to vote. Teams from the University of Vermont (UVM), Morehouse College, Rochester University, Patrick Henry College, Pepperdine University, and Penn State University joined the conversation. In partnership with NJPIRG Rutgers-Newark, the debate team coordinated a voter registration drive. Led by debate team members Julie Jang and Geetika Doshi, both of whom are members of NJPIRG, the initiative provided participants and community members with the opportunity not only to debate the right to vote but also to take tangible steps toward exercising that right in the upcoming election. Jhamar Youngblood, a Newark native, community leader, and scholar with a background in Globalization Studies, served as the expert judge.

The team also hosted the Newark Invitational Public Forum Debate Tournament, advancing the debate team’s commitment to strengthening educational pipelines and expanding access to higher education opportunities. The event welcomed hundreds of middle and high school students from across the nation, bringing diverse young scholars, educators, coaches, and families to the Rutgers-Newark campus, introducing them to the vibrant Newark community.



Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development Hosts Evening of Film and Dialogue on “Reimagining Democracy”



The Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development hosted an evening of film and dialogue for “Reimagining Democracy: Justice, Reentry & Community Voice Through Film” at Express Newark at Rutgers University–Newark on April 15.

Writer, producer, and director Kiara C Jones (Cultivated Films, LLC) and Christopher Agans, executive director at the New Jersey Scholarship and Transformative Education in Prisons program (NJ STEP), shared their insights following the screening of “A Woman on the Outside,” a film that follows Kristal Bush, a young woman in Philadelphia who saw nearly every man in her life disappear to prison.

SPAA Hosts Workshop on Advancing Equity for LGBTQ+ Communities

SPAA hosted a dynamic and timely conversation on advocacy, public policy, and advancing equity for LGBTQ+ communities on April 8. The workshop brought together practitioners and scholars to examine how public institutions, including universities, have historically marginalized LGBTQ+ communities, and how we can work toward meaningful, systemic change.

Featured speakers included Diego Galego, assistant professor at Rutgers SPAA; Kareem Willis (BA’16, MPA’17, PhD’22), Rutgers SPAA’s first triple alum and social impact architect; and Brielle Winslow-Majette, acting executive director at Garden State Equality. Cleopatra Charles, associate professor at Rutgers SPAA, served as the moderator. Some of the most impactful takeaways from the discussion included:

- Advocacy is deeply personal and many leaders are driven by lived experiences and a commitment to community
- There is still a significant disconnect between policy design and the realities faced by LGBTQ+ communities
- Intersectionality is NOT optional. It must be central to how we design inclusive systems
- Meaningful change requires sustained and intentional action



Accolades



Lindsey McDougle was announced as president-elect of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA).



Suzanne Piotrowski was elected to the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) as a member of its 2025 Class of Academy Fellows.

SPAA FACULTY

Jin Ai received a Rutgers-Newark's Chancellor's Office Seed Grant.

Ricardo Bello-Gomez received a 2026 Rutgers Global Grant, and was selected to participate in two national leadership development initiatives for academic year 2026-2027: the NASPAA NEXT cohort and the Volcker Alliance's Future Leaders of Schools of Public Service program.

Cleopatra Charles received the 2025 Best Innovative Teaching Method Award from the European Network on Cultural Management and Policy (ENCATC).

Diane Hill received the 2026 James Spellman Community Service Award from the New Jersey Chapter of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), and was honored by the Zonta Club of Essex County during its annual scholarship awards tea and honors celebration.



Cleopatra Charles (L) receives ENCATC's 2025 Best Innovative Teaching Method Award from Maria Feliu, vice-rector of University of Barcelona.

Gregory Porumbescu was awarded a stipend from the Accountability and Reform Research Consortium (ARRC), and received a 2026 JPART Outstanding Reviewer Award.

Pengju Zhang joined the editorial team of *Local Government Studies* as an editor.

PHD STUDENTS

Tong Chen was selected as a 2025 Equity & Inclusion Fellowship recipient by the Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (APPAM).

Canyu Gao was selected as an American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Founders' Fellow as part of the Class of 2026.

Nicolás Lagos was awarded the 2025 Aramco Internal Audit Dissertation Scholarship, established by the Internal Audit Foundation of The Institute of Internal Auditors.

Vageesha Sharma was selected for the 2026 ARNOVA Graduate Diversity Scholars and Leaders Program.

Tomás Soto-Jara was selected as a 2026 American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) Founders' Fellow, and was selected as a Mercatus Fellow at the Mercatus Center at George Mason University for the 2026–2027 academic year.

MPA STUDENTS

George Zapata received the 2025 Sheila Oliver Service Award from the New Jersey Municipal Management Association (NJMMA), and a 2026 Public Administration Student Achievement Award from the New Jersey Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (NJ ASPA).

PHD GRADUATE JOB PLACEMENTS & POSITIONS



Monica Aldea-Espinoza
Adjunct Instructor,
Kennesaw State University

Aldea-Espinoza's research interests include state modernization, social equity and justice, and the organizational conditions that support effective and responsive governance.



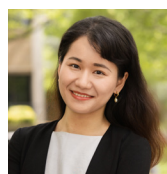
Valentine Lamar
Postdoctoral Associate,
Rutgers Institute for Data, Research
and Innovation (IDRIS)

Lamar's research interests include corruption, governance, institutional development, citizen engagement, and public policy.



Tong Chen
Postdoctoral Researcher,
City University of Hong Kong

Chen's research is centered on systematically analyzing and quantifying large-scale unstructured text data, and covers integrity and accountability, nonprofit social media communication, and AI governance.



Ying Liu
Assistant Professor,
University of Rhode Island

Liu's research interests include public and nonprofit management, social equity, local governance, digital government, and accountability. Committed to mainstreaming gender issues in public and nonprofit administration, she is currently exploring topics such as women's representation, gender-responsive budgeting, gender discrimination, gender and technology, and women's nonprofit organizations.



Zachary Curinga
Part-time Lecturer,
Rutgers School of Public Affairs and
Administration

Curinga's research interests focus on organizational change, nonprofit management, disability equity, and administrative law. His research has been published in *Administration & Society*.



Vishal Trehan
Postdoctoral Associate,
Rutgers Institute for Data, Research
and Innovation (IDRIS)

Trehan's research focuses on improving governance and decision-making through the use of information and communications technology. His previous experience includes working as a research fellow at the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy in India and as a consultant in the information technology services sector.



Md Shahidulla Kaiser
Associate Professor,
University of Chittagong

Kaiser's research interests lie in the fields of global development cooperation, nonprofit management and governance, human rights, and social inclusion.



Nicolás Lagos
Assistant Professor,
Boise State University

Lagos's research examines how automation and artificial intelligence are transforming public auditing and anti-corruption oversight, with a focus on discretion, legitimacy, and public management reforms.



Jinah Yoo
Assistant Professor,
Lamar University

Yoo's research focuses on public management, including performance management, citizen-state interactions, and local government management. She is committed to enhancing the social and democratic accountability of public service delivery through effective public management.

Alumni Highlights

SPAA Alumni Participate in Fall Weekend of Service

SPAA alumni and friends spent a meaningful weekend celebrating service on Oct. 18-19, 2025. It started with a morning of giving back at the Community FoodBank of New Jersey in Hillside, NJ on Saturday, where volunteers helped fight food insecurity in the state by sorting and packing essentials for families in need.

The weekend closed out with heart and hope at the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk on Sunday morning in Newark, NJ. Together, alumni walked in unity, in memory, and in support — raising awareness and standing strong for those affected by breast cancer.



SPAA alumni and friends at the Making Strides Against Breast Cancer Walk.

SPAA Community Gathers at Rutgers-Newark for Homecoming 2025

SPAA alumni, faculty, and staff came to Rutgers-Newark for the first Homecoming celebration held at the campus in 10 years.



SPAA family meet with Tonya Smith-Jackson, the new chancellor of RU-N, at Homecoming 2025.





Amina Bey (MPA'13) was awarded SPAA's 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award for Practitioner Excellence, for outstanding achievement in public administration and public service through applied practice in the field. Bey has spent her entire life in public service, building a career rooted in expanding opportunity, strengthening communities, and delivering resources to those most in need.



Patria de Lancer Julnes (PhD'97) was awarded SPAA's 2026 Distinguished Alumni Award for Academic Excellence, for outstanding contributions to the intellectual, theoretical, and institutional advancement of public administration. She is an internationally recognized scholar in performance measurement and the first woman to graduate from Rutgers with a PhD in public administration.

SPAA Alumni Recognized with Awards from NJ ASPA and NJMMA



Jillian Barrick (MPA'14) was presented with the Outgoing President Award, having finished her term as president of the New Jersey Municipal Management Association (NJMMA). Barrick has been the business administrator for Morristown, NJ since 2015.

Corey Gallo (MPA'96), administrator of the Borough of Bergenfield, NJ, received the 2025 Outstanding Manager Award from NJMMA.

Stephen Marks, an MPA alumnus, was honored with the 2026 Public Service Award in a Government Organization from the New Jersey Chapter of the American Society for Public Administration (NJ ASPA) for his exemplary service as the township administrator of Montclair.

Above, (L to R) Corey Gallo (MPA'96) and Kaifeng Yang, and right, Jillian Barrick (MPA'14), at the NJMMA awards ceremony.

Far right, (L to R) Kaifeng Yang; MPA alumnus Stephen Marks; MPA student George Zapata; and Lois Warner, associate teaching professor, Rutgers SPAA, at the NJ ASPA awards ceremony.



SPAA Launches Policy & Impact Brief Series to Highlight Research Insights

Public Administration is, at its heart, a practical field. If research isn't reaching the hands of nonprofit directors, city managers, and business leaders, then faculty's work isn't finished. Through this series, SPAA's goal is to translate complex data into actionable insights for the wider community.

To read past and upcoming briefs, visit:
<https://go.rutgers.edu/spaa-briefs>

When Democracy Weakens, Fair Government Follows

We often focus on the visible parts of democracy — elections, campaigns, and political debates. But the real strength of democratic governance lies in something quieter: the professional civil servants who implement laws and deliver public services. New research from **Ricardo Bello-Gomez** examines 85 countries over more than two decades (1996–2022) and finds that when democratic institutions weaken, the professional foundations of government begin to erode as well. Specifically, democratic backsliding is associated with declines in merit-based hiring and impartial decision-making in public administration. Attempting to align public officials with their specific policy agenda, political leaders with authoritarian aims target and weaken public administration.

When City Workers Pick Up Their Phones, Underserved Neighborhoods Benefit

Every city wants its digital service app to work for everyone. Few actually do. Residents with less internet access, less digital literacy, and less faith in government are consistently the least likely to report problems — which means their neighborhoods get less attention. New research from **Gregory Porumbescu** points to an unexpected fix in Newark: frontline workers. Given flexible tools and a clear signal from leadership, they stepped in where residents couldn't — and the city's most underserved neighborhoods were better off for it.



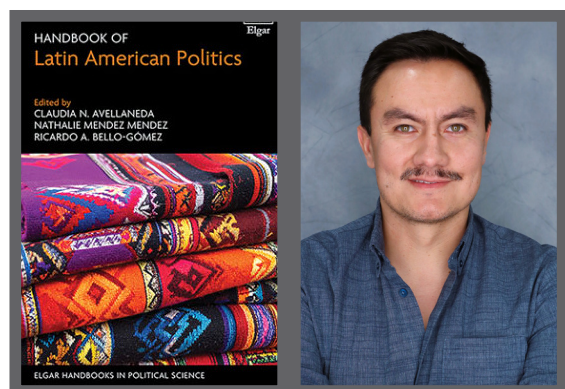
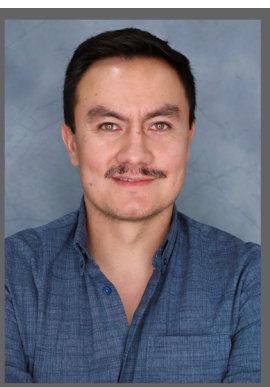
When Social Movements Meet Their Moment: How LGBTQ+ Rights Get Made

New research from **Diego Galego** shows how LGBTQ+ rights advance more where collective action meets political opportunity. How do marginalized communities win rights in political systems built to exclude them — and how do they hold onto those rights once won? Galego's new book takes up that question with his "queering process framework," testing it against 101 LGBTQ+ rights decisions in Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States from 1831 to 2024. The puzzle driving the book: even where decriminalization came early, legal change has rarely guaranteed safety or acceptance in everyday life for queer individuals.

Women Enter Public Service Sooner, But They Don't Usually Stay Longer

New research from **Tiana Marrese** tests that assumption by watching early career decisions unfold rather than counting heads. Following a cohort of millennials from adolescence through 2019, the study separates two distinct decisions: the choice to take a job in a sector and the choice to stay in the job.

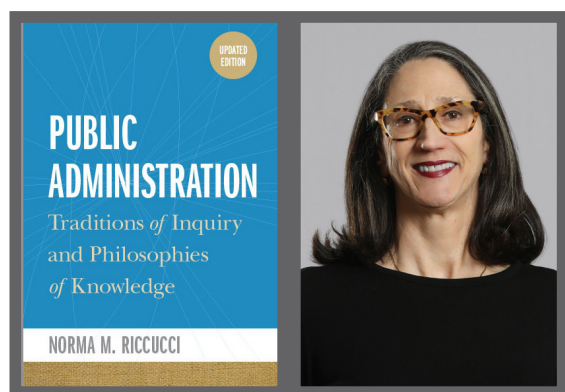
FACULTY BOOKS



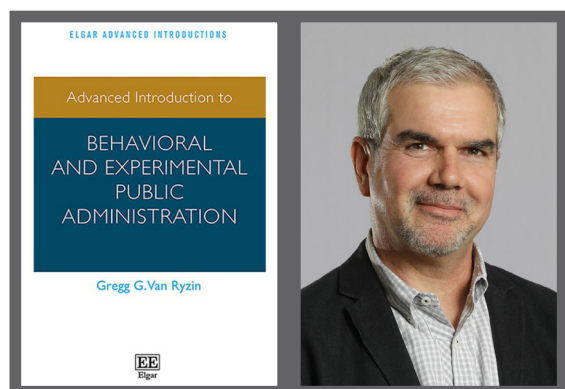
Ricardo Bello-Gomez co-edited a new book, *Handbook of Latin American Politics* (Edward Elgar Publishing), which provides a timely and comprehensive exploration of the evolving actors, challenges, institutions and dynamics shaping governance and democracy in contemporary Latin America. With over 70 entries by leading scholars, it examines the interplay of social movements, political elites, civil society, state institutions, and international participants, revealing both the promise and perils of democratic and institutional development in Latin America.



Diego Galego published *Queering Public Policy: A Disruptive Yet Inclusive Framework for Policymaking* (Palgrave Macmillan, Palgrave Pivot). Drawing on research conducted across four countries — Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and the United States — the book offers a rigorous, data-informed analysis of how LGBTQ+ actors have transformed the global policy agenda. It presents a systematic framework for understanding queering as a policy process, with implications for scholars, practitioners, and advocates working at the intersection of identity, governance, and public administration.



Norma Riccucci released an updated version of her award-winning classic, *Public Administration, Traditions of Inquiry and Philosophies of Knowledge* (Georgetown University Press). It examines the intellectual origins and identity of the discipline, the debates surrounding its diverse research traditions, and how public administration research is conducted today. The book intends to engage scholars, graduate students, and professionals in a dialogue about heterogeneity in epistemic traditions, and to deepen the field's understanding and acceptance of its epistemological scope.

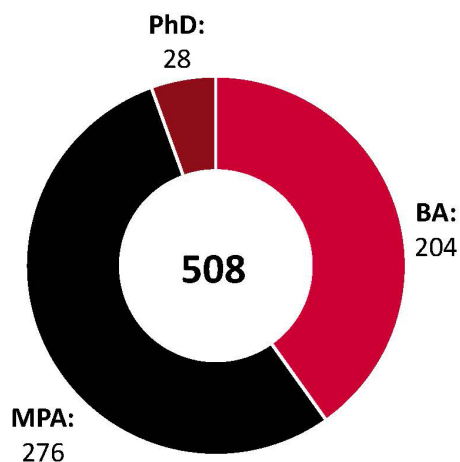


Gregg Van Ryzin published *Advanced Introduction to Behavioral and Experimental Public Administration* (Edward Elgar Publishing), which explores key ideas, methods, practices, and prospects in the growing subfield of behavioral and experimental public administration (BEPA). In addition to investigating the intellectual history of BEPA, the publication demonstrates the essential role of experimental design and logic in addressing emerging challenges in public policy and administration, serving as a useful resource for those seeking an overview of behavioral theory and experimental methods as applied to public management.

SPAA STUDENTS BY THE NUMBERS

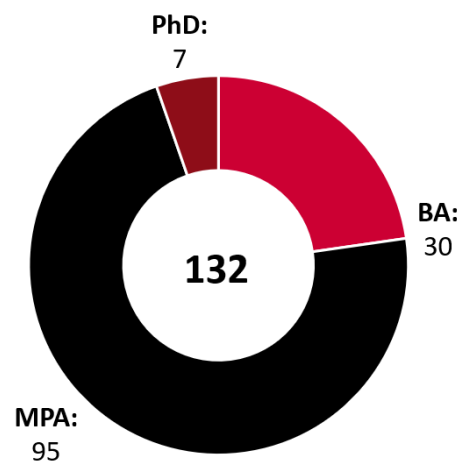
Enrolled Students

FALL 2025



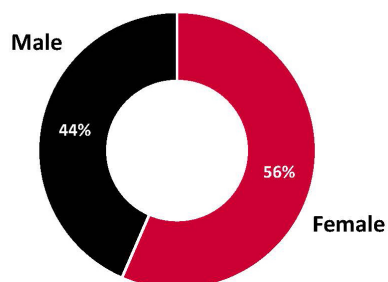
Degrees Conferred

ACADEMIC YEAR 2025-2026



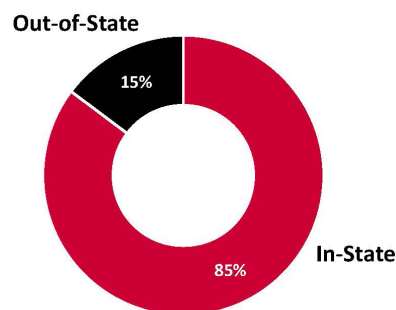
Enrollment by Stated Gender

BASED ON FALL 2025 ENROLLMENT ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS



Enrollment by NJ State Residency

BASED ON FALL 2025 ENROLLMENT ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS



Enrollment by Stated Ethnicity

BASED ON FALL 2025 ENROLLMENT ACROSS ALL PROGRAMS

African American	27%
Hispanic	26%
White	22%
Asian	12%
Unknown/No Response	9%
Biracial	3%

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Undergraduate

- Major in Public Administration (BA)
- Minor in Public Administration
- Minor in Public Leadership
- Minor in Public Policy
- Second Concentration: Accelerated MPA
- NextGen Leadership Academy

Master Programs

- Master of Public Administration (MPA):
Public Management or Nonprofit Management
- Online Executive Master of Public Administration (EMPA)
- Accelerated Master of Public Administration (BA or BS/MPA)
- MPA Fast Track Program

Doctoral

- PhD in Public Administration

Dual Degrees

- Juris Doctor/Master of Public Administration (JD/MPA)
- Master of Arts in Criminal Justice/Master of Public Administration (MA/MPA)
- Master of Public Administration/Master of Accountancy in Governmental Accounting (MPA/MACC)

Certificates

- State of NJ Certified Public Manager® Program (CPM)
- AI Governance and Policy
- Appreciative Inquiry for Strength-Based Leadership and Innovation in Public and Nonprofit Sectors (Ai)
- Budgeting and Financial Management
- Healthcare Administration
- Diversity and Inclusion in the Workplace
- Leadership and No-Blame Problem Solving
- Leadership of Public Organizations
- Nonprofit Management
- Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies (undergraduate)
- Public Leadership (undergraduate)
- Public Policy (undergraduate)
- Public Sector Labor-Management Relations
- Social Entrepreneurship



RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
**School of Public Affairs
and Administration**



#8 in Public Management and Leadership
#8 in Nonprofit Management
#9 in Urban Policy
#14 in Local Government Management
#19 in Public Finance and Budgeting
#25 in Best Public Affairs Programs
#36 in Public Policy Analysis

U.S. News & World Report (2026)



**SHANGHAI
RANKING**

#1 in the Nation
#6 worldwide
in Public Administration

*Global Ranking of
Academic Subjects (2026)*

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**NASPAA
ACCREDITED**

*The Commission on Peer
Review & Accreditation*

CENTERS, INSTITUTES & LABS

- Center for Applied Appreciative Inquiry (CAAI)
Director: James Davy
- Center for Health Excellence and Community Empowerment (CHECE)
Director: Diane Hill
- Lab for Experimental and Behavioral Public Administration (L-EBPA)
Director: Gregg Van Ryzin
- New Jersey State Policy Lab (NJSPL)
Academic Director: Gregory Porumbescu
- Rutgers Institute on Anti-Corruption Studies (RIACS)
Director: Yahong Zhang
- Rutgers Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Development (CNLD)
Director: Lindsey McDougale
- Transparency and Governance Center (TGC)
Director: Suzanne Piotrowski



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