



One School: Faculty and Staff Making a Difference

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It is difficult to keep up with everything happening at the School. In theory I am supposed to know about all of it. Good luck with that. This post covers a mix of things that have come across my radar screen since my last post, including a couple of items from my last round of Faculty Lunches with the Dean.

MPA Program and Rankings from *U.S. News & World Report*. Most of the School's work is not subject to formal rankings by an external organization. Faculty members have close relationships with groups of North Carolina public officials and there is regular feedback on whether we are meeting their needs. The MPA Program is different because it is ranked annually by *U.S. News & World Report*. [This year's ranking](#) brought welcome news. The program rose in the overall public affairs rankings from 25th to 23rd, and from 5th to 3rd in the local government management specialty ranking.



In fact, our MPA Program should be ranked 1st because it does the best job of preparing students for professional careers in public service. You might ask if I have conducted a comprehensive review of all other programs, and I have not. I do have a theory to support my claim, however. Our faculty understand public administration research and theory as well as faculty teaching in other MPA programs. And they publish extensively in peer-reviewed journals. In addition, however, their regular work with North Carolina officials allows them to combine theory and practice in a way that distinguishes them from all other MPA faculty members. In addition to informing their research, the work with officials also allows them to combine theory and practice as they teach our students to be excellent public service leaders. No other program can make that claim. Our program should be ranked 1st, and it would be if *U.S. News* thought more carefully about the rankings criteria. Or if they just talked to me. Kudos to all of our faculty and staff who work incredibly hard to support the MPA Program.



Alecia Matthews

Staff Retreat. Alecia Matthews, my irrepressible executive assistant, provided wonderful leadership in developing a retreat for many of the School's professional staff members in non-supervisory roles. She conducted a survey to see if they wanted such an opportunity, as well as what topics might be included on a program. The topic that generated the most interest was career development. The retreat was held at Hyatt Place in Chapel Hill on April 6 and by all accounts it was a great success. One session was focused on managing your career—investing in your professional development and recognizing your value. Another session addressed internal collaboration (improving customer service) and personal wellness (coping with stress and distractions). The day also included team-building exercises that allowed people to see how everyone contributes to the overall work of the School. One product of that teamwork is the painting of a ram that now hangs in the break room near the atrium. It is made of fifteen tiles that were painted separately and then combined to form a wonderful completed picture. It is just one of the ways that the retreat reinforced the One School concept—the idea that we require contributions from everyone—regardless of one's position in the organization—to successfully carry out our mission. Thanks to Alecia for her leadership, and thanks also to other staff colleagues who pitched in to make it happen.





Maureen Berner

Maureen Berner. In the last round of Faculty Lunches with the Dean, Maureen described her time last fall as a visiting scholar at the University of Ghent in Belgium. Her goal was to extend her work with food banks and pantries in North Carolina by learning from Belgium's experience in responding to food insecurity. One of Maureen's observations was that the day-to-day practicalities of food assistance work is similar in the two places. She was struck by two differences, however. One is that Belgium's measurement for poverty is broadly defined as material deprivation (lack of housing, food, clean water, heat, etc.) rather than an income-based measure. Another difference is a ubiquitous focus on the idea of "social inclusion," which is the idea that including people in community life will reduce the need for government to address problems that come from social isolation. She heard about social inclusion from government, non-profits, schools, businesses, and even from the local library and her neighbors down the street. Maureen is trying to figure out how the idea of inclusion might be relevant for North Carolina. One idea is that it may hold promise for bringing different groups to the table to talk about collaborating on community issues. Maureen's experience in Belgium was featured in a recent issue of *Endeavors*, [which can be found here](#) if you want to know more.

John Stephens. Unfortunately we ran out of time at our last lunch before John could fully describe some of the interesting work he is doing on the potential value to local governments of having volunteers use open data for good. The incentive for local governments is "free expert labor using public data, which could result in computer applications that improve services." There is something called [Code for America](#), for example, which has six brigades located across North Carolina. According to their website, "[t]he two biggest levers for improving people's lives at scale are technology and government. We put them together." Consider this a preview of coming



attractions. We will start the faculty lunches again in the fall and I'll make sure that John has a chance to share more about this interesting development.



John Stephens at Open NC Event in Greensboro