

Public Administration Conference: Engaging Women and MPA@UNC

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This year's public administration conference was the best ever. The sessions were good and attendance was strong. Former U.S. Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood did a nice job of talking about the importance of public service and bipartisanship in delivering the Deil S. Wright Lecture. ([Wright](#), pictured, was a distinguished MPA faculty member for more than 40 years before his passing in 2009.) Thanks to everyone who had a hand in organizing and delivering a first-rate conference. Let me highlight two things from the conference.

The pre-conference session on "Engaging Women in Public Administration" was eye-opening and inspiring. For example, did you know that women are well-represented among local government employees (40%) but not in management positions (13%)? The more surprising fact is that those percentages have not changed since 1981. In addition to organizing this session, Leisha DeHart-Davis also did a wonderful job of framing why it is important to engage women in our public organizations. The keynote speaker was Marilu Goodyear, Director of the School of Public Administration at the University of Kansas. She did a masterful job of blending academic research with stories from her own life to help all of us—men and women—see how to support and mentor women in our workplaces. Margaret Henderson did a nice job of facilitating a conversation among the participants about engaging women. The slow progress for women in local government leadership is unacceptable, but I am encouraged by this session and by the incredible pipeline of



talented women (including our MPA students) who are ready to assume those positions.



Leisha DeHart-Davis

More than 20 students from [MPA@UNC](#), the online format of our MPA program, attended the conference—many from North Carolina and others from Michigan and Texas. It was so great to meet them. I talked with a number of them at the conference and at a tail-gating event before the football game on Saturday. They are remarkable! I'm not surprised, but it is wonderful to interact with them and confirm that they are every bit as impressive as our on-campus students and our alumni. I love the diverse experiences that they bring to their classes—a county librarian, a communications professional at a community college, a soldier, a student affairs professional at UNC-Asheville, a private-practice attorney who works on legislative issues, an economics teacher, and a special education teacher. That is just a sampling. They had high praise for the quality of the online program and talked about the satisfaction of immediately applying classroom concepts in their jobs. The soldier I met is scheduled to ship overseas in January to help manage our withdrawal from Afghanistan—and he won't have to interrupt his studies at all.

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I was inspired by our online students, just as I'm always inspired by our on-campus MPA students. We need these talented folks to help address the many challenges facing our communities. MPA@UNC gives these students the opportunity to develop their skills by participating in a rigorous program that otherwise would be unavailable to them. They are taking full advantage of that opportunity, and I'm confident that we will be as proud of their accomplishments as those of any other MPA alumni. Special thanks to everyone at the School and at 2U who has worked in different ways to guarantee an excellent experience for our online students.