



SCUPSO 2012: Making Connections

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I'm on my way home from this year's annual SCUPSO (Southern Consortium of University Public Service Organizations) conference in Biloxi, which was hosted by the Stennis Institute of Government at Mississippi State University. Marty Wiseman, long-time Director of the Stennis Institute, was our host. His son, Parker, is an alumnus of our MPA Program and is now the elected Mayor of Starkville. My recollection is that his classmates thought he would be Governor of Mississippi one day, and he has taken his first step. Bill Rivenbark, our MPA Director, worked for Marty as a graduate student at Mississippi State. Lots of connections.

A few impressions from the conference. There were presentations about the short- and long-term impact of Hurricane Katrina. The hurricane struck in August 2005 and the water damage from the 28-foot storm surge was devastating. Thousands of residents left and will never return. Biloxi lost 60% of their property tax base. One council member described holding their meetings immediately after the storm under the town water tower so that people could find them. A panel of local officials talked about the challenges they continue to face?one mayor of a small coastal town described an 11-hour council meeting the previous night that had focused almost entirely on Katrina-related issues. They learned small lessons that will save lives the next time, and they all assume that there will be a next time. For example, many people would not heed the warnings and evacuate as the storm approached because they refused not leave their pets. In the future local officials will provide for emergency animal shelters during the evacuation. Another lesson was to re-open schools immediately or families will not return. They all praised the contributions of the many volunteers



from across the country. The recovery continues to be long and hard.

Our own Tyler Mulligan came down and gave a very nice presentation about the Development Finance Initiative. He did a terrific job and I heard a number of positive comments about it throughout the day. There was an interesting presentation on how public service centers might do a better job of helping public officials translate data into better decision-making. Mark Weinberg, Director of the Voinovich School for Leadership and Public Affairs at Ohio University, described several projects where they are using technology to organize data in ways that are more accessible for policymakers. Mark always seems to be doing something innovative that can inform our work. Gordon Whitaker was his dissertation advisor when Mark was a doctoral student in political science at Carolina, and his son, Micah, graduated from our MPA Program a few years ago. More good connections.

The SCUSO conference is small, which makes it is easy to have lots of helpful conversations. I met Brian Dabson, for example, who directs the Institute of Public Policy at the University of Missouri. He has been charged with finding ways to help the faculty make helpful connections with legislators and other policymakers in Missouri. He is thinking through the same set of issues that Aimee Wall is helping us navigate in North Carolina, and he may visit the School to share ideas in June. A nice, new connection.

I flew into New Orleans and drove to Biloxi. That allowed me to stop for lunch and enjoy my new favorite dessert. I feel obliged to share this important information in the event you find yourself within 100 miles of [the restaurant, Boucherie](#). The dessert is a bread pudding made with Krispy Kreme Doughnuts. One of our first-year MPA students (Jordan Jones) told me about this place last week, and I am indebted to him. Oh my. It was bliss, or possibly a sugar-related stupor, but who cares? The owner is from Winston-Salem and my waiter was from Hickory. Connections, connections, connections.



Boucherie Krispy Kreme Bread Pudding