

1980-2020 EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

Celebrating 40 Years of Public Service Education in Michigan

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EMU's MPA Program: Then and Now

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EMU's MPA Program: Then and Now

In the Beginning

In the fall of 1980, the Master of Public Administration Program at Eastern Michigan University began admitting students. Among the early professors were Dr. Charles Monsma, Dr. Raymond Rosenfeld, and Dr. Joe Ohren. Dr. Monsma was with the program from the beginning, spearheading its creation and the implementation of its course catalog, while Dr. Rosenfeld and Dr. Ohren joined the EMU Political Science faculty and the MPA Program just a few years later. "Eastern is a large regional state university in a large metropolitan area. The opportunity for an MPA program in such an environment was tremendous," Dr. Rosenfeld said. The longtime EMU professor joined the faculty in 1983, believing that the program had an incredible amount of potential. He envisioned that students would eventually be provided with a full range of programs, from a doctoral program for both academic and applied careers, master's, graduate certificates, and combined undergraduate/graduate programs. Dr. Rosenfeld had visions of "a public administration program that would be as strong as any of the programs at Eastern's peer and aspirational institutions. EMU would be right along with the best of them."

Just two years later in 1985, Dr. Ohren

began teaching Introduction to Public Administration. What attracted the Grand Rapids native to join the MPA program was clear. "I wanted to be engaged with graduate students; the MPA was (and is) the 'calling card' for students entering the profession, particularly for those interested in local government management, which was my primary area of interest," Dr. Ohren said. What also attracted him to EMU were the relationships that the MPA program was forming with local governments throughout the region through the Institute for Community and Regional Development (ICARD). Faculty consulted these local governments, and pre-service graduate students gained the opportunity to obtain some real-world experience.

In the MPA program's adolescence, the process of accreditation through the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA) was essential for the program's growth. In the early 1990s, under Dr. Rosenfeld's leadership,



“The MPA was (and is) the 'calling card' for students entering the profession, particularly for those interested in local government management...”

- Joe Ohren, Professor Emeritus



EMU's MPA Program: Then and Now *Continued*

accreditation was achieved. It was both expensive and time consuming, but the difficult work was accomplished. Dr. Ohren remembers the watershed moment fondly: "The process involved a careful analysis of current efforts and allowed us to reshape and strengthen the program and bring it into alignment with national standards. We received the first of now five approvals/reaccreditations by NASPAA." The MPA Program has remained accredited ever since, an impressive feat.



Raymond Rosenfeld,
MPA Faculty

Both Dr. Rosenfeld and Dr. Ohren were, and are still, driven by their interactions and continued connections with current graduate students and alumni. "After gaining tenure, I had a 12-year period where I did a tremendous amount of research. More than I could ever do by myself. Graduate students allowed this research to happen," Dr. Rosenfeld explained.

Dr. Ohren reminisced on some great field trips he took with students: "Who can forget the several field trips that both undergraduate and graduate PA students took in the 1990s: to Detroit and other Michigan locations to attend Michigan Municipal League/City Manager Conferences, to Chicago to interview city personnel/human resources leaders, and to Toronto to explore the effort to implement a regional governmental arrangement?" Many alumni are still in contact with both professors, showing that such connections make a real difference in one's education, career, and overall quality of life. The alumni that came out of the first two decades of the MPA Program speak to the degree's amazing ability to produce qualified public servants. Of the five alumni interviewed for this newsletter, almost all mentioned Dr. Rosenfeld, Dr. Ohren, and Dr. Monsma, or the program's professors in general as huge influencers of their success throughout the years. The connection between the professors and the graduate students is just one of many aspects that makes the MPA Program at EMU not only successful, but special and long lasting.

The Present

The faculty of the EMU MPA Program form the backbone of the program. The professors teach courses for the program based on their areas of expertise. For example, Dr. Barbara Patrick focuses on budgeting in the public sector. Currently, she teaches



“As society continues to evolve, there will be an increased need for leaders and administrators with specialized knowledge of government organizations and their role in society.”

- Barbara Patrick, MPA Faculty

two courses within the MPA program, Public Administration Concepts and Public and Nonprofit Budgeting. Dr. Patrick believes that a specialized skill such as budgeting is, and will remain, in high demand. "As society continues to evolve, there will be an increased need for leaders and administrators with specialized knowledge of government organizations and their role in society. Our public administration program will continue to prepare students to meet those needs in Michigan and across the country for years to come," she explained. MPA graduates will be in high demand in this decade and into the next. Administrators at all levels of government are aging, meaning that many positions will open up soon due to retirements. This will result in a massive administrator shortage within the public sector over the next ten years.

Just like Dr. Patrick, Dr. Gregory Plagens teaches two core courses, Public and Nonprofit Personnel Administration and the Capstone Seminar. He spoke of this shortage as an important opportunity for the future of the program. "The demand for high-quality leadership and management in government and nonprofits has never been greater. We see our program as well positioned to help develop students of administration to meet this demand." There will not only be an increase in demand for government workers and bureaucrats, but for individuals that will properly fulfill their duty to taxpayers. High quality administrators and leadership are vital for all levels of government if it is to function properly. Dr. Jeffrey Bernstein, who teaches Quantitative Methods in Public Administration, believes that high quality leadership is desperately needed in today's public sector. "I think we're really seeing, as we're looking at how the government is dealing with Coronavirus and how the government is dealing with a whole lot of just the nuts and bolts of running a country, the need for wise administrators and expertise at all levels of government. Elected officials get elected, but they depend heavily on the



Gregory Plagens,
MPA Faculty



EMU's MPA Program: Then and Now *Continued*

government workers, the bureaucrats, the administrators, to know things," Dr. Bernstein explained. In the coming years, there will not only be an increase in demand for public administrators, but for highly qualified and competent public leaders.



“You probably can't drive 20 minutes in this state without finding some place that is being served by people we have trained at some level. I think that's been a mark of this place... We are southeastern Michigan; we are educating and training the people who are going to be doing these important services for us in years to come.”

- Jeffrey Bernstein, MPA Faculty

Graduates of the MPA program can be found working all over the state of Michigan. Dr. Bernstein believes this is by far the most attractive aspect of the program. “The folks who graduate from this program have for so many years been the people that become local government administrators here, who administer our nonprofits. That's something that we as a program can be really proud of. You probably can't drive 20 minutes in this state without finding some place that is being served by people we have trained at some level. I think that's been a mark of this place. When you look at this institution, the people that are teaching your kids in the public schools, the people that are administering the local governments, the people that are working and helping you in the hospital when you are sick, this school turns out some really good graduates, who very often stay local and do great things for our community. We are southeastern Michigan; we are educating and training the people who are going to be doing these important services for us in years to come.”



There are also exciting opportunities regarding nonprofit management. Dr. Tucker Staley joined the faculty in 2017 and brings years of nonprofit experience and expertise to the MPA program. “I am

Tucker Staley, MPA Faculty

excited for the future of the MPA program at EMU, especially as it relates to our nonprofit concentration and nonprofit-focused students. We are in the process of increasing the number of our regularly offered nonprofit-specific courses, increasing applied learning opportunities, and providing additional resources

to support the nonprofit and voluntary sector in our community,” Dr. Staley said. As the nonprofit sector continues to grow, the demand for qualified and competent individuals to fill open positions will only grow. The MPA program is preparing its graduates to be competitive in the ever-changing job market. “Students earning their MPA from Eastern Michigan will be well equipped with the knowledge and tools necessary to

meet the challenges of an ever-changing world and take on transformative leadership roles. The MPA's mission and core values reflect the importance of preparing knowledgeable and skilled nonprofit professionals, and we will adapt as necessary to ensure our students are prepared to change the world in an ever-shifting nonprofit landscape,” explained Dr. Staley.

Looking Forward

The MPA Program is known as a graduate program that is attractive to both full-time students and full-time professionals. This is vital, as the program seeks to provide pre-service and in-service individuals the skills and tools to either break into the public and nonprofit sectors and become a leader or allow those currently in either sector to climb the ladder. Therefore, all core courses meet once a week in the evening.

Many current graduate students work all over southeast Michigan. Henry Outlaw, a third-year MPA student and Management Assistant at the City of Brighton, said, “The MPA program not only gave me the tools and know-how to be an effective manager in the public sector, it also connected me with leaders in the field who could help guide me.”

Second-year student Bradley Wheelock also works in local government. “The MPA program has been a boon for my professional endeavors,” said Wheelock, who serves as the Building Clerk at Sumpter Township. “Beyond simply assisting me in improving my day-to-day activities as an administrator,



EMU's MPA Program: Then and Now *Continued*

my knowledge of the function of municipal government has increased dramatically. The faculty and staff are an amazing resource, whether it is for professional development or assisting with a problem on the job they have seen other administrators face. I cannot recommend the MPA

program at Eastern Michigan enough!" he continued. Both graduate students are nearing the end of their time at EMU and look primed to carry successful careers within the public sector.

Juliane Vogl came to EMU's MPA program after working for several years in North Carolina's nonprofit sector. As she also nears the end of her time in the program, she reflects: "Learning how to critically think when solving a problem in the public sector will be my most valuable tool going forward. By encouraging us to view problems from all perspectives, it challenged us to view them through multiple lenses that we may not have thought of before."

While the program works well for in-service graduate students, there is a plethora of promising pre-service students. Cameron Armstrong, a second-year MPA student from Maine, believes that the MPA program is providing him with the necessary skills to pursue a successful career within the public sector, specifically local government. "Since becoming a graduate assistant in 2018, I have conducted research with Dr. Bernstein.

“The MPA program has been a boon for my professional endeavors. Beyond simply assisting me in improving my day-to-day activities as an administrator, my knowledge of the function of municipal government has increased dramatically.”

- **Bradley Wheelock**, MPA Student and Building Clerk for Sumpter Township

This challenging but fulfilling experience has prepared me not just for a position within the public sector, but has opened the possibility for a doctoral degree. My options seem endless," Armstrong said.

EMU's MPA students have diverse academic and professional backgrounds. Current MPA student Theodore Johnson is a perfect example of this. He received his bachelor's degree in aviation and may

pursue a career in federal aviation administration or pursue further education with a PhD. Johnson shared, "The EMU MPA Program has enabled me to meld my immense passion for aviation with public administration and higher education in more ways than I could have imagined. The practical coursework coupled with the diverse skill-set and experience possessed by each MPA faculty member has strengthened my collective knowledge, skills, and abilities." The classes have familiarized Johnson with the public sector. He continued, "I am now extremely comfortable interacting with public sector administrators at the local, state, and federal levels, especially in specialized industries such as aviation. One of the most

“One of the most prominent advantages of the program is the amount of exposure graduate students obtain throughout the course of their studies with real-world issues...”

- **Theodore Johnson**, MPA Student

prominent advantages of the program is the amount of exposure graduate students obtain throughout the course of their studies with real-world issues via special projects and with public sector professionals

through events established by the Public Administration Club."

The professors and early program alumni built a strong and solid foundation. This foundation has allowed in-service and pre-service graduate students to pursue such a valuable master's degree that will prepare them to meet the demands and challenges of serving communities.

EMU MPA Snapshot

FALL 2019

41 students enrolled

71% were in-service, **29%** were pre-service

68% were part-time students, **32%** were full-time students

2019-20 ACADEMIC YEAR

20 new students started the program

5 graduate assistants worked in the Political Science Dept.



Meet five EMU MPA alumni from the 1980s and early 1990s who exemplify how the MPA can help launch thriving careers in various areas of public service.

EMU MPA ALUMNI

David Gajda

David Gajda valued the holistic perspective on public administration and the organizational management skills he learned from the MPA program and applied them to his successful career in Michigan local government finance.

Eastern Michigan University's MPA Program prides itself on preparing graduates for successful careers within the public sector, especially those in local government. Since receiving his Master of Public Administration in 1985, David Gajda has worked as the finance director/treasurer for the cities of Southgate, Brighton, and Farmington Hills and is currently a fiscal services officer at Oakland County. The Eastern Michigan alum is a prime example of the MPA Program fulfilling its mission to prospective students.

When asked how the MPA degree has contributed to his long and prosperous career, Gajda heaped praise on the program. "I believe my EMU MPA helped me throughout my local government career by providing me a holistic perspective on public administration beyond my financial management focus." The MPA degree continues to provide students with a multitude of skills that are essential when attempting to break into the public and nonprofit sectors.

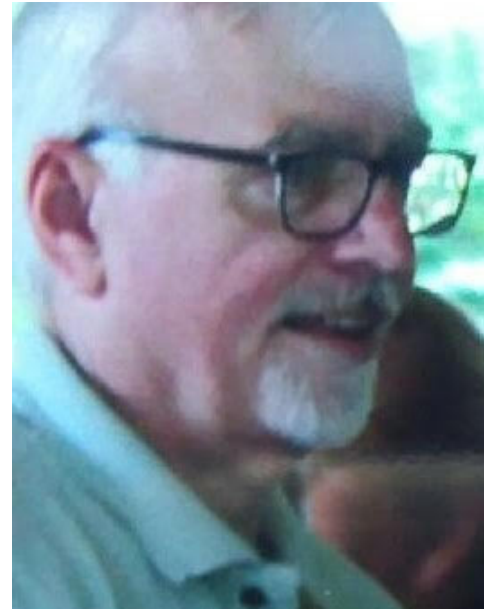
Gajda has loved his decades-long experience within the public sector and advises current students to at least consider a career in the often undervalued field. "I found working for a local government to be personally very rewarding. Living in and around the communities I have served provided me a very real-life perspective of the issues and concerns of those folks whom I

came in contact with and helped answer questions. Therefore, my advice to current students is to consider a career in local government, which I believe can be very enriching."

When he was pursuing his MPA in the early 1980s, the program was in its infancy, and there were some skills that Gajda wishes had been included throughout the curriculum, especially in regards to people management. "I wish the MPA program had offered a more practical 'people management' focus in its curriculum. I believe, over time, I was able to more effectively

“I found working for a local government to be personally very rewarding. Living in and around the communities I have served provided me a very real-life perspective of the issues and concerns of those folks whom I came in contact with and helped answer questions.”

manage the employees working for and reporting to me, but it would have been very beneficial to have learned more about some of the real-life people issues that arise in virtually every work environment." Group work has since been highly integrated into courses. In addition, multiple classes now cover case studies, theoretical situations where the student is put into the shoes of a manager who must decide what action to take in regards to a difficult or ethically challenging predicament.



Gajda believed that organizational management skills were the most valuable skills he gained during his MPA studies. The skills allowed him to create his own management style and approach and bring those with him to new organizations. "Each organization I have worked for had its own history and culture and although conforming to those organizational norms is important, being able to provide new and different perspectives can also be important in moving organizations forward or in different directions, if ultimately it is for the betterment of the organization," Gajda explained.

In conclusion, David Gajda argued that his time pursuing the MPA at EMU was one of the many parts that made his successful career in local government possible. "I was better equipped to understand and work with public service professionals and elected officials whose backgrounds and perspectives may have been different from mine, but who ultimately had the same dedication and commitment to better the organization on behalf of its stakeholders."





EMU MPA ALUMNI

Martha Kern-Boprie

Since earning her MPA in 1984, Martha Kern-Boprie has become a leader in both the government and nonprofit sectors.

Martha Kern-Boprie received her MPA from Eastern Michigan in 1984, just four years after the program began admitting students in the fall of 1980. Since graduating, Kern-Boprie has worked in local government, served on nonprofit boards, and currently works as an accountant for the University of Michigan. The MPA program played its part in making this successful career possible.

One of the main goals of the MPA program is to prepare graduates for a career in the public and nonprofit sectors, and Kern-Boprie is a clear illustration of this objective being met. For 27 years she has held elected office. Whether it is as the Superior Township Treasurer, Washtenaw County Commissioner, or Superior Township Parks Commissioner, Kern-Boprie consistently held leadership positions within the public sector throughout her career.

Her public service career started

immediately upon graduation. In 1984, Kern-Boprie was elected the Superior Township Treasurer. When asked how the MPA program helped her in achieving these career goals, Kern-Boprie stated that there are “courses in a range of fields: budget planning, personnel, land use, inter-organization

relations, measurement methodology, and state and local politics. During my career, I dealt with issues in most of these fields at one time or another, and the coursework in the MPA program added to my effectiveness.”

The nature of the MPA program—a

““Students with recent bachelor’s degrees brought the newest ideas and issues to the table. The more experienced professionals brought a wealth of experience at ‘how it works in the real world,’ and I benefited from both.””

mix of younger, full-time students and experienced professionals who are taking classes while working full-time—is what sets this program apart from the rest. “Students with recent bachelor’s degrees brought the newest ideas and

issues to the table. The more experienced professionals brought a wealth of experience at ‘how it works in the real world,’ and I benefited from both. I also received help with seeking employment from fellow students in senior positions,” Kern-Boprie explained.

In addition to her extensive experience within local government, Kern-Boprie has served on multiple commissions and nonprofit boards throughout Southeast Michigan: Friends of the Ypsilanti Freighthouse, P.O.W.E.R., SEMCOG, and the Washtenaw Area Transportation Study, to name just a few. When asked what was the most valuable skill that she obtained during her studies at Eastern Michigan University, Kern-Boprie answered, “Mechanisms to measure

and evaluate the effectiveness of a program.” This ability is vital if one is to actively serve on a nonprofit board or commission and really move the organization in a positive direction.

The MPA Program was in its infancy when Kern-Boprie was enrolled at EMU, and as with most things in life, there have been growing pains. “More content on intergovernmental collaboration would have been helpful. During my career, I dealt with contracts between multiple local units and the sheriff department for law enforcement services. Many grants now call for funding collaborations between governmental and nonprofit groups, for both capital projects and programs,” she explained. Fortunately, multiple classes now thoroughly cover intergovernmental and government-nonprofit relations.

Martha’s Advice for Current Students

“The faculty have remarkable backgrounds. Seek their ideas and direction. And look to your fellow students. One may find the key to a career opportunity in a student colleague.”



Bryan Weinert

The MPA principles of professionalism, integrity, and public service built the foundation of Bryan Weinert's rewarding career in recycling.

The MPA Program at Eastern Michigan University aims to prepare graduates for careers in the public and nonprofit sectors. Without actual success stories, however, these claims have no real backing. Fortunately, there are a multitude of MPA alumni who have gone on to have brilliant public and nonprofit sector tenures. MPA alum Bryan Weinert is a prime example of this, serving in both sectors throughout his career. Weinert completed his graduate degree from EMU in the early 1980s, making him part of the original pack of MPA program alumni. The program "grounded me in the principles of professionalism, integrity, and public service," Weinert explained. These ideals and principles, especially that of public service, are what drove him to get into recycling.

Upon graduation, Weinert immediately entered the nonprofit sector. His first position was as Operations Coordinator at Recycle Ann Arbor, a nonprofit, community-based environmental organization. The MPA Program prepares students not just for public sector careers, but to be leaders wherever they work. When asked what was the most valuable skill he gained while at EMU, Weinert's answer was clear. "Life is complicated. Organizations are complicated. Communities are complicated. Have humility. Engage and listen to peers and the community in which you are called to serve." This notion of leading with humility allowed the MPA alum to thrive at Recycle Ann Arbor and also find success in the public sector. "This position ultimately led to my being hired as the City of Ann Arbor's very first

Manager of Resource Recovery, and ultimately, as Solid Waste Coordinator for the City."

Although Weinert gained valuable skills during his time at Eastern, there are things he wishes he had learned. "Better time management. How to better prioritize work based on that which is most important, not necessarily most urgent," he said. Time management as a professional skill is now taught in many different mediums throughout the program. Multiple classes now cover a plethora of methods public administration leaders use to properly delegate and prioritize tasks by their level of importance and urgency.



Bryan Weinert has had an incredibly successful career with the City of Ann Arbor. He has now returned to Recycle Ann Arbor to serve as Interim CEO. Rising through the ranks and gaining prestige, power, and notoriety, however, are not what he has ever sought. Weinert urges current MPA graduate students to have the same outlook on the public and nonprofit sectors.

“Life is complicated. Organizations are complicated. Communities are complicated. Have humility. Engage and listen to peers and the community in which you are called to serve.”

Bryan's Advice for Current Students

"Carefully discern what is most important to you as a public administrator -- Public service? Position title? Power? Geographic location? Subject matter focus? My hope is that all PA students at EMU will consider the ideals of contribution and service as their primary motivation, which ultimately will provide the most fulfilling career trajectory and lasting contribution to the community or organization served."



Joe Koenig

With the MPA, Joe Koenig transitioned from a long-time career in law enforcement to a thriving one in fraud investigation.

Eastern Michigan University's MPA program was in existence for just a few years when Joe Koenig, a Michigan State Police Officer, began taking classes. The program helped him immensely in a long and successful career as a fraud investigations officer, while supplying the skills necessary to expand opportunities and publish two books.

After Koenig worked as an inspector within the Michigan State Police department's Detroit narcotics unit, the MPA degree opened up many new career opportunities. "The MPA degree helped me immensely in my career after leaving law enforcement." After ending his service as a police officer upon graduating in 1992, Koenig joined Hartford Financial as a fraud investigations officer. "The MPA degree allowed me to get this job," the Michigan native said. After four successful years within the new and challenging position, Koenig was offered a position as an internal auditor at the National Bank of Detroit and took it.

After two years, however, Hartford Financial came calling back. This time, the Fortune 500 company had Koenig work as a national manager at their national medical fraud investigative office in Hartford, Connecticut. The MPA graduate held this position until retiring in 2004. Instead of laying back and relaxing, Koenig decided to start his own investigative firm, KMI Investigations. The Grand Rapids-based company works in financial investigation, forensic

linguistics, forensic accounting, and elder fraud.

When discussing what skills the MPA program gave him, Koenig stated, "It required a great deal of writing and thought. It drove us students to write and think more in depth than we had been challenged before." The classes and assignments were a process of "developing the mind," he continued. Most importantly, the master's program gave Koenig the

“[The MPA program] required a great deal of writing and thought. It drove us students to write and think more in depth than we had been challenged before.”

analytical abilities to further his career and publish two books, one of them covering the story of flight hijacker D.B. Cooper. When speaking of this special and invigorating time at Eastern, Koenig has only fond memories. "It's an outstanding program. I was really impressed with the quality of the



professors."

Of course, nothing is perfect. There are some things that the former law enforcement officer wishes he had learned during his time at Eastern. "A little more mathematics. There was a great deal of focus on literature and writing, but a little bit more skill in quantifying things would have gone a long way."

Joe Koenig believes that current and future students should enjoy the years of pursuing a master's degree. "Relish the experience you're going through. Think beyond the questions that are asked by your professors, and make sure that you're completely understanding the concepts that they're trying to get across to you."

Joe's Advice for Current Students
"Relish the experience you're going through. Think beyond the questions that are asked by your professors, and make sure that you're completely understanding the concepts that they're trying to get across to you."



EMU MPA ALUMNI

Maureen Burns

The MPA helped prepare Maureen Burns for leadership roles in research development and higher education.



with state and federal sponsors, and compliance," Burns explained. After serving in this position for a few years, she began working with the Trade Adjustment Assistance for Firms, a program

Burns was influenced greatly by the professors within the MPA program, who kept her grounded, challenged her work, and pushed her to do better. When asked what the most valuable skill she gained during her time at Eastern Michigan University was, Burns replied, "It sounds too simple, but Joe Ohren asked at my [capstone] defense, 'So what?' That took me by surprise at the time. Perhaps it was arrogance that led me to believe everything I did was important! Now I ask the same question frequently when critiquing research proposals and making important decisions."

While the EMU MPA Program focuses on preparing students to lead in the local government and nonprofit arenas, the program's alumni have proven to be successful administrators in all sectors. Maureen Burns is a great example of that. After graduating with the MPA from Eastern Michigan University in 1990, she began working at the University of Michigan and has served in multiple leadership roles at the institution ever since.

funded by the U.S. Department of Commerce. Burns continued, "In addition to serving small manufacturing firms by developing turnaround plans, this

position included advocacy and lobbying the federal delegations from my states (Michigan, Indiana, and Ohio) and the Ways & Means Committee.

"Shortly after graduation, I left a federally-sponsored position to become the Manager of Research Support at UM's Ross Business School. I established a framework for securing and managing funds for sponsored research. This included policy development, interaction

I was involved in many budget and reauthorization battles." The MPA alum then returned to the University of Michigan, where she now leads in the College of Engineering.

“My career opportunities expanded dramatically with my MPA in hand. This degree is applicable to many different occupations.”

While the program helped Burns gain valuable skills in analyzing research proposals, it also greatly expanded her career opportunities. "I had earned a BBA [Bachelor of Business Administration] at EMU but decided to take a different path for my master's degree. The MPA was a good complement. My career opportunities expanded dramatically with my MPA in hand. This degree is applicable to many different occupations. It took forever to get where I was in 1990. After that, I succeeded at a series of very interesting career and board positions."

Maureen's Advice for Current Students

"Try to find a career path that excites you. Think about the skills you need to acquire to succeed in your journey. That may mean putting more time and energy into your career life. Take risks. Be open to different ideas and people. Add value to society."

Special Edition of *The MPA Network*

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