

Public Policy Bulletin



policy.uark.edu

Volume 18, Issue 1
Fall 2025



UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

Inside this Issue

- 01 New Student Spotlights
- 03 Teaching Award Recipient
- 04 Policy Social Mixer
- 05 Arkansas Press Women's (APW) Award Recipient
- 06 Scholarship Winner



Lee Shultz

Shultz — Policy Management

Lee Shultz currently serves as the Assistant Director of Data Science Undergraduate Programs and has been on UARK's campus as a student and staff member for 14 years. She completed all of her post-secondary education at UARK and recently received her Master's Degree in Public Administration and Nonprofit Studies. Due to her attachment and work with the university, she decided to extend her studies and pursue a PhD in Public Policy. Her research interests lie in studying the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

and how public policies affect the agency's disaster response capacity. She says, "FEMA is an agency that is often impacted by presidential leadership (or lack thereof), but in times of crisis, constituents don't always understand how much those choices impact them when disasters occur."

She decided to specialize in policy management due to the alignment with her previous education in public administration. She is passionate about policy decision-making and learning about the real-world impacts of those decisions. After completing her PhD, she wants to work in either an administrative or teaching role on a college campus to make an impact on future students and prepare them for long-term success.



Elsa Ibarra

Ibarra — Health Policy

Elsa Ibarra comes to the UA Public Policy program with a background in dental and pediatric services. She was born in the United States, but has resided in Mexico for the majority of her life where she received her Master's Degree in Pediatric Dentistry. After moving from Baltimore, Maryland, she decided she wanted to do more with her career, and after researching what different universities had to offer, she was most impressed with UARK. She says, "I like PUBP's interdisciplinary approach, but what really stood out to me was how approachable and responsive the faculty and staff have been — even before starting the program." Additionally, the faculty's willingness to answer questions and provide assistance made her feel confident that UARK would be the right place to begin her PhD journey.

Her decision to choose health policy as her specialization stemmed from her background as a pediatric dentist. In her research endeavors, she aspires to promote equity in preventative dental health and improve health outcomes for marginalized populations on a larger scale. A fun fact about Elsa is that she has competed in seven half marathons and is preparing to compete in her first full marathon. She says that "Pushing through challenges and proving to myself that I can achieve something I once thought impossible has completely shifted my mindset." Running, for her, has become an important part of her life.



Nina Maziar

Maziar — Policy Management

Nina Maziar is native to Iran and currently holds two master's degrees. She has a Master's Degree in Political Science with an emphasis on middle eastern studies from UA, and another in the Contemporary History of Iran from the University of Tehran. She is affiliated with UARK's Middle East Studies (MEST) Department and has worked extensively with Dr. Shirin Saeidi as a teaching and research assistant. Her captivation to the UA PUBP Program came from a multifaceted interest in governance, comparative politics, institutional designs, and the practical features of public policy. For her, the policy management specialization contributed to her decision to join the program. She says, "I am into applied science, not just pure studies and theoretical studies." Nina is still contemplating what her main research interests will be, but has indicated that studying different forms of governance could be a possibility. Once she completes her PhD, she says that she is flexible to pursuing a career internal or external to academia, but prefers an institutional and collaborative atmosphere.

Owusu — Policy Management

Isaac Mensah Owusu comes to UARK from Agogo, Ghana with a background in academia and community service. He currently holds a Master of Arts in Public Policy from the University of Nottingham and an MBA in Human Resource Management from the University of Cape Coast. The academic and social excellence in the PUBP program motivated him to choose UARK for his PhD studies along with the program's "supportive environment for research-driven solutions to contemporary social and corporate problems." During his time in the UA program, Isaac wants to focus on community and organizational development, social policy, and employment and gender-based interventions as his primary research interests. Through these domains, he wants to "harness research to address real-world issues."

In his professional career, Isaac has served in different leadership roles as a department head, president, secretary general, and student representative. He believes that by specializing in policy management, he can cultivate innovative and actionable steps to facilitate positive change in Ghana, as well as the entire Sub-Saharan region.



Isaac Mensah Owusu



Carson Rein

Rein — Community Development

Carson Rein serves as a U of A Instructor for the Political Science Department, and also interns for the Razorback Foundation Inc., a 501(c)(3) that supports student-athletes. His Master's Degree is in Public Administration and Nonprofit Studies from the U of A. He attributes his selection of the PUBP program to the support U of A has given him, as well as the "experiences and opportunities that I will cherish for the rest of my life." Carson wants to focus his research on recreational policy and its influence on wellness, community, and civic engagement. He aspires to work in higher education as a tenured faculty member. He clarifies, "I want to teach classes, but I also want to engage with students, develop curriculum, and enhance the Recreation and Community Development program for universities with the call for such a program."

Additionally, Carson co-authored *Introduction: Your Coaching Journey Begins Here*, a book that focuses on recommending advocacy strategies for instructor coaches working with college students.



Kaitlyn Riggin

Riggin — Social Justice

Kaitlyn Riggin is the Associate Director of UA Cares, where she has been working with students and the community for over

four years. She has a Master's Degree in Mental Health Counseling from the University of Central Arkansas, and is entering the social justice specialization. Her decision to join the program stemmed from her current status as a campus employee as well as the opportunities to pursue social justice and work with its faculty members. She says, "We have some incredibly wonderful and intelligent folks in the department, and I'm excited to learn from them!" Her passion for social justice policy comes from an appreciation for "fair, effective policy and ensuring policies/decisions regarding policies align with our human rights." She plans to center her research around women's healthcare, specifically access and reproductive rights. After completing her PhD, her dream career is to work for the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to address oppressive and ineffective policies. Outside of school and work, she likes to crochet and attend live music shows in her spare time.

PLSC Teaching Award Recipient



Christopher Giller is a PUBP student specializing in K-12 education policy and the recipient of the Political Science Department Teaching Award. He has an extensive background in education, having taught social science and literature in Florida's public school system. After teaching in Florida, he returned to his home in to work for the Illinois House of Representatives. At U of A, he has taught two semesters of Public

Policy, an upper division undergraduate class for political science students. In response to receiving the award, he says "The award is special to me because I admire the department and its great faculty and students. I put a lot of time and effort into trying to make my course meaningful and practical." Teaching at U of A has represented an incredible opportunity for him to help younger generations realize the importance of the political system, and look beyond coursework for opportunities.

Pedersen — Social Justice

Gabrielle Pedersen is an alumna of the U of A with a Master's Degree in Communication. At U of A, she has taught public speaking courses, tutored student-athletes, worked on the #BlackatUARK project with Dr. Chris Goering, and researched women's agency and gender expression. Gabrielle will be specializing in social justice to apply prior knowledge and research about rhetoric to real-world settings. She says, "I spent years studying how communication affects power, but now I get to study and research how policy legitimizes or prohibits power." Her connection to the U of A and Fayetteville motivated her to pursue a PhD, wherein she aspires to study the long-term implications of sexual behavior and gender expression policies. She also says that her internship at the American Foundation of Suicide Prevention and work on the 988 Hotline contributed to her decision as "it taught me a lot about mental health policies, but taught me that public policy was a passion that I wanted to pursue."



Gabrielle Pedersen

Spring Public Policy Research & Social Mixer



On April 11th, 2025, the Graduate and Professional Student Congress (GPSC) hosted a research and social mixer that allowed Public Policy graduate students, faculty, and alumni to come together for an afternoon of great food, insightful conversations, and connections across all six of the program's specializations. The gathering provided an opportunity for catching up and enjoying time with fellow Public Policy cohorts and faculty.

The event featured a special guest, Professor, Dr. Geoboo Song, who serves as the Editor-in-Chief for the *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ). He showcased the work and accomplishments of PSJ, as well as valuable insights on submitting and publishing academic research in scholarly policy journals.

**APW 2025 Communicator of
Achievement Award Recipient:
Kristin Netterstrom Higgins**



Kristin Netterstrom-Higgins, a doctoral student at the University of Arkansas, is the recipient of the Arkansas Press Women's (APW) 2025 Communicator of Achievement (COA) Award, the organization's highest honor. This award recognizes individuals who are professionally distinguished and exemplify the values of community service. Netterstrom-Higgins said, "Looking at the long list of incredible women who served before me — Jamie Jones, Charlotte Schexnayder, Dorothy Stuck, Brenda Blagg, Maudine Sanders, and so many others — it's truly humbling."

Netterstrom-Higgins has been a longtime member of APW and the National Federal of Press Women (NFPW), serving in different leadership capacities in both organizations. Among the leadership roles, she has served as APW president (and immediate past president), state contest co-director for APW, and NFPW secretary, as well as national conference co-chair.

She has devoted over two decades to journalism and public service, spending 10 years as a journalist and working at newspapers in Bentonville and Little Rock. She holds a degree in journalism and a master's degree in agricultural education and extension from U of A. She is currently pursuing her PhD in public policy with an emphasis on social justice policy and voter ballot initiatives.

Netterstrom-Higgins is program associate and leader of the Extension Public Policy Center at the U of A Division of Agriculture. This organization provides nonpartisan education to citizens on public issues and voting. She also administers the Arkansas Ballot Issue Education Program, which serves as a helpful tool for voters in the state of Arkansas to learn about complex election and voting issues. Additionally, Netterstrom-Higgins writes a monthly newsletter to spread awareness and information regarding Arkansas ballot issues, and has been doing so for 12 years.

She was recognized on September 13th by the NFPW and is a contender for a national COA award.

You can find the full APW article covering Netterstrom-Higgins's COA Award here: <https://arkansaspresswomen.org/kristin-higgins-coa/>

International Peace Scholarship Winner:

Eva Stephani Caroline



Eva Stephani Caroline, a PUBP student at the University of Arkansas, is a second-time recipient of the International Peace Scholarship. She was honored by the Philanthropic Educational Organization (PEO) Sisterhood, an organization dedicated to supporting higher education opportunities for women.

After receiving the news of her award, Caroline said:

“I am deeply grateful to receive this scholarship for the second time. As a PhD student and mother of three daughters, this scholarship reminds me that with God’s grace, it’s never too late to learn, grow, and pursue my dreams. No matter the cultural beliefs, challenges, or how many children we have, we can achieve our goals through faith and determination.

I also want to express my heartfelt thanks to the Public Policy program, the Agricultural Economics Department, the International Culture Team, the Indonesian Student Association, and other local organizations that have provided opportunities for me to learn, grow, and serve a broader community. Lastly, I’m especially thankful to the PEO sisterhood for believing in

me again — women supporting women is a powerful force, and I look forward to continuing to serve others, even more than I have been supported.”

Caroline is originally from Indonesia and holds a bachelor’s degree in Fisheries from Fisheries University in Jakarta, Indonesia. She completed a master’s degree in Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness at the U of A. Currently, she is in her second year as a PhD student in the Public Policy program and is supported by a graduate assistantship from the Agricultural Economics Department. During her time at U of A, under the guidance of Dr. Quiquiong Huang, Caroline has worked with faculty members on projects concerning irrigation, rice production, and the forestry sector. She has also presented her research at several conferences, including the Southern Agricultural Economics Association Conference and Arkansas Water Resources Conference. Soon she will present at the upcoming Universities Council on Water Resources Conference.

Outside of her work at U of A, Caroline is an active member on campus and in the local community. She currently serves as the President of Indonesian Student Association, and as the Departmental Student Organization (DSO) representative for Public Policy. On the weekends, she volunteers as a student engagement leader with Furniture Friends organization and assists in the children’s ministry at New Height Church.