Legal Studies and Public Administration: Graduate programs meet growing demands

Texas State’s graduate programs in Legal Studies and Public Administration, located in the Department of Political Science, are building high profiles in Texas and around the country.

The Graduate Program in Legal Studies is one of only a handful of programs nationwide offering a Master of Arts degree with concentrations in Legal Administration, Alternative Dispute Resolution, and Environmental Law. It also offers a post-graduate Lawyer’s Assistant certificate program that provides entry-level preparation for the paralegal field, and a Mediation Certificate Program that provides entry-level skills and state certification for mediators. Some 10 percent of students in the program plan to attend law school, and the program also provides law courses for students seeking other graduate degrees.

“The legal profession is relying more and more on specially-trained non-lawyers to help in the delivery of legal services—professionals trained in reading, researching, and analyzing law, and in working with legal requirements and restrictions,” said Program Director Dr. Terry Hull. In meeting the need for non-lawyer professionals with legal expertise, the Legal Studies program has become one of the largest graduate programs in the College of Liberal Arts.

Graduates of Texas State's Master's Degree Program in Public Administration serve in all walks of public life. The program primarily serves early- or mid-career professionals who want state-of-the-art training in the areas of personnel, finance, urban and regional planning, criminal justice, government information systems, human resources, allied health, international relations, and more. The program, directed by Dr. Patricia Shields, teaches students to apply theory to the policy-making process and to management, in ways that are immediately relevant to their jobs.

Dr. Shields is helping the MPA program to gain national recognition in other ways. In 2002, she won the nation’s top teaching award in Public Administration—the Leslie A. Whittington Excellence in Teaching Award from NASPAA. Recently, Shields, who edits the interdisciplinary journal Armed Forces and Society, consulted on a PBS television program on the U.S. Army, Proud to Serve, about soldiers’ experiences.

Toni Watt: Improving children’s wellbeing

Dr. Toni Terling Watt left a career in business and marketing research a few years ago to become a sociologist because she envisioned doing more meaningful work through sociology. Now, her research into child and adolescent health is making headlines around the world. After USA Today published news of her recent study showing that students in small secondary schools are more likely to be emotionally troubled than students in large schools, she received calls from school systems as distant as New York and Australia, asking for more information about her findings.

“My theory is that small schools offer less diverse social groups,” she continued. “So if you’re different, you’re all alone in that environment; you’re kind of under a microscope. Big high schools may foster anonymity, but they also offer a critical mass of students who can form like-minded groups. Those who don’t fit into one group are less likely to face complete isolation,” she explained.

The school systems want Dr. Watt’s ideas on the optimum size of schools in order to foster emotional wellbeing and academic success. Watt said breaking large public high schools into “multiplex schools,” or schools within schools, may counter some of the drawbacks of big schools. “The students can learn in smaller environments but still have opportunities to meet and  

This issue of Mosaic highlights some of the outstanding faculty, students, and programs in the Social Sciences. As you read, I think you will become as excited as I am about our programs’ opportunities, as well as our challenges, and see why the Social Sciences are in such demand.

Sincerely,

Ann Marie Ellis, Ph.D.
Dean

“Texas State and UTSA: Teaming up to prepare the next neuroscientists”

When Dr. Augustus “Gus” Lumia taught in the acclaimed undergraduate neuroscience program at Skidmore College in New York, the nation’s best universities competed to attract his students into their Ph.D. programs. Lumia, who retired recently to the Texas Hill Country, is now a visiting professor in the Texas State University-San Marcos Department of Psychology. He teaches courses on brain and behavior, and he’s once again looking forward to placing his students in the nation’s best graduate programs in neuroscience.

Research in neuroscience attempts broadly to correlate changes in the brain with changes in behavior. At his Skidmore lab, Lumia studied the biochemical basis of depression and the effect of anabolic steroids on aggressive and violent behavior. Because neuroscience is at the cutting edge of research in the field of psychology, Ph.D. programs in neuroscience are highly selective: to be admitted to such programs, undergraduate and master’s students need to engage in neuroscience research in laboratories specializing in the study of vertebrates.

One such lab is located at The University of Texas-San Antonio and is directed by Lumia’s wife, Dr. Marilyn McGinnis, a research professor in biology. Texas State students take a course of independent study with Lumia on the Texas State campus, and as part of their independent study they travel to San Antonio three days a week where they conduct research in McGinnis’ lab. The first students in the program are now applying and being accepted to graduate schools.

“Texas State has a strong commitment to undergraduate education, and we have high-quality students,” said Lumia. “In fact, one of my students is among the 10 most promising students I’ve ever taught. He’s already given a paper before the top professional organization in neuroscience, and he’s developed new biochemical research techniques in the lab. Texas State has the opportunity to send its best and brightest to first-rate graduate programs.”

IN MEMORIAM

Former Texas State President Jerome Supple dies at 67

Dr. Jerome Supple, a great friend of the College of Liberal Arts and former president of Texas State University-San Marcos, died in January at the age of 67. During his presidency, the University raised admission standards, improved student retention, set enrollment records, increased private giving and research funding, and opened new buildings. In Liberal Arts, the University established three doctoral degree programs in Geography; the Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, the Roy E and Joann Cole Mitre Chair in Creative Writing, and the Jesse H. Jones Chair in Geographic Education. Dr. Supple’s interest in Southwestern culture and folk music inspired the creation of the Center for the Study of the Southwest and helped it gain the designation as NEH Southwest Regional Humanities Center. Other significant programs and centers were established in Liberal Arts under his leadership. President Supple had a strong affinity for the liberal arts and saw them as essential to a well-rounded undergraduate education. When it is complete, the Supple Endowment for Southwestern Studies will support an endowed professorship in Jerry and Cathy Supple’s name.

CREATIVITY

Texas State and UTSA: Teaming up to prepare the next neuroscientists

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Dr. Watt’s work is having impact on other areas of sociology, as well. Her groundbreaking work on kinship care—the practice by Child Protective Services of removing children from abusive parents and placing them in relatives’ care—showed that such placements fall 50 percent of the time, in many cases because the children have special needs that relatives are not equipped to handle. The work won her the Pro Humanitate Literary Award from the Center for Child Welfare Policy, an award honoring an article or a book that made a contribution to child welfare practice.
Exhibit of ancient American art to open in Chicago

A major exhibit of ancient American art organized by a Texas State anthropologist will open at the Art Institute of Chicago in November. Titled "Hero, Hawk, and Open Hand: American Indian Art of the Ancient Midwest and South," the exhibit is one of the first devoted to the art of Native Americans of the eastern woodlands during the Mississippian Period, A.D. 900-1600. Featuring 200 Mississippian objects from museums and private collections, the exhibit is a project of Texas State's Center for the Art and Symbolism of Ancient America, directed by Anthropology Professor Dr. Kent Reilly. Reilly is a principal contributor to the exhibit and sits on its board of scientific review. The exhibit, curated by Mesoamerican scholar Richard F. Townsend of the Art Institute of Chicago, will also travel to the St. Louis Art Museum and the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C.

For a decade, anthropologists from around the country have gathered on the Texas State campus each year to study the Mississippian ceremonial iconography. Texas State students also participate in the meetings. The meaning that scholars have recovered from the symbols carried by pottery, statuary, and costume has given the world a corpus of symbols that can now be understood with some certainty, according to Reilly. Currently, the scholars are trying to ascertain whether two groups—the Caddo of East Texas and the Cahokia in Missouri and Oklahoma—are sharing and manipulating the same set of symbols. The group's findings will be published soon in two volumes—Studies in Mississippian Iconography, Vols. 1 and 2. Three more volumes are planned.

Scholars study the political careers of women and African-Americans

Although women and African-Americans are still significantly underrepresented in state legislatures and in Congress, their representation has increased markedly in recent years. An award-winning paper co-authored by Political Science Professor Dr. Cynthia Opheim explores the forces shaping the career patterns of women and African-American legislators, focusing on two key stages in the process: the election to state legislatures and the election to the U.S. House of Representatives. Opheim and co-authors Gary Copeland and Carolyn Pickthorn, both of the University of Oklahoma, won the Jewel Prestage Award for best paper in Gender and Minority Politics and the Alan Saxe Award for the best paper in State and Local Politics, both from the Southwestern Political Science Association.

The scholars found that women in state legislatures tend to emerge from more liberal, northern, and better-educated states, and they are more likely to gain seats in legislatures with high rates of turnover. They also found that Black members get elected when there are enough Black voters to elect them. Their success in being elected to state senates and to the U.S. House seems to be determined by the number of African-American politicians primed to move up by having served in the next lower body. The supply of candidates is the one variable common to the election of both women and African-Americans to the U.S. Congress.
Faculty-student research gains national attention

The Social Sciences provide undergraduate and graduate students with outstanding opportunities to conduct high-level research with senior faculty. The work often draws national and international attention to the University as it prepares students for graduate work and careers.

A study of 525 students, by undergraduate Psychology majors Catherine Bower and Brian Cano, demonstrated that students whose parents were divorced were more likely to engage in risky behavior—alcohol and drug use and sexual behavior—when compared to other students. Bower and Cano conducted the research in collaboration with Psychology Department Chair Dr. Randall Osborne. Bower, Cano, and Osborne presented their findings at the annual meeting of the Social Psychologists in Texas this spring, and they will present the work at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association in Hawaii this summer. Also this summer, Bower and Cano will present parts of the work at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Society in Chicago. The work has won one of four awards for outstanding research given by Alpha Pi Alpha and Psi Chi, the psychology national honor societies.

A Ph.D. candidate in Geographic Education, David Rutherford, has published a substantial body of work in the past year that furthers the study and practice of geography education. He published two papers on merging history with geography in the K-12 curriculum, with Dr. Richard G. Boehm, Director of the Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education at Texas State, and Dr. David Warren Saxe, Professor of Education at Penn State. This spring, he and Boehm were invited to edit a special issue of the journal *The Social Studies*. The issue contains articles by geography faculty from around the country reflecting on the national standards for geography education 10 years after they were published by the National Geographic Society. Boehm was a member of the team that authored these standards in 1994. Rutherford also drew international attention to the Texas State Geography Education program recently when he was invited to present a paper to the Royal Geographical Society in London.