



**MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

# Capstone Showcase

Spring 2026

**May 13, 2026**

**6:00 P.M.**

**Interdisciplinary Research Building  
(IDRB 2.204)**

# Why a Capstone?

The MPA curriculum concludes with a rigorous capstone project where students choose a research area, policy, or program to apply the skills they have learned in data analysis and policy review. The capstone serves as a culminating applied research experience that allows students to integrate the knowledge they have gained throughout their coursework and apply it to real public policy issues.

Our capstone course often involves collaboration with organizations or government agencies, enabling students to fully integrate classroom learning. Under the guidance of Dr. Andonoska, students formulate research, evaluation instruments, and recommendations. We are proud of their work and confident in their potential as future public servants.

# Evaluating the Registered Not Paid (RNP) Campaign at UTEP Online

By: Diego Araiza



## Abstract

The Registered Not Paid (RNP) Campaign at UTEP Online was created to support students who register for classes but do not complete their payment arrangements before Census Day. Students who do not complete payment arrangements may be dropped from their courses for non-payment, which can delay their academic progress and create enrollment challenges for the university. The purpose of this evaluation was to examine whether the RNP Campaign helps reduce drops for non-payment and supports student enrollment.

The evaluation focused on the Fall 2025 RNP Campaign and used enrollment and payment data collected through university systems such as Banner and Cognos. The evaluation reviewed the number of students on the initial RNP list, the number of students who completed payment arrangements, and the number of students who were dropped for non-payment. Outreach efforts completed by the Online Financial Enrollment Counselor and Enrollment Counselors, including emails, phone calls, and text messages, were also reviewed.

The results suggest that the campaign had a positive impact on enrollment outcomes. During Fall 2025, 1,243 students appeared on the initial RNP list across different semester terms. After outreach efforts were completed, 126 students were dropped for non-payment, showing that many students were able to resolve their payment status and remain enrolled. The results also showed that the number of students on the RNP list decreased throughout the campaign as students completed payment arrangements, enrolled in payment plans, received financial aid, or paid their balances.

The evaluation suggests that communication and outreach play an important role in helping students remain enrolled. Many students may not fully understand payment deadlines, financial aid processing, or the options available to them. Direct communication and reminders can help reduce confusion and encourage students to complete important enrollment steps on time.

Several recommendations were developed from the findings, including improving outreach tracking, strengthening reporting systems, and continuing to evaluate the campaign in future semesters. The evaluation shows that the RNP Campaign plays an important role in supporting students and helping maintain enrollment at UTEP Online

# NCAA Student-Athlete Mental Health and the Impact of Staff Support

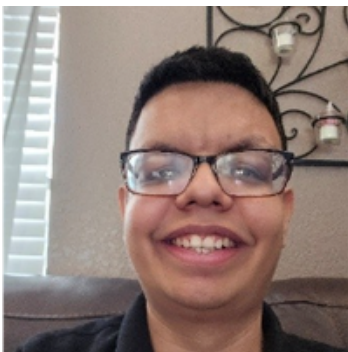
By: Andres Arellanes, Gabriella Folden, Bruce McDowell & Natalie Murillo

## Abstract

This study examines how NCAA Division I athletic departments are implementing mental health best-practice guidelines amid evolving policy pressures, including Name, Image, and Likeness policies, the expanded transfer portal, and scholarship-related performance expectations. Using a secondary qualitative policy analysis design, this research draws on five data sources — the NCAA Student-Athlete Well-Being Study (2021), the NCAA Student-Athlete Health and Wellness Study (2022-23), the NCAA Mental Health Best Practices (2nd ed., 2024), the ACHA National College Health Assessment Spring 2024 Report, and the SAMHSA National Survey on Drug Use and Health (2024) — supplemented by 15 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026.

Findings reveal that while post-pandemic mental health outcomes have partially improved, significant disparities persist across gender, race, and sexual orientation. Coach comfort around mental health conversations has declined since before the pandemic, and the gap between what the NCAA framework requires and what institutions actually deliver remains wide. The general college student population is already struggling with sleep, stress, and belonging — pressures that are amplified for student-athletes by the additional demands of competitive sport.

Five recommendations are offered: mandatory mental health training for coaching staff, tiered NCAA implementation guidance, standardized annual screening protocols, intentional mentoring structures, and crisis preparedness protocols for major disruptions. This study concludes that closing the implementation gap requires not just adding services, but fundamentally shifting the culture in which those services are offered.



# **Nonprofit Management and Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs), examined through the lens of the El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank (EPFH)**

By: Melissa Astorga, Jessica Kendrick, Juan Morales, Steven Thomas

## Abstract

This research examines nonprofit management and Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) through the case of the El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank (EPFH), the sole food bank serving El Paso, Culberson, and Hudspeth counties. Operating in a region characterized by high food insecurity, EPFH collaborates with over 100 partner agencies and various public and private entities to distribute food, administer federal nutrition programs, and implement innovative services such as home delivery for seniors and mobile client-choice pantries. These partnerships demonstrate how PPPs can strengthen nonprofit capacity, broaden service reach, and enhance operational efficiency, positioning EPFH as an exemplary case for analyzing the functions and impacts of cross-sector collaboration (El Paso Chamber, n.d.).

El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank serves as the primary hunger-relief organization in the El Paso region, supporting over 130 partner agencies and aiding with more than 200,000 food-insecure residents (Goodell, n.d.). The organization administers major federal nutrition programs, including the Commodity Supplemental Food Program (CSFP) and the National School Lunch Program, and collaborates with schools, churches, shelters, and private-sector partners to distribute nutritious food throughout underserved communities. EPFH also participates in innovative partnerships, such as working with DoorDash for home delivery and collaborating with Marathon Petroleum on monthly food distributions and financial support. These collaborative efforts enable EPFH to address geographic isolation, supply chain challenges, and increasing community needs, thereby enhancing its operational resilience and strategic capacity (El Paso Chamber, n.d.)

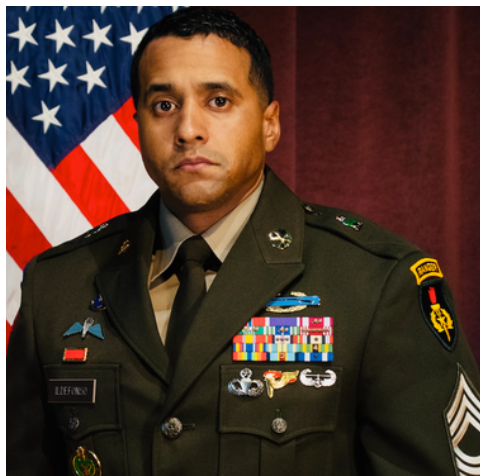
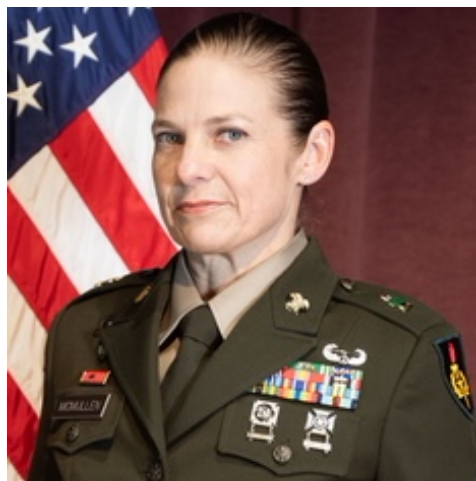


# Evaluating the Distribution Locations & Schedules of El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank: Program Evaluation

By: Anna Dougherty, Johnny R. Ildefonso, Clara McMullen, and Timothy J. Reinker

## Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess whether El Pasoans Fighting Hunger's (EPFH) food distribution sites are equitably positioned to serve the areas of greatest food insecurity within El Paso County. Despite EPFH's substantial reach, serving over 180,000 food-insecure residents annually across the Borderland region, questions remain about whether the geographic placement and service frequency of its 64 distribution sites are optimally aligned with the communities where socioeconomic vulnerability is most concentrated. This evaluation examines that alignment by comparing distribution site locations with census tract-level indicators of need, with the goal of providing EPFH leadership with data-driven insight to guide future resource allocation and site planning decisions.



# How effective are Texas laws and school policies in addressing cyberbullying on social media among students?

By:Thalia A Escobedo, Bradley McNair, Angelica Miranda & Delma E Zita

## Abstract

This study examines the relationship between social media and youth criminality with the focus being on cyberbullying and Texas policies. As social media grows in usage and accessibility, so does the use of it by teenagers and pre-teens. This leads to a higher exposure of the youth to harmful content that might encourage deviant behavior and bullying. The research addresses the three questions of the effectiveness of Texas laws and school policies when it comes to cyberbullying, the extent to which parental involvement and prevention stratifies reduce online bullying and what are the current limits of current policies.

A mixed method design was used were the survey data of 34 parents and the qualitative insight from school personnel and law enforcement officials. The findings indicate that although parents are aware of the high negative impacts of social media there are concerns regarding the efficiency of school policies and policy. There are existing measures for prevention such as the Securing Children Online Through Parental Empowerment (SCOPE) Act and other cellphone banning legislation efforts, but their effectiveness is dependent on proper enforcement and parental involvement.

Overall, the findings reveal a disconnect between policy intent and practical outcomes. The study underscores the need for more comprehensive, enforceable, and collaborative approaches involving policymakers, educational institutions, families, and social media companies to effectively address cyberbullying and youth criminality in an evolving digital environment.



# Evaluating FEMA Preparedness Programs and Community Disaster Readiness

By: Guillermo Espinoza, Kirsten Garcia & Isaac Sanchez

## Executive Summary

This report evaluates the effectiveness of community-based emergency preparedness programs supported by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) with a focus on the ability to translate public awareness into consistent household preparedness actions and behaviors. Although preparedness initiatives aim to increase public awareness, encourage planning, and strengthen local response capacity, the evidence gathered suggests that increased awareness does not consistently result in preparedness action.

Using secondary data sources including FEMA reports, OpenFEMA databases, academic literature, and public preparedness resources, this study examines the relationship between outreach efforts and household readiness practices. Findings suggest that while FEMA-supported initiatives provide important benefits, awareness does not always translate into sustained action. This leaves many households underprepared and lacking in emergency supplies/plans.

The report concludes that preparedness programs remain valuable, but their evidence-based effectiveness depends on their ability to not just spread awareness but also produce sustained action in the household. Strengthening targeted outreach, emphasizing behavioral outcomes, and improving accessibility to FEMA programs will improve program impact and reduce vulnerabilities from disasters. The report also includes an implementation and evaluation matrix that prioritizes recommended actions based on urgency, feasibility, and expected preparedness impact.



# Designing Incentives to Improve Healthy Food Access: A Case Study of El Paso's Food Deserts

By:Melissa Faulkner, Elizabeth Hernandez, Vianney Miranda, Valorie Rivera

### Abstract

In many low-income communities across the United States, including Central El Paso, TX; the lack of access to healthy food remains an ongoing issue. The traditional definitions of food deserts, such as those used by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), primarily focus on the absence of nearby supermarkets and often overlook the role that ethnic markets and small community stores play in providing food access to residents in low-income areas. This case study examines the continuing issue of food deserts in Central El Paso, with a focus on inner-city census tracts and the ethnic markets located within those communities. Specifically, the study asks: When ethnic stores are included in food access analysis, where are the food deserts located in Central El Paso? Using a quantitative research approach, the study combines demographic data, field observations, and geospatial mapping through ArcGIS Pro to analyze census tracts within zip codes 79901 and 79903. Supermarkets, ethnic stores, and public transportation routes were mapped to evaluate access to healthy and culturally relevant food options.

The findings suggest that traditional food desert metrics frequently overlook ethnic markets, despite their importance in providing fresh and culturally relevant foods to underserved communities. The researchers found that 37% of the ethnic stores surveyed met the threshold for offering healthy and culturally relevant food options. However, structural inequalities related to income, race, and transportation access; continue to contribute to residents in Central, El Paso lacking access to healthy nutrient rich food. The study recommends policies that support ethnic markets, allowing these businesses to expand their ability to offer a wider variety of healthy and nutritious food; through targeted grants, partnerships with local farmers, city-sponsored markets utilizing public spaces, and financial incentives to encourage healthy food retail.



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# **Understanding Responsibility at the District Level: How City Council Representatives Influence Administrative Outcomes in El Paso, Texas**

By: Andres Garcia

## Executive Summary

This report examines how responsibility is exercised and constrained at the district representative level within a council–manager form of municipal government, using the City of El Paso as the institutional context. In council–manager systems, elected district representatives are politically accountable to residents but do not hold direct managerial authority over administrative departments. This institutional arrangement complicates how responsibility is understood, exercised, and evaluated across districts (International City/County Management Association [ICMA], 2019; National League of Cities [NLC], 2016).

The study adopts a qualitative case study design supported by institutional document analysis and stakeholder interviews. Responsibility is conceptualized not as direct control over service delivery, but as the capacity of district representatives to influence administrative action through advocacy, coordination, and negotiation within structural limits common to all districts. The analytic framework integrates public administration theory on governance, political–administrative relations, public value, and social equity to guide research design and interpretation (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Frederickson, 2010; Kettl, 2015).

To reflect how responsibility is experienced in daily governance, the study explicitly incorporates El Paso’s constituent service interface. District offices are structured to respond to resident concerns, track casework, and coordinate with city departments, reinforcing that district-level responsibility is frequently visible and relational even when administrative authority is located elsewhere (City of El Paso, 2025). The EP311 system also functions as a core administrative pathway through which residents submit non-emergency service requests and track resolution, further shaping expectations and perceptions of responsibility (City of El Paso, n.d.-a).

Preliminary findings suggest that district representatives exercise responsibility primarily through indirect influence rather than direct command. The study contributes to public administration practice by clarifying the role of elected officials within council–manager systems and offering applied insight into how responsibility is performed through institutional processes.

# Community Risk Reduction Through Data Integration and Cross-Sector Coordination

By: Luis Juarez Vieira, Colton Ryals & Justin Westfall

## Executive Summary

Public safety systems in the United States are largely built around response (ability? Time?...). Fire departments, emergency medical services (EMS), and law enforcement are highly effective at reacting to incidents, but this approach often results in the same preventable problems occurring repeatedly in the same locations. This study examines how emergency service demand is distributed and what factors are driving it, with the goal of identifying opportunities to move toward a more proactive, prevention-focused model.

This research uses an integrated, cross-sector approach that combines data from the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) health datasets, and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) crime data. These datasets are aligned at the census tract level and analyzed using descriptive statistics, spatial analysis, and multivariate regression methods. This approach allows for a more complete understanding of how emergency demand relates to underlying community conditions.

The findings show that emergency service demand is not evenly distributed. A relatively small number of census tracts account for a disproportionate share of total incidents. These high-demand areas consistently show higher rates of chronic illness, mental health challenges, substance use, and crime. The regression analysis further demonstrates that these factors are strong predictors of call volume, even when controlling for population and other structural variables. This indicates that a significant portion of emergency demand is tied to ongoing, measurable community conditions rather than isolated or random events.

These results have clear implications for public administration and service delivery. Current models that distribute resources evenly across jurisdictions do not align with the actual distribution of demand. A more effective approach would prioritize high-risk areas and focus on reducing the underlying conditions driving repeated incidents. This requires stronger coordination across public safety, public health, and social service systems, along with improved data integration and information sharing.

This study provides a practical, repeatable framework for integrating cross-sector data to support Community Risk Reduction (CRR). By identifying where demand is concentrated and what is driving it, public agencies can shift from a reactive model to a more targeted and proactive strategy. This approach has the potential to reduce repeat incidents, improve outcomes, and make more efficient use of limited public resources.



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# **Urban Sustainability, Desert Urbanism, and the Thermal Metabolism of Digital Infrastructure: A Critical Analysis of Plan El Paso**

By: Manuel Eloy Morales

## Abstract

Urban sustainability is frequently framed as a series of technical hurdles, yet it is fundamentally a challenge of integration. This research investigates the multi-layered process of planning, implementing, and assessing sustainability within the arid context of El Paso, Texas. Using a mixed methods approach, the study triangulates qualitative policy analysis, quantitative temperature modeling, and case study evaluation. Central to this inquiry is the "Urban Heat Island" (UHI) effect and the specific architectural interventions required for passive survivability in the Chihuahuan Desert.

The study explores the transition from traditional Euclidean zoning to the Transect-based "SmartCode," evaluating how Plan El Paso serves as a constitutional shift toward 21st-century resilience. Additionally, the paper examines the emerging challenge of digital infrastructure, analyzing how data center thermal management and waste heat recovery present both a sustainability paradox and an opportunity for circular urban economies. Finally, the paper offers a critical lens on the "supply-side bias" and the persistent equity gaps that threaten to leave low-income residents behind in the transition to a "green" urban future.



# Infrastructure Inequality and Residential Segregation in Colonias in Texas

By: Arantxa Rangel

## Abstract:

Colonias are low-income, unincorporated communities located primarily along the Texas-Mexico border that often lack access to essential infrastructure and public services. Despite decades of federal and state interventions, many colonias continue to experience persistent poverty, inadequate housing conditions, and limited access to transportation and basic services. This study examines how infrastructure and socioeconomic factors are associated with patterns of residential segregation in colonia communities in selected border counties of Texas. Using census tract-level data from the American Community Survey (ACS), the analysis focuses on indicators such as Hispanic population concentration, poverty rates, plumbing deficiencies, educational attainment, and vehicular access. Descriptive statistics and comparative analyses were performed using Excel to identify patterns of inequality among census tracts. The findings indicate that the selected census tracts have, on average, an 87.62 percent Hispanic population and an average poverty rate of 24.04 percent. Infrastructure disparities remain significant, with some districts reporting a considerable number of homes lacking complete plumbing and having limited vehicular access. These findings suggest that residential segregation in colonial communities is closely linked to concentrated poverty and unequal access to essential infrastructure. The study concludes with policy recommendations that emphasize targeted infrastructure investment, improved access to transportation, and data-driven allocation of public resources to reduce persistent inequalities in Texas's colonial communities.

# Property Taxes and Housing Affordability in El Paso, Texas: A Policy Analysis of Financial Burden and Homeowner Stability

By: Ashley Rincon, Alejandra Sandoval, & Denisse Villavicencio

## Abstract

This study investigates the escalation challenges of housing affordability and homeowner stability in El Paso, Texas, a region that has been recognized historically for its low-cost living. This research highlights a significant disconnect between household incomes and the rapid increase of property tax collections around the over 75% increase and median home prices (going from 200k to 275k) between the years 2020 and 2026. By utilizing a mixed method approach, the study combines quantitative analysis of housing market data, property appraisals and budget reports with qualitative insights from structure surveys conducted of 51 Pasoans residents. Findings indicate that rising property values have largely offset existing tax relief measures, creating what the study identifies as a “New Homestead Gap,” where exemptions fail to provide meaningful relief due to rapid appraisal increases. For renters, the burden is equally severe, with two-thirds experiencing rent increases, often attributed by landlords to rising property taxes. The study further indicates that 74.5% of participants have considered relocating due to economic pressures, including limited employment, high taxes, and a cost of living that has outpaced income for 62% of respondents. The study concludes that El Paso’s current property tax structure functions as a regressive burden on low- and middle-income households and poses risks to long-term community stability facing a critical time where the fundamental cost of shelter is becoming unattainable for its workforce, necessitating urgent, data-driven policy interventions to address the mismatch between wages and housing carrying costs and preserve community stability.





# **Fatal Remedies: How France Undermined it's Own Objectives in Algeria,1954-1962**

By: Elizabeth Mae Tornabene

## Thesis Abstract

While much of the best-known literature on the Franco-Algerian War has emphasized insurgency, counterinsurgency, and the grievances of the colonized, this thesis takes a broader, historical and public administration approach by analyzing the relationship between the development and implementation phases of government and military policies and the unintended, sometimes fatal, outcomes that followed. Although it does this from the perspective of policymaking in the country that is trying to maintain control over its distant territory, it has implications for those interested in maximizing resistance to these policymakers.

By conducting a structured, focused comparison of a typical case across three theories on how policies lead to unintended consequences – Merton's Theory of Unintended Consequences, Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory, and Systems Theory – this thesis seeks to determine if there is an existing theoretical framework that fully explains how policy development and implementation lead to unintended consequences. It also aims to understand how different factors can lead to unintended policy outcomes and how knowledge of these factors can be used to limit secondary policy effects, thus improving development and delivery of service.

This thesis finds that, in the case of the Franco-Algerian War, all three of the theories examined account for some aspects of unintended consequences, but none were able to explain everything. Furthermore, it finds that the causes of unintended consequences are complex and multifactorial arising from policy development, implementation design, implementation drift, the actions of third parties, or a combination of these. It further identifies multiple factors across theories that policymakers can and should consider while attempting to limit unintended secondary policy effects including rapid formulation, blind motivation, practical limitations at the time of implementation, the potential for policy distortion by street-level bureaucrats, and the influence of third parties

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**Congratulations to Dr. Andonoska and  
all PAD 5367 students on a job well  
done!**

**To those in attendance this evening,  
thank you all for your support towards  
our students!**





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