



MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Capstone Showcase

Spring 2025

May 15, 2025

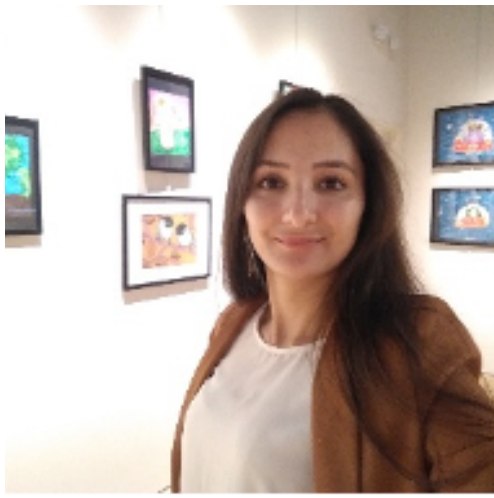
6:00 P.M.

**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.



Impact of hospital consolidation on the affordability and quality of healthcare in the United States

Oyimchakhon Abdullaeva

Abstract

This study learns about the impact of hospital consolidation to the cost and quality of healthcare in the United States. It suggests that when hospitals merge, it can lead to a healthcare market that is less competitive, which is not good for people to pay their bill or the kind of care we receive.

Looking at what other studies have found, while some think merging hospitals might have some benefit, the reality often seems to be that prices rise up after these deals. Also, when hospitals are in the competition, the quality of care tends to be better. This research looks at past studies and uses economic ideas, like how monopolies try to make the most money and a concept of market concentrations to see how much market power hospitals have.

The findings show that we have seen more of these hospital mergers, making markets less competitive. It turns out that just being part of a bigger hospital system does not automatically mean lower costs, and if there are savings, they do not always get passed on to patients. What is more, when hospitals have more control of the market, they might focus more on profits, which could affect the quality of care, as seen in the example of staffing issues at a hospital in a less competitive area.

Thinking about this issue in the US healthcare, one possible way could be to encourage the creation of private hospitals owned by physicians. These could be that they publicly share their transparent costs which allows people to compare prices for healthcare services before choosing a hospital, almost like looking at a menu before ordering food. To do this, government support might be needed to provide initial funding to these physician-led hospitals as a startup money under the condition of cost transparency.

In short, when hospitals merge mainly to maximize profit, it often leads to higher prices and possibly worse care, with fewer choices for patients. To make it possible, it's suggested that the government agencies like the FTC should be more active in stopping hospitals to be merged that could adversely affect the healthcare market competition and in making healthcare more affordable.



ASPCA in Action: Evaluating Animal Welfare and Community Impact

Daniela Cisneros

Abstract

The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, hereinafter, ASPCA—has a straightforward mission, “to provide effective means for the prevention of cruelty to animals throughout the United States.” (ASPCA). Its statistics and reports undoubtedly show that it rescues, fosters, reunites, or adopts thousands of animals each year. (ASPCA) Apart from adoption and rescue services, the ASPCA also provides spay and neuter care, provide veterinary care, rehoming, shelter intake and surrender, among other services.

Although the ASPCA is certainly doing remarkable work to combat the maltreatment of animals; reports indicate they also have a high number of euthanasia’s and some lack of consistent funding for key programs. Looking into the reallocation and appropriation of funds, while also finding ways to reduce the number of annual euthanasia’s and continuing to grow support and are crucial for the long-term well-being of this organization. Findings show that as the ASPCA operates, there is a high number of successful adoptions, effective lobbying, and a strong appeal to donor’s pathos, bringing in over \$290 million in revenue, including grants and donations (Axelrod, 2021).

Transition Assistance Program

by George Bennett, Matthew Barnett, Kat Muniz

Abstract

Our capstone paper “Transition Assistance Program” analyzes the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a multi-agency initiative designed to assist military service members in their transition to civilian life. The study examines TAP's effectiveness in enhancing labor market outcomes for veterans, focusing on employment, income, and education.

The research combines quantitative analysis of employment statistics from sources like the Department of Labor and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, with qualitative analysis of reports and case studies. Key findings include that while TAP aims to provide crucial resources and support, its success varies across different participant tiers and military branches. Specifically, the researchers find that TAP has not had a statistically significant impact on veteran unemployment rates. This is likely due to other economic factors. Additionally, the program's implementation and accessibility are uneven, and there are gaps in data collection and employer engagement. The authors suggest that TAP is most effective when veterans utilize all the resources the program has to offer, such as SkillBridge, MilGears, and employment workshops.

The paper concludes that TAP is a vital resource, but needs improvement in several areas, including standardized data collection, consistent program delivery, and stronger connections between employers and mental health support. The authors recommend future research to include multi-branch studies, analysis of participant attitudes, and comprehensive program evaluations.



George Bennett, &
Matthew Barnett



Kat Muniz

Evaluation to Assess the Long-term Impact of SHOCAP on Youth Rehabilitation and Recidivism

by Melissa Olivas-Rodriguez, Cynthia Serrano, Valeria Zuniga

Abstract

This study evaluates the Serious Habitual Offender Comprehensive Action Program (SHOCAP) in El Paso County to assess its impact on juvenile rehabilitation and recidivism reduction. SHOCAP, a collaborative program integrating probation, law enforcement, schools, social services, and mental health providers, focuses on high-risk youth and emphasizes early intervention and individualized support to address the underlying causes of delinquency. Utilizing a mixed methods study approach, this evaluation aims to determine whether SHOCAP aligns with current best practices, such as trauma-informed care and evidence-based interventions, and whether it successfully reduces recidivism and improves youth outcomes. It examines how SHOCAP's strategies align with juvenile justice standards and offers insights into potential improvements for enhancing its effectiveness. Ultimately, this evaluation seeks to contribute to the ongoing shift toward more rehabilitative and youth-centered approaches in the juvenile justice system."



Cynthia Serrano



Melissa Olivas-Rodriguez



Valeria Zuniga



Mental Health in the Fire-Rescue Service: Removing the Cultural Stigma Associated with First Responders

Frank Reyna, Jr.

Abstract

This research examines how the cultural stigma within the tradition of the fire-rescue service has impacted the mental health of first responders. The mental wellness of firefighters and emergency medical technicians is affected by repetitive exposure to traumatic incidents and disasters. The nature of their work contributes to three mental health disorders: substance abuse, post-traumatic stress, and suicidal ideation. Mental health issues are attributed to the lack of mandatory wellness programs, inadequate mental health services, and the fire department cultural stigma towards those who voice the need for mental health resources. The cultural stigma in the fire-rescue service prevents first responders from seeking help, fearing they will embody a negative perception of being mentally unfit for duty by their supervisors and peers. The objectives are to prevent poor mental health cases throughout the fire-rescue service and help those who are currently ailing from mental health disorders. The push for awareness and the need for mandatory mental health counseling for all first responders is the ultimate goal. The methodology for the research consists of a quantitative and qualitative study that analyzes data collected from a standardized survey conducted on first responders backed by literature review. The findings of the study indicate that mandatory mental health services should be introduced at the start of a first responder's career. The conclusion of this study provides the fire-rescue service awareness of the impact of its cultural stigma and what mandatory a mental wellness program could provide for first responders. The concepts of peer debriefing/defusing, professional counseling, mental health resources and other means of intervention will not be effective if the Fire-Rescue service continues its cultural stigma about mental health.



Health and Fitness Evaluation Plan for the Pflugerville Fire Department (PFD)

Brandon Soto

Abstract

This program evaluation assesses the effectiveness of the Pflugerville Fire Department's (PFD) cadet health and fitness program, with a specific focus on improving key physical domains that support firefighter safety, performance, and injury frequency. It also explores common challenges cadets face that affect the quality or consistency of effort required during physical training. Given the physical demands of firefighting as a profession, developing cardiovascular and muscular endurance are essential for improving operational readiness and career longevity.

This evaluation employs a mixed-methods approach that combines internal historical data, cadet feedback, and a review of peer-reviewed literature to understand the value of a health and fitness program. Thirty new cadets were evaluated three times (Beginning, middle, and end) across their 7-month fire academy, during which they completed morning physical training and earned their Fire/EMT certifications. Results from this program evaluation indicated progression within multiple domains such as body composition, aerobic capacity, muscular endurance, power/strength, and mobility.

The findings suggest the fire department effectively achieved their goal by tracking progressional advances within the cadet's physical fitness levels. To enhance future outcomes of its health and fitness program, the department should consider introducing benchmark comparisons, implement wellness workshops across health domains, gather additional qualitative feedback, and utilize technology to support ongoing fitness development.



Reducing EMS Overuse Through Integrated Care: An Evaluation of El Paso's MIH Program

Christopher J. Tijerina

Abstract:

This report evaluates the extent to which participation in El Paso's Mobile Integrated Health program reduced the number of 911 calls made by frequent EMS users between 2021 and 2024. Frequent users were defined as individuals with four or more emergency calls in a given year. The goal of the evaluation was to determine whether MIH participation corresponded with reduced reliance on emergency services and to identify patterns that could inform policy and operational planning.

The study used incident-level data drawn from the department's internal record management system. Call volume was analyzed before and after program enrollment to identify changes at both the individual and group levels. A survey of MIH field providers was also conducted to gather observations from those delivering care. Though the dataset covered the full program period, the most reliable and complete records came from September 2024 forward, when data entry processes became more standardized. Findings showed a consistent decrease in 911 calls following MIH enrollment for most participants. This reduction was evident in average and median comparisons and supported by visual distribution analysis. Several participants completely disengaged from emergency services post-enrollment. Provider feedback affirmed the program's effectiveness, pointing to in-home visits and ongoing care coordination as central to observed outcomes. Some operational challenges were also identified, including patient noncompliance and resource limitations.

While the study did not use a control group, the pattern of reduced use, supported by field insight, suggests the MIH program has contributed meaningfully to relieving system strain. The report concludes with several recommendations, including expanded research designs, improved data integration, and consideration of MIH models as a scalable tool for EMS systems under pressure. These results offer practical implications for city leaders, fire departments, and health systems seeking to extend care while maintaining emergency readiness.



Alcohol & Drug Abuse: Rehabilitation and It's Departing Affects

Michael Wood

Abstract

The New Mexico 5 Actions program, started in 2020, addresses the important issue of alcohol and drug abuse within a state grappling with one of the highest rates of alcohol-related deaths in the country. With alarming statistics highlighting the prevalence of Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) and substance use disorders (SUD) across various demographics, the research collects current literature on the causes and consequences of addiction, emphasizing the need for comprehensive intervention strategies and treatment.

By utilizing the psychological models, the paper explores the complex interplay of genetic, environmental, and social factors that contribute to addiction. Additionally, it raises questions about the long-term support for individuals in recovery, particularly regarding employment and housing challenges, and whether programs like the New Mexico 5 Actions can effectively assist participants beyond treatment. Through this research, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of addiction recovery and emphasizes the importance of continued support to grow successful reintegration and assimilation into society.



Profiling Crime Victimization by Age, Offense Type, and Reporting Delay: A K-Means Clustering Approach

Yuanlu Yin

Abstract

This capstone project investigates the intersection of victim age, crime type, and reporting delay in the metropolitan context of Los Angeles from 2020 to 2025. Using an unsupervised K-Means clustering approach, the study identifies distinct victim profiles and reporting behaviors based on three key dimensions: victim age, crime type, and delay in reporting.

The analysis draws on social disorganization theory, environmental criminology, and routine activity theory to interpret the observed patterns. Key findings reveal that younger victims tend to report quickly, while older adults, particularly those targeted by financial scams, experience significant reporting delays.

These insights underscore the need for age-targeted interventions, including rapid response tools for youth and specialized fraud support for seniors. The study highlights the importance of integrating data-driven crime analysis with human expertise to enhance public safety and optimize resource allocation.

**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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