

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

SPRING 2026 NEWSLETTER

Program Welcome

BY DR. ERIC BOYER, MPA PROGRAM DIRECTOR

This has been an exceptional year for the UTEP Master of Public Administration Program. We are proud of the accomplishments of our students, faculty, alumni, advisory board members, and community partners who continue to strengthen public service throughout our region.

A major milestone was the completion of our seven-year reaccreditation review with the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA). In February, we welcomed the site visit team to campus to meet with students, alumni, faculty, advisory board members, and university leaders. The visit highlighted our commitment to academic excellence, student success, and community engagement.

Students participated in a variety of high-impact learning experiences throughout the year. More than 150 students attended events in our Public Administration in Action speaker series, while others completed internships, attended professional conferences, and presented their work at the Spring Capstone Showcase. These experiences help students connect classroom learning with professional practice and prepare for careers in public service.

Our faculty continued to contribute important scholarship in public administration, nonprofit management, and public policy through publications, conference presentations, and externally funded research projects.

We also celebrate the success of our graduates. This year, 38 students earned their MPA degree – the largest graduating class in program history. Their achievements reflect the dedication, service, and leadership that define the UTEP MPA Program.

Thank you for your continued support of our students and our mission.

In this Issue...

Faculty News

Pages 02-03

PA in Action

Page 04

Student Reflections

Pages 05-07

MPASA

Page 08

Spring 2026 Capstone Showcase

Page 09

Spring 2026 in Photos

Page 10

Student Awards and Graduation

Pages 11-14

Alumni Corner

Page 15

Stay Connected

Page 16



Recent Faculty Publications in Public and Nonprofit Administration



Dr. Eric Boyer

Publication:

Boyer, Eric J., Niccolò Cusumano, Carlos Olmedo, and Veronica Vecchi. Forthcoming. "The Influence of Demand and Supply Knowledge on Framework Utilization in Centralized Procurement." *The American Review of Public Administration*.

Funding Award:

2026. State of Nonprofit Capacity Building Report. (Co-Principal Investigator). Catalyst Exchange and Helix Solutions. External award.

Conference Presentations

Boyer, Eric J. and Yannick Atouba. 2026. "Nonprofit Resilience on the U.S.-Mexico Border." Public Management Research Conference (PMRC), Washington, DC.

Boyer, Eric J. 2026. "Public Procurement under Tariffs and Global Uncertainties." American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), Los Angeles, CA.



Prof. Erika Andresen

Speaking engagements:

Resilient Leadership Issue of Boss Moves Magazine (May 2026). The article "Remove the Pressure: Smarter Strategic Thinking" and can be seen here:

<https://www.sherisesstudios.com/post/remove-the-pressure-smarter-strategic-thinking>

Podcasts:

Riding the Wave: Project Management for Emergency Managers. Discussed the critical importance of preparedness for businesses, role of risk management, and the limitations of relying solely on insurance. January;

Story Power Marketing Show. Discussed being prepared with some effort now rather than a lot of work later should catastrophe strike. April;

Widow, Wisdom, Wealth. Discussed resilience, life pivots, and practical strategies for navigating business and personal challenges after loss. May.

Faculty News

Recent Faculty Publications (cont.)



Dr. Euipyo Lee

Publication:

Cheema, F., Lee, E., Gupta, R., & Perry, J. Reconceptualizing the street-level bureaucrat construct as a general variable. *Public Administration and Development*. (Online First).

Conference presentations:

Lee, E., Kim, E., & Jung, Y. H. Moderating role of public service motivation in the relationship between bureaucrats' job demands-resources and well-being. *Public Management Research Conference*, DC, June 2026

Lee, E., Kim, E., & Jung, Y. H. Moderating role of public service motivation in the relationship between bureaucrats' job demands-resources and well-being. *American Society for Public Administration conference*, Los Angeles, California, March 2026

NASPAA Re-accreditation Site Visit

The MPA program faculty and staff send our sincerest **Thank You** to our students, MPA Advisory Board, and campus partners (Counseling and Psychological Services, University Career Center, Military Student Success Center, Center for Accommodation and Support Services, and the Graduate School), who gave of their time and insight during our re-accreditation Site Visit in February 2026.

The Site Visit Team was able to learn more about our student services and experiences, as well as our connection with alumni and the community. Your input is appreciated and helps our program improve for future generations of MPA students.



MPA Faculty and Staff with our Site Visit Team:

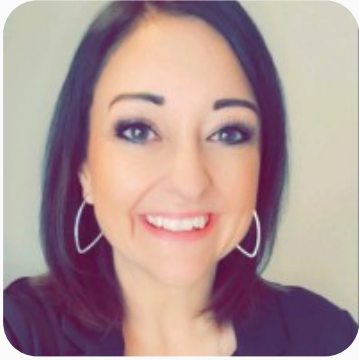
Dr. Eric Boyer, Dr. Esther Han, Dr. Steven Golightly (County of Los Angeles), Dr. Jose Villalobos, Dr. Euipyo Lee, Dr. Shannon Vaughan (University of Montana), Dr. Juan Pablo Guzman (University of Maryland, College Park), and Luci Rodriguez

MPA Advisory Board and our Site Visit Team:

Dr. Juan Pablo Guzman, Diana Hastings, Andrea Macias, Fred Lopez, Dr. Eric Boyer, Christian Lopez, Valerie Armendariz, Dr. Steven Golightly and Dr. Shannon Vaughan

PA in Action – Spring 2026

About PA in Action

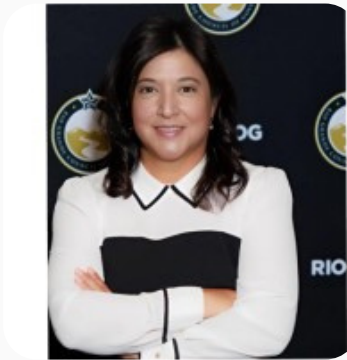


**Nicole Schiff, Executive Director
Paso Del Norte Center of Hope**

February 19, 2026
"Human Trafficking 101: Empowering
Communities"

The *Public Administration in Action* series is an initiative by the MPA Program that seeks to connect our students with the broader professional and academic community in the realm of the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. *PA in Action* brings professionals and academic experts to engage our students through presentations, discussions, and networking. This spring, our students got to hear from three impactful community leaders who are making an impact on the borderland.

To start the spring semester, the MPA community heard from Nicole Schiff, the Executive Director of the Paso del Norte Center of Hope. Her presentation on human trafficking was poignant and presented us with a call to action on how to support the Center's work and how community members can recognize trafficked victims.



**Annette Gutierrez, Executive Director
Rio Grande Council of Governments**

April 2, 2026

"How Regionalism is the Best Approach
to Solving Your Local Issues"

In April, we welcomed Annette Gutierrez, Executive Director of the Rio Grande Council of Governments about how the eight counties and nations in the Borderland work collaboratively to plan and deliver services to all within the region. It was truly an insight into the daily workings of intergovernmental efforts.

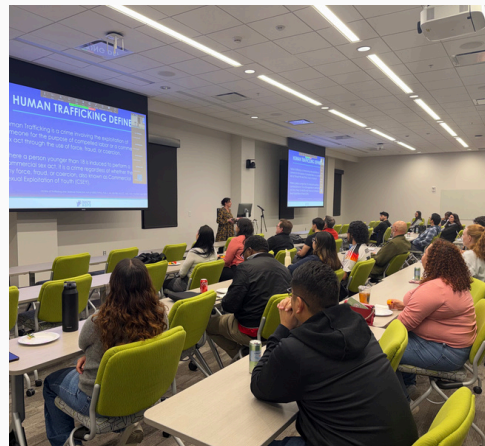
To round out the semester, Georgina Hernandez, CEO of the United Way of El Paso, shared with us the impact that UW has had in the community. Consisting of 17 agencies and 22 programs, the organization's impact reaches all corners of El Paso.



**Georgina Hernandez, CEO
United Way of El Paso**

April 28, 2026

"Crafting Your Impact: Your Voice, Your
Community, Your Influence"



PA in Action, coordinated by Dr. Ljubinka Andonoska, welcomes attendees from the UTEP community, alumni, and public administration professionals. Alumni: if you or someone you know would be a great speaker, please reach out to Landonoska@utep.edu.



Student Reflections

MPA Students Beyond the Borderland

National League of Cities Congressional City Conference- Elizabeth Macias, MBA/MPA student

Attending the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference in Washington, D.C. was a transformative experience that brought my political science studies and public service work to life. The conference focused on strengthening communities through federal and local partnerships, housing solutions, economic development, and identifying resources that help cities better serve residents. I attended sessions on economic development, civility and respectful leadership, and accommodations for persons with disabilities. A major highlight was visiting Capitol Hill and seeing our nation's history firsthand. Visiting the Lincoln Memorial and Capitol made lessons from my coursework with Dr. Villalobos feel real. My greatest takeaway was that public service is ultimately about community. Regardless of political differences, strong leadership comes from serving others, continuing to learn, and connecting communities with the resources they need to grow and thrive.



Elizabeth Macias, far right, with Congresswoman Veronica Escobar and City of El Paso employees at the National League of Cities Congressional City Conference



Brianna Cooper at her poster session on Food Security

Compact26- Brianna Cooper, MPA student

During the spring I was granted the opportunity to attend Compact26 in Chicago through Campus Compact. Not only did I get to present during the poster session on the Food Security work that I have been working on over the past 2 years here at UTEP, but I was also invited to speak on a panel about my VISTA experience and the state of food insecurity here in Texas. I had an amazing time being able to connect with others and brainstorm ideas on how we are impacting our communities and how we can tell those stories. I was able to connect with my fellow AmeriCorps VISTA members as well as the Campus Compact team which was amazing since we are all located in different regions around the country and don't get to see each other often.

Learning Outside the Classroom

Paso del Norte Community Foundation Nonprofit Conference: Reimagine!

On April 22, 2026, the **Paso del Norte Community Foundation** hosted its 6th annual **Nonprofit Conference: Reimagine!** The conference is designed for nonprofit executive leadership, staff, and board members to come together to think, develop, network, and grow. The conference provides attendees from all nonprofit backgrounds access to high-level thought leadership and skill-building. This year, the MPA program was able to sponsor the attendance of 8 students thanks to the generous donors who contribute to the MPA Student Enhancement Fund.



MPA students and faculty/staff, from front center clockwise: Sarah Alba, Luci Rodriguez, Veronica Porras, Niloufar Zarei, Luis Juarez, Judith Rodriguez, Alejandra Sandoval, Julio Eggenhafer, Dr. Esther Han, and Brianna Cooper

This year's sessions had underlying themes of workplace culture, philanthropy and governance, and collaboration and team building. When asked about their favorite session, the feedback was near unanimous: Adam "Smiley" Poswolsky's keynote about culture and workplace belonging. Sarah Alba noted that his discussion on culture and workplace belonging stood out "because it approached professional environments in a more human and relational way, rather than focusing only on productivity or performance." Niloufar Zarei added that "the message emphasized that when individuals feel seen, valued, and included, it not only improves well-being but also strengthens overall organizational culture." This was such a great keynote session... and somehow provided a small sneak peek into a new MPA course taught by Dr. Euipyo Lee in Summer 2026 titled "Public Service Motivation."

Of course, the conference remained true to its focus on philanthropy and fundraising, giving students the opportunity to hear from Dr. Marguerite McClinton Stoglin on the 2025 Bank of America Study of Philanthropy. The afternoon conference sessions allowed students to hear about more of the nitty gritty details of nonprofits. MPA students, Sarah Alba and Veronica Porras both reflected on a presentation by Rosemary Marin on the Legal Considerations for NPO's + Governance. Alba commented that the presentation provided a clearer understanding of how complex the legal and governance responsibilities of nonprofits actually are, and that its important for nonprofits to have strong internal structures and clear policies to avoid legal risks. Porras added, "The session was very insightful, and 'scary' as she called it, but knowing what needs to be done is very important for a nonprofit."

Overall, the Reimagine Conference was a great learning opportunity. Julio Eggenhafer, Nonprofit Administration and Governance graduate certificate student, recommends for students to attend as it "provides valuable exposure to real-world community issues, networking opporntunities, and insight into how different sectors work together to create impact."



Texas City Management Association's (TCMA) Annual Conference

The Texas City Management Association (TCMA) is the premier professional association for city managers, assistant city managers, and local government executives in Texas. The organization provides professional development, networking, and leadership training opportunities while promoting excellence in local government management across the state. The 2026 conference, which marked TCMA's 100th anniversary, brought together hundreds of local government professionals, academics, and students from throughout Texas for four days of learning and networking.

Representing UTEP's MPA Program, through funds donated to the MPA Student Excellence Fund, students Bradley McNair and Antonio (Tony) Martinez attended the conference alongside Dr. Ljubinka Andonoska. The conference provided opportunities to learn from city managers and local government leaders on topics including leadership, governance, strategic planning, innovation, and the future of local government. Students also networked with professionals and faculty from other Texas MPA programs, including institutions that participate in TCMA's Future City Managers and Intercollegiate Bowl activities, while exploring career pathways in city management.

When asked to reflect upon his conference experience, MPA Student Tony Martinez shared that the conference was a "worthwhile professional development experience that strengthened my leadership knowledge, expanded my professional network, and reinforced the importance of relationship-based leadership and continuous learning." Martinez currently works in local government and found that presentations and panels that city managers and leaders were the most impactful and he was able to connect with other local government professionals from various Texas communities.



Brad McNair, Dr. Ljubinka Andonoska, and
Tony Martinez

Similarly, Brad McNair, who is an MPA Online student from Houston, Texas, also made lasting connections through the TCMA conference. He noted that TCMA "was a game-changing experience," sharing that his favorite session was on the Texas Legislature which dove into state policy and featured members from the State legislature to speak on both local and federal issues. He added that he will be attending next year as well. With aspirations to become a city manager himself, McNair connected with TCMA leadership, networked with fellow attendees, and received multiple on-the-spot job offers from various cities across the state.

The MPA program is committed to continuing our attendance and membership with TCMA. Students- be on the lookout for next year's call for conference attendance applications!

Join the Master of Public Administration Student Association (MPASA)

The Masters of Public Administration Student Association (MPASA) is a student-led organization focused on professional development, peer support, and engagement within the public and nonprofit sectors. The group aims to create meaningful opportunities for students to connect with faculty, alumni, and community partners while strengthening the MPA student experience.

MPASA is always open to and recruiting new members and welcomes all students interested in leadership, service, and career development. Follow them at @mpasa.utep on Instagram for more updates. To receive information on upcoming meetings, please scan the QR code/click [this link](#) and visit our page on [MineTracker](#)!

Call for Leaders!

MPASA is graduating some of its members in Fall 2026. Join the organization to remain connected to fellow students!



MPASA members, Ernesto Altamirano and Nilou Zarei, tabling at the Spring 2026 Get Involved Fair!



MPASA recruited students for Project Move to volunteer alongside fellow Miners. Students prepared 500 conference bags for the Paso del Norte Community Foundation's upcoming Nonprofit Conference



**BUILD YOUR FUTURE BY
BUILDING COMMUNITY!**

The UTEP Masters of Public Administration Program is relaunching the Master in Public Administration Student Association (MPASA) and you are invited to join us!

SCAN THE QR CODE TO JOIN OUR MAILING LIST AND STAY IN THE KNOW ABOUT UPCOMING EVENTS, MEETINGS, AND WAYS TO GET INVOLVED WITH OUR STUDENT ASSOCIATION!



Powered By QuestionPro

LET'S BUILD SOMETHING GREAT — TOGETHER!

Spring 2026 Capstone Showcase

The MPA curriculum concludes with a rigorous capstone project in PAD 5367, where students choose a research area, policy, or program to apply skills of data analysis and policy review. The 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. On May 13, 2026, students in Dr. Andonoska's capstone course shared their projects at the Spring 2026 Capstone Showcase with MPA staff, faculty, alumni, and their families and friends. We are proud of their work and confident in their potential as future public servants. To view all past capstone projects, [click here!](#)

Diego Araiza: "Evaluating the Registered Not Paid (RNP) Campaign at UTEP Online."

Andres Arellanes, Gabriella Folden, Bruce McDowell, & Natalie Murillo: "NCAA Student-Athlete Mental Health and the Impact of Staff Support."

Melissa Astorga, Jessica Kendrick, Juan Morales, & Steven Thomas: "Nonprofit Management and Public-Private partnerships (PPPs), examined through the lens of the El Pasoans Fighting Hunger (EPFH) Food Bank."

Anna Dougherty, Johnny R. Ildefonso, Clara McMullen, & Timothy J. Reinker: "Evaluating the Distribution Locations & Schedules of El Pasoans Fighting Hunger Food Bank: Program Evaluation."

Thalia A. Escobedo, Bradley McNair, Angelica Miranda & Delma E. Zita: "How effective are Texas laws and school policies in addressing cyberbullying on social media among students?"

Guillermo Espinoza, Kirsten Garcia & Isaac Sanchez: "Evaluating FEMA Preparedness Programs and Community Disaster Readiness."

Arantxa Rangel: "Infrastructure Inequality and Residential Segregation in Colonias in Texas."

Melissa Faulkner, Elizabeth Hernandez, Vianney Miranda, & Valorie Rivera: "Designing Incentives to Improve Healthy Food Access: A Case Study of El Paso's Food Deserts."

Andres I. Garcia: "Understanding Responsibility at the District Level: How City Council Representatives Influence Administrative Outcomes in El Paso, Texas."

Justin Westfall, Luis Juarez Vieira & Colton Ryals: "Community Risk Reduction Through Data Integration and Cross-Sector Coordination."

Manuel Eloy Morales: "Urban Sustainability, Desert Urbanism, and the Thermal Metabolism of Digital Infrastructure: A Critical Analysis of Plan El Paso."

Ashley Rincon, Alejandra Sandoval, & Denisse Villavicencio: "Property Taxes and Housing Affordability in El Paso, Texas: A Policy Analysis of Financial Burden and Homeowner Stability."

Thesis:

Elizabeth Mae Tornabene: "Fatal Remedies: How France Undermined its Own Objectives in Algeria, 1954-1962."



Spring 2026 in Photos



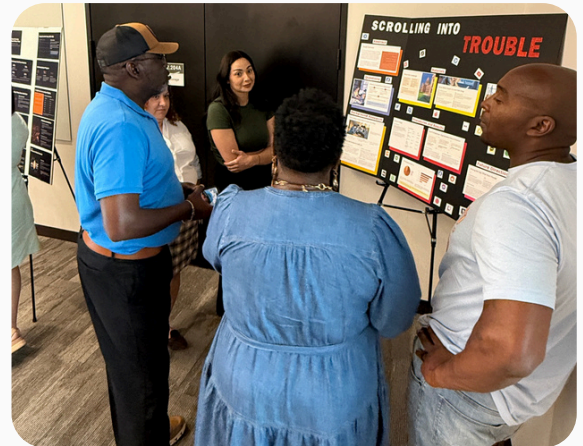
MBA/MPA students, Niloufar Zarei and Luis Juarez, with luchadores at the Nonprofit Reimagine Conference.



Dr. Esther Han and Dr. Eric Boyer at the Public Management Research Conference at American University, Washington D.C., June 2026.



Project Move volunteers assist the Paso del Norte Community Foundation with conference prep work for the upcoming Reimagine Conference.



Capstone students presenting their research to guests.



MPA students, faculty, and staff at the Department of Political Science and Public Administration Graduation Celebration, May 15, 2026.



Ready to be hooded! MPA students awaiting the College of Liberal Arts Hooding Ceremony on May 15, 2026

Each fall and spring, the MPA faculty and staff have the honor, and difficult decision, of nominating students for recognition in two awards categories. The *Outstanding Student Award* is bestowed upon a student for exceptional academic work, meaningful contributions in classroom discussion, and for demonstrating a commitment to enhancing the dialogue present in the field of public service. Recipients often have the highest GPAs, but also have made an impact on their classmates and professors. The *Public Service Award* is presented to students who have demonstrated exceptional commitment to public service– through their employment, volunteer work, and in their leadership values and actions.

We are honored to celebrate three of our exceptional graduates with this year's awards. Congratulations!

Outstanding Student Award Anna Dougherty



Originally from Springfield, Virginia, **Anna Dougherty** moved to El Paso, Texas, in November 2022 with her husband after graduating from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor of Science in Fish and Wildlife Conservation and a 3.63 GPA. In January 2025, she began pursuing her online Master of Public Administration degree here at UTEP as a full-time student. While completing her graduate studies, she has also worked full-time and remotely as the sole Recruiting Coordinator for Zeiders Enterprises, Inc., supporting five government contracts and high-volume hiring efforts focused on quality-of-life programs for service members, spouses, and veterans.

Over the past 1.5 years, Anna has successfully balanced a full-time graduate course load with a demanding professional role, demonstrating exceptional dedication, time management, and commitment to public service. Her work has been recognized with multiple company awards, including SPOT, STAR, and several Bravo Zulu Awards for customer service, leadership, service excellence, and high-impact recruiting initiatives.

Following graduation, she hopes to serve communities through public sector leadership and program administration, with a particular interest in environmental and natural resource agencies that support conservation, sustainability, and community well-being.

Public Service Award Johnny Ildefonso & Sylvia Perez



A native of New York City, **Johnny Ildefonso** is a senior noncommissioned officer in the United States Army with more than 20 years of military service and is a combat veteran of both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Throughout his career, he has led, mentored, and developed soldiers across multiple organizations while serving in leadership roles centered on readiness, training, and professional development. His leadership philosophy is grounded in transformational and servant leadership, with an emphasis on purpose-driven teams, disciplined standards, and investing in people to build cohesive and effective organizations.

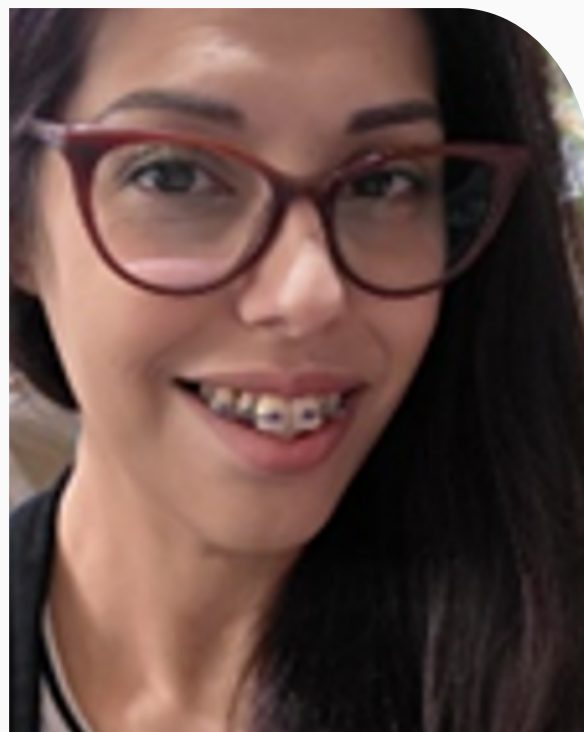
In addition to his military service, he is committed to self-development, continued education, and public service. He earned his bachelor's degree in management from American Military University and is currently attending the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss, Texas, in conjunction with his MPA here at UTEP.

As he transitions into the role of Operations Sergeant Major in the 82nd Airborne Division, he remains committed to mentoring future leaders and serving others beyond the military profession. Following retirement, he hopes to establish a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting underserved and at-risk youth. Having benefited from mentorship and second-chance opportunities earlier in life, he is passionate about giving back by helping young people pursue education, personal growth, and pathways to public service and leadership.

A proud San Antonio native, daughter of immigrants from Mexico, and a first-generation college graduate, **Sylvia Perez**, she is dedicated to public service and community impact. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts from Our Lady of the Lake University and just completed her MPA this spring. For more than 15 years, she has served her community through nonprofit and workforce development organizations, building a career centered on advocacy, opportunity, and service.

Her professional journey began with supporting youth and families, particularly individuals with disabilities and underserved communities. Those early experiences shaped her passion for advocacy and led her into workforce development and community leadership roles throughout the San Antonio region. Her work continues to be driven by a commitment to creating opportunities that empower individuals, strengthen families, and positively impact the community she calls home.

She brings extensive leadership experience, including four years in director-level leadership managing multi-million-dollar federal workforce grants, seven years of supervisory experience in workforce development, and deep knowledge of workforce programs such as Choices, SNAP, WIOA Adult and Dislocated Worker, TAA, and Youth services. She is currently serving as Deputy Director of Operations and Partnerships with C2 Global Professional Services at Workforce Solutions Alamo, where she leads workforce operations and career center activities.





Class of 2026



Master of Public Administration

Diego Araiza
Andres Arellanes
Diego Carlos
Anna Dougherty
Guillermo Espinoza
Melissa Faulkner
Andres Garcia
Kirsten Garcia
Johnny Ildefonso
Jessica Kendrick
Crista Mack
Bradley McNair
Bruce McDowell
Clara McMullen

Angelica Miranda
Vianney Miranda
Juan Morales
Natalie Murillo
Sylvia Perez
Arantxa Rangel
Timothy Reinker
Ashley Rincon
Valorie Rivera
Colton Ryals
Isaac Sanchez
Alejandra Sandoval
Elizabeth Tornabene
Denisse Villavicencio

Dual MBA/MPA

Luis M. Juarez Vieira

Graduate Certificates

Tanya Bell
Julio Eggenhafer
Makayla Jackson

Dr. Eric Boyd, Daniel Ochoa, Michael Reyes, and Dr. Mark Ruppel have served as UTEP's
graduates' career coaches. Thank you for your support and love for graduates!

PI ALPHA ALPHA HONOR SOCIETY

Pi Alpha Alpha (PAA) Honor Society is the National Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration. There are more than 160 chapters, located around the world, which recognize students who excel in their scholarship and commit to the values of integrity, professionalism, and public service. To be eligible for PAA induction, students must have at least 50% of their MPA coursework completed and maintain a GPA of 3.7 and above.

We presented the following students for induction on May 15, 2026:

Diego Araiza
Gilbert Cardenas
Kabia Cook
Brianna Cooper
Kirsten Garcia
Sandra Holguin
Johnny Ildefonso
Luis M. Juarez Vieira

Jessica Kendrick
Carlos Legarreta
Luke Liechti
Clara McMullen
Angelica Miranda
Vianney Miranda
Joseph Pawloski
Arantxa Rangel

Timothy Reinker
Ashley Rincon
Victor Sanchez
Alejandra Sandoval
Simone Valdez
Justin Westfall



Get Connected and Give Back!



Powered By QuestionPro

Know an alum who is making strides in their community? Nominate them (or yourself!) for our **Alumni Spotlight!** This helps us keep updated on your achievements and strengthens our community. If you're interested in supporting as a PA in Action speaker or have opportunities to share with students, please let us know!

[Alumni Connection Survey](#)

Our **MPA Student Enhancement Fund** supports MPA students' needs whether textbook costs, or funding experiential learning opportunities. This semester, 10 students were able to attend conferences through the use of these funds.

We appreciate being part of your annual giving efforts. Our fund is open year-round, thank you for your contributions in supporting future public servants!

[Donate here.](#)



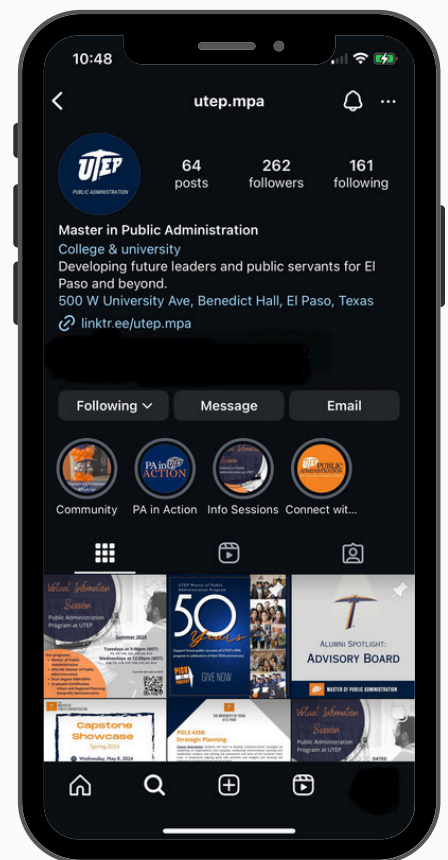
Join the **UTEP MPA Alumni, Students, & Friends Networking Group** on LinkedIn to remain connected, meet current students, and share job opportunities and successes. Thank you to the **MPA Advisory Board** for suggesting this networking group!

Have an event to promote or highlight to share? Email us at larodriguez15@utep.edu

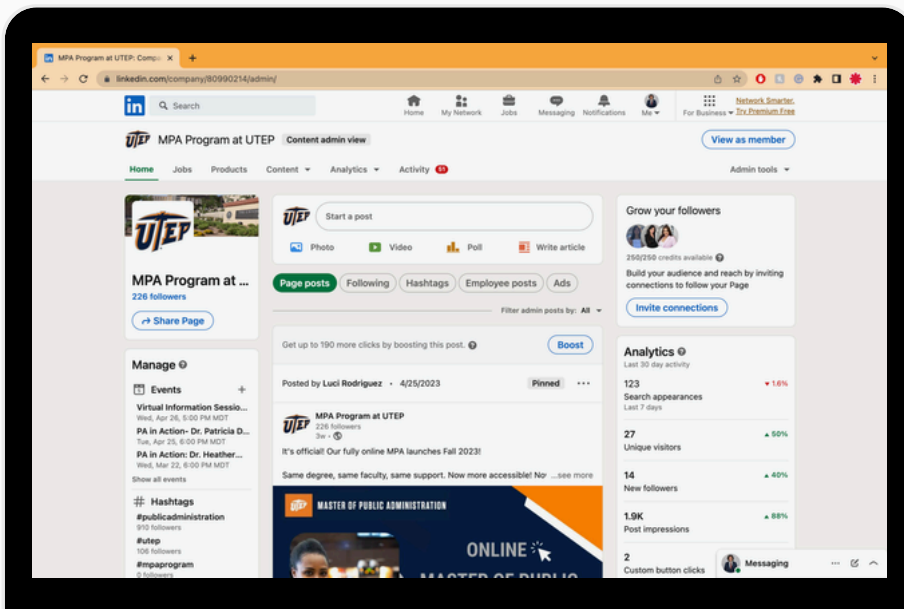
Connect with Us



Instagram:
@utep.mpa



Website: www.utep.edu/liberalarts/mpa/



LinkedIn:

"MPA PROGRAM AT UTEP"

