

MPP *at* UNI NEWSLETTER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA | MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY | SPRING 2025

MPP PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

We maintain a core group of dedicated, interdisciplinary faculty, with backgrounds in business, geography, philosophy, political science, and survey research.

Over 80 percent of our students in the current cohort are expected to graduate this summer, and our overall persistent rate toward graduation for all cohorts since 2017 stands at 80 percent.

BACKGROUND

The MPP program at UNI is a fully online program established in 2015 (it was an on-campus program from 1991-2015). The program was accredited by NASPAA in 2023, making it the only program in Iowa to receive that designation. As stated in its mission statement, the purpose of the program “is to enhance the public service values of emerging and mid-career public service professionals and equip them with the knowledge and skills needed to analyze, develop, and evaluate public policy and affairs at all levels of government.” Students move through the two-year program as part of a cohort, developing professional relationships with a network of colleagues. Recognizing that many of our students are working professionals, the curriculum is designed to ensure flexibility. Students take two courses per

semester, but the courses are offered sequentially, meaning students take one course the first 8 weeks and the second course the second 8 weeks of each semester. Courses meet via Zoom on Tuesday nights and focus on providing practical skills for students interested in working in the public and nonprofit sectors. Additionally, students are required to complete two practitioner-based courses, an internship and a capstone practicum, where students work in conjunction with policy practitioners to apply skills learned throughout the program to real-world policy issues. Upon graduation, students will have developed skills in policy analysis, program evaluation, and data analytics, among others, along with a portfolio of applied research based on interactions with practitioners in the field.

MPP UPDATES

MOVING *to* ANNUAL COHORTS

We are excited to announce that the Master of Public Policy (MPP) program at the University of Northern Iowa has moved to annual cohorts.

We will be admitting students every fall semester, with the application portal opening in November or December for admittance to the following fall semester. The move to annual cohorts allows us to better serve our prospective students, specifically those early to mid-career professionals across Iowa who may be looking for a flexible and practical online program.

Students will continue to have two opportunities to engage with practitioners as part of our core curriculum, and we remain the only program in Iowa to be accredited by NASPAA.

PARTNERSHIPS *with* IOWA CITIES THROUGH CAPSTONE PROJECTS

As part of the curriculum, students are required to complete two practitioner-based courses, including a “Capstone practicum” course in their final semester. The purpose of the capstone is to provide students with an opportunity to apply the data analytic and program evaluation skills learned throughout the program by partnering with selected organizations in surrounding communities to engage in policy analysis and decision making.

We are excited to announce our summer 2025 partnerships, adding to our relationships with cities and organizations throughout Iowa.

If you are interested in working with our students, please feel free to reach out to the Program Coordinator, Chris Larimer, by phone (319-273-6047) or email: christopher.larimer@uni.edu.

City of Dubuque (summer 2025)
City of Fort Madison (summer 2025)
City of Oelwein
City of Waverly (summer 2025)
Black Hawk County Department of Public Health (summer 2025)
Patricia A. Thomson Center for Violence Prevention (summer 2025)
Cedar Valley United Way

APPLY TODAY!

We are still accepting applications for our upcoming cohort set to begin in August. Information about the application process can be found on our [program webpage](#). We have [scholarships](#) available!

>> online.uni.edu/public-policy

To see some of the exciting fields our recent graduates are working in, check out the “Careers & Placement rates” tab on our Program [Fact Sheet](#).



STUDENT SPOTLIGHT



ADRIENNE MILLER

HOMETOWN

Waterloo, Iowa

WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO UNI?

Before entering the MPP program, I earned my degree in Public Administration from UNI. I then spent 11 years working in the public sector, gaining valuable experience. Pursuing my master's had been on my mind for several years, and I eventually realized that if I didn't take the leap now, I might never do it. UNI and the MPP program was a natural fit due to my familiarity with the College of Social & Behavioral Sciences, faculty and UNI being in close proximity to home.

WHAT DID YOU ENJOY MOST?

I really enjoyed how the program encouraged real-world application of public policy theories. The small class sizes allowed engaging discussions, and I appreciated how accessible and supportive the faculty were throughout the program. I also valued the flexibility of being able to take

classes from anywhere, which made it possible to balance my education with my personal and professional life. The program allowed me to connect with students from all over the country, each bringing unique perspectives that made the experience even more valuable.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED?

Completing my undergraduate degree in Public Administration at UNI gave me familiarity with the university's strong academic programs and supportive environment. As I built my career in the public sector, I realized I wanted to strengthen my skills in public sector leadership and decision-making. The MPP program at UNI felt like the perfect fit to meet those goals.

MOST INFLUENTIAL PROFESSORS?

All of the professors in the program were incredibly supportive and created a great learning environment. Several professors had a significant impact, but I would especially highlight Professor Larimer and Professor Renfro for their support. They helped create a positive learning environment that contributed greatly to my academic and professional growth.

POST-GRADUATION PLANS?

After graduation, I plan to continue expanding the Business Services and Advocacy program at Grow Cedar Valley in Waterloo, Iowa, focusing on strengthening regional business partnerships and advocating for local economic growth.

HOW DID UNI MPP PREPARE YOU?

The MPP program at UNI has provided me with the tools to make a meaningful impact in Grow Cedar Valley's Business Services and Advocacy program. I've already applied my policy analysis and decision-making skills while collaborating with similar organizations and engaging with businesses across the community. Additionally, I work directly with business leaders to better understand their challenges and successes, which allows us to tailor our strategies to support local economic growth and strengthen regional business partnerships.

ADVICE FOR FUTURE PANTHERS?

If you've been thinking about grad school, just go for it! The MPP program has done more than expand my knowledge and skills — it's given me a boost in confidence, both personally and professionally, that I didn't have before. Don't let doubts hold you back. It's a great chance to learn more, meet amazing people, and open new doors for your future.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



DARRIN GAGE

EDUCATION

BA, Political Science
University of Northern Iowa

BA, Public Administration
University of Northern Iowa

Master of Public Policy
University of Northern Iowa

Certified Municipal Clerk – 1998

Certification provided by the
International Institute of Municipal
Clerks for courses taken through Iowa
Municipal Professionals Institute &
Academy at Iowa State University

Certified ADA (Americans with
Disabilities Act) Coordinator – 2016

Certification provided by the University
of Missouri for courses taken through
the ADA Coordinator Training
Certification Program

CURRENT LOCATION

Mount Vernon, Iowa

CURRENT POSITION

Director of Policy & Administration/Linn
County, Iowa – Cedar Rapids, Iowa

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE UNI?

After working in local government as a city clerk, city administrator, and county director of policy and administration, I had a strong desire to further develop my knowledge of policy design and analysis at an in-depth, rigorous level that professional conferences and seminars cannot provide. UNI's MPP program offers a flexible schedule for non-traditional students and ongoing opportunities to engage meaningfully in cohort-based learning and to benefit from the experience of other professionals.

HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED?

While I was searching for ways to continue my professional development, I received an email from UNI about the MPP program. I received my undergraduate degrees from UNI, so the MPP program was a perfect fit.

WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR CURRENT POSITION?

I work closely with the Linn County Board of Supervisors to plan and implement a wide variety of initiatives and priorities. I provide research and analysis to the Board and other decision makers on those topics and recommend other measures to the Board for consideration and adoption. I write and help implement internal policies and procedures and oversee a wide variety of contracts, leases, and agreements. I monitor state legislative activity for the County and act as a liaison with lobbyists and legislators. I develop and provide oversight for the capital improvement plan and manage a variety of special or one-time projects

and serve as the County's Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator.

I enjoy working in local government, as opposed to state or federal government, because it is the government most accessible to the public and because of the positive, meaningful impact I have seen it have on people's every day lives.

HOW DID UNI MPP PREPARE YOU?

I started in my current role before I enrolled in the MPP program, but it introduced and enhanced skills that I use regularly. For example, the program started with course work in using case studies to apply theory to practice, which is directly applicable to policy analysis and research that I perform. A specific tool taught in the program is the criteria selection matrix that I continue to use an essential evaluation method. I keep also Eugene Bardach's *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* on my desk and refer to its Eightfold Path from time to time.

MOST MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE?

Specific theories that stick out and that I continue to refer to as part of my job are salience and proximity, bounded rationality, image and venue, and the paradox of search.

David Graeber's *The Utopia of Rules* is the book that most challenged me to think about my understanding of how things work and Robert Reich's *Saving Capitalism* is the book I enjoyed reading the most.