MPA Program Blog

MPA Director Michael Craw

September 20, 2019

Welcome to the Start of the 2019-20 Academic Year!

Greetings Greener MPA Students and Friends,

As a new academic year begins for our program, I wanted to take a few moments to welcome you back from summer and wish you well in your studies for the upcoming year. The MPA program faculty and staff here at Evergreen have been hard at work to make the 2019-20 academic year a successful one for our students, and we are all excited to share what we know with you.

I think it is appropriate that I begin my tenure as director of the MPA program with an Evergreen custom: offering a few expressions of gratitude. First I want to thank our out-going director Doreen Swetkis. Doreen has served our faculty, staff, students and community with distinction over the past four years and has laid the groundwork for our program’s continued success in educating the next generation of Washington’s leaders. Second, I want to say thank you to the MPA program faculty and staff, all of whom have gone out of their way to make me feel welcome and make my transition to Evergreen smooth.

I also want to express my gratitude to our students and alumni. We live in times when public servants are often unrecognized for their vital contributions to our communities, even by those at the highest level of our government. It gives me great hope for our future to see talented people make the choice to pursue careers that will make a difference in our society, and I thank you for doing so.

I also would like to share a little bit about my path to Evergreen’s MPA program and some ideas on how we can build on it to enhance our impact on our community and state. I have long had an interest in how public policy can be used to address poverty and inequality, particularly in urban centers. In pursuit of that knowledge, I earned my PhD in political science at Indiana University in 2004, with specialties in public policy and statistical methods. My first full-time job as a professor was at Michigan State University’s James Madison College, a program that emerged from the same movement in experimental colleges that spawned The Evergreen State College. Here, I learned how important it is to me, as a teacher, that students use what they learn in my courses to be pioneers who introduce practices that will make government work better. A great need exists for evidence-based decision-making in local and state government and the nonprofit sector and so in my teaching practice I help students learn how to introduce and use these methods to better serve the public.

In 2012, I left the James Madison program to become faculty in the Master of Public Administration program at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. In my time here, I learned how much impact an MPA program’s faculty, staff, and students can have when they work together to address community challenges. Over my time in Little Rock, I guided a project in collaboration with other faculty and students that evaluated the work that neighborhood organizations undertake to improve their communities. This work generated several related projects, such as a study of the impact of multi-family housing on neighborhoods, a study of how neighborhoods affect recidivism and the “prison cycle”, and student-led projects assessing infrastructure disrepair and crime in the city’s most vulnerable neighborhoods.

What excites me the most about being part of Evergreen’s MPA program is the opportunity to help us to accomplish our mission of “advocating powerfully on behalf of the public” and “accomplishing positive change in our workplace and in our communities.” We are accomplishing this in multiple ways, through our service learning and capstone projects and our unique model for integrating tribal governance into the program. The launch of our MPA program in Tacoma this fall opens yet more possible ways we can collaborate to make a difference. In my experience, successful community-engaged MPA programs like Evergreen’s generally rest on four key principles:

1) An integrated curriculum that connects to both other fields of study and to the community and state it serves.

2) A commitment to diversity and inclusion in recruiting students and faculty and in the program’s culture.

3) Engagement with the community and region in high quality applied research, technical services, and professional development and training

4) Assessment practices that support a culture of continuous improvement and enhance a collaborative approach to program governance.

Evergreen’s MPA program embraces these principles. As I begin my time here, I look forward to working with you all to continue us on a path that reinforces and deepens our commitment to excellence in public service for the state of Washington.

Sincerely,

Mike Craw

MPA Program Director

Alumni newsletter

Message from MPA Director

Greetings MPA Alumni and Friends,

I think it is appropriate that I begin my tenure as director of the MPA program with an Evergreen custom: offering a few expressions of gratitude. First I want to thank our out-going director Doreen Swetkis. Doreen has served our faculty, staff, students and community with distinction over the past four years and has laid the groundwork for our program’s continued success in educating the next generation of Washington’s leaders. Second, I want to say thank you to the MPA program faculty and staff, all of whom have gone out of their way to make me feel welcome and make my transition to Evergreen smooth.

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I also would like to share a little bit about my path to Evergreen’s MPA program and some ideas on how we can build on it to enhance our impact on our community and state. What I value most in my teaching and research are the opportunities they provide to improve the communities we serve. My first full-time job as a professor was at Michigan State University’s James Madison College, a program that emerged from the same movement in experimental colleges that spawned The Evergreen State College. Here, I learned how important it is to me, as a teacher, that students use what they learn in my courses to be pioneers who introduce practices that will make government work better. A great need exists for evidence-based decision-making in local and state government and the nonprofit sector and so in my teaching practice I help students learn how to introduce and use these methods to better serve the public.

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What I learned from this that has really stuck with me is that MPA programs are ideally positioned to collaborate with governments and nonprofit organizations to make our communities work better. MPA programs that do their jobs well teach by doing. They cultivate opportunities in the public and nonprofit sectors where students can gain experience that cannot be taught in a classroom and to demonstrate what they have learned in ways that benefit society. And faculty expertise can be marshaled to address public problems and policies in ways that help solve those problems while providing generalizable knowledge to practitioners and academics around the globe.

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Mike Craw

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