

Their Legacies Continue to Live On

It's no secret that Appalachian State University's Town Administrator, City/County Management (TACCM) and Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs are highly regarded for educating and training a number of North Carolina's municipal and county managers. In addition to having graduates of these programs represent 25% of municipal and county managers in North Carolina; the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) has bestowed one of its greatest honors on Appalachian State University twice in the past 34 years.

Established in the name of the longtime director of the University of Pennsylvania's Fels Institute of Government, the Sweeney Academic Award goes to an academic leader or academic institution that has made a significant contribution to the formal education of students pursuing careers in local government. In 1986 ICMA honored Dr. Matt Williamson with the award, and in 2010 Dr. Marvin Hoffman was the recipient. Appalachian State University's TACCM and MPA programs are one of only two schools in the nation to have two professors receive this esteemed award. It is with the legacies of both Dr. Williamson and Dr. Hoffman that these programs thrive and continue to produce outstanding and professional graduates year after year.

Dr. Matt Williamson found his way to Appalachian in a rather untraditional way. As a former President of Churchill Downs, he was no stranger to politics and working with people. However, after a few years he made the decision to revisit his alma mater, the University of Virginia, where he obtained his Ph.D. In 1970, after a five year teaching stint at Georgia Southern University, he took a professorship at Appalachian State University where he began to develop the program that would make him known as the "Godfather of Local Government".

A letter from the Southern Regional Education Board suggesting the development of an internship program at Appalachian preceded his arrival at ASU. During the next year Dr. Williamson worked to design and implement an internship program. He worked with a number of managers across the state educating them on the benefits of an internship program and encouraging them to open their offices to a student. In the summer of 1971, Dr. Williamson became the Director of the Student Internship Program and placed the first interns.

In 1972 Dr. Williamson became the Director and Administrator of the Cooperative Education Program, where he secured a grant and initiated the Cooperative Education program, which stimulated the expansion and growth of the entire internship program. This resulted in the placement of over 5,500 interns across 20 disciplines throughout the state of North Carolina.

Stemming from his interest in politics and public administration, Dr. Williamson saw the need for highly skilled public officials in North Carolina municipalities and counties. In 1972 he began to develop a six-month internship program that focused exclusively on small cities and towns. The internship would teach students local government administration, budgeting and planning. Williamson interviewed and hand selected each of the student participants. Eventually this internship program developed into the Town Administration, City/County Management program. Dr. Williamson served as Director of this program from 1972 – 1986.

Ed Burchins, TACCM graduate and current City Manager of Laurinburg,, NC states, "He [Dr. Williamson] was the kind of man who had a knack of picking out people who would make great managers. He could read their personality, tell if

they were hard working, and ensured that they were the kind of people who didn't take life too seriously. Those of us who worked under Dr. Williamson developed not only a strong professor/student relationship with him, but a friendship as well. It was a fraternity of men and women all working for a common goal. We all shared our war stories and cares and stayed in touch."

In 1986, ICMA presented Dr. Williamson with the prestigious Sweeney award in honor of his academic leadership and contributions to the formal education of students pursuing careers in local government. Five years later, in 2001, Dr. Williamson passed away from cancer. His legacy lives on today in each of the 240 students that he impacted with his program; of whom 124 went on to serve as municipal and county managers. Both the North Carolina City/County Managers Association (NCCCMA) and the Appalachian State University Local Government Alumni Association (ASULGAA) have endowed scholarships in Dr. Williamson's name.

As Dr. Williamson was working toward retirement from ASU, a new face emerged onto the TACCM/MPA scene at Appalachian. Dr. Marvin Hoffman, who worked briefly with Dr. Williamson at ASU from 1971-1972, returned to the university in 1984 to begin teaching political science.

Dr. Hoffman brought his own hands-on expertise to the program. After leaving Appalachian in 1972, Dr. Hoffman pursued a twelve-year career in local government where he served in the capacity as a city and county manager, as well as a fire chief. His involvement in the positions gave him the ability to not only teach theory but to add an additional perspective of real world use, something that students find beneficial.

Anthony Starr, graduate, former town manager and current Planning Director in Henderson County, NC states, "Dr. Hoffman is always a favorite among students and alumni. He has a very entertaining way of blending sound public

administration theories with practical methods of applying those principles. He effectively uses "war stories" from his tenure as a local government manager to engage students in realistic classroom discussions."

With the TACCM program becoming increasingly popular; it became apparent that there was a need for a graduate program to provide individuals seeking a career in local government with a means of higher education. Dr. Hoffman began working with the university and alumni to establish a Masters degree in Public Administration. In the fall of 1989 the Master of Public Administration program enrolled its first students. The focus of the program is to educate students interested in working in local government and not-for-profit organizations. In 1990 Dr. Marvin Hoffman became the director of the program.

In June of 2010, after 20 years serving as MPA Director, Dr. Marvin Hoffman decided to step down as director and focus solely on teaching. During his tenure as director, Dr. Hoffman oversaw the graduation of over 300 individuals who have moved on to perform a wide array of jobs in local, state, and federal governments, as well as national not-for-profits. In June of 2010 ICMA announced that Dr. Hoffman would join the prestigious ranks of his colleague, Dr. Williamson, as a recipient of the Stephen B. Sweeney award. In October 2010 the ICMA will formally honor Dr. Hoffman for his years of servitude at their annual conference in San Jose, California.

In order to preserve the legacies of these two professors and guarantee the continuing excellence of these two programs, a group of graduates came together and started the Appalachian State University Local Government Alumni Association (ASULGAA). The purpose of the Association is to support the professional training and continuing education of present and future local government managers, planners, and other professionals, in addition to ensuring that both programs maintain excellence in the field of

practicing municipal and county managers. Hundreds of graduates of the TACCM and MPA programs, as well as graduates from the Community & Regional Planning program are active participants in the Association. Each year the ASULGAA awards eight scholarships to undergraduate and graduate students pursuing careers in local government. In order to assist students with their education costs the association has raised over \$250,000 in scholarship money.

In addition to scholarships the alumni association offers students and those practicing in the field with immense networking opportunities. Many TACCM and MPA students would not be in the current positions if it weren't for the contacts they made within the ASULGAA.

Megan Piner, 2010 MPA graduate states, "I would not be where I am today without the ASULGAA; their commitment to what they do is clear to every student they speak with. Members of the alumni association helped me obtain both of my internships, as well as my current position in Henderson County."

The public management field in North Carolina knows and respects the local government alumni from Appalachian State. These alumni stand strong at state and national conferences. Donald Duncan, City Manager of Conover, NC puts it into perspective, "As a college student I attended the statewide manager's conference with Dr. Marvin Hoffman. At one point he asked for all alumni present to stand when their respective alma mater was called. Western Carolina had three stand, East Carolina five, NC State eight and Chapel Hill twelve. Finally he asked for all of those from Appalachian to stand and over 200 individuals proudly rose to their feet."

Through the hard work and dedication of Drs. Williamson and Hoffman, and with the continuing support of the ASULAA, both the TACCM and MPA programs are among the most prominent local government academic programs in the

country. Since their inceptions these programs have graduated over 1,000 students, of who 25% comprise 25% of North Carolina's municipal and county managers. Alumni carry on the legacies of these two professors and work every day to commit to the highest ideals of excellence in public service. Indeed, North Carolina owes a great deal to each of them. Steve Wyatt, TACCM graduate and current Henderson County Manager says it best, "Most North Carolinians have no idea who Appalachian effects their daily quality of life – the streets they drive on, the water they drink, and even how their solid waste is managed. From sunrise to sunrise, 365 days a year, Appalachian graduates oversee the operations of our State's municipalities and counties at the highest standard."

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