

Pepperdine University School of Public Policy
Student ICMA Chapter

2015-2016 Annual Report

Introduction

It has been a year of exciting changes and new relationships for the Pepperdine University School of Public Policy ICMA student chapter. After a bitter-sweet goodbye to the chapter's "founding chapter mentor," Rod Gould (who retired as City Manager of Santa Monica, CA in 2015), the chapter welcomed Artie Fields, City Manager of Inglewood, CA as its new chapter mentor. Artie first became involved with the group last year, when he spoke to students about his career and the diverse communities he has worked in. We were excited to be able to deepen and formalize our relationship with such a passionate, enthusiastic leader.

This year the chapter flourished under the capable student leadership of chapter president Christian Daly, vice president Alan Jeffers, and chapter secretary Allie Bergeron. Together with the broader membership (over 1/3 of the students in the Pepperdine SPP program are members of the Student ICMA chapter), the chapter had its busiest year to date.

A Year of Diversity

While the events and activities of the student chapter this year were wide-ranging, a common theme throughout was diversity. Students heard from people of diverse ethnicities and backgrounds, in diverse stages of their careers, or serving in diverse structures of city government. As Christian described it, "We really wanted students to see the full range of opportunities available to them in a career in local government leadership.

Fall Semester

For the fall semester, the board decided that they wanted to hear perspectives from someone who was just starting his career in municipal government, as well as from someone who has had a long career and reached the full potential of her career in local government.

Accordingly, the semester kicked off with a lunchtime discussion with George Gabriel, one of the founding members of our student chapter, who has now graduated and is working in the Public Information Office for the City of Malibu, CA. Gabriel offered strategies for getting a foot in the door, shared some of what he is enjoying about these first years of a local government career, and sketched out the trajectory he hopes to follow. He shared why he finds local government a promising field for having a real impact on your immediate community.

Teaming up with another student organization, Women in Public Policy, the chapter hosted Pat Martel, current president of the ICMA board of directors and city manager of Daly City. Martel spoke on "Local Governance for Today and

Tomorrow,” sharing some of her own experiences as a woman of color in local leadership. She noted that municipal government, at least at the executive level, remains a relatively homogeneous field, but noted that this is changing. Looking around the room at a group with slightly more women than men, and with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds, she added, “The diversity in this room is a very hopeful thing for the future of this field.”

Spring Semester

For the spring semester, the chapter opted to explore different ways that cities are governed. They did this through a combination of on-campus meetings with city leaders, and off-campus visits to city hall.

Beginning at home, students met with then-City Manager of Malibu Jim Thorsen. He spoke to students about the advantages and challenges of running a small, contract city. Malibu has only 13,000 residents, and contracts with the County of Los Angeles and other agencies for public safety and other services. Thorsen also gave students insights into how he has addressed issues particular to Malibu, as a small affluent city that has a major tourist draw, and unique environmental challenges.

Students then met with chapter mentor Artie Fields, who shared the very different perspective of leading a mostly-lower-income, full service city with a population of over 100,000 set right in the heart of the Los Angeles Metro area. Fields described the negotiations for bringing Los Angeles’ new football stadium to Inglewood and the value that would add to what has often been a challenged community. He also talked about the issue of affordable housing and unique ways that Inglewood has used federal HUD funds to improve the community.

In addition to meeting with these city managers, students took “field trips” to both Malibu and Inglewood city halls. In Inglewood, Fields arranged for students to meet with nearly every department head to gain a well-rounded picture of local government leadership. For several student members this was a highlight of the year, helping to focus their own career paths.

Finally, during the spring semester, members of the student ICMA chapter had a dinner with the School of Public Policy’s 2016 ICMA City Manager in Residence, Kurt Wilson, city Manager of Stockton, CA. Wilson joined the City of Stockton as deputy city manager in September 2012, less than 10 weeks after the city filed for Chapter 9 bankruptcy protection. He became City Manager in 2014. Wilson had an open discussion with the students about the challenges of taking on leadership after bankruptcy. He also shared his unique career path which began in state government working with the department of corrections and with the probation system.

