Amid the Global Pandemic Lockdown, the Schar School Kept Its Focus on What’s Important—the Students

Molly Reed was understandably concerned. The sophomore government major at the Schar School was home in Dallas for Spring Break in March when word came from George Mason University that the novel coronavirus outbreak would cause the campus—and much of the world—to shut down. Her books and notes were in her room at her residence hall in Fairfax, Va., with no chance of retrieving them. Her daily routine of classroom attendance, homework, research with professors, and multiple extracurricular activities was suddenly upended. Worse, the budding law school candidate worried that her 4.0 GPA was in jeopardy—anything less would diminish the spotless record she had worked so hard to achieve.

Meanwhile, her professors were busy acquiring the technology and skills to “pivot” from in-person instruction to entirely online, as was every other unit within the university. Few were certain a successful “continuity of service” was entirely possible, despite the extraordinary collective effort. It took getting used to—and for some, online distance education was a struggle—but in the end, according to Schar School students, faculty members, and staff, the challenges were met head-on and, by and large, overcome.

See page 4.
Letter from the Dean

On the heels of taking every course and student service offered at the Schar School onto an online format in mid-March—from classroom instruction to conferring degrees—the explosion of civil unrest that shook the nation in May ignited the best instincts of our faculty to apply their expertise to finding solutions to lingering and worrisome social ills.

By capitalizing on the capabilities of WebEx and Zoom we explored during May’s week of COVID-19 webinars, and by performing new and revealing research, Schar School professors illuminated aspects of social justice in America for five days, in a series of well-received discussions featuring distinguished guest speakers from around the country. You can read the recaps in our cover story and watch each of the sessions at bit.ly/JusticeWrap.

Meanwhile, it seemed as if the summer term was in full swing by the time our graduating students had figuratively tossed their (virtual) mortarboards in the air at the conclusion of their online commencement. I am happy to report our Student Services and Advising teams not only maintained close contact with current and prospective students, but they expanded their reach by developing a robust variety of online advising and career advancement programming, much of it spearheaded by the Alumni Chapter, for which I am grateful.

As if to acknowledge these student-oriented efforts, George Mason University recognized one of our own as the Employee of the Month for July. Congratulations to Schar School Director of Student Services, Silva Pecini Morris. You can read more about the important work she and her staff do elsewhere in this issue.

After the challenges and opportunities we faced in the spring and summer, and heading into the closing weeks of a historic election year, our faculty and staff are looking forward to the new semester with confidence that we are ready to help prepare our students to take charge of our nation’s and the world’s future challenges and opportunities.

Mark J. Rozell
Dean, Schar School of Policy and Government
Ruth D. and John T. Hazel Chair in Public Policy

The Big Number

$41 Million

The “advertising value equivalency” of the June 9 Washington Post-Schar School Poll gauging support for the nationwide protests following the killing of George Floyd. The survey appeared in 1,055 media outlets around the world, through August 14.
“Finishing the semester at home, 1,400 miles away, without the physical interaction I was used to was difficult at first but we all had no choice but to accept it as the ‘new normal,’” Reed concluded. “And eventually it got easier, although I still miss everyone.”

The good news: She kept her 4.0.

Saving a Semester
The continuity of services was crucial to the success of the semester, from the continuation of teaching the semester’s curriculum to the Celebration of Degrees and the university’s commencement ceremony—all virtually. Not only did classroom instruction continue, Student Services and Advising made the pivot to keep 2,000 students engaged and successful. Advising, career counseling, resumé polishing, awards presentations, internship placements, admissions assistance, PhD defenses, and other vital activities continued, albeit through laptop screens.

The students noticed. It wasn’t an “easy A,” but based on feedback, it seemed the Schar School got a passing grade. “For me, it was impressive how my professors rapidly responded to the daunting changes and challenges associated with shifts in learning,” said Madhavi Jodhpurkar, a student in the cohort-based Master’s in Organization Development and Knowledge Management program and co-founder of Gitayog.org, an educational well-being nonprofit.

“They’re humility, deep desire to achieve learning outcomes, along with wanting to give students an engaging academic immersion really shined. What is especially remarkable about the Schar School faculty is their openness to receive dynamic feedback about the hybrid/digital classroom experience from students.”

Meryam El Gazzah echoed the sentiment. “Through such a unique and difficult time I can say with confidence that Mason truly ensured comfort and ease for their students,” said the rising sophomore in the Schar School’s government and international politics program. “All the professors were incredibly thoughtful and understanding, striving to acknowledge and respond to any concerns or misunderstandings the students faced.”

Noting that he, as well as his classmates, have long been familiar with FaceTime and other video communication platforms, International Policy and Commerce student Nathan Lotze observed that “some of my classmates actually became more engaged in the [classroom] discussions after making the [distance learning] switch, likely due to feeling more comfortable in their own homes.”

Student research is encouraged at the Schar School and is supported by various programs. But original research requires access to library materials, research tools, and meetings with faculty sponsors. Blair Schaefer, an Honors College student with an eye on law school, admitted she was “anxious to make the transition to distance learning.”

“However, my professors were all incredibly accommodating, recognizing that students not only had to adjust to a new style of learning, but that many also lost their jobs, had family members with the virus, or found themselves in a difficult learning environment,” Schaefer said. “On my weekly calls with [Associate] Professor Guadalupe Correa-Cabrera, who I worked with through the [Undergraduate Research Assistant Program], she asked about how I was doing, both academically and emotionally, and offered me her support throughout the semester. My other professors were equally as kind and comforting.”

(Update: Schaefer is now a student at the University of Virginia School of Law.)

At least one student wants to keep distance learning, or at least aspects of it. "All in all, I do miss the in-person time with professors like [Assistant] Professor Heba El-Shazli—who’s lectures and dedication to each student is second to none,” said rising senior Emmanuel Tetteh, who is working on a Bachelor of Individualized Studies degree. "However, like everything in life we have to adapt to change, and the supplements of virtual discussions, recorded lectures, and Blackboard discussions have proven incredibly useful. In fact, I would not want to give away these luxuries even when we are allowed to return back to the classroom.”

Professors were encouraged to be patient with students who were using new technology for distance learning for the first time. “The professors were very understanding with any technical issues, such as poor internet connection or microphone problems,” said Glenham Smith, who graduated in May from the Government and International Politics program and won the 2020 DACOR Bacon House Foundation Metro Scholarship. "Given the underlying circumstances, I felt the professors I had adapted very well to the change.”

Meghan Davis, who is in the Master’s in International Commerce and Policy program, benefitted from synchronous virtual meetings. “These meetings not only led to an increase in the collaboration amongst my peers, but effective group presentations proceeded unencumbered,” she said. “For another course centered around lectures, the professor created detailed asynchronous instructional videos, which incorporated greater flexibility into my schedule.”

And for those in the biodefense program, well, it was more than a learning experience.

“I found it ironic that a pandemic necessitated a transition to virtual learning for my very timely health security preparedness class,” said Madeline Roty, who is in the Master’s in Biodefense program. “[The Schar School] resiliently adapted, advancing my education and protecting the quality of it while still providing me with ample opportunities for engagement and professional development.”

Additional assistance by professor of International Commerce and Policy J.P. Singh.

Justin Gest Wins Mason’s Teaching Excellence Award
The 2020 Teaching Excellence Award—George Mason University’s highest teaching honor—was given in May to Schar School Professor Justin Gest. Recipients of the annual award are recognized for their significant work in course planning, innovation, and curriculum development.

Gest is a professor of public policy researching comparative politics, immigration policy, minority politics, and qualitative methods. He has published commentary in a number of major news outlets including the Washington Post, Politico and Reuters. His books on immigration policy, including The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality and The White Working Class, have made headlines of their own.

Before joining the Schar School, Gest was a Harvard College Fellow and lecturer in Harvard University’s Departments of Government and Sociology. In 2014, he received the Joseph R. Levenson Memorial Teaching Prize, Harvard’s highest award for teaching.

Despite the awards, Gest considers his students his true achievements. “That is what I hope that they take away from my courses—not my ideas, but their own,” he said. “And in this way, the student becomes my achievement. The student becomes my legacy.”

—Mason Goad
Mason Employee of the Month: Silva Pecini Morris

For her outstanding work as a director of Student Services, Silva Pecini Morris is the July Employee of the Month. Pecini Morris has worked at Mason for 15 years. In her current role she works with graduate students and faculty to make their learning experience as smooth as possible.

Pecini Morris works with prospective students to customize their curriculum and help students get in touch with other departments, such as the Office of Student Financial Aid or the Office of the University Registrar.

Pecini Morris credited her team as much as they credited her for their department’s success. “If it wasn’t for our team and how supportive they are and how good they are, I don’t think I would have stayed as long as I have. I just feel like I’m part of a family,” said Pecini Morris, who earned her master of public policy from Mason in 2007. “I love what I do, and I love Mason, and this award really belongs to all of them.”

—Delaney Harrison

Jack Goldstone Named a Carnegie Fellow

Scholar School Professor Jack Goldstone is one of 27 recipients of this year’s Andrew Carnegie Fellows Program awards. Goldstone is the director of the Schar School’s Center for the Study of Social Change, Institutions, and Policy and is the Virginia E. and John T. Hazel Chair Professor of Public Policy.

Goldstone begins his fellowship in September 2020. His research, he said, will look at how different population trends will affect international economy and security.

“Right now, population change is really confronting the world with lots of challenges,” said Goldstone, who was nominated for the award by George Mason University leadership. “How are we going to support and care for aging generations when we’re facing a huge economic downturn? How will the young, fast-growing labor force in Africa and South Asia be productively employed?”

Regarding the recognition, Goldstone said, “It’s another affirmation that the work my colleagues and I are doing at Mason on global population trends addresses major social challenges. I am deeply honored to get this support from the Carnegie Foundation.”

Goldstone is the third Mason professor and the second from the Schar School to receive the award, following the Schar School’s Louise Shelley (2015), director of the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center, and Charlotte Gill (2017), deputy director of the Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy. Mason is one of just 15 universities nationwide with three or more Carnegie Fellows, including Yale, Duke, Harvard, Stanford and MIT.

—Damian Cristodero

Mark J. Rozell Reappointed for Second Term as Dean

Mark J. Rozell has been reappointed for his second term as the dean of the Schar School of Policy and Government. The reappointment, announced by the Office of the Provost at George Mason University, concludes a months-long process detailing the successes of Rozell’s first four years at the helm of one of the country’s highest ranked policy and government schools.

In his announcement, then-Provost S. David Wu noted Rozell’s “steadfast leadership” during a period that saw the Schar School secure a $10 million naming gift and raise the school’s profile and reputation as well as “maintaining his own scholarly output while serving as dean.” (Wu is now president of Baruch College of the City University of New York.)

“I am excited to continue to lead one of the most innovative and respected policy and government schools in the country,” Rozell said. “I look forward to continuing to work with faculty, staff, students, alumni, and friends of the Schar School to build on our successes and become a premier national and international thought leader in public policy and government studies.”

—Damian Cristodero

They Said It at the Schar School:

“‘I was either evil incarnate, deep-state who clearly must be gotten rid of, or I was a great intelligence professional who had stood up and given truth to power. And the problem was, I didn’t want to be anyone’s agenda.’

—Former Deputy Director of National Intelligence Susan Gordon on her 2019 resignation from the Trump administration. Gordon made an exclusive appearance in an event hosted by the Schar School’s Hayden Center and moderated by Distinguished Visiting Professor Michael Morell.

—Susan Gordon

Photo by Buzz McClain/Schar School of Policy and Government
In his first live public appearance since being dismissed by the Trump White House, former acting director of the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), Russ Travers, warned that the U.S.'s intelligence and counterterrorism communities are confronted with a number of dangerous threats, and not all of them from foreign sources.

Travers joined Schar School Distinguished Visiting Professor Michael Morell, former acting director of the CIA, in late July for an hour-long discussion hosted by the Michael V. Hayden Center for Intelligence, Policy, and International Security. More than 380 viewers from around the world tuned in to the online event that was marred by an ill-timed thunderstorm that knocked out power in parts of the Washington, D.C., region. As such, Travers appeared on screen in his parked car, giving the espionage-like aura of communicating from the proverbial "undisclosed location."

"As we look to the future, we are going to see things like 'deep fakes' and computer-generated techniques to build weapons," Travers said. "All of these things we are going to have to consider here in the next four to five years. It seems to me that the threat is—in some ways—offsetting some of those tremendous gains that we've made [since 9/11]." Terrorists, too, are becoming more technologically sophisticated, posing a greater risk to various facets of our nation's cybersecurity efforts. "We never worried about terrorists using cyber to conduct attacks, to damage networks, to damage critical infrastructure, or what have you," said Morell, reflecting on his time as acting director of the CIA. "If Russ is worried about it, then I'm worried about it."

—Mason Goad and Buzz McClain

ODKM Program Turns 25

Founding director of the Schar School’s Organization Development and Knowledge Management program Tojo Thatchenkery has seen both fields—the “OD” and the “KM” of the program’s title—evolve in the last quarter of a century. "OD has transformed itself to focus on organizational wellbeing in addition to bringing about alignment between individual and organization goals and values," he said. As for KM, "a recognition that knowledge sharing is equally important for sustainability and resilience of organizations has emerged during the last 15 years."

The program celebrated its milestone 25th anniversary in August with a day-long, six workshop virtual "learning community" event featuring a keynote speech by learning organizations guru Peter Senge.

"Ours is the only program that addresses this critical need of focusing on both OD and KM, as evidenced in the title of the degree," the proud professor pointed out. Here’s to 25 more years.

—Buzz McClain

"These rankings speak highly of the scholarly output of our faculty who, as this study demonstrates, are among the most productive in the country," said Schar School Dean Mark J. Rozell. "Our students are learning from some of the very top scholars in the various disciplines represented in the Schar School."

Mason is one of the top research universities in the nation, holding an R1 designation from the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. "As we look to the future, we are going to see things like 'deep fakes' and computer-generated techniques to build weapons," Travers said. "All of these things we are going to have to consider here in the next four to five years. It seems to me that the threat is—in some ways—offsetting some of those tremendous gains that we’ve made [since 9/11]."

Terrorists, too, are becoming more technologically sophisticated, posing a greater risk to various facets of our nation’s cybersecurity efforts.

"We never worried about terrorists using cyber to conduct attacks, to damage networks, to damage critical infrastructure, or what have you," said Morell, reflecting on his time as acting director of the CIA. "If Russ is worried about it, then I’m worried about it."

—Mason Goad and Buzz McClain
The Schar School will launch the first graduate certificate course in the U.S. to study the global problem of illicit trade. The Graduate Certificate in Illicit Trade Analysis will take students on a fast-moving, five-course dive into the intersection of national security, international trade, law enforcement, and social science. The certificate program will tackle subjects such as smuggling and human trafficking, transnational crime and corruption, global trade relations, transportation, operations and logistics, and trade and regulatory compliance, among other issues that cost nations billions of dollars every year, not to mention the amount of countless lives lost. “The rise of illicit trade has only been recently recognized as a global problem, but it costs the international community billions of dollars,” said Louise Shelley, Director of the Schar School’s Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center. “George Mason University has been at the forefront in teaching and engaging in scholarship and outreach on this underrecognized problem. As a university that focuses on innovation, we are seeking to address new international problems and provide capacity to focus on a global challenge that undermines health, economies, and political stability around the world.”

The Graduate Certificate in Illicit Trade Analysis program admits its first cohort of students for the fall of 2020 semester.

— Mason Goad

The Schar School Student Emergency Fund

schar.gmu.edu/ScharEmergencyFund

Gifts to the Schar School Student Emergency Fund will assist with students in dire need. Gifts to this fund will allow the Schar School to respond quickly to the emergency needs of our students for expenses such as housing, food, and other unexpected financial needs. Your contributions enable students to pursue impactful, fulfilling careers without the burden of student debt and financial loss.

#PatriotsHelpingPatriots #ScharSchoolStrong

You make their dreams possible.

At TraCCC, a First of Its Kind Certificate in Illicit Trade

The Schar School will launch the first graduate certificate course in the U.S. to study the global problem of illicit trade. The Graduate Certificate in Illicit Trade Analysis will take students on a fast-moving, five-course dive into the intersection of national security, international trade, law enforcement, and social science. The certificate program will tackle subjects such as smuggling and human trafficking, transnational crime and corruption, global trade relations, transportation, operations and logistics, and trade and regulatory compliance, among other issues that cost nations billions of dollars every year, not to mention the amount of countless lives lost. “The rise of illicit trade has only been recently recognized as a global problem, but it costs the international community billions of dollars,” said Louise Shelley, Director of the Schar School’s Terrorism, Transnational Crime, and Corruption Center. “George Mason University has been at the forefront in teaching and engaging in scholarship and outreach on this underrecognized problem. As a university that focuses on innovation, we are seeking to address new international problems and provide capacity to focus on a global challenge that undermines health, economies, and political stability around the world.”

The Graduate Certificate in Illicit Trade Analysis program admits its first cohort of students for the fall of 2020 semester.

— Mason Goad

Responding to a Crisis: ‘Social Justice in America’

As the stench of teargas, pepper spray, and acrimony filled the air of cities around the world during an event in May now known as a “reckoning,” messages of support for diverse and disenfranchised communities were issued by industries, institutions, and individuals. Media outlets and social media channels were flooded with posts offering everything from heartfelt condolences to mea cuulpas. While some at the Schar School of Policy and Government posted their own thoughts about the global uprising and its aftermath, the school itself did not. “We can post all the platitudes we want, but we need to do more,” Schar School Dean Mark J. Rozell told the faculty and staff. “We need to take action.”

With assurance of the appropriate resources for the most promising proposals, the response was swift and substantial. Working groups were convened. Ideas flew across the country on laptop screens in animated Zoom conversations as the pandemicically scattered faculty members formed committees to develop deliverables. Associate Dean Ming Wan supervised what would become a week of daily webinars addressing five different aspects of civil and human rights in the U.S. The series, “Social Justice in America,” would bring to Zoom screens more than 20 scholars, practitioners, community leaders, and former government officials debating and lamenting the social and civil ills the new uprising had illuminated in our country.

Dean Rozell hosted the programs and moderated the first of the series, an hour-long conversation about “Evolving State and Local Politics” with Schar School Distinguished Visiting Professor and former governor of Virginia Terry McAuliffe. McAuliffe drew on his experience as governor during the white nationalist rally that turned deadly in Charlottesville, Va., in 2017.

Other topics in the series included local politics, prisons, and the welfare state; immigrants and Latinx as “forgotten” populations; race, education, and unequal opportunity; and the relationship between human rights and the practice of U.S. foreign policy.

Guest speakers scattered throughout the noon-time panels included former ambassadors, professors from Howard University, the New York University School of Law, Columbia University, Rutgers University, Georgetown University, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, and senior representatives from the World Bank, the Dallas Morning News, the League of United Latin American Citizens, among others.

In all, a half dozen Schar School professors served as on-camera moderators, with dozens more working behind the scenes to contribute to the content of the discussions. The conversations were frank and sometimes distressing as the panelists described a country fraught with turmoil and only small, stubborn gains over decades of injustice. A week later, the Schar School Alumni Chapter sponsored its own panel discussion, this one comparing the energized Black Lives Matter movement with the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.
Study: Contact Tracing Effective in Controlling Spread of Coronavirus

By Buzz McClain

A new study by professors at the Schar School and the College of Science at George Mason University indicates coronavirus is transmitted in densely populated venues—such as music concerts—and travels great distances, infecting new populations as it spreads from its location of origin. The study was published this month in July in the journal of the International Society of Travel Medicine.

Researchers, including Schar School Director of Research and Professor Naoru Koizumi and College of Science Interim Dean Ali Andalibi, spent two months beginning in mid-February following developments from a series of live house concerts in Osaka, Japan. The researchers, including Schar School public policy PhD student Abu Bakkar Siddique, examined the virus’ spread through the concerts in a two-month period.

“The study points to the importance of social distancing and other precautionary measures, given that close contact, as well as the significant number of asymptomatic carriers both appear to contribute to the spread of the disease,” said Andalibi, who is a molecular biologist and geneticist.

“We identified the ‘seed’ person who subsequently infected over 100 people in 13 prefectures—including primary, secondary and tertiary transmissions,” said Koizumi. “The virus quickly spread to 100-plus people after the concert, but the effective contact tracing managed to stop the transmissions from this cluster completely within less than two months.”

“I was surprised that asymptomatic people can infect other people as effectively as symptomatic people,” said Siddique, noting that more than a quarter of the infected concert goers were asymptomatic. “The active contact-tracing measures—called ‘cluster countermeasures’—implemented by the government of Japan have helped the nation to reduce the potential impact of the virus.”

“The results of the poll resonated across the country. In short, 69 percent of respondents said they thought the slaying was indicative of broader problems in policing; 61 percent disapproved of President Trump’s handling of the protests, including 47 percent “strongly” disapproving. The poll was cited in more than 1,055 media outlets in the weeks following its publication, and as of mid-August, it continues to be cited.

Other initiatives are planned in both the short term and the long term.

For the fall semester, the school will continue the social justice initiative with research and panel discussions. Major innovations require longer term planning and collaboration with the university at large. Dean Rozell already has put forth a number of proposals related to enhancing the diversity of Schar School faculty and staff, including graduate and post-doctoral fellowships, a new research center, and scholarship support.

For the Schar School, the action the dean requested in May is far from over.
Students Study Policy, Harmony, and e-Scooters for Bird

Imagine renting an e-scooter to be environmentally friendly in Arlington, Va., and then being penalized when leaving it in adjacent Washington, D.C. That is exactly what could happen, and what students in one of the Schar School’s graduate programs sought to fix.

Students in the Master’s in Transportation Policy, Operations, and Logistics (TPOL) program conducted research into e-scooter regulations across various municipal boundaries. Houda Ali, Aleksandr Grinshpun, Ellie Larson McCurdy, Jephthah NTL, Sterling Wiggins, and Siddarthar Rayaprolu worked with e-scooter company Bird, one of the best-known brands of e-scooters. Chris Stockwell, a 2017 Mason alumnus of the TPOL program who now works at Bird as a senior manager of partnerships, assisted the students.

Working—virtually, of course—with Professor Jonathan L. Gifford, director of the Center for Transportation Public-Private Partnership Policy, and PhD in Public Policy candidate Lauren N. McCarthy, the students wrote a report titled “Scooting the Boundary: An Analysis of E-Scooter Harmonization.” The team analyzed the patchwork of laws surrounding the use of e-scooters in metropolitan areas.

“Having the opportunity to study current, practical policy issues was an invaluable part of my graduate school experience,” said McCurdy, a transportation planner for VHB, a planning and engineering firm.

The research team looked at the way such policies have been “harmonized” throughout various principalities, states, and countries. They presented both the pros and cons of harmonizing the policies so as to present an unbiased synopsis of their research.

—Mason Goad

Study: COVID-19 Fails to Slow Spread of Fentanyl Trade

The novel coronavirus pandemic has worsened America’s drug crisis, according to a new study by Louise Shelley, director and founder of the Terrorism, Transnational Crime and Corruption Center (TraCCC) at the Schar School.

The consumption of fentanyl, a synthetic drug responsible for over 30,000 deaths in 2018 alone, was not slowed by the virus, according to Shelley’s research, but has increased during the pandemic. Her study, “Fentanyl, COVID-19, and Public Health,” was published in July in the journal World Medical & Health Policy.

Despite severed supply lines of the chemicals needed to make fentanyl, the drug traffickers in the U.S. had stockpiled enough supplies to keep up with the demand of the drug, the study indicates.

“Among the tragic lessons of the pandemic is that existing strategies to address the illicit fentanyl trade are ineffective,” said Shelley. “In the post-pandemic era, we need to seriously rethink our approach to the online drug trade and how to protect our citizens better from its pernicious products.”

—Mason Goad

How Will the Pandemic Change the Lobbying Industry?

More than 200 viewers tuned in to an afternoon Schar School webinar addressing an industry many might not realize is damaged, perhaps permanently, by the novel coronavirus pandemic: Lobbying the government.

The hour-long virtual panel in May, called Lobbying Congress in a Post Covid-19 World, asked questions and provided answers on the effect of the pandemic and the ensuing global lockdown on the professional advocacy industry’s strategies and tools. Schar School professor David K. Rehr, director of the school’s Center for Business Civic Engagement, moderated.

Panelists included veteran Capitol Hill staffer Mildred Webber, who shared her perspective on what some members of Congress and their staffs are viewing as effective influence in the post-COVID-19 world, author Stephanie D. Vance, whose experience as a legislative director and chief of staff in Congress led her to founding Advocacy Associates; former U.S. Rep. and House Majority Whip Geoff Davis (R-Ky.), managing partner of Republic Consulting; Joshua Habursky, head of federal affairs for the Premium Cigar Association and founder and chairman of the Grassroots Professional Network; and Kevin Richardson, president and managing director of the multinational Heartland Solutions Group and former senior vice president for government affairs for the ServiceMaster Company and former mayor of Lake Barrington, Ill.

One aspect of lobbying that will not change, said Webber, are special event days on the Hill, such as those when constituents bring their pets as attention-getters. “The member loves it and the staff loves it,” she said. “I think not having them is temporary.”
Hilton Root Named Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Social Science

Schar School Professor of Public Policy Hilton Root has received the honor of Fulbright Distinguished Chair in the Social Sciences (China) for the study of the political economy of American and Chinese relations. Root is one of only 800 Americans across all disciplines selected by the Fulbright Program who will teach and conduct research abroad during the 2020-21 academic year. Only about 40 of those 800 are selected as Distinguished Chairs.

“As holder of the Distinguished Chair in the Social Sciences I will be working with students on both sides of the Pacific to identify options to reset the U.S.-China relationship,” Root said. “We will be conducting research on how to move the U.S.-China relationship from confrontation to productive cooperation, examining the prospects for managed competition in issues ranging from trade and security to health and climate change.”

The Fulbright Program, funded by the Department of State, is the United States’ flagship program for international educational exchange. Fulbright scholars are selected based on criteria regarding their academic and professional achievements, their service to others, and leadership in their field.

—Mason Goad

Epidemiologist, Alumna Saskia Popescu Joins Faculty

Saskia Popescu, who has served as an epidemiologist and infection preventer on the front lines during the coronavirus pandemic, has returned to the Schar School as a term assistant professor in the biodefense Graduate Programs. The Biodefense program, which offers a PhD, master’s, or graduate certificate degree in Biodefense, is designed to produce the next generation of professionals and leaders working at the nexus of health, science, and security at the local, national, and international levels.

Popescu, who earned her PhD in Biodefense from the Schar School in 2019, will teach courses on the epidemiology of infectious diseases and how to improve the resilience of healthcare systems. She also will serve as a Schar School ambassador to the public health and healthcare communities.

“I’m thrilled to return to the Schar School as a professor to engage not only the next generation of biodefense students, but also develop courses to address what we’re facing now with the COVID-19 pandemic,” Popescu said. “George Mason University’s Schar School is a center of excellence for biodefense and I’m excited to join their prestigious team. I look forward to joining the Mason faculty.”

—Buzz McClain

They Said It at the Schar School:

“I think the statistics have moved in the wrong direction. I am not seeing enough follow-up of sexual assault victims or enough people taking a stand and talking about these issues.”

—Deborah Lee James

—Former Secretary of the Air Force Deborah Lee James, who made gender issues a priority during her term, in a book talk with Associate Professor Bonnie Stabile, director of the Gender and Policy Center.
Mirae Kim Joins the Schar School’s Nonprofit Studies Program

It was during a creative internship program Mirae Kim had while staying at New Zealand’s University of Auckland for a year-long study abroad. She was an English literature major at Seoul National University and realized she wanted to make her career at arts organizations. But…

“I asked myself, what can I do if I love art and want to make a living at arts organizations, but I am not an artist myself?”

The question brought her to seek education in running nonprofit organizations, especially those involved in the arts. She began her journey to her new position as an associate professor of nonprofit studies at the Schar School at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy where she had a chance to curate a rare book exhibit that explored philanthropy and sponsorship in medieval times.

The flowering of charity during the Middle Ages intrigued Kim as to the role of nonprofits in the arts in the modern era, and, encouraged by her husband, Pilgyu Kang, who is an assistant professor at Mason’s department of mechanical engineering, Kim earned a PhD in public administration at Rutgers University and devoted her studies to nonprofit management.

With the addition of Kim to the nonprofit faculty—which includes Stefan Toepfer, director of the Schar School’s Master’s in Public Administration program—“our nonprofit management program has much to offer public service-minded students interested in working in this important and growing sector of our economy,” said Alan J. Abramson, director of the Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, and Policy.

The question brought her to seek education in running nonprofit organizations, especially those involved in the arts. She began her journey to her new position as an associate professor of nonprofit studies at the Schar School at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy where she had a chance to curate a rare book exhibit that explored philanthropy and sponsorship in medieval times.

“ ‘I asked myself, what can I do if I love art and want to make a living at arts organizations, but I am not an artist myself?’
- Mirae Kim

The flowering of charity during the Middle Ages intrigued Kim as to the role of nonprofits in the arts in the modern era, and, encouraged by her husband, Pilgyu Kang, who is an assistant professor at Mason’s department of mechanical engineering, Kim earned a PhD in public administration at Rutgers University and devoted her studies to nonprofit management.

With the addition of Kim to the nonprofit faculty—which includes Stefan Toepfer, director of the Schar School’s Master’s in Public Administration program—“our nonprofit management program has much to offer public service-minded students interested in working in this important and growing sector of our economy,” said Alan J. Abramson, director of the Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, and Policy.

—Buzz McClain

An Avalanche of Admissions

Every master’s degree program offered by the Schar School saw double-digit increases in enrollment for the Fall 2020 semester. Political Science led the way with a 500 percent increase, followed by Biodiversity (217 percent), International Security (120 percent), International Commerce and Policy (72 percent), Transportation, Policy, Operations, and Logistics (35 percent), and Organization Development and Knowledge Management (35 percent).

JIM PFIFFNER:

Jim Pfiffner joined the nascent Department of Public and International Affairs in Mason’s College of Arts and Sciences in 1984 as a professor of Public Administration. He departs 36 years later after playing a significant role in creating the school that is now the highly ranked Schar School of Policy and Government. Pfiffner was an instrumental member of the committee, chaired by former U.S. Rep. Joseph Fisher, that surveyed policy schools and determined a public policy program at Mason was not only feasible but uniquely positioned for success. The creation of The Institute of Public Policy in the late 1980s, in addition to early funding for research, led to the development of graduate programs, centers, and institutes that continue to benefit of the Commonwealth and the region.

Pfiffner, who received the Distinguished Faculty Award at Mason in 1990, served on the Clarence J. Robinson Committee, which sought to hire high-profile faculty to specifically teach undergraduates. The arrival of civil rights leader Roger Wilkins and preeminent public administration professor Hugh Heclo, among other scholars, to the teaching staff helped put young George Mason on the map.

Pfiffner has 18 books about the presidency and the U.S. government to his credit, and he counts his semester at the School for Advanced Study at the University of London in 2007 as a career highlight as it afforded him the opportunity to write “Power Play: The Bush Administration and the Constitution” (2008, Brookings). Another highlight, he said, was the summer of 2013 as a visiting scholar at Griffith University in Brisbane, which included a lecture in the Australian Senate Parliament chamber.

“Although I will not be teaching now, I have several research projects going, and I will continue to participate in academic conferences,” he said of his emeritus status. “I will also spend more time reading the pile of books that I have been meaning to read—and also working out more often.”

ROBERT DUDLEY:

Professor Emeritus of Policy and Government Bob Dudley arrived at George Mason on the heels of Jim Pfiffner, coming aboard the young university staff in 1986. During his career he directed the Department of Public and International Affairs’ Administration of Justice program and served as director of the Center for Public Service. He was associate chair of the department for six years before chairing it for the next eight years.

He moved into the Dean’s Suite in 2015 in the role of Associate Dean for Public Policy and Public Administration and held the title until 2017.

Dudley, a proud Army veteran who served in the Vietnam War, taught at all levels, from undergraduate to graduate, and was a devoted pre-law advisor from 1986 to 2014. He was the department’s Professor of the Year in 1988 and was a finalist in Mason’s David King Outstanding Teacher Award in 2005.

His eight books and various government and agency reports explore the fields of judicial process and constitutional law, executive politics, electoral behavior, and public policy.
Graduating senior Glenham Smith was awarded the $6,000 DACOR Bacon House Foundation Metro Scholarship to encourage his study of foreign affairs. Each year, five Washington, D.C., area universities are tasked with choosing an exceptional junior or senior to receive the scholarship.

“It certainly means a great deal to me, not only in the recognition it carries but also in the assistance it provides in these particularly difficult times,” said Smith, a Government and International Politics major—now graduate—from White Post, Va.

Smith made the most of his career at the Schar School, including a stint interning for an elected official—in Ireland. Smith spent the summer of 2019 interning for Senator Jerry Buttimer, the leader of the Fine Gael party and the first openly gay Fine Gael Teachta Dála (the equivalent of a member of Congress) in the Houses of Oireachtas.

“I was comfortable in the internship because of the wealth of experience looking at policy I have received at the Schar School,” he said.

“My degree helped me be more prepared to look at a political system I wasn’t familiar with.”

— Dixie Downing

Gender and Policy Center Presents GAP Leadership Award

Jatia Wrighten celebrated important milestones of her academic career in the locked down virtual space. In addition to graduating with her doctoral degree in Political Science in May, she was recognized as the 2020 winner of the Schar School’s Gender and Policy Leadership Award.

“We are delighted to continue the tradition of highlighting the work of students who advance understanding of gender in the realm of politics and policy, and Tia’s scholarly contribution about Black Women and Leadership in State Legislatures is right on point, with an intersectional focus,” said Gender and Policy Center (GAP) founder and director, Bonnie Stabile. Associate Professor Stabile is also director of the Master’s in Public Policy program.

“We expect her novel ‘Heavy Lifters Theory’ to have resonance in the academic community and beyond as she begins her career as a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University.”

Wrighten’s work is among the first to study sexual and racial disparity in leadership at the state-level—and she’s found considerable variations across the 50 U.S. states.

A record number of women of all races currently are serving in state houses across the country. Wrighten said she is thrilled by the progress women have made in state legislatures as senators and representatives, but she’s less excited by the leadership gaps that exist in every state capital.

“Currently four states have never had women in any leadership position, black, white, brown, whatever—no women,” she said. “Nine states have never had black women in their state legislatures. I think this is clearly politically relevant at this point in time.”

“‘We expect her novel ‘Heavy Lifters Theory’ to have resonance in the academic community and beyond as she begins her career as a faculty member at Virginia Commonwealth University in the fall.’

- Associate Professor Bonnie Stabile on Jatia Wrighten’s research

Senior Brings Home the DACOR Bacon House Prize

They Said It at the Schar School:

“If you are thinking of a life in government, please do. It is the most rewarding, challenging, gratifying, but frustrating—in the right way—thing you can do on behalf of your country. You will meet and work with incredibly smart people who are working for the same thing as you.”

- Susan Rice

— Former ambassador to the UN and National Security Advisor Susan Rice, during a private meeting with Schar School students before a 2019 panel discussion with former director of the CIA David Petraeus
When the World Confronts Challenges, Graduates Rise to Meet Them

One of the things that originally attracted me to the Schar School was its dedication to practitioners, both as members of the faculty and in the way the institution develops students. The last few months the Schar School has leveraged our base of practitioners as we have navigated the complexities of an aggressive pandemic, examined racial inequities punctuated by several highly visible abuses, and encountered extremely uncertain economic forecasts—all of which is taking place during a presidential election year.

It is times like these that a blend of theoretical academics and experienced practitioners is needed to understand the complexities of the environment we have found ourselves in. While we are traversing these challenging times, I am proud and happy to report that the Schar School has found ways to continue to thrive. For many of our programs, as I write this in late summer, applications are at or above levels of previous years; the Alumni Chapter has quickly shifted to the online, virtual environment to continue to engage with our community; and we are developing plans for the ambiguity ahead.

It is that practitioner base at the Schar School that has provided the grit to get through this period, providing the awareness that sometimes we just need to put one foot in front of the other during a difficult period. We are looking for opportunities to learn lessons and to make our school, ourselves, and our community stronger.

As the incoming Alumni Chapter president, and as a fellow practitioner, I am proud and excited to step into this role during this period. We are addressing issues head on and looking for ways to make a positive contribution.

- The Events Committee is as active as ever putting together great programming to address issues of COVID-19, racial inequities, and other important topics of our time.
- The Student Support Committee is gearing up for another semester of activities and opportunities to connect current students with alumni.
- Our Veterans Committee is connecting our military and veteran populations.
- The Fundraising Committee is continuing to identify ways to raise money to support student scholarships and other needed support to ensure our school can provide education to as many students as possible.

We are digging in for a challenging year, but we have been here before. As Patriots, practitioners, alumni, and scholars, we will lead our School, our community, and our country to a bright future.

I look forward to another great year supporting the Schar School and encourage my fellow alumni and students to participate actively in making this a year to remember—to remember how we moved forward together.

J.J. Stakem
2012, Master’s in Organization Development and Knowledge Management
President, Schar School Alumni Chapter

The Schar School and the Monterrey Institute of Technology in Mexico will work together to deliver a 3-credit “virtual” study abroad course, Policy Challenges in Times of Crisis. Professor Ellen Laipson, director of the Master’s in International Security program, and Jorge Morales from Monterrey Tech, will lead the program.

The fall class focuses on U.S.-Mexico relations and will provide an opportunity for students to hear from experts during synchronous video sessions presented in a panel platform, followed by discussions with students from the partner institution in Mexico. Students will complete asynchronous work and collaborate on joint assignments. The four major themes of the class will focus on security and cyber security, emergency response, immigration and border issues, and leadership in politics and trust in government.

“In the COVID era, we need to be creative in providing diverse learning experiences for all Schar School students,” said Laipson. “Here’s a non-traditional approach to study abroad and cross-cultural learning and an opportunity to work, online, with a Mexican institution and its students. It’s an opportunity to deepen the understanding of the many issues in U.S.-Mexican relations, and to broaden student exposure to the international dimensions of policymaking,” Michal McElwain Malur, director of the Schar School’s external programs, added that an opportunity to visit Mexico when travel restrictions are lifted will be offered to participants “to meet their fellow students, the program speakers, and visit our embassy for a briefing.”

—Mason Goad

Ellen Laipson, Director of the Master’s in International Security Program

J.J. Stakem

Did You Know?
The Schar School’s alumni community is more than 16,000 strong. George Mason University, at just 48 years old, boasts more than 200,000 graduates.

Ellen Laipson, Director of the Master’s in International Security Program

J.J. Stakem

Letter from the Alumni President

Students Offered Study Abroad, But Virtually

One of the things that originally attracted me to the Schar School was its dedication to practitioners, both as members of the faculty and in the way the institution develops students. The last few months the Schar School has leveraged our base of practitioners as we have navigated the complexities of an aggressive pandemic, examined racial inequities punctuated by several highly visible abuses, and encountered extremely uncertain economic forecasts—all of which is taking place during a presidential election year.

It is times like these that a blend of theoretical academics and experienced practitioners is needed to understand the complexities of the environment we have found ourselves in. While we are traversing these challenging times, I am proud and happy to report that the Schar School has found ways to continue to thrive. For many of our programs, as I write this in late summer, applications are at or above levels of previous years; the Alumni Chapter has quickly shifted to the online, virtual environment to continue to engage with our community; and we are developing plans for the ambiguity ahead.

It is that practitioner base at the Schar School that has provided the grit to get through this period, providing the awareness that sometimes we just need to put one foot in front of the other during a difficult period. We are looking for opportunities to learn lessons and to make our school, ourselves, and our community stronger.

As the incoming Alumni Chapter president, and as a fellow practitioner, I am proud and excited to step into this role during this period. We are addressing issues head on and looking for ways to make a positive contribution.

- The Events Committee is as active as ever putting together great programming to address issues of COVID-19, racial inequities, and other important topics of our time.
- The Student Support Committee is gearing up for another semester of activities and opportunities to connect current students with alumni.
- Our Veterans Committee is connecting our military and veteran populations.
- The Fundraising Committee is continuing to identify ways to raise money to support student scholarships and other needed support to ensure our school can provide education to as many students as possible.

We are digging in for a challenging year, but we have been here before. As Patriots, practitioners, alumni, and scholars, we will lead our School, our community, and our country to a bright future.

I look forward to another great year supporting the Schar School and encourage my fellow alumni and students to participate actively in making this a year to remember—to remember how we moved forward together.

J.J. Stakem
2012, Master’s in Organization Development and Knowledge Management
President, Schar School Alumni Chapter

Ellen Laipson, Director of the Master’s in International Security Program

J.J. Stakem
Shaping Policy in Richmond

By Buzz McClain

What is it like being the Commonwealth of Virginia’s legislative and policy director? Let’s ask the Schar School alumna who fills that role.

“We had a bill about milk, but not calling it milk ‘milk,’ or anything that’s not derived from a dairy cow,” said Gerica Goodman. “I find stuff like that super interesting.”

Goodman is but one of a number of historic “firsts” in the current Virginia General Assembly—the first female Speaker of the House, the first Black Lieutenant Governor, and the first female Majority Leader, to name a few. Goodman is the first Black woman to serve in the key role of Legislative and Policy Director.

Goodman earned her bachelor of science degree in psychology in 2012, when working with troubled children sounded like a useful career path. But Goodman took advantage of George Mason University’s opportunities and flexibility by exploring different majors, sampling careers via internships, and working part-time as a graduate student (and later full-time) in Admissions. All of that led her to the degree that helped her reach her historic position: A Master’s in Public Administration degree in 2015.

“I realized my original intention when I started at Mason was government,” she said from her office near the one occupied by her boss, Speaker of the House Eileen Filler-Corn.

The degree comes in handy—daily, in fact, she said.

“One of my favorite classes was Program Evaluation,” she said, adding that it was taught by an adjunct who was also a senior analyst with the Government Accountability Office, “a bureaucrat’s bureaucrat,” Goodman said. “The class looked at government programs and took them apart and evaluated them, which is essentially what I do for bills and government agencies.”

As policy director, Goodman collaborates with the Speaker and the chief of staff, among others in the Statehouse, and offers opinions and recommendations on the brief legislative session’s rapid cascade of proposed bills—1,800 of them this winter—as they wend their ways through committees. And she loves it.

“I’m kind of like a boring person who likes the legal print on the back of anything, and I like legal jargon,” she said. “Reading bills seems like a daunting process, but I always find something really interesting.”

Even ones about milk being “milk.”

For information about planned gifts contact the Office of Development & Alumni Relations at 703.993.4035. If you already included the Schar School in your estate plans, thank you! Please let us know of your generosity and dedication. We would like to welcome you to the Legacy Society where you can join other alumni and friends who share the vision of the Schar School.

Schar.gmu.edu/PlannedGift
Erin Schaible’s original goal was to be a fashion designer. Armed with a bachelor of science in clothing and textiles, she set out for the Fashion District of New York City to make her mark, but as things happen in the Big Apple, Schaible’s interests morphed from designing to retail, and then to retail security, which she found fascinating. The security officers, she said, “were having so much fun catching people stealing things. And that’s how I sort of found my way into law enforcement.”

After retiring in 2018 with 28 years with the Fairfax County Police Department—rising to the rank of Deputy Chief of Patrol—Schaible was named in 2019 as Chief of Police for the Fairfax City Police Department, becoming the first woman to run the 66-officer department.

While an advanced degree was not a requirement for either of her promotions in Fairfax County or the job with Fairfax City, Schaible earned a Master’s in Public Administration in 2007 from the Schar School. The degree, she said, was “a ‘bucket list’ sort of thing. It seems really intimidating to get your master’s, but I like challenges.”

The challenges abounded. Not only was she putting in the considerable work to get a master’s degree, she also was working as a duty officer in Fairfax County. Her shifts consisted of “one month of midnights, one month of daywork—and I didn’t have an office,” she said. She studied assignments in her police cruiser and attended class in her police uniform after completing her patrol. (Her classmates gave her the “Most Likely to Respond to a Major Incident” award.)

On top of her demanding police work, she had three children under the ages of five, quite the handful for her and her husband, Lance, a captain with the Fairfax County police force.

But her Schar School professors and her county supervisors provided the flexibility she needed to complete her degree, she said.

“Erin was one of those students who started out strong and then got better,” said public administration professor James Burroughs. “She is all about service over self, and those qualities have been recognized during her career… Those of us who have known her simply said ‘when and where will she become chief of police?’ There was never a thought of ‘if.’”

“A highlight for Schaible was a study abroad trip to the Netherlands, where she saw first-hand how government agencies in that nation work together. ‘For me, it was really powerful,’ she said. ‘I got a lot from that.’”

Thanks to the pandemic crisis, global health security has taken center stage. Schar School 2020 Master’s in Biodefense graduate Michael Krug this year secured a position as a Global Health Officer working in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Office of Pandemics and Emerging Threats.

Before joining the Schar School, Krug received his bachelor of science in biochemistry from Virginia Tech University. His science training led to work in drug development before realizing his interest in biodefense policy.

“I was looking for something that would provide me with a policy background,” said Krug. “I found the [Schar School’s] Master’s in Biodefense program, and it has helped to hone my skills with policy knowledge.”

Krug made the most of his time at the Schar School. He is the co-founder of the George Mason University chapter of the Next Generation Health Security Network; as a student he helped secure special speakers for the classroom, including former Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle who recalled his office’s 2001 anthrax scare; and he held internships at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a think tank focused on global security threats, including pandemics.

For his efforts, Krug was selected as the 2020 Outstanding Biodefense Master’s Student.

“Michael Krug: The Master’s in Biodefense degree ‘has helped to hone my skills with policy knowledge.’”

Biodefense PhD student Justin Hurt hosted an hour-long webinar that addressed, yes, zombies, and with much academic rigor (mortis). His guests during the ComicCon@Home event included biodefense program director Gregory Koblentz and noted zombie expert and pop culture author Max Brooks. “Zombies and Coronavirus. Planning for the Next Big Outbreak” drew thousands of viewers during its late July broadcast.

“Max Brooks joined Schar School’s Gregory Koblentz and Justin Hurt during a national webinar on zombies and other kinds of pandemics.”

“Schar School Stars in ComicCon Zombie Talk”
Hats Off to Our 2020 Grads!

When it was announced the Schar School Celebration of Degree and George Mason University’s commencement exercises would be virtual instead of in-person because of the pandemic, we regretted the Class of 2020 would not be able to decorate their mortarboards with personal and public messages. But wait: Why not make the graduation caps as virtual as the ceremonies? We invited our graduates to create their caps using a template the university made available online. Here are a few of the ones tossed our way.

—Buzz McClain

The Schar School offers classes at Mason’s Fairfax and Arlington campuses in Virginia. Both campuses are located within the heart of a dynamic region and close to the nation’s capital. Opportunities for internships, jobs, and research are unequaled, as is access to archives and museums, policymakers and think tanks, and diverse career opportunities. With 90 full-time faculty, we offer 13 degree programs across undergraduate, masters, and doctoral levels.

A Dynamic Education for an Evolving World
schar.gmu.edu