From the Director: *Tidings* Quarterly Reflection

“Reflections on the Roots of Democratic Leadership”

It appears axiomatic to argue that leadership is important in organizations, in policymaking and policy implementation, and in democratic politics more generally. Indeed, shelves of books have been published providing guidance and supposed “easy steps” to secure “leadership results” for individuals working in all three sectors of our political economy. However, just what constitutes effective civic and public leadership, especially for change—a question of great moment to those of us working at the Institute—remains a contested proposition.

If there is a tendency, not to say a consensus, concerning this question in the literature on leadership, it likely would be to view “transformative leadership” and its close brethren of servant leadership and adaptive leadership as appropriate lodestones. These approaches all share a normative frame or assumption set that often goes unstated, but that nonetheless presumes that leaders will behave with ethical and moral probity, that they will seek to inspire those with whom they work to develop their own capacities and that they will consistently act unselfishly. This vision of leadership emerged in the Post-World War II period and, as is perhaps obvious, it asks a great deal of those who seek to realize it. It also posits that virtually anyone can be a leader and, correspondingly, that leadership can be developed.

Nevertheless, most people do not have to think very long about their experiences to recall one or more individuals who have used leadership roles to aggrandize themselves, or who have actively harmed others so as to maintain a socially or organizationally preeminent or privileged status. Some do so artfully, and bob and weave in institutional or partisan politics to attain personal power and ascendance because their egos demand it; scholars have dubbed these individuals, often well perceived because of their ability to feign empathy, “pseudo-transformational” leaders. No part of what they do is undertaken for anyone’s sake except their own, but they are supremely clever about hiding that fact and appearing to act with concern for others. Other people seek power precisely because it lends

Max Stephenson
Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy & Governance
them the capacity to wield it. This sort of individual is often feted in our celebrity-drunk culture, and the 1980s witnessed a variant of this propensity when pundits and business analysts created a virtual cult in praise of “The Tough-Minded, Downsizing CEO.”

In short, even if the academic field of leadership may be said broadly to espouse an ennobling idea of the leader, it does not follow that all leaders will so behave, or that popular or social aspirations associated with such leadership will always or often be attained or embraced, even by those who devoutly seek them. Indeed, as Joshua Rothman has recently observed, a book by Stanford University’s Jeffrey Pfeffer, Leadership 'BS,' has identified,

… five virtues that are almost universally praised by popular leadership writers—modesty, authenticity, truthfulness, trustworthiness and selflessness— and [Pfeffer contends] most real world leaders ignore these virtues. (If anything, they tend to be narcissistic, back-stabbing, self-promoting shape-shifters)

In this view, the entire field of leadership studies today is Orwellian in that it serves only, or at least principally, to obscure the depravity and cruelty of which humans are capable in their pursuit of status, prestige and personal power (however fleeting that perceived standing may actually prove) by convincing others of their high motives and genuine fealty to empathy and other-regardingness, while behaving in exactly antithetical ways. There is a reason, one supposes, that Dante, in his Divine Comedy, reserved a special place in the Inferno for those who, as leaders, deliberately misled others or preyed on them selfishly to accrue or maintain personal power or wealth.

As the academic debate concerning what should constitute leadership and how it is actually manifest rages, public and civic organizations (the Institute’s primary concern), whether domestic or international in character, must nevertheless seek to realize their aims. Likewise, communities must organize to address their shared challenges. None of these entities are likely to lead themselves, and so the question of how to equip individuals for such roles is a deeply practical one.

As I have noted previously, the Institute has, for some years now, hosted an interdisciplinary group of graduate students and faculty, members of a close-knit intellectual community from multiple colleges, called Community Voices, which seeks to investigate the question of democratic leadership and social change. The group meets weekly during the school year to discuss scholarship relevant to these concerns, with the aim of identifying ways and means by which to engage populations at diverse analytical scales in crafting their common futures. Community Voices invites guests who have worked in civic and public leadership roles to campus several times a year to speak. Visitors also participate in roundtable discussions regarding their experiences and share those, too, with students who conduct interviews with them for the Institute’s podcast series, Trustees Without Borders. The talks, dialogue and podcasts constitute a living archive on issues of leadership and change in democratic societies, and this summer the Institute will publish the first book of essays using this record as an empirical foundation.

The question of how individuals may lead democratically is one of the central ongoing interests of the Community Voices team. That is, the group is exploring how leaders may honor the dignity and agency of citizens in democracies or in democratizing contexts and nonetheless play the sense-making roles so often assigned them by those with whom they work. This is an endlessly complicated concern mediated by a wide array of factors that together suggest it is situated at the nexus of structure and agency, and that it may evolve dynamically in time. Moreover, broader cultural, social, economic and political conditions may make the resolution of this dialectic “sticky” for considerable periods. This orientation raises the vexing question of
how to join disparate sources and forms of knowledge while dignifying all in the exchange, since democratic freedom ultimately arises from social devotion to the liberty of the individual.

Given this enduring puzzle, and on the basis of the experiences and insights shared by some 31 Community Voices guests to date, I have concluded that while the intentions of public and civic leaders may not be determinative in the varying contexts in which they find themselves working in democracies or democratizing polities, it is nevertheless critical that they approach their roles and responsibilities seeking to listen actively to those with whom they work, so as to help to identify paths that serve those individuals’ best interests. This orientation should be foremost in leaders’ minds as they go about addressing their responsibilities. This concern is age old and a reminder that democracies may founder when demagogues are able to exploit those they serve, whether by appeals to prejudices or emotions, or by means of false claims and subterfuge. As it happens, this question is especially salient in the West’s mature democracies, as Donald Trump commands a lead in the race for the Republican party’s presidential nomination in the United States, and a number of very similar authoritarian and nativist leaders have emerged in Europe as well. All of these individuals are appealing to the fears and emotions of the populations of their respective nations in ways likely only to undermine self-governance and freedom.

In short, while there remains much to learn and explore about the always vital question of democratic leadership, my engagement with Community Voices suggests to me that it makes sense to expose future public and civic leaders to transformative and ethical conceptions of leadership, and even to proselytize for these as potential ideals toward which each should strive in their future professional and political roles. It also appears prudent to warn them of the ways in which leaders and followers alike will almost certainly compromise such leadership, so as to ensure they are able to address the enormous complexities and challenges their roles will evidence.

While Pfeffer is surely correct that leaders may fall short of fully and consistently realizing the normative claims of current leadership theory, it seems short-sighted to fail to offer individuals a sense of the “democratic possible” simply because it will not always be realized. One should not, in this critical domain, advise would-be leaders to jettison their highest aims, when retaining them as iconic claims represents a far more appropriate social aspiration. Indeed, it seems willfully ignorant not to acknowledge how often democracy falls short of its ideals, but it appears more reckless not to maintain those hopes as social ambitions. The consequences of failing to do so are potentially too high for democratic legitimacy and freedom. Would-be democratic leaders must employ ideals to guide their practice, but also must be deeply aware of the frailties of humankind as they contemplate their roles and responsibilities. They require an ethical integrity and emotional and intellectual toughness born of a keen sense of the realities in which they shall work coupled with an abiding devotion to the preservation of human dignity and freedom. Those involved with Community Voices at the Institute will continue to explore the many facets of this vital democratic imperative.

Sincerely,

Max Stephenson Jr.
Professor of Public and International Affairs
Director, Virginia Tech Institute for Policy & Governance
Notes


Opportunities

**Call for Submissions:** The editors of SPECTRA: the ASPECT Journal invite scholarly work in all areas of social, political, ethical and cultural thought for the Spring 2016 issue. All abstracts should be submitted online at [spectrajournal.org](http://spectrajournal.org). Abstract guidelines, topic guidance, submission formats, and more details can be found on the SPECTRA Call for Submissions Issue 5.2 announcement page. Initial project descriptions/samples due: **April 15, 2016**.

**Call for Papers:** The European Group for Public Administration (EGPA), in close collaboration with Utrecht University, is organizing the 2016 EGPA Annual Conference to be held from August 24-26 in Utrecht, The Netherlands. There are a variety of study groups from which to choose a paper topic. Read more on the Call for Papers page. Proposals can be uploaded through the submission website by **April 15, 2016**.

**Call for Articles:** *Forced Migration Review* issue 53, to be published in September 2016, will include a major feature on Local communities: first and last providers of protection. Deadline for submission of articles: **May 16, 2016**.

**Call for Proposals:** The School of Public Affairs at Penn State Harrisburg welcomes your proposed papers, panels, and posters for *2016 Northeastern Conference on Public Administration* (NECoPA), “Public Administration in the Era of Collaboration” to be held November 11-13, 2016 in Harrisburg, PA. Please submit your proposal (250 words) as an email attachment together with a title, biographical sketch, and contact information. All proposals must be submitted by **June 1, 2016**.
Acknowledgements & Accomplishments

Congratulations to Wafa Al Daily, who recently started a faculty position at the Virginia Tech Office of International Research, Education, and Development (OIRED) as Program Coordinator for Middle East and North Africa Initiatives. Wafa successfully completed her doctoral defense in February of 2013, with committee members Max Stephenson (VTIPG director and chair), Kathleen Parrott (Apparel, Housing, and Resource Management and co-chair), Sonia Hirt (Urban Affairs and Planning), and Karen Till (Geography, National University of Ireland Maynooth).

Another congratulations to Anna Erwin (PGG), who successfully defended her dissertation proposal on March 31! Anna’s dissertation is titled “Participatory Justice? Exploring Farmworker Agency through the Case of a Faith Based Organization.” Her dissertation committee includes Kim Niewolny (Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education), Barbara-Ellen Smith (Sociology), Andrew Scerri (Political Science) as committee members and Max Stephenson (Professor of Public and International Affairs and VTIPG Director) as committee chair.

Congratulations to David Moore, who was recently awarded the 2016 Citizen Scholar Award! The Citizen Scholar Engagement (CSE) initiative at Virginia Tech encourages graduate students to create a mutually beneficial partnership with the community by utilizing their research and academic skills to solve real-world problems. The Citizen Scholar Engagement initiative also demonstrates that graduate students are not only dedicated researchers and scholars but also engaged citizens with a special skill-set that is essential to the functioning of society (http://graduateschool.vt.edu/gs/cse/engagement).

Virginia Tech was selected to serve as an academic institute for the Mandela Washington Fellowship (MWF) for Young African Leaders. This summer, 25 young community leaders from Africa will attend a 6 week intensive training workshop focused on civic leadership. Civic Leadership Institutes are for Fellows who are civically engaged and serving the public through nongovernmental organizations, community-based organizations, or volunteerism. The participating Institutes expose Fellows to the meaning of civic leadership in the United States while building technical and leadership capacity in areas such as advocacy, strategic planning, organizational development and the intersection of civil society with business and government.

The Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders is a program of the U.S. government and supported in its implementation by IREX. For more information on partnering with the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), please visit yougafricanleaders.state.gov/washington-fellowship/partnership-information.

Photo from February 3-5, 2016 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders Institute Partner Retreat
Upcoming Policy and Governance Related Events

**Book drive!** The Smart Beginnings NRV AmeriCorps Team is participating in Global Youth Services Weekend this month. This is an international service event that engages youth across the globe and this year we have decided to serve with community partners in the New River Valley by building, installing, and supplying **Little Free Libraries**. One of the team’s goals is to collect children and youth books to supply the Little Free Libraries through a book drive. We invite you to participate by donating new or gently used children’s or teen’s books. There is a box located in front of Regina’s desk at IPG’s office (201 W Roanoke St., Blacksburg). Please email any questions to sbnrvreadinghour@gmail.com. Thank you for your support of our community’s families!

**Thursday, April 7th, 2016**
12:30pm-1:30pm
Newman Library, First Floor Multipurpose Room (Room 101)

_“It’s a start that someone is listening to us”: Participatory Mapping with Village Women as Part of “Visualizing Water Services for Decision Making” Research in Burkina Faso_

This is the final Women and Gender in International Development discussion of the semester. The presentation and discussion will be led by Sophie Wenzel, the Assistant Director for the Center for Public Health Practice and Research at Virginia Tech.

**Saturday, April 23rd, 2016**
10:00am-11:30am
Goodwin Hall – Quillen Family Auditorium

_Age of Disruption Matinee Featuring Dr. Bill Thomas_

RSVP at [https://drbillthomas.org/event/dr-bill-thomas-virginia-tech/](https://drbillthomas.org/event/dr-bill-thomas-virginia-tech/)

**Thursday, April 28th, 2016**
4:30pm-7:30pm
Architecture Annex 111

_**Impasse: Unsolvable Migration, Indestructible Borders, and Permanent Immigration Crises**_

A symposium on perpetual problems of refuge and transnational migration.

[http://www.ipg.vt.edu/](http://www.ipg.vt.edu/)

Virginia Tech Institute for Policy and Governance (VTIPG) builds strategic relationships between the university and community by linking academic research and outreach efforts to address significant public policy issues. VTIPG, a university level institute, was created to blend theory with practice by a variety of policy-related services.
Conference & Print Representation

January 19th’s *Soundings* commentary by VTIPG Director, **Max Stephenson**, was published in the *Roanoke Times* on March 16.

**Max Stephenson** and **Laura Zanotti** (Political Science) had their paper entitled *International aid, development and higher education: an analysis of one initiative in rural Haiti* accepted to the 32nd European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS) Colloquium to be held July 7-9, 2016 in Naples, Italy.

**Laura Zanotti** (Political Science), **Nancy McGehee** (Hospitality and Tourism Management), and **Max Stephenson**’s article *International Aid, Local Ownership, and Survival: Development and Higher Education in Rural Haiti* has been published by VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations in its *Volume 27, Issue 1* (February 2016).

**Max Stephenson**, **Laura Zanotti** (Political Science), **Cristina Zennaro** (FondTech) and **Alberto Grando** (Bocconi University) had their abstract *Examining the Nexus of Development, Organizational Learning and Accountability in Two Cases* accepted for presentation at the 12th International Conference of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), to be held in Stockholm, Sweden June 28 - July 1, 2016.

**Anna Erwin** (PGG) had her submission entitled *Investigating labor agency with Critical Realism: The case of Farmworker FBO* accepted to the joint annual meeting of ASFS/AFHVS/CAFS, to be held June 22-25, 2016 at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC). The conference theme, “Scarborough Fare: Global Foodways and Local Foods in a Transnational City,” emphasizes the changing nature of food production, distribution, and consumption as people, goods, foods and culinary and agricultural knowledge move over long distances and across cultural and national borders.

**Anna’s commentary, Pondering Farmworker Justice: The Visible and Invisible Borders of Social Change** has been published in a special issue of the Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development, “Labor in the Food System from Farm to Table,” sponsored by the Inter-institutional Network for Food and Agricultural Sustainability (INFAS).

**Anna Erwin** also recently had TWO abstracts selected from over 1000 submissions for presentation at two sessions during the XIV World Congress of Rural Sociology, to be held August 10-14, 2016 at Ryerson University in Toronto, Canada. The first session is titled RC-40 Mini Conference: Global trends in Alternative Agri-food movements: seeking convergence paths (IRSA_3), where Anna will present *Global justice? Explorations on farm labor agency through the case of a faith based organization*. The second session is titled Food Sovereignty: Participatory, Transdisciplinary and Solidarity Based Research Approaches In-With-For Sustainable and Just Rural Transformation (IRSA_7), where Anna will present *Assaying the field(s): Research methodologies for partnering with a farmworker focused FBO*.
Recent Events on Campus Related to Governance

April 2 Ariana E. Vigil (UNC, Chapel Hill) spoke on *The Many Deaths of Ruben Salazar* as a part of the 2016 ASPECT Graduate Conference.

April 1 Simon Stow (College of William & Mary) spoke on *American Mourning: When Crisis Becomes Disaster* as a part of the 2016 ASPECT Graduate Conference.

March 24 a roundtable discussion was held on Financial Inclusion and Digital Platforms (part of the 2015-16 Ridenour Faculty Fellowship program)

March 21 Community Voices Event - live performance from Dust in the Bottomland

March 14 Paola Zellner (Assistant Professor, School of Architecture & Design) gave a presentation about the International Archive of Women in Architecture (IAWA).

March 2 Kevin Vallier (Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Bowling Green State University) spoke on *Three Concepts of Political Stability*

March 2 Dr. Heather Switzer (Assistant Professor in Women and Gender Studies, School of Social Transformation, Arizona State University) presented on *Postfeminist Politics and Global Girl Effects: Notes of Rural Maasai Schoolgirls’ Experiences* as a part of the Women and Gender in International Development Discussion Series.

Community Voices - Patricia Parera

February 11 Community Voices guest Patricia Parera (Economic and Social Development Consultant for The World Bank) participated in a roundtable luncheon with CV members.

February 12 A writing workshop was held with Cathy Grimes (Communications Manager, Virginia Tech Graduate School) and Jim Dubinsky (Director of Undergraduate Studies, Virginia Tech English Department).

February 10 Christopher Freiman (Assistant Professor, William & Mary Department of Philosophy) lectured on *Should States Allow Markets in Citizenship?*

200th Soundings Commentary

February 1 marked publication of the 200th Soundings commentary. VTIPG hosted a reception, with remarks from VTIPG Director Max Stephenson, author of Soundings, to celebrate the milestone.

February 1 Pamela Scully (Emory University) spoke on *History and Sexual Violence in the South African and Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission Reports*

January 28 SPIA kicked off the Ridenour Faculty Fellowship with a lecture from Jose Antonio Vargas, Evaluating the Conversation around Immigration and Citizenship in America. This year the Ridenour Faculty Fellowship is featuring a series of events highlighting inclusion, diversity and policy innovation.

January 21 Frank William Pierson (Professor, Biosecurity and Infection Control, Avian Medicine, Department of Population Health Sciences) spoke on the topic of *Agro-terrorism and the Art of War* as a part of the spring 2016 Public Health Grand Rounds.
Faculty Spotlight: Kim Niewolny

Kim Niewolny is an associate professor in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. She has contributed to the tripartite land-grant mission of teaching, research, and extension here at Virginia Tech since 2009. Her scholarship centers on the role adult and community education plays in community development experiences with a specific focus on capacity building, social justice, and community food work. Recent research initiatives emphasize the theoretical and methodological frameworks of asset-based community development; narrative inquiry; action research; critical pedagogy; and community food security.

Kim currently serves as co-project director of the USDA AFRI funded Appalachian Foodshed Project (AFP), a multi-state initiative focusing on enhancing community food security in West Virginia and the Appalachian regions of North Carolina and Virginia. The AFP strives to learn from and build relationships with a diversity of stakeholders related to community and economic development; health and nutrition; environmental advocacy; social justice; and agricultural production, processing, and distribution. The hopefulness of this effort lies in the creation of a “common agenda” that adheres to the values of the individuals and organizations making positive changes across the food system in our Appalachian communities. In spring 2013, Kim led an AFP initiative to create and share narratives or “stories” that illustrate the lived experiences of activists, educators, farmers, and practitioners who are involved in a variety of Appalachian organizations and groups that are connected to the broader issues of food system change in the region. The Community Food Work Through Story: Possibilities for Hope and Transformation initiative includes a number of community efforts, such as the creation of a CSA-food pantry partnership, the impact of school and community gardens, and the development of novel structures for organizing. These narratives are designed to be spaces for learning and transformation as a personal testament to the triumphs and challenges of community food work in the region.

Through her extension role, Kim serves as the Director of the Virginia Beginning Farmer and Rancher Coalition, a state-wide coalition-based program that uses a community-based participatory research and collective impact approach to enhance opportunities for sustainable farm start-up and community development in Virginia. Kim also serves as director of the AgrAbility Virginia program, which is a partnership between Virginia Cooperative Extension and Easter Seals UCP North Carolina & Virginia. This state-wide capacity building program assists individuals and their families who farm, and have illnesses, injuries, or disabilities that are impeding their ability to work safely, effectively, and productively.

Kim teaches several graduate courses that closely reflect her research and extension programming, including Community-based Participatory Research, Community Education and Development, Food Security and Resilient Communities, and Theoretical Foundations of Non-Formal Learning. Kim also provides teaching leadership in Virginia Tech’s undergraduate minor in Civic Agriculture and Food Systems (CAFS). For 2016-2017, Kim is looking forward to revisiting her Food Security and Resilient Communities graduate-level course to further develop her narrative work as a university-community partnership project in the central Appalachian region.
He burst out of his office door at the front of the classroom, “The Twin Towers have just been hit by two stealth bombers. My wife works in the city and she just called to tell me.” It’s Mr. Susser’s third period tech class and we had been learning to build catapults. I’m in eighth grade and it’s September 11th, 2001.

The hallways were buzzing and around us the adults were glued to their television sets. We were young and the gravity of the situation hadn’t set in. Less than fifty miles away, the landscape of the world we were growing up in had changed in a matter of moments. The skyline of the city with which we identified most had lost an icon, and this change, in physicality, would only allude to a new world in which terror was always at our doorstep.

They had us assemble in the gym. Classes had been cancelled and our principal was fielding questions from the audience. “Do you know if it hit where they make Daily Show,” Matt asked. This was the first time I had heard of it, and I no idea what he was talking about, but I couldn’t help asking myself why anyone would care about a television show at a time like this. The principal didn’t know.

We filtered out to the buses. A haze was in the air smelling of ash and concrete. That smell and haze would hang there for days. “We should go down on the beach,” Devan said. She was handling this whole experience well, but she was scared and we needed time to make sense of things. We walked out to look at the Long Island Sound toward Bridgeport, Connecticut. We carved our names into the retaining wall with a few sharp stones and drew a picture of the towers ablaze with “9/11/01” beneath them. We looked at each other and at our work and told each other that we would always remember this day.

Fast Forward: “Courage. Honor. Commitment.” Sgt. Vincent Gomez tells me that you have to be a little crazy to want to be in this man’s Marine Corps. I had just flunked out of SUNY Brockport and all I knew is that I wanted to serve my country - somehow, someway. My mother had started crying when I told her I was meeting with a recruiter, but that hadn’t deterred me in my search. I’m looking for purpose and to salvage my wounded pride after getting kicked out for not attending classes. Vince Spataro had joined and Dave Solini was meeting with his recruiter in Syracuse that day too. “I want to serve my country and make an impact in the world. My name means ‘defender of man’ and I loved the discipline I had in martial arts,” I told him. He eyed me, “Alright, let’s get your paperwork together and we’ll get an ASVAB scheduled.”

Gomez is grinning, “Don’t you want to know how you did?” We’re walking out of the indoc center at Fort Hamilton on the south side of Brooklyn, “Don’t you want to know if you’re an idiot or not, dog?” I’m nervous. The test was early that morning and I’ve never been a morning person. “Come on, Gomez. Don’t mess me around like this.” That smirk. “That’s Sergeant Gomez to you, dog.” He’s holding the paper like it’s the steering wheel on his govie - their term for a government issued vehicle they usually beat the heck out of. “You can do anything you want, Stubberfield,” he says, revealing my score.
“Don’t read too much of that philosophy. It’s good for you, don’t get me wrong. General Mattis loves it, but it’ll get you thinking too much and that’s not the best in this Corps,” Major Pietro Scarselli is down from Albany. He’s promising me a spot to try out for Fleet Force Recon after boot camp, and he’s got it in writing. “Well, we’ve got your contract. We’ll be in touch. Now let’s go, Alex,” my father snarls. I’ve never seen Marines so shaken by a glare. “Courage. Honor. Commitment,” I think to myself as we exit the recruiting office.

“I’ve got to have the courage to honor this commitment. That’s why I’ve got to go back and complete my degree at Brockport. I need to see this thing through,” I say to the Gunny. “I understand,” he says, “You were making us feel frustrated with how long this process is taking anyway. Don’t feel too bad about it. We’re Marines. We do two things: we fight and we make more Marines. Don’t forget to say thanks to Gomez. You were his file and I’m sure he’ll want to see you out the door.” I shake his hand, thank him for lunch and give a salute. Maybe it was Gomez’s fault. He once told me there are many ways to serve.

It’s another recruitment fair. At Brockport this time. “I want to do what you do. I want to be a professor,” I say to Georges Dicker, the philosophy department chair. “Well you know, getting a PhD and what we do is really hard,” he says. I’m looking worse for the ware from a welcome back party the rugby team threw me. “That’s okay,” I say, “I think I’m up for the task. I just have to find a subject that grabs me. I loved my philosophy classes at Suffolk Community College, and I think I’ve got what it takes to get into grad school. I just have to dig myself out of this hole with my GPA. They dropped a whole bunch of classes from my transcript to get me back to a 2.0. “We’ve had few students go on to graduate work, but they were quite exceptional,” he says. “I doubt I’m exceptional but I have a few things to say and I want to learn how to say them.”

Alex Stubberfield is a first-year PhD student in the Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical and Cultural Thought (ASPECT). He earned his Bachelors of Science in Philosophy at SUNY Brockport and continued his education at Virginia Tech earning a Masters in Philosophy, a Masters of Public and International Affairs with a graduate certificate in Nonprofit and Nongovernmental Organization Management. His research concerns political theory, political ideology, political philosophy, social theory, value theory, philosophy of science, corporate personhood and political subjectivity. He teaches American politics as an instructor in the Political Science department.
Podcast interview with the composer (Nate May) and vocalist (Andrew Munn) of Dust in the Bottomland. Nate and Andrew are recent Community Voices guests who gave a live performance of Dust in the Bottomland on March 21.

Podcast interview with recent Community Voices guest Patricia Parera (Economic and Social Development Consultant for The World Bank)

Photo: Bass vocalist Andrew Robert Munn (left) and composer Nate May (right) with interviewers (left to right) Dana Hogg, Jordan Laney, and Cheryl Montgomery.

Blogs & Commentaries

Soundings - a commentary from VTIPG Director Max Stephenson

March 28 - The Road Not Taken
March 14 - A Descent into Brutish Crudity and Demagoguery
February 29 - The Common Good, Today’s GOP, Morality and Democratic Politics
February 15 - On Anti-“Political Correctness” Posturing, Human Dignity and Self-Governance
February 1 - The State of the Union: An Angst-Filled Trajectory for Self-Governance
January 19 - Guns, Ugly Fantasies and Democratic Politics (also published in the Roanoke Times)
January 4 - A House Divided: Blaming the Poor

Tidings - a quarterly reflection from VTIPG Director Max Stephenson, now featured as the Director’s Letter in our Quarterly Newsletters beginning October 2014.

Read Tidings from previous quarterly newsletter, January 2016 – Policy for youth from troubled families: what sort of society do we wish to be?
RE: Reflections & Explorations - Online essay series hosted by VTIPG, written by graduate students across the University to reflect on their ongoing work in governance and policy related concerns.

April 1 - Beyond Interests: Symbiogenic Resonance and the Democratic Subject
by Alex Stubberfield (ASPECT)

March 25 - Hashtag Revolutions, Spectacles and Politics
by Johannes Grow (ASPECT)

March 17 - Migrant Crises: The Cosmopolitan Imperative
by Jake Keyel (PGG)

February 23 - Theorizing technological change and participatory/democratic practices in workplaces
by Luis Felipe (PGG)

February 18 - Biopiracy and the Threat to Indigenous Knowledge
by Ashleigh Breske (PGG)

February 5 - Understanding The Green Economy
by Vanessa Guerra M (PGG)

February 2 - The Unaccounted Risks of Public Private Partnerships
by Priscila Izar (PhD candidate in the School of Public and International Affairs)

January 28 - Korean Comfort Women: Bargaining Chips in East-Asian International Relations
by D’Elia Chandler (Assistant Director of Government Relations at Virginia Tech)

Thriving Places Project - http://thrivingplacesproject.com/
This project shares ideas for change, and provides resources for people interested in making positive changes in their community.

Beth Olberding (MURP-MIP) in Costa Rica - https://betholberding.wordpress.com/
IPG affiliated master’s student Beth Olberding (MURP-MIP) is in Costa Rica now in pre-service training for the Peace Corps. Beth will spend the next 2 years volunteering in the community economic development sector. Check out her blog from time to time, as she will update it when she is able!

SPECTRA: The ASPECT Journal
Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Theory Archives (SPECTRA) is a student-led online scholarly journal established as part of the ASPECT (Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical, and Cultural Thought) program at Virginia Tech. The journal features work of an interdisciplinary nature and is designed to provide an academic forum for students to showcase research, explore controversial topics, and take intellectual risks. SPECTRA welcomes submissions for publication by way of scholarly refereed articles, book reviews, essays, interviews and other works that operate within a problem-centered, theory-driven framework.


Find the latest issue and previous volumes here:
https://spectrajournal.org/index.php/SPECTRA/issue/archive