

This year was an active and productive one for the Public Policy Institute. In addition to participating in several on-campus engagement activities, the PPI worked with several local governments, state and regional nonprofits, and other community organizations. Our projects varied from hosting nonpartisan election debates for state and federal offices, to facilitating an economic development forum for a local municipality, to surveying all North Carolina local government leaders about trends in local government employment issues, to creating a fundraising and marketing plan for county farmers' market. Student involvement was a crucial component in all of our projects. Our students served as the principal contributors in most projects and were involved at each stage, from the project's initial planning to creating any final reports. These projects not only delivered valuable services to the community, but also provided our students with practical, hands-on experiences that will help them in their future careers. These projects also allowed our students to develop valuable relationships with professionals in the industry, which could serve the students as references and contacts in their future careers.

<http://www.wcu.edu/about-wcu/centers-institutes-affiliates/public-policy-institute/>

Below we provide a brief overview of who we are and then include summaries of the activities in which the PPI participated. Some include links to media coverage of the activities. However, the PPI could not have provided any of these benefits to the students or our community partners without the assistance of many other individuals and departments. This year the PPI received support from many on-campus groups, including the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the Provost, the College of Arts and Sciences, the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, the Office of Communications and Public Relations, the Center for Service Learning, the Pre-Law Club of WCU, Creative Services, and the WCU Print Shop, among others. The PPI also received assistance from off-campus organizations such as the North Carolina Center for Non-profits, the North Carolina City and County Management Association, North Carolina Campus Compact, the Southwestern Commission, Pisgah Legal Services, the Asheville-Buncombe Community Relations Council, WLOS-TV, and the Community Foundation of Western North Carolina.

The WCU Public Policy Institute aims to empower the Western North Carolina region to effectively manage real policy problems by mobilizing students, community leaders, faculty, and citizens to discuss and develop viable policy options to create more effective policies.

The Public Policy Institute (PPI) was founded in 1999 as a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent research and outreach organization. The mission of the PPI is to generate effective public policy responses and alternatives to important political, administrative and social problems that profoundly affect the quality of life in Western North Carolina. Faculty, staff, and students in the PPI use the tools of empirical social science to understand and address public policy problems. The PPI staff writes for multiple audiences, enabling research projects to reach as many constituencies as possible.

The PPI helps undergraduate and graduate students connect the classroom with real-world applications. The specific student contributions vary from project to project, but students frequently collect data, co-author reports and articles, and act as full partners in the research process. Students also interact with external constituents delivering policy recommendations and becoming part of the policy process.

As an explicitly collaborative organization, the PPI welcomes partnerships with local governments and nonprofits as well as with faculty throughout the Western Carolina University campus.

Our goals are:

- *To help students* to become active participants in their communities.
- *To improve public policy in the region* by conducting rigorous research on major issues and making it available and understandable to a practitioner audience.
- *To exercise policy leadership* in the region.

- *To obtain resources* to carry out the mission of the institute, and to attract dedicated students, faculty, and staff to assist in carrying out that mission.

2014 Constitution Day

The PPI hosted a free public forum for Constitution Day entitled, “Is Two Better than One? Comparing our Rights (and Responsibilities) under the North Carolina and United States Constitutions.” Our forum featured a panel with Chris Brook of the American Civil Liberties Union, Dr. Robert Ferguson of the WCU History Department, and former NC Supreme Court Justice and former executive director of the NC Institute for Constitutional Law, Robert Orr. This event, which coincided with WCU’s year-long theme, “North Carolina: Our State, Our Time,” explored the similarities and differences between the two constitutions and raised awareness of the historical and societal importance of each. In addition to this forum, the PPI partnered with the Pre-Law Club of WCU to distribute pocket constitutions to WCU students. For coverage from one of WCU’s student journalism publications, follow this link:

<http://www.thewesterncarolinajournalist.com/2014/10/06/nc-constitution-as-important-as-us-constitution/>

2014 Election Activities

The PPI makes concerted efforts to increase community involvement in the political process. In the fall of 2014, the PPI facilitated the “Voter Engagement Coalition,” a nonpartisan group of student leaders and staff to coordinate voter education programs, registration events, and other election-related activities. This group included student leaders from campus student government, representatives from the College Democrats and College Republicans, and students representatives WCU’s Center for Service Learning. This group assisted in coordinating several election-related events on campus such as voter registration drives, daily shuttles to the polling location, and an election night watch party. To assist in the costs of such events, the PPI was awarded a micro-grant of \$750 from North Carolina Campus Compact.

The PPI was also instrumental in hosting three heavily attended political debates. PPI facilitated the only debated for the 11th Congressional District seat between Mark Meadows and Tom Hill on September 4th on the WCU campus. The PPI also took a lead role in hosting a debated for the NC House of Representatives, District 119, between Joe Sam Queen and Mike Clampitt and the NC Senate, District 50, between Jim Davis and Jane Hips. These events were also streamed on Asheville’s ABC affiliate, WLOS-TV. All of these events were free and open to the public.

For coverage of the US House debate, follow this link:

<http://www.smokymountainnews.com/component/k2/item/14213-u-s-house-candidates-square-off-at-wcu>

For the NC Senate debate: <http://www.smokymountainnews.com/news/item/14378-n-c-senate-debate-gets-dicey-when-candidates-talk-race>

For the NC House debate: <http://www.smokymountainnews.com/news/item/14337-n-c-house-candidates-queen-and-clampitt-draw-distinctions-during-debate>

2014 Local Government Survey

In the summer and fall of 2014 conducted a statewide survey of city and county government leaders as part of its annual Local Government Survey (*LoGoS*). This year’s theme examined personnel practices and employment trends in local governments. The survey was sent to all North Carolina city and county managers and human resources directors. We received over 200 responses. Of the pertinent findings from the survey, over one-third of the (39%) said that finding and hiring employees is more difficult now than five years ago, while the most effective tools to recruit employees were personal contacts and organizational web

pages. In looking at retention of employees, over one-third (38%) suggested that it is more difficult to retain employees now than five years ago, most stated that when staff leave it is more often to go to another local government job, and that over half (55%) see longevity pay raises or market pay analyses increases as the best way to retain local government employees. As to the potential retirement “bubble” in local government, 33% of respondents indicated that at least 10% of their administrative personnel will be eligible for retirement within the next five years.

Hendersonville Study

At the PPI, we are devoted to insuring that local communities have a resource for help with policy problems they encounter. In the fall of 2014, we completed a study of parking in the central business district of Hendersonville, by collecting a data set of parking spaces juxtaposed with building usage. This study allowed the city to have a starting point for tackling their issue of a lack of parking available in highly trafficked areas of downtown by understanding where spaces are versus where they are needed.

Nonprofit Survey

In the winter of 2014, the PPI, in partnership with the N.C. Center for Nonprofits, conducted a human resources survey of nonprofit organizations on staffing, recruitment, and retention practices in North Carolina. The purpose of the survey was to gain insight into current practices and employment trends to better understand the direction the sector is going. Of particular interest were topics related to: staff size, composition, and growth, staff recruitment, turnover, and retention, and staff professional development. The survey was distributed to executive directors or other organizational leaders at 1,290 nonprofit organizations in the state. Responses were received from 233 individuals, which was a response rate of 18%. The survey responses indicate several important points: most nonprofit organizations (51%) have experienced an increase in their staff size over the last five years and that most respondents (62%) indicated that their staff is more productive now than five years ago. Most respondents (51%) indicated that the ability to recruit and retain quality staff members has not changed significantly in the past five years and that when staff members voluntarily leave, they are more likely to pursue work with other nonprofits than in the public or private sector. Nonprofit strategies used for staff recruitment include webpages, listservs, and direct contacts, with a plurality (45%) of respondents indicating that they use informal networking. To retain staff, most respondents use a combination of professional development opportunities and salary increases, with over one-fourth (28%) stating that salary increases are the most effective means to retain staff.

“Focus on Franklin” Forum

In July of 2014 the PPI helped organize and facilitate the "Focus on Franklin" town hall meeting. The meeting brought the town of Franklin, NC together to discuss the future of the community in light of a changing economic and cultural landscape. Over 60 residents showed up to begin a dialogue with their city officials. Issues explored included strategies to increase tourism, improve downtown infrastructure, directional goals for Franklin’s “Main Street Program,” and a discussion of best practices from similarly situated towns in the region. Included here is a link to coverage from the Macon County News: <http://www.maconnews.com/news/7046-ppi-forum-fewer-meetings-more-action>

Renter's Rights Brochure

The Landlord/Tenant Rights Brochure is a set of two pamphlets that serve to make the rights of renters in North Carolina more accessible. Ranging from basic law to discrimination, this brochure will be hosted on the PPI website and available for anyone who is interested in understanding or helping others understand their rights as renters. Both Pisgah Legal Services and the Asheville-Buncombe Community Relations Council assisted in the creation of this brochure.

Macon County Care Network

In the fall of 2014 the PPI assisted the Macon County Care Network (or CareNet) in gathering feedback on how to better provide, enhance, and promote their services to the county. The nonprofit works with low income communities in Macon County to help provide the basic necessities to those who may otherwise go without. This meeting led toward the discussion of partnerships with other nonprofits, increased assistance from the Town of Franklin, and more business involvement in aiding the nonprofit.

Haywood Historic Farmer's Market

In Spring of 2015, the PPI was contacted by the Haywood Historic Farmer's Market (HHFM). The long standing market was seeking to identify ways to enhance their fundraising and grant strategy. PPI assisted in developing a Grant Application, Strategic Plan and a Grant Resource Database. The HHFM will use these tools in the future in order to expand their location and the services they provide to the community. More information on this organization may be found at their web page:

<http://www.waynesvillefarmersmarket.com/>

Western North Carolina Food Policy Council

For another year, the PPI played a crucial role in supporting the WNC Food Policy Council, a community organization that coordinates with various groups to support agricultural development and reduce food insecurity in the seven western counties in NC. Of most significance this year with the WNCFPC was the creation of the 2015 Appalachian Farm School, conducted in the spring of this year. The Farm School was a resource for local farmers to cover such topics as marketing, food safety, regulation compliance, and agritourism. The PPI also worked with the WNCFPC in the development of a regional food systems map, which will provide quick information on food producers, food distribution locations, farmers' markets, and other information in GIS format. More information may be found at the WNC Food Policy Council's web page: <http://www.wncfpc.org/>.

Other Supported Activities

In addition to the activities listed above, the PPI was also a contributor in other activities on the WCU campus. The PPI provided support for the daylong symposium in April, "North Carolina in Dialogue: Our Past, Present, and Future." This symposium included several panels with government leaders, commentators, practitioners, and was a key event in WCU's year-long theme. The PPI also provided support for the inaugural Women's Leadership Conference in March, 2015. This conference concluded with a panel from North Carolina's three female state Supreme Court justices.