

*Message from the Director*

Once again the Public Policy Institute (PPI) engaged in a very active and productive year, providing educational experiences for our students, programming for Western Carolina University and the region, and aiding our community partners in their important missions in our area. The Local Government Training Program (LGTP) also conducted numerous educational opportunities for local government professionals in the 26 western counties of North Carolina. We were also excited to welcome a new director for the LGTP. Robert (Bob) Boylan was named the director in June of 2017 and had an outstanding first year guiding this important program.

**Annual  
Report  
2017-2018**

Highlights of this year's PPI activities include consulting with local governments to foster public participation in government decision making, facilitating focus groups for a nonprofit organization looking to expand its programming, conducting a residential survey on public services for a municipality, assisting with numerous voter registration efforts on the Western Carolina University campus, and conducting an intensive impact analysis for a regional nonprofit. Student involvement was a crucial component in all of our projects. Our student staff members served as the principal contributors from each project's initial planning to producing the final reports. These projects not only delivered valuable services to the community, but also provided important learning and networking opportunities for our students.

Below we provide a brief overview of who we are and summaries of selected PPI activities from the past academic year. 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 Contracts and Grants Office, the Office of Communications and Public Relations, the Center for Service Learning, Creative Services, and the WCU Print Shop, among others. The PPI also received assistance from off-campus organizations such as Buncombe Partnership for Children, the Village of Forest Hills, and Haywood County, NC, among others. Thank you to all these groups, both internal and external partners, for their continued support.

*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: Who We Are*

The Public Policy Institute (PPI) was founded in 1999 as a 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 their classroom education with real-world applications. 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 non-profits as well as with faculty throughout the Western Carolina University campus.

### **Our goals include:**

*To help students* become active participants in their communities.

*To improve public policy in the region* by conducting rigorous research on major issues and making that research available and understandable to a practitioner audience.

*To exercise policy leadership* in the region.

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

## *Public Policy Institute*

### *2017 - 2018 Staff*

#### **Director, Public Policy Institute:**

Dr. Todd Collins  
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#### **Director, Local Government and Training Program:**

Robert Boylan  
rcboylan@email.wcu.edu

#### **Graduate Research Assistants:**

Preston Blakely  
Lillian Hatton  
Dorcus Munoko  
Faviola Olvera  
Kaitlin Sines

# 2017 - 2018 SUMMARY OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

## 2017 Constitution Day

The PPI hosted several events in observation of Constitution Day. Students handed out pocket Constitutions and conducted voter registration activities on the University Center lawn. We also hosted our second annual “Constitutional Shark Tank” competition for student participants. This year several students presented their ideas for a needed change or amendment to the United States Constitution. Their ideas ranged from campaign finance reform to abolishing the death penalty. Our winners this year were Rylee Davis, Regina Glover, and Carleen (Tena) Turner.



## Homeward Bound - Cost Effectiveness Study

This past year we worked very closely with Homeward Bound, a regional nonprofit organization that works to find permanent housing for the homeless population of Buncombe and Henderson Counties. The PPI gathered information about Homeward Bound clients, including health records and interactions with the criminal justice system. The goal was to determine whether the use of public services, such as public-supported health resources and interactions with law enforcement, changed after Homeward Bound clients moved into permanent housing. This project builds on previous work that found decreases in the use of health care services and fewer criminal charges once people obtained permanent housing. While we continue to work on our final report, we anticipate that our analysis will be useful to Homeward Bound in their long-term planning, grant applications, and other funding opportunities. Our students gained valuable experience in working with bureaucratic structures in gathering records, data analysis, and program evaluation.



## Preschool Programming Expansion - Public Input Sessions

Our graduate students assisted the Buncombe County Partnership for Children in facilitating several community focus groups concerning preschool programming. The Buncombe Partnership for Children is a nonprofit organization that offers support to parents in the region and training for those in the childcare industry such as daycare center employees, in-home childcare personnel, and other childcare providers.

Their training programs include issues such as licensing requirements, topics on children's health, and activity planning for preschool-aged children. The organization is exploring an intensive grant-driven project to expand high-quality preschool programming in Buncombe County. The proposals include expanding preschool programs through the summer, having longer hours, and focusing on quality standards. Our students conducted focus groups about the proposals with various stakeholders, including childcare providers, community leaders, and parents. Graduate students created different questionnaires for the various focus groups and facilitated small group discussions concerning the potential changes. Overall, our students were able to interact with a diverse group of stakeholders, gained leadership skills and improved their communication skills while serving as group facilitators, and gained a better understanding of an organization's policy implementation process.



### Forest Hills - Staffing Study

In the fall of 2017, our graduate students worked closely with community leaders from Forest Hills, NC, a municipality located near the Western Carolina campus. Forest Hills is a small community with no full-time town employees. This can create difficulties in fulfilling government tasks. Our graduate students examined similar sized towns in the state to determining their staffing structures. We also explored the possibility of Forest Hills sharing staff with other nearby municipalities, such as Webster, NC, and Dillsboro, NC. Examples were found of shared town managers across the state and models of multiple year internships for MPA students to serve as municipal administrators. This information was reported to Forest Hills leaders and graduate students made suggestions on moving forward. Graduate students gained knowledge of the various positions in municipal governments, improved their abilities to conduct comparative research studies, and improved

their communication skills while presenting their findings.

### Hinton Rural Life Center - Client Services Survey

The Hinton Center is a religious-based nonprofit conference center that provides an event and meeting location for both faith-based and non-faith based organizations. Many of their events are also open to the public, such as guest speakers and workshops. As part of its long-term planning, Hinton Center leaders looked to create a survey for their clients to determine if the Center is fulfilling community needs. The Center leaders also looked to assess whether there was a need for the Center to expand the services it offers. The PPI assisted the Hinton Center leaders in the formulation of their survey questions and consulted with them on the best way to conduct the survey.

## Waynesville Strategic Planning - Public Participation

In 2017, Waynesville, NC, began a process to update its land development plan, which had not been revised since 2002. In conjunction with town staff, the PPI consulted with town leaders in assessing various strategies for public participation in the process. The PPI gave guidance to town administrators and explored future involvement with the PPI in their process in the summer and fall of 2018.

## Forest Hills - Resident Satisfaction Survey



The town of Forest Hills sought assistance from the PPI in conducting a survey of its residents. This project was in conjunction with graduate assistant Kaitlin Sines' capstone project in which she compared public services offered by other municipalities of similar size as Forest Hills. Building on Kaitlin's project, PPI students created a residential survey for Forest Hills. Our GAs gained experience in formulating the survey questions, explored different methods of reaching potential respondents, and the graduate students

worked closely with town leaders throughout the process. The PPI conducted the survey by contacting all property owners (158) through either email or mail and received 73 usable responses. Graduate students also helped to present the results to the elected town board and write the final report for town leaders.

## Local Government Training Program (LGTP) Activities

Housed within the Public Policy Institute, the Local Government Training Program (LGTP) continued its important work training local government leaders in Western North Carolina. The LGTP facilitated many in-person and video conference programs across the region, including several events at WCU's Biltmore Park location. This year marked the first for Director Bob Boylan, a two-time graduate from WCU. Boylan earned an undergraduate degree in Political Science and a Master of Project Management (MPM) from Western. Boylan also completed the year-long Municipal and County Administration Course, an intensive set of classes offered through the UNC School of Government to train local government leaders. Participants from this year's LGTP workshops included mayors, councilmembers, board members, town and county managers, finance directors, department directors, clerks, planners, and economic development directors, among others. Some examples of these workshops include:



Bob Boylan named Director of the LGTP

Capital Finance	Essentials for Municipal Government (2 sessions)
Governmental Accounting	Family Medical Leave Act Update
Regional Seminar for Magistrates (Small Claims & Criminal)	Purchasing and Contracting (2 sessions)
Procedures for Public Officials (2 sessions)	Liability for Public Officials
Evaluating Manager and Board Performance	Legislative Zoning Decisions
Public Employment Law Update	Fiduciary Responsibilities for Elected Officials
Property Tax Collection	Emergency and Disaster Management

In addition to University of North Carolina School of Government workshops, the Local Government Training Program also assisted in the planning of four quarterly WNC Managers Association Meetings.

## STUDENT EXPERIENCES

Working in the Public Policy Institute this school year was an incredible experience that gave me the opportunity to learn and grow as a student and as a professional. The PPI allowed us to interact with both nonprofit and local government entities. The ability to interact with nonprofit and local government entities gave me an outlook on what my future career may entail. In particular, I enjoyed working with the Asheville Buncombe Partnership for Children this past year. Working with the ABPC gave me invaluable experience such as leadership skills, communication skills, coding data, creating short surveys, and leading focus groups. I am excited to use the skills I learned not only next year in the PPI but also in the public sector in the future.

- Preston Blakely, PPI Graduate Research Assistant



Working for the Public Policy Institute at Western Carolina University has been an amazing experience and I am looking forward to continuing to work with the PPI next year. Over the past year, I have learned how to write, code, and analyze survey data. In addition, I have been able to engage with community leaders in the public and non-profit sectors. The project that I worked on the most was our cost-benefit analysis with Homeward Bound in Asheville. This has been a long and difficult project but I have learned so much about working with multiple organizations simultaneously and coding data containing private information. I know that working for the Public Policy Institute will allow me to continue to learn valuable skills in communication, teamwork, and research.

- Lillian Hatton, PPI Graduate Research Assistant

The Public Policy Institute has proven to be a complement to my studies in the MPA program. Everything I have learned as a student has benefited me and I am thankful for having the opportunity to be a graduate assistant. Not only has it taught me valuable skills, it has taught me how to be my best self as part of a team. I will forever be a Catamount and look forward to serving my WNC family after I earn my JD. Go Cats and Go Masters! We are prepared to serve WNC and that is an amazing feat.

- Kaitlin Sines, PPI Graduate Research Assistant

