For the past 16 years, Texas McCombs has offered MPA students the opportunity to gain a global business perspective by studying abroad. In this issue, we’ll learn more about this summer’s program in Argentina.

Buenos Aires. The capital city known for tango, steak, and soccer. This eclectic metropolis has so many pastimes, delectable eats, incredible architecture, and outstanding educational institutions that it’s easy to see why it was chosen as an MPA study-abroad destination.

Since 2014, Texas McCombs has partnered with Universidad de San Andrés (UdeSA), a private university with approximately 2,500 students, to provide a study-abroad experience for MPA students. UdeSA offers degrees in business, law, social sciences, and economics on two campuses in the Buenos Aires area. Approximately 70 MPA students study abroad each summer. This summer, 26 elected to study in South America at UdeSA’s downtown campus. Here, they lived, learned, and explored Argentina together.

One of the unique features of the program is that MPA students take classes with both UT-Austin and UdeSA professors. Texas McCombs faculty members Steve Goodson and Kristina Zvinakis traveled to South America to teach one of the courses in the five-week program, and a UdeSA faculty member taught the other course. “MPA students benefit by earning six credits in another country without extending their degree program,” said Emily Maxon, Executive Director of International Programs at UdeSA. “It opens their minds to the ways business is done in a different country while they are also learning to be adaptable and flexible.”

Students noted that Santiago Barraza, their UdeSA Management professor, was one of the highlights of their trip. “He was interested in each student’s experience and applied it to real world situations,” said Charlie Howell, a fourth-year student (pictured below, left) who participated in the program. Professor Barraza even took students on an office visit to a local software development company whose stock was skyrocketing at the time.

But it wasn’t just the ability to earn course credit that drew students to South America; they also participated in cultural assignments UdeSA arranged and organized excursions (both in Buenos Aires and around Argentina) for themselves. Before classes started, students toured a large swath of the city by bus to get a flavor of Buenos Aires. They also learned how to make empanadas and how to tango during their stay. “McCombs and UdeSA planned everything so well. They helped us find a balance between studying and enjoying the city,” said fifth-year student Julia Siegel (pictured below, center). On the weekends, they explored the country by hiking in Patagonia, visiting wine country in Mendoza, and experiencing the beauty of Iguazu Falls.

Fifth-year student Dean Cohen (on the right) summed up his experience stating, “We had a great, dynamic group of students, and we brought that back to Austin.” These students made a connection abroad that will stay with them throughout their time at UT, in their careers, and (we hope) their future travels.
FROM THE CHAIR
MICHAEL CLEMENT

DEAR FELLOW ACCOUNTING LONGHORNS:

On Saturday, May 25, I experienced my first commencement ceremony as Department Chair. The 202 graduates in this class represent the 72nd graduating class of the Texas McCombs MPA program and join the Department in celebrating 108 years of accounting education.

What particularly struck me at this year’s ceremony is our strong tradition of excellence across those years and that’s what we highlight in this edition. We’ll tell you about four graduates who received awards at the ceremony and the three alums who won the Elijah Watt Sells award in 2018 (and reconnect with a 2009 award winner). The UT CPA exam pass rate has consistently been among the highest in the country and, for the past eight years, at least one Texas McCombs student was on the list of Sells Award winners.

This strong tradition has also created a reputation that extends beyond Texas. Students in this year’s graduating class took jobs around the country in cities such as Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Denver, New York City, Phoenix, San Jose, Seattle, and Washington D.C. In addition, our study-abroad programs extend our reputation internationally; 64 MPA students studied abroad in Buenos Aires (featured on our front page) and Prague this past summer.

Our tradition of excellence is supported both by the outstanding teaching (some of which was recognized at commencement ceremonies) and the outstanding research of our faculty. Through research we expand the boundaries of business knowledge, and that knowledge creates a richer learning environment for our students. For example, our faculty investigate how investors use accounting information to price stocks, the best ways for owners to incorporate accounting information into compensation contracts, and what determines how users of financial information respond to the language in audit reports.

The impact of this research is measured by the selectivity of the journal in which a study is published and the number of times a study is cited by other researchers. Publication in the best accounting academic journals is very competitive. Some of these journals publish as few as 15% of the manuscripts submitted to them. And, competition for publication comes from faculty at all of the top business schools.

Our faculty are well represented in terms of research impact. BYU tracks the research productivity of accounting faculty around the world. According to the BYU survey, Professors Kachelmeier, Koonce, and Mills rank in the top 100 (the top 1%) of almost 6,000 researchers included in their database.

An additional research strength of the Department is the breadth of research conducted; we are much more diverse than many schools in that our faculty includes financial, managerial, tax, and audit researchers. According to the BYU rankings, when all accounting research areas are considered, UT ranks second among all schools in publication productivity since 1990. This breadth is also a benefit to our doctoral students who receive broader research training as a result. The BYU rankings note that our PhD alums rank second among all doctoral programs in publication productivity since 1990. This year, graduating doctoral students Jakob Infuehr, Antonis Kartapanis, and Kristen Valentine will carry on our strong tradition. We will tell you more about them and faculty research in the following pages.

We are always working hard to ensure that this strong tradition continues to produce outstanding students (read about Alyssa Sternadel on the back page) and we take pride in our outstanding alumni who are a part of that tradition. In closing, we salute one of those alums, Niloufar Molavi (PPA ’91), for being one of five individuals inducted into the McCombs Hall of Fame this year. Congratulations Niloufar and Hook ‘em Horns!
The McCombs School of Business Hall of Fame was established in 1983 to honor former students, faculty, and supporters who have made outstanding professional contributions to the business community and who have advanced humanity. Niloufar Molavi, PPA ’91, is one of five individuals honored with this award in 2019.

Niloufar began her career with PwC in 1991, after graduating from the PPA program with a concentration in taxation. In 2001, she was promoted to partner and in 2009, she joined the firm’s U.S. leadership team as Chief Diversity Officer. In that role she oversaw the firm’s diversity strategy and all of its related programs and initiatives.

From 2011 to 2016, Niloufar served as the firm’s Greater Houston Market Managing Partner; she currently leads PwC’s Global and U.S. Energy practice, which is comprised of over 6,000 professionals serving clients in the oil and gas industry. She is responsible for all client services including assurance, advisory, and tax.

With 28 years of experience at PwC, Niloufar has served a wide range of energy companies both in the U.S. and abroad, advising clients on international and U.S. tax structuring, mergers, acquisitions, and potential public offerings. In all of those years, she has also been a supporter and friend of the Department and the MPA program.

Niloufar is currently a member of both the McCombs and Department Advisory Councils. She also serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees of Awty International School and serves on the board of Central Houston. She resides in Houston with her husband and two children, one of whom is currently following in her mom’s footsteps as an iMPA student on the tax track.

“My ultimate career goal is to be as successful and respected as my mom. She is my inspiration and motivation to work hard and achieve my maximum potential of greatness,” said Niloufar’s daughter, fourth-year iMPA student Tara Molavi.
MAKING AN IMPACT
STEVEN KACHELMEIER

How do you come up with your research ideas?
In a sense, coming up with new research ideas is one part preparation, in terms of becoming familiar with the literature, and one part inspiration, in terms of identifying important questions that have been neglected in the literature. In the particular case of my research on creativity, my coauthors and I were aware of decades of management accounting research on how different kinds of incentives affect performance on routine, straightforward tasks, but there was essentially nothing in the accounting literature on how incentives affect the more open-ended, creative tasks that characterize contemporary business. We sought ways to fill that gap.

How did the idea for this study come to you?
Our latest study of creativity continues a much longer program of study that dates back to a 2008 article in the Journal of Accounting Research I coauthored with Bernhard Reichert and Michael Williamson. In both that study and in a subsequent follow-up study (again with Michael) published in a 2010 issue of The Accounting Review, we found that the right kind of monetary incentives can result in a greater quantity of ideas without harming creativity. But at the same time, we did not find evidence that incentives can actually improve creativity. In the research that led to our 2019 article, Laura Wang, Michael, and I explored the reasoning that incentives might not improve creativity right away, but could possibly improve creativity after some rest. Sure enough, we found that a rest period as long as ten days or as little as 20 minutes between experimental sessions helped participants provided with monetary incentives generate not just a greater quantity of ideas but also more creative ideas.

What was it like working with Laura and Michael?
Laura and Michael are great, not only professionally, but also at a personal level. Research is much more enjoyable when research colleagues are also friends. Laura, Michael, and I developed an effective and efficient working relationship by identifying the things each of us does best, while also capturing insights from joint conversations to plan our next steps. We achieved a joint outcome that would have been very difficult for any of us to have produced individually.

Tell us what this particular study is about.
Is creativity something that results from hard work or from pure inspiration? Our study predicts and finds that both elements are necessary. That is, monetary incentives are necessary to motivate people to come up with lots of ideas, even if those ideas are not particularly creative right away. Then, after taking a break from the task, those who are motivated by incentives to work hard initially become more creative after they return. As a practical example, professionals at successful companies like Google and Indeed clearly work hard. But these companies also provide ample opportunities for breaks from hard work that allow creative “incubation” to take place.

What does it mean to conduct an “experiment” in accounting?
Experimentation tests whether something matters by trying it both ways and observing the difference. For example, as every elementary school student has observed, plants grow better with ample watering (one experimental condition) than with little watering (another condition, often referred to as the “control” condition). Accounting experiments follow the same principle. Specifically, in our latest experiment, we provide monetary incentives that depend on the quantity of “rebus puzzle” ideas our participants produce in one condition, while providing fixed pay independent of production in another, control condition. We then ask separate panels of creativity raters to evaluate the creativity of the rebus puzzles our participants produce, both at the time of our initial experiment and in a second-stage task in which we ask the same participants to generate additional rebus puzzles either ten days later (in one study) or as little as 20 minutes later (in a second study). Just as the elementary school student finds that plants grow better with additional water, we find that participants’ creativity ratings are higher when they operate under monetary incentives that depend on the number of ideas they produce. Importantly, however, this difference arises only after the rest period, indicating that both incentives to work hard and some time away from the task are necessary for creativity.

Who are the “participants” in an experiment?
Different kinds of participants are needed for different kinds of research questions. In the particular case of this creativity research, the question did not require any particular experience or expertise, so we recruited undergraduate students as compensated volunteers. Other research questions require specific expertise, such that researchers might seek out professionals such as auditors, financial analysts, or attorneys. As one might imagine, these more experienced participants are more difficult to access, but they provide a valuable service by helping academic researchers investigate important questions that bear directly on their real-life challenges.

Do you ever need to rerun an experiment?
Yes, absolutely! An experiment can simply fail, in which case one goes back to the drawing board and tries again. More often, an experiment does not fail, but it leaves some important questions unanswered. In our case, we found a statistically significant effect of incentives on creativity in one study after bringing participants back ten days after they participated in the first-stage experiment. This finding led us (and our journal reviewers) to wonder if it was necessary to wait a full ten days, or if a much shorter rest period could achieve the same effect. That is why we reran a different variation of our experiment with a rest period of just 20 minutes, which produced a similar finding.

Your latest article has been cited many times in the popular press. Why do you think that is?
Who is not interested in creativity? Although our accounting backgrounds added some perspective for looking at creativity through a management accountant’s lens, a broader interest in creativity is part of everyday life for nearly everyone. Simply put, lots of people are interested in ways to become more creative, so our attempt to answer that question generated curiosity well beyond the boundaries of accounting.
A LOOK AT RESEARCH AND PUBLICATION STATISTICS

Department of Accounting faculty create knowledge and improve their expertise through research. Let’s dive into some of that research and its impact.

ROWLAND ATIASE’s paper, “Predisclosure Information, Firm Capitalization, and Security Price Behavior Around Earnings Announcements,” was published in the Journal of Accounting Research in 1985. According to the Web of Science database, of the 2,037 articles published in this journal, Rowland’s paper, with 356 citations, is the 32nd most cited.

Based on peer-reviewed articles published in 12 well-respected accounting journals since 1990, LIL MILLS ranks second in the area of tax publications. This list of researchers includes 803 individuals; the faculty member in the top position is a UT PhD graduate, Richard Sansing (’90), currently on the faculty at Dartmouth. Visit byuaccounting.net/rankings for more information.

DAIN DONELSON and JOHN McINNIS’s paper with Matt Ege (Texas A&M, UT PhD ’13), “Internal Control Weaknesses and Financial Reporting Fraud,” has received significant amounts of attention. According to Altmetric.com, which gathers metrics complementary to traditional, citation-based metrics, this puts their article in the top 5% of all research scored. John explains, “We examine a central claim behind Congress’ decision to require IC audits as part of SOX: that weak (strong) controls increase (decrease) the risk of financial statement fraud. We find evidence that they do.” John suggested that one reason their findings have garnered attention is because they relate to the current debate about whether such IC audits should be curtailed.

ULISSA CALIX
MPA (EXPECTED) MAY 2021
“I am excited about working with a great professor who loves what she teaches and cares about her students.”

DID YOU KNOW: I was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras and lived there for 12 years prior to moving to Houston.

RYAN HESS
PhD (EXPECTED) MAY 2021
“The TCJA has changed many tax-law provisions. Professor Mills provides her students a framework that allows them to understand and apply these provisions without overwhelming them.”

DID YOU KNOW: My wife, Diana, is also a graduate student at UT.

ANTHONY WELSCH
PhD (EXPECTED) MAY 2023
“I especially enjoy my TA work when I can leverage my public accounting experience to help students understand concepts and provide them with real-world applications of the tax law they are learning.”

DID YOU KNOW: I am a certified yoga instructor.

THROUGH THE LENS

THESE TAs MEAN BUSINESS. Graduate students have the opportunity to be teaching assistants for many of the Department’s courses. Meet the TAs for Professor Mills’ fall Introduction to Taxation classes.

Forthcoming in Management Science, Ronghuo Zheng’s research with coauthors at Johns Hopkins and Carnegie Mellon shows how a simple rule change could increase the number of usable organ donations, resulting in saved lives and a boost to social welfare.

Research by Jaime Schmidt and coauthors at BYU, the University of Oklahoma, and the University of Virginia (undertaken with the AICPA’s help) finds that group audit quality can be improved by using a decomposed risk assessment process rather than a traditional, holistic risk assessment approach. A decomposed process enables auditors to better identify qualitative risks. The findings are important given that both U.S. and international regulators have identified deficiencies in group audit engagements. Their conclusions are based on a randomized controlled experiment that involved 235 million a year.

Shuping Chen’s research (with Assistant Professor Wuyang Zhao) finds that bearish stock-analysis articles posted on SeekingAlpha.com, the most prominent online crowdfunded investment platform, differ systematically in content from bullish articles. The biggest difference is in the discussion of SEC filings: bearish articles put greater emphasis on analyzing accounting issues at covered firms. Their study employed an unsupervised machine learning technique to analyze.

7
Assistant Professors

2
Associate Professors

14
Professors

$235 MILLION A YEAR

88
PRACTITIONERS

200,000
ARTICLES

200,000
ARTICLES

7
Assistant Professors

2
Associate Professors

14
Professors

Assistant and Full Professors aiming to get tenure as a result of their research.

Associate and Full Professors whose publications contribute to maintaining the Department’s outstanding research reputation.

TENURED FACULTY

TENURE TRACK

Assistant and Full Professors whose publications count toward tenure as a result of their research.
On Saturday, May 25, family, friends, faculty, and staff came together to celebrate the graduation of more than 200 students (including integrated, traditional, and economics MPAs) from the Master in Professional Accounting program. Here we’ll tell you more about the students who received awards during the ceremony.

EXCELLENCE IN ACCOUNTING AWARD
Adam Landefeld received the Excellence in Accounting Award while in his fourth year of the MPA program. This award is presented to a student who demonstrates excellence at all levels of their accounting coursework. Adam’s impressive academic performance also earned him an Endowed Presidential Scholarship. While in the program, he co-founded the MPA Consulting Club which prepares students to enter the consulting and advisory fields.

OUTSTANDING FIFTH-YEAR MPA AWARD
Alec Weissman won the Outstanding Fifth-Year MPA Award. While in his last year of the program, Alec worked as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for Jeff Johanns’ audit course. Jeff shared that Alec “demonstrated dedication far above and beyond that of a typical TA” by volunteering to mentor struggling students. Academically, Alec was at the top of his class, graduating with a perfect GPA.

OUTSTANDING STUDENT LEADERSHIP AWARD
Derek John received the Outstanding Student Leadership Award for his meritorious service and support of the MPA community. While in the program, Derek worked as a Peer Career Consultant. In this role he recorded webinars, conducted mock interviews, and reviewed resumes to ensure MPA students were utilizing all of the job-placement resources available to them and were presenting themselves as professionally as possible to their future employers.

OUTSTANDING tMPA AWARD
Emily O’Keefe received the Outstanding tMPA Award for her exceptional contributions to student life and class unity. Emily’s personal character, class spirit, and campus leadership were cited as the reasons she was chosen as the recipient of this award. Emily also closed out the MPA commencement ceremony by leading the singing of “The Eyes of Texas.”

Graduating MPAs show their Longhorn pride at commencement as “The Eyes of Texas” is sung.

Students celebrate outside of Gregory Gym after graduation.

YOUR SUPPORT MATTERS
Student scholarships, faculty development, and curricular innovations are made possible through the generosity of our alumni and friends. Join us in our commitment to excellence in accounting education at the University of Texas at Austin.

THANK YOU ALUMNI AND FRIENDS!

NAME ________________________________
STREET ADDRESS ____________________________________________
CITY, STATE, ZIP __________________________________________
PHONE NUMBER ___________ EMAIL ADDRESS ________________
YEAR GRADUATED FROM UT __________ PROGRAM ____________
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THE TAKEAWAY
ISAIAH MASSEY

Ten years ago, Isaiah Massey (MBA '09) was named an Elijah Watt Sells Award winner. He started his professional career with Deloitte in Houston and now is the CFO of CAZ Investments. Read on to learn more about Isaiah and his journey from auditor to CFO.

WHAT'S YOUR STORY, ISAIAH?
My family continues to be the greatest success of my life. Professor Clement told me once that my spouse would be the greatest driver of my success, and he was correct. I have been married to my wife, Hope, for 13 years and we have two sons: Ridge, 6, and Kruz, 4. The time I spend with them gives me the strength of character it takes to be successful in my profession. At CAZ Investments, I have a team that I can trust and we support our team's success both in the workplace and at home. My role here deals with all things legal, compliance, and accounting/reporting, but the team is what sets the experience apart.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY ACCOUNTING?
Originally, I went to Wichita State to become a math teacher since I excelled in math in high school and teachers were the only professionals I knew growing up in Dexter, Kansas (a town of about 100 people). While I have a high level of respect for teachers, I quickly grew bored with the content. An accounting professor challenged me to pivot; I read a few chapters of the textbook and immediately knew it was something I enjoyed and could be successful in.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO MOVE TO TEXAS TO EARN YOUR MPA?
I wanted to go to the best school possible, and UT-Austin was at the top of the rankings. The program also helped to make it financially possible for me to attend, which I continue to appreciate. It was a school and region that I was generally familiar with from growing up in the Midwest, so that also put it above other great schools.

WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE CLASS WHILE AT TEXAS MCCOMBS?
I took two classes from Professor Robert Prentice: a course in CPA ethics and a course in insider trading/applied finance law. He wrote his own textbooks, loved mornings like I did, and is one of the most genuine people that I have ever met. He cared about each student and how we were doing on a daily basis. Over the course of my tenure at Texas McCombs, I remember Professor Prentice, Professor Clement, and Professor Granof all offering me personal advice that went beyond the classroom and actually changed how I lived and what I valued. For them to care at that level was very special, and I continue to appreciate them and view them as great teachers and leaders who influenced me.

HOW DID YOU FIND OUT YOU WERE A SELLS AWARD WINNER?
Someone from the AICPA called to tell me that I won the award. It was fairly late in the evening and I was still onsite at a Deloitte client, so the first person I told was my manager (a fellow UT grad, Asylbek Osmonov). I initially thought it was a practical joke of some sort because the call was outside of normal business hours and I never thought it was likely that I would win, but the caller knew so many details that by the time I hung up, I knew it was legitimate.

TELL US ABOUT YOUR CAREER PATH.
I was at Deloitte for a few years, then left to work in Austin at a company called Stratfor. I was lucky to have great leaders to learn from at both places. Shea Morenz, also a UT grad, was my CEO at Stratfor and I am not sure that I can ever repay the confidence and trust he placed in me as a young accountant, as he propelled me into a leadership role as Stratfor's CFO. He gave me room to grow, forgave my arrogance and mistakes, and continues to be supportive of me today. Currently I am CFO at CAZ Investments in Houston.

WHAT IS CAZ INVESTMENTS?
CAZ Investments is an investment manager that provides access to investments that might otherwise be unavailable to our investors. We embody our leadership and our team in our culture, and we value each other more than we value ourselves. That spirit of selflessness in the team permeates to how we value and work with our investors, sponsors, and vendors. To me, that is what sets us apart.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOU?
A rural boy from Kansas who had never heard of accounting as a profession until he was 19 has wandered into being educated at the best schools and taught to lead by great men and women. I couldn't predict the details, but if history tells me anything I will look up in five years and realize that I continue to be a very blessed individual.

2018 SELLS AWARD WINNERS
The AICPA named the 110 recipients of the 2018 Elijah Watt Sells Award on Thursday, April 11; included on that list were these three MPA graduates. The award recognizes exam takers who scored a cumulative average above 95.50 across all four sections of the CPA exam, passed all four sections on their first attempt, and completed their testing in 2018. More than 86,000 individuals sat for the CPA exam in 2018.

NATALIE GILBERT
BBA '17, MPA '18
Employer: PwC
Houston, TX

ELISE JONES
BBA '17, MPA '18
Employer: KPMG
Dallas, TX

MINJAE KIM
BBA/BHP '17, MPA '18
First-year Accounting PhD student
UT-Austin
TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF, ALYSSA.
I grew up in Victoria, Texas and have been doing my parents tax returns since I was 8. (Just kidding!) I wasn't predestined for accounting or blessed with a natural talent for numbers, but I've always worked hard in school and known that if I dedicate myself to achieving something, it can be done. That hard work helped me make it into the top of my high school graduating class, got me admitted to UT and, eventually, Texas McCombs. That same goal-oriented mindset that got me into such a great school continues to get me through these tough UT classes today.

WHY ACCOUNTING?
I decided to study accounting because of the many opportunities available to someone with an accounting degree. Being able to understand complex financial statements is a great asset to any team and is in high demand. I chose tax as my track because of its complexity and because of the integration of accounting with law. The study of tax involves politics, accounting, psychology, finance... the list goes on! It's a very dynamic and continuously changing field. I'd like to be able to provide value to an employer by being able to navigate and understand the complex tax environment.

WHAT DID IT TAKE TO WIN THE EXCELLENCE IN ACCOUNTING AWARD?
It's funny, but I've never thought of myself as the type to win such a neat award. I didn't get this award for having the best GPA or answering every question correctly. I believe I won this award as a result of my genuine interest in accounting and the hard work that stemmed from wanting to be successful in my future career.

WHAT DOES WINNING THIS AWARD MEAN TO YOU?
Winning this award means that it pays to put forth effort, and it pays to do more than just “get by.” And I don't just mean this in the context of studying hard and getting good grades; it's important to put forth effort and get to know your professors, to go that extra mile in the presentation, to develop good relationships with teammates, and to step out of your comfort zone. Yes, it would require much less energy to show up, get my work done, and head home, but putting forth that extra effort doesn't go unnoticed.

WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS?
There are so many! My main goal is to find a job that challenges me to the point where I never get too complacent or comfortable. I'd also like to work for a company that provides opportunities for growth and invests in their employees. Working hard is an essential value of mine, and having that work be appreciated and rewarded is a must for me (as I think it should be for everyone). I want to find value in my work and have that work be valued by others.

WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR FUTURE MPA STUDENTS?
Stay engaged. Students get so much out of this program by learning from their professors, trying to understand the big picture and reasoning behind concepts and rules, and dedicating themselves to projects, cases, and assignments. Utilize the resources available and embrace the tough classes.

EXCELLENCE IN ACCOUNTING  ALYSSA STERNADEL
Each spring, Texas McCombs honors exemplary undergraduate students at its Honor’s Day celebration. This year, the Department presented the Excellence in Accounting Award to Alyssa Sternadel, a fourth-year iMPA student. Alyssa received the award in recognition of her academic accomplishments, hard work, professionalism, and dedication. Her receipt of this award will also be celebrated at the May 2020 MPA commencement ceremony.