

## From the Director: *Tidings* Quarterly Reflection “Revisiting the Central Challenge of Democratic Self-Governance”

No academic institute with governance in its title can or should ignore the central issues of democratic self-governance. So, it is that I have often pointed to the enduring tensions in American politics arising from our continuing collective cultural disposition to distrust political authority, our persistent debate concerning whether and how to draw boundaries between our devotion to the market and its inherent penchant to create inequality, and our desire nonetheless to ensure political equality (including an ongoing debate about just how that term might most appropriately be defined). Since we are a federal nation that also jealously seeks to protect the prerogative of its subnational governments, I have also highlighted the issues that arise from that innate political tension as well. Beyond these concerns, I have contended that our Republic will not long survive without capable leaders devoted to the preservation of citizen civil rights and freedom, nor can it endure if our population does not acknowledge its sovereign responsibility to the commonweal and to self-governance. More, the United States contains a diversity of people with differing religions, ethnicities, native languages and values and mores. That heterogeneity represents a continuing challenge to self-governance, as would-be leaders historically have employed difference as one mechanism by which to foment discord, fear and rage, and ultimately thereby to enervate or undo civil liberties and obtain power. Finally, our



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regime depends strongly on the capacities of that same citizenry to make informed and deliberative choices at the ballot box and to remain probatively engaged in governmental affairs so as to ensure that its agents remain transparently accountable for their actions and behavior.

While this list is hardly exhaustive, it does include many of the central questions that have, and will ever, confront our citizenry as a self-governing people seeking to maximize and protect the freedom of all of its number. All of these concerns at various times and in diverse ways have both

shaped policy design possibilities and their implementation realities. In short, they are practical as well as theoretical concerns for the devotee and student of freedom and democracy.

In his book, *Arvo Pärt*, Paul Hillier, conductor of the Tallis Scholars, addressed the work of that great modern Estonian composer and argued that,

All music emerges from silence, to which sooner or later it must return. At its simplest we may conceive of music as the relationship between sounds and the silence that surrounds them. ... When we create music, we express life. But the source of music is silence, which is the ground of our musical being, the fundamental note of life. How we live depends on our relationship with death; how we make music depends on our relationship with silence. [1]

I cite this passage as I have been reflecting since our national election that it might be said that music relates to silence as self-governance is linked to the virtues and capacity for deliberation of the people who must practice it. Silence anchors music for Hillier, as civic virtue stood as the foundation of democracy for our Founders and Abraham Lincoln. In this respect, in October 2016, I reflected on democracy as an ethical ideal and argued,

Individual beliefs and values drive collective democratic possibility, and for decades now, many of our leaders have invited Americans to devalue their role in self-governance and to regard their neighbor as a prospect, “other” or competitor, and not as a fellow citizen. [2]

Another way to make this point is to say that many, and perhaps an increasing number of Americans, are not charting the balance between democratic freedom and their role in the institutions related to it, in a way that assigns pride of place to the preservation of individual freedom in society. Our nation’s Framers did not assume our country’s citizens would be angels. Indeed, they assumed the reverse, and sought to design our political institutions to stymie those seeking to usurp individual rights and freedom, but they also recognized that citizens would, more or less consistently, have to make reasoned and deliberative choices if they were ultimately, collectively to preserve their freedom. As Alexander Hamilton observed in *The Federalist*, it was:

... reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined for their political constitutions on accident and force. ... Happy will it be if our choices should be directed by a judicious estimate of our true interests, unperplexed and unbiased by considerations not connected with the public good. [3]

The issue for the Framers was not that this “happy” circumstance was automatic or inevitable. Rather, it was to be set as a lodestone, and a difficult to reach goal. For present purposes, it is important to recognize that the Founders expected that such deliberative action could result over time only through the considered and prudential action of the body politic. Given this reality, it seems important to ask what the response of so many voters to the demagoguery of Donald Trump says about the current capacity and willingness of a plurality of the American people to reason deliberatively and make choices in the name of

the common good and of freedom. As Hamilton also remarked in *The Federalist*, "Ambition, avarice, personal animosity, party opposition, and many other motives not more laudable than these, are apt to operate as well upon those who support as those who oppose the right side of a question." [4]

Here are some examples of Trump's mendacious and often venal and anti-democratic claims to which many, if not most, of his devotees responded not only with support, but judging by television footage of his rallies, positive gusto:

- Persistent completely unfounded claims that Hillary Clinton was guilty of breaking many (never articulated) laws and should be locked up;
- Similar arguments that he (Trump) would jail his opponent if elected;
- Specious contentions that all of those of the Islamic faith constitute a threat to the security of the United States;
- Constant repetition of false claims concerning the "hordes" of immigrants entering the United States and attacking Americans and taking jobs so as to scapegoat those groups as the architects of some voters' social and economic anxieties;
- Persistent outright lies concerning living conditions in U.S. cities and the nation's unemployment rate;
- Attacks on various groups, including those who had been prisoners-of-war, Gold Star family members of the "wrong" ethnic heritage, immigrants, journalists and others, including a sitting Federal judge, so as to "other" and demonize those actors in the eyes of his supporters;
- An invitation to Russia's authoritarian leader to interfere in the U.S. election (which that nation apparently did do successfully).

This list suffices to suggest the demagogic character of much of Trump's campaign. His behavior has since been rationalized by many, in keeping with the typical inclination in democracies in which the operative legitimating assumption is always that the "people" must have chosen rightly. Some apologists, for example, have argued that Trump used this consistently dishonest and hate-laden rhetoric only to "signal" to his supporters that he was serious about their concerns, a widely cited contention that begs the question it purports to address. Other observers have argued his appointments to government offices would moderate his otherwise frequently recklessly pressed course, a claim his proposed nominations for various national posts has already undermined. Still others have argued flatly that most citizens who voted for Trump were not, evidence to the contrary, animated by his demagoguery. But this contention too neatly sets aside the question of why they chose to support a candidate so obviously willing to sully democratic values and to descend to naked bullying and viciousness. Meanwhile, Trump's staff has employed variants of Orwellian double-speak to "explain" his rhetoric.

None of these post-facto attempts at justification change the reality that the President-elect of the United States persistently lied to the American public in often openly egregious ways and "othered" his opponents and manifold groups to gain office, employing age-old tried and true demagoguery to do so. That fact, in turn, highlights the question of why a plurality of voters were willing to accept his ugly diatribe and/or set aside his demonizing rhetoric and vote for him anyway, a still more unsettling contention. Their support was obviously imprudent and corrosive of civil liberties for all Americans, whatever the merits of his opponent. Indeed, this issue is not about Hillary Clinton, but about the characteristics and the character of her opponent's appeals.

In light of Trump's narrow victory in the Electoral College, most impartial analysts considering the nation's recent presidential campaign and election are left grasping for explanations for a continuing decline in the character and quality of U.S. political discourse symbolized by the President-elect's mix of invective and lies, a pattern of behavior he has shown no sign of changing since the election. Humans' penchant for fear and loathing of those different from themselves has ever provided fertile ground for anti-democratic claims. As a result, demagogues will always present a challenge to self-governance and democracy. Our Founders counted on American civil society as well as institutional safeguards to prevent the usurpation of individual rights, but this election has raised the question of whether sufficient numbers of the U.S. citizenry are equipped or willing any longer to address political questions in anything like a prudential fashion, or whether their fears can be used by those canny enough to sense them to gain power, while undermining the freedoms of all. On the evidence of Trump's appeal, one must ask the hard question of whether he is a bellwether of worse to come in our politics, or instead represents an aberration. Time and his actions as the nation's chief executive will tell, as will American voters in coming state and local elections. This will be so, as one may expect that having once seen such tactics succeed, many would-be political leaders at all levels of governance will likely seek to emulate Trump's demagoguery.

One key role the Institute can play in light of these political trends is to continue to highlight these concerns and to evaluate their implications for self-governance and freedom and to do so as clearly and cogently as we can. We will continue to chart these changes in American politics in our daily work and in our reflections on those efforts as effectively as we can, as partisans, first and foremost, of civil and human rights and the freedom they both protect and represent.



Max Stephenson Jr.  
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## Notes

[1] Paul Hillier, *Arvo Pärt*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, p.1.

[2] Max Stephenson Jr., "The Ethical Ideal of Democratic Governance," *Tidings*, October 1, 2016, <http://tidings.spia.vt.edu/the-ethical-ideal-of-democratic-governance/>

[3] Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison. *The Federalist Papers*, New York: New American Library, 1961, p.33.

[4] Hamilton, Jay, Madison, *The Federalist Papers*, New York: New American Library, 1961, p.34.

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## Opportunities

**Call for Submissions and Reviewers** (deadline **January 31, 2017**) - Special Series On Communication in Transdisciplinary Science: Challenges, Perspectives, and the Future

Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline (InformingSciJ) is a peer-reviewed journal that publishes scholarly articles that provide an understanding of the complexities in informing clientele.

More information such as topic guidance can be found [here](#).



**Call for Proposal Submissions** The Association for Public Policy Analysis & Management (APPAM) is now accepting proposal submissions for the 2017 International Conference: Public Policy and Governance Beyond Borders, to be held July 13-14, 2017, in Brussels, Belgium.

The conference hosts invite researchers, analysts, and policymakers to critically reflect on their experiences of working on issues of public policy and governance beyond borders.

The deadline for submissions is **January 31, 2017**. Please find further details including submission guidelines here:

<http://www.appam.org/events/international-conferences/2017-international-conference/>



**Call for Papers** for the 2017 Virginia Social Science Association (VSSA) Annual Meeting, to take place on March 25, 2017 at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, Virginia.

2017 marks the ninetieth annual meeting of the Virginia Social Science Association, the oldest association of academics in Virginia. With immigration again emerging as a salient issue around the world it is vitally important that the social sciences provide much needed analysis and perspective. Toward this end, the ninetieth annual meeting is themed: "Immigration— People and Societies in Movement: Immigration, Migration, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons." Especially sought are submissions that address the "Immigration" theme, but as always, welcome panel and paper proposals from any social science discipline (anthropology, economics, gender & sexuality, health, history, international relations, media studies, politics, policy studies, sociology) on any subject. To be considered for inclusion in the program, please submit a one page panel or paper proposal by 5:00 p.m. on **February 19, 2017**.

The proposal should be no more than 500 words and should summarize the theoretical argument, methodology, findings, and significance of the panel or paper.

Paper proposals should be submitted to VSSA via:

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VSSA\\_Registration\\_2017](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VSSA_Registration_2017)

## Acknowledgements & Accomplishments

Congratulations to **Jordan Laney** (ASPECT), who has been accepted to [Virginia Tech's Edward Alexander Bouchet Graduate Honor Society](#).

The Bouchet Society commemorates Edward Alexander Bouchet, the first African American to earn a doctorate degree from an American university (Physics, Yale University, 1876). Virginia Tech chartered its own chapter in 2014. The society "seeks to develop a network of preeminent scholars who exemplify academic and personal excellence, foster environments of support, and serve as examples of scholarship, leadership, character, service, and advocacy for students who have been traditionally underrepresented in the academy." Jordan is recognized as a scholar who exemplifies the society's mission and values.

**Andy Morikawa** (VTIPG Senior Fellow) delivered the Graduate School commencement address for the 2016 Winter Commencement Ceremony (also featured in [VT News](#)). A full recording of the commencement ceremony can be found at <https://youtu.be/u51wvuEL3-c>

Congratulations to **David Moore** (CPAP PhD student and VTIPG Senior Research Associate) who successfully defended his dissertation proposal on December 5, 2016.

Congratulations to **Cheryl Montgomery** (PGG) who successfully defended her preliminary examination on December 6, 2016. VTIPG Director Max Stephenson serves as Cheryl's committee chair.

### Community Change Journal Launch

VTIPG is excited to announce the recent launch of [Community Change](#), an online, peer reviewed, graduate student journal that seeks to explore multiple approaches to democratic community development and change.

The 100th *RE: Reflections and Explorations* was posted on November 17, 2016. *RE: Reflections and Explorations* is an 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.

**Mary Beth Keenan** (Virginia Tech alumnae and AmeriCorps Reading Hour Coordinator at VTIPG) was featured in [VT News on December 21!](#) The article is about I WILL, a new leadership education initiative focused on Inspiring Women in Lifelong Leadership (I WILL). Mary Beth and Holly Means, also featured in this article, are council members at IWILL.

### VTIPG Milestone

VTIPG noted another milestone recently with **Sarah Jonson** (MPIA) successfully defending her thesis on Wednesday, December 7, 2016. Sarah is the 50th Master's student to complete her work for committees VTIPG Director **Max Stephenson** has chaired.

The title of Sarah's thesis was "*Occupational segregation in Namibia: Women's experience doing 'men's work' in the construction and manufacturing industries.*" In addition to Max Stephenson serving as committee chair, other committee members were Laura Zanotti (Political Science) and Denise Simmons (Myers-Lawson School of Construction).

Congratulations to Sarah on her successful defense!



**Andy Morikawa**

## Nancy White Retirement



Nancy Jane White retired from Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy and Governance on December 24, 2016. She graduated from Virginia Tech in 1973 with a Bachelor of Science and in 2005 she earned her Master's Degree in Social Work from Radford University. She came to the Institute for Policy and Governance at Virginia Tech in March 2006 with 30 years of experience at the Grayson County Department of Social Services, and having served as the Grayson Director. She continued her work here in a variety of positions. As a research associate she supported sponsored research and technical assistance projects. Her experience, training and common sense approach contributed greatly to projects in the areas of child welfare, mental health, low income families and veterans' services.

As the IPG business manager for the last few years she further displayed her passion and dedication to her work and colleagues. While detail oriented and very organized, she also possesses an uncanny ability to look beyond the current task to see the bigger picture. Nancy was always kind, patient and

willing to listen. She didn't always agree, but she would listen with an open mind and explore other options. Always the consummate professional, Nancy was skilled at interfacing with all members of the university community (ie., students, faculty, staff) as well as the public at large, making her an invaluable member of the IPG team.

Nancy mentored many aspiring young (and not so young) professional women, not only with her encouragement and positive attitude, but also she assisted them to dress for success. Her advice and wisdom was priceless. Nancy further brought her sense of style to event planning. She loves a good party and knows how to make any event a success. Large or small, personal or business, anyone who attended an event that she helped create, always knew that they would enjoy themselves.

Saying goodbye is always hard, and Nancy will definitely be missed. But we at IPG wish her well as she and her husband begin the next chapter in Wilmington North Carolina. Enjoy your just desserts!



## Conference & Print Representation

**Lyusyena Kirakosyan** (VTIPG Senior Project Associate) presented at the 42nd conference of the Association for Moral Education, held December 8-11, 2016 in Boston at Harvard School of Education. The title of Lyusyena's paper was *Educational legacy of the Rio 2016 Games: Exploring the Games' impact on youth engagement*.

**Lyusyena Kirakosyan's** [article](#), *Moral Imagination of the Special Education Teachers in Brazil: Reflecting on the Role of Continuing Teacher Education*, was published in the educational peer-reviewed journal Paideia of the Chilean University of Concepcion - [Volume 57](#).

**Max Stephenson** and **Laura Zanotti** had their [article](#) *Exploring the Intersection of Theory and Practice of Arts for Peacebuilding* published by the Global Society, an interdisciplinary journal of international studies that promotes the analysis of the internationalisation and globalisation of various levels of social, economic and political interaction from a multitude of disciplines.

**Max Stephenson, Lorien MacAuley, Anna Erwin,** and **Jeremy Elliott-Engel** had their proposal accepted for the [2017 Appalachian Studies Association Conference](#). The conference will be held at Virginia Tech, March 9-12, in Blacksburg, VA.

## Upcoming Policy and Governance Related Events

**January 25, 2017**

[Community Voices](#) presents **Ramón Zepeda**, Student Action with Farmworkers (SAF) Program Director, on Wednesday, January 25, 2017 at Noon (roundtable luncheon) and 7:00pm (evening lecture "*Theater in the Fields*") - both events to be held in the Virginia Tech Graduate Life Center Room F

**Monday, February 20, 2017**

**Kimberly Williams** (assistant director of the Black Cultural Center) is bringing the authors of *Hillbilly Nationalists* to speak. Full book title: *Hillbilly Nationalists, Urban Race Rebels, and Black Power: Community Organizing in Radical Times (2011)*

**Friday, February 24, 2017**

4:00pm-6:00pm

Haymarket Theatre, Squires Student Center

*Anger and Revolutionary Justice*



**Next Community Voices Speaker, Ramón Zepeda**

The Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics at Virginia Tech will host the PPE Distinguished Public Lecture in February 2017. The lecture will be delivered by **Professor Martha Nussbaum** (University of Chicago). The lecture is open to the public with no tickets required. You are cordially invited to attend the lecture and the public reception afterwards. For further information concerning the lecture, please follow this link: <http://www.ppe.phil.vt.edu/news-events/PPEDPL2017.pdf>



Community Voices continued the fall 2016 season with returning guest speaker **Anthony Flaccavento**.

In his October 24, 2016 presentation, *Beyond the Margins: Six Transitions to Building a Healthy Economy from the Bottom Up*, he shared his research on the bottom-up economy, and described the six essential transitions he believes our nation must establish to build a healthier, more just and sustainable economy and food system for its citizens.

Check out the Trustees Without Borders podcast interview with Anthony, interviewed by graduate students **Anna Erwin** and **Pallavi Raonka**.

<https://soundcloud.com/andy-morikawa/twb-anthony-flaccavento>



**pictured left to right: Anna Erwin, Anthony Flaccavento, Pallavi Raonka**

## **ideas for change :: ideas that matter**

Community Voices is an interdisciplinary group of Virginia Tech graduate students and faculty, and community representatives interested in innovative approaches to community building and engagement. The group organizes a series of public seminars by leaders from public, private, and nonprofit sectors who share their insights and experiences helping communities shape their futures. The speakers' presentations, which include conversation with the audience, are free and open to the public.

[communityvoices.info](http://communityvoices.info)



## Recent Events

**October 6-8** [CityWorks \(X\)po](#) was held in Grandin Village, Roanoke, VA. CityWorks (X)po is a national idea exchange and festival conference for anyone who is passionate about the work of placemaking and creating stronger communities.

**October 13** **Heather Leeper** presented on the importance of having a supportive network, discussing her own struggles with negativity and how it inspired her to create Be Kind Blacksburg.

**October 17** ASPECT Working Paper: *There's Always a Man in the Loop: The Gendered Politics of Civilian Drones* – with **Christine Labuski** (Department of Sociology) and **Phil Olson** (Department of Science and Technology in Society) with respondents **Priya Dixit** (Political Science) and **Caroline Alphin** (ASPECT)

**October 21** Hospitality and Tourism Management Department guest **Professor Humberto Luis Miranda Lorenzo** spoke on *"The changing political and economic landscape of Cuba"*

**October 25** The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences hosted food justice advocate **Karen Washington** from Rise and Root Farm.

**October 26** **Cedric de Leon** (Providence College) presented on *"The Origins of Right to Work: Race, Class, Party and the Freedom of Contract"* as a part of the fall 2016 Virginia Tech Program in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics (PPE) Speaker Series.

**October 27** **Jackie Harder** [presented](#) on *"Emerging into the professional landscape: Exploring balance, generating income, rejection and community support"* as a part of the [fall 2016 Women Influencing the Arts series](#), sponsored by the [Women's Center at Virginia Tech](#) and the School of Performing Arts.

**October 28-29** The 13th Annual Virginia Tech Graduate Philosophy Conference took place. Each year, graduate students from top Masters and PhD programs are invited to Virginia Tech's to present their work and receive feedback through commentaries provided by Virginia Tech's graduate students.

**November 2** *"Perspectives on the Global Refugee Crisis: A Panel Discussion"* took place around the current global refugee crisis and the various discourses surrounding it.

**November 2** ASPECT Working Paper series continued with presentation *"Smartphone Information Protection Privacy Practices (SIP3): The Importance of Knowledge and Awareness"* by **France Belanger** (Department of Accounting and Information Systems, Pamplin College of Business). Respondents were **Eric Jardine** (Political Science) and **Mario Khreiche** (ASPECT).

**November 10** **Amanda Zehner** (Founder and Owner, Living Threads Co.) presented on *"Economic Development Through Art: Women, Culture, and Environment"* as a part of the fall 2016 Women and Gender in International Development Discussion Series.

**November 16** **Jonathan Anomaly** (UNC-Chapel Hill) gave a talk entitled *"In Defense of Eugenics"* as a part of the fall 2016 Virginia Tech Program in [Philosophy, Politics, and Economics \(PPE\) Speaker Series](#).

**January 17** *"Return to Prince Edward County -- A Black Liberation Talk"* - an interactive discussion led by Professor **Christian Matheis** about Prince Edward County—the Virginian county that shut down its schools to avoid racial integration for several years in 1959 and its legislative influence today.

## Faculty Spotlight: Thomas Skuzinski

Thomas Skuzinski joined Virginia Tech in 2015 as an Assistant Professor of Urban Affairs and Planning at the School of Public and International Affairs, and in 2016 joined the Global Forum on Urban and Regional Resilience as a Faculty Fellow.

Thomas' background spans both planning and law. Following training in economics, he studied at Michigan State College of Law, focusing on environmental, land use, and tax law. He holds a master of urban planning and doctoral degree in urban and regional planning, both from University of Michigan. He positions his research at the nexus of urban and regional planning, public administration, and urban and metropolitan politics. He is fascinated by policy contexts—such as local and metropolitan land use governance—in which conventionally rational decision-making is likely an inadequate model or reality, and where we could expect reasoning that features novel forms of utility and heuristic cognitive processes to dominate.



Prior to his arrival at Virginia Tech, he worked on research projects investigating the interpretation of NAFTA expropriation provisions, the geography of regional land use coordination, the production of low-income housing through public-private partnerships, and perceptions of suburban residents about gentrification and multi-family housing. His work would eventually coalesce around an interest in how local government actors perceive and deal with problems that are at a scale or scope that demands collective action, whether across traditional political or sectoral boundaries.

Currently, Thomas' research investigates how deeply held individual values and biases—specifically our views about the optimal arrangement of social relationships within groups and between humans and their natural and institutional environments—shape the perceptions and behaviors of policymakers. Can we better explain processes and outcomes by viewing policy actors as not only economically, politically, and institutionally rational, but also as *culturally* rational? Over the past four years, Thomas has probed this question through a study of cooperative land use among municipalities in his native Michigan, finding that the cultural explanation has remarkable explanatory purchase. The work reinvigorates our understanding of the role of elected and administrative actors in metropolitan governance by directly challenging existing models of decision-making that remain grounded in rational choice and institutional determinism. While many theories of the policy process recognize the importance of values and framing in shaping policy processes and outcomes, Thomas' work uses quantitative and qualitative analysis to give these the primary attention they deserve. His scholarship is under review at journals in planning and public administration, and many of the key arguments and findings will be published in the *The Risk of Regional Governance*, a book under contract with Routledge.

Thomas is also pursuing external funding with colleagues in SPIA and the College of Engineering that would support the study of how local actors adopt and implement sustainability and resilience policies, and how novel and inexpensive decision-making interventions can change these processes. Thomas has found SPIA to be a supportive home for his research interests, and looks forward to continuing to learn from and collaborate with his students and colleagues.

## Student Spotlight: Vanessa Guerra



My name is Vanessa and I am a doctoral student in the Planning and Environmental Design track at the PGG program at the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech. I have always been passionate about fighting inequality in South America and improving people's quality of life by providing sustainable and livable cities, which is why my current research interests include: sustainable development, city planning, slums clearance, transportation, urban renewal and public space.

I earned a bachelor in Architecture at USFQ University in Quito-Ecuador, where I am from; and a master of Urban Planning at the University

of Melbourne-Australia. Additionally, I participated with the University of Melbourne in the project "How Sustainable Transport Networks Build Great Cities" at Munich and Zurich and I studied abroad in Pennsylvania while in college.

Academically, the combination between Architecture and Urban Planning helped me understand that "in order to transform our world we need to transform our cities" [1], and that "Buildings are important, but they are only a component of a much bigger picture. You cannot separate the buildings out from the infrastructure of cities, and the mobility of transit" [2]. Currently, at the EDP track I have been able to find courses that not only fit with my professional interests, but also with the needs of my country such as the integration of social, environmental and technical fields, in both theoretical and practical approaches.

In addition to my academic training, volunteering has been a key element in my formation. I got involved in the construction and volunteer management areas of Un Techo para mi País from 2008 to 2012 – a group that works in nineteen Latin American countries with the final goal to eradicate extreme poverty-. And I also volunteered in 2009 with Habitat for Humanity in New Orleans rebuilding houses affected by Katrina hurricane. These experiences have helped me not only to open my eyes to different social realities but also to shape my vision and gain perspective regarding my career goals.

Personally, being able to get my studies in Ecuador, the United States, Australia, Switzerland and Germany has been a fantastic, unique and challenging experience. Living in such process of cultural, social and academic exchange has made me learn different ways of thinking, to evolve and grow a person and to broaden my perspective. But most importantly, it has taught me that we all have more in common than what we think, and that no matter where we come from or we are, we can all share the same dream, and we can always team up to work towards it.

Prior to Virginia Tech, I taught at USFQ University in Quito, coordinated an "Habitat III" awareness seminar at USFQ, and co-founded LIGNUM in Quito, an architecture and urbanism firm. Currently, I am researching

## *[continued]* ... Student Spotlight: Vanessa Guerra

Quito's urban form and the existing disconnection between peripheral areas and the inner city, as well as investigating transport interventions as potential contributions to poverty reduction. In addition to my research, as part of my PhD funding, I teach Urban and Regional Analysis, an undergraduate class within the College of Architecture and Urban Studies, which has been a very enriching experience.

While at Virginia Tech I have been able to have plenty of interesting discussions with all sorts of people about all sorts of different topics, and I have been lucky enough to meet both faculty and classmates that not only have inspired me but also have encouraged me to question several theories and to critically develop my own ones. One of the most valuable experiences I have got at Virginia Tech is being part of Community Voices, a group of faculty and students that discuss theories and ideas and implement projects - such as seminars, workshops and interviews- in order to improve our communities.

Finally, after spending the last couple of years here at Virginia Tech I can assure that this community and its people has changed me in several ways, and that it has been a great experience. My experience at Virginia Tech is probably different to my fellow's experiences, it is different to my advisors' experiences, and it is different to the dean's experience. However, although I used to believe that sometimes when we talk too much about community, we imply that there are those who *aren't* part of the community or that people who do things differently couldn't possibly be in the community; being part of Virginia Tech have taught me to cherish the differences and to discover that it is the uniqueness of everyone's experiences what makes of Virginia Tech what it is.

*"Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a year, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in." — Author Unknown*

### **References:**

1. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. (2016, October). Conference commemorating World Cities Day. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkEslsEcw-4>
2. TED. (2007, January). Norman Foster: Building on the green agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNgkEGs1l4A>

## Blogs & Commentaries

**Soundings** - a [commentary](#) from VTIPG Director **Max Stephenson**

January 17 - [Bullying, Derision and Democracy Make Poor Bedfellows](#)

January 3 - [A Tale of Democratic Political Frailty, Fractiousness and Human Dignity](#)

December 5 - [Defining Democratic Legitimacy Down](#)

November 16 - [A Nest of Paradoxes](#)

November 14 - [Leonard Cohen: A Villanelle for our Time](#)

November 7 - [Electoral Carnage, American Style](#)

October 24 - [A Demagogue Attacks American Governance](#)

October 10 - [In Search of Democratic Deliberation](#)

**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, October 2016 – [The Ethical Ideal of Democratic Governance](#)

**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.

December 12 - [Social Movements, Neoliberal Policy and Indian Democracy](#)

by **Pallavi Raonka** (Sociology)

November 28 - [Cooperative Organizations: Toward an On-Going Practice of Democracy](#)

by **Jake Keyel** (PGG)

November 17 - [Protecting Cultural Property and Heritage Sites During Conflict](#)

by **Ashleigh Breske** (PGG)

November 11 - [Hogra and Youth Inclusion in the MENA region](#)

by **Nada Berrada** (ASPECT)

November 3 - [America's Recent Military Actions in the Middle East](#)

by **Joseph "Joe" Karle** (PGG)

November 1 - [Globalization and Sustainable Development](#)

by **Vanessa Guerra M** (PGG)

October 20 - [What is Special about Paralympic Volunteering?](#)

by **Lyusyena Kirakosyan** (VTIPG Senior Project Associate)

October 13 - [Who is Talking? Paradigm Shifts, Knowledge-Power and the Aquatic Ape](#)

by **Lorien MacAuley** (Agricultural Leadership, and Community Education)

October 10 - [The Unnoticed Contextual Realities of Hillbilly Elegy](#)

by **Jordan Laney** (ASPECT)

**SPECTRA** - The latest issue of SPECTRA: The ASPECT journal (Vol. 5, No. 2) was recently published.

SPECTRA is a graduate student-run, peer reviewed scholarly journal hosted at Virginia Tech. The journal features work of an interdisciplinary nature and is designed to provide an academic forum to explore controversial topics and take intellectual risks.