



UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL
ARKANSAS

Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies

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Department announces the creation of the Alumni Advisory Council (AAC)

Eighteen alumni of the Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies have been chosen as members of the inaugural Alumni Advisory Council (AAC). The AAC will assist the department in several ways, including alumni outreach and fundraising, mentoring current students, and providing advice to faculty regarding academic programs and curriculum. Members of the AAC will serve three-year terms, with the terms of the initial AAC staggered between one and three years. Members may serve two consecutive terms on the AAC. The 18 members of the Alumni Advisory Council in 2024-2025 include: Ben Kaminar, Ben Hovland, Nealon DeVore, Meredith Herring Powell, Lauren Miller Ballard, Kelsey Boggan, Janet Harris, Michael Bynum, Chante' Rogers Moy, Dexter Pearson, Tyler Bittle, Willis Arnold, Emily O'Neal Juarez, Jake Logan, Jose Guzzardi, Itzel Velazquez, Ben Maddox, and Robin Hudson Gifford (chair). Department alumni who have an interest in serving on the AAC should contact Kim Hoffman at khoffman@uca.edu or Mark Mullenbach at markm@uca.edu. [Read More](#)

Department presents 2024 Distinguished Alumni Awards

The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies recognized two distinguished alumni for their achievements in government and public service at the Distinguished Alumni Reception held in Buffalo Alumni Hall at UCA on September 12, 2024. During the reception, Dr. Clay Arnold, chair of the department, presented plaques to Dakisha Wesley (BS in Public Administration, 2000) and Dexter Pearson (BS in Public Administration, 2001). [Read More](#)

Dakisha Wesley graduated with a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Public Administration from UCA in 2000. She earned a Master of Public Administration (MPA) from the University of North Texas in 2002. Dakisha has 22 years of experience in local government administration. In 2002, she began work as a financial analyst in the Budget and Research Office in the City of Grand Prairie, Texas. After three years, Dakisha worked in the City of Fort Worth, Texas where she held several positions including management analyst, senior management analyst, and Assistant Director of Municipal Court Services. In 2017, Dakisha moved to Lake County, Illinois to serve as the Assistant County Administrator. Currently, Dakisha serves as the Assistant County Administrator in Buncombe County in North Carolina. In addition to her work as a county administrator, Dakisha is an active member of the community serving on various boards and advisory councils.



Dexter Pearson graduated with a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Public Administration from UCA in 2001. He has over 20 years of experience in public service in the legislative and executive branches of the federal government in Washington DC. From 2003 to 2010, Dexter served as a legislative assistant for Arkansas Congressman Vic Snyder. He served for a year as a senior staff member of the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Since 2011, Dexter has worked at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in several positions including Acting Director of the USDA Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, Associate Director of the USDA Office of Advocacy and Outreach, Outreach Advisor for the USDA Community & Economic Development, and currently as a USDA Business Relationship Strategist and Real Estate Developer.



Department hosts Open House in August

The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies welcomed students back to campus for the Fall Semester with an open house held on August 28, 2024. Faculty, staff, and students enjoyed coffee, snacks, good conversation, and a photo booth!



Department hosts the 2024 International Affairs Summer Camp at UCA

The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies hosted the Arkansas and the World: International Affairs Summer Camp at UCA on July 14-19, 2024. Previous summer camps were hosted by the department in 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2023. Forty-eight Arkansas high school students participated in a unique, interactive learning experience designed to enhance their understanding of international relations, international organizations, and diplomacy. Early in the week, students participated in educational workshops on international relations, the United Nations, and fundamentals of Model United Nations. The students represented assigned countries in interactive simulations of the UN General Assembly, including committee and plenary sessions of the UN General Assembly throughout the week. During the week-long summer camp, students participated in several group competitions, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Poster Competition and the Global Trivia Competition. The students also participated in the Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF) Letters of Hope project on Wednesday evening. Speakers included Dr. **Adnan Rasool**, University of Tennessee at Martin; Mr. **Shane Hough**, Diplomat-In-Residence, Tulane University; and Mr. **Jerry Adams**, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF). Dr. Mark Mullenbach and Dr. Bailey Fairbanks directed the summer camp. [Read More](#)



Department hosts 59th Arkansas Model United Nations (AMUN) Conference at UCA

The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies hosted the 59th Arkansas Model United Nations (AMUN) Conference at UCA on November 22-23, 2024. More than 500 delegates from 29 high schools in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Missouri participated in the conference. **Julien Mrad** (International Studies & Linguistics) served as Secretary-General, and **Jaylan Harris** (International Studies and Public Administration) served as Deputy Secretary-General of the conference. Several UCA students, as well as students from Hendrix College and the University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, served as committee chairs, co-chairs, and legal counsels. Dr. Mark Elrod served as AMUN conference coordinator, and Dr. Mark Mullenbach served as AMUN faculty advisor liaison.

[Read More](#)



Alumni News

Michael Bynum (BS in Public Administration, 2007)



Arkansas Business recognized department alumnus **Michael Bynum** as one of its “40 Under 40” intriguing business and political leaders under 40 years old. Michael is a 2007 graduate in public administration who earned his MPA degree from UA-Fayetteville and each his JD degree from the UA-Little Rock, William H. Bowen School of Law. Michael has served the State of Arkansas in several state government agencies including the Arkansas Department of Agriculture, the Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, and the Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration. Michael is currently an Assistant Attorney General with the Arkansas Attorney General's Office. [Read More](#)

Kelsey Boggan (BA in Political Science, 2012)



Arkansas Money and Politics profiled department alumnus **Kelsey Boggan** as a young, rising attorney in its article, “Next Gen: Up-and-Coming Attorneys Set Stage for Future of Arkansas Law.” Kelsey earned her JD degree from the UA-Fayetteville School of Law in 2017. Kelsey is currently an attorney with Leslie Copeland Law & Mediation in Fayetteville. [Read More](#)

Benjamin Kaminar (BA in Political Science, 2004)



Benjamin Kaminar, who graduated from UCA with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Political Science in 2004, earned a Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) degree from the Bush School of Government & Public Service at Texas A&M University in May 2024. After graduating from UCA, Ben earned a Master of Arts (MA) degree in International Relations and a Juris Doctorate (JD) degree from St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas in 2007. Ben served as a Field Artillery Officer in the Texas Army National Guard from 2007 to 2018, including overseas military service in Iraq in 2009-2010. Ben served as Assistant Criminal District Attorney in Fannin County, Texas from 2011 to 2017. Since 2017, Ben has served in the Lamar County (Texas) District Attorney's Office as Assistant County & District Attorney (2017-2021) and First Assistant County & District Attorney (2021-present). Ben is married to **Sarah (Freeman) Kaminar**, who earned a BA degree in Political Science from UCA in 2005 and earned a JD degree from Baylor University in 2009. Sarah is currently an Associate Attorney with The Moore Law Firm in Paris, Texas. The couple, along with their daughter Zoe, reside in Paris, Texas. [Read More](#)

Student News

Abigail Wells awarded the Newman Civic Fellowship



Abigail Wells, who is majoring in public administration, was named a Newman Civic Fellow for 2024-2025. The Newman Civic Fellowship is a program recognizing and supporting student leaders at Campus Compact member institutions. Fellows are nominated by their president or chancellor based on their potential for public leadership and their work with communities. Abigail is being recognized for her efforts as the founder of a student organization (Bears Adapt) and a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to adaptive sports. Both organizations create recreational athletic opportunities for people with and without physical disabilities to enjoy together. Abigail also works tirelessly as a Vote Everywhere ambassador where she advocates for access to democratic processes and civic education. Students from the Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies have been named Newman Civic Fellows for four out of the past six years, including **Itzel Velazquez** (BA in International Studies, 2019) - 2019-2020 Fellow; **Greta Hacker** (BS in Public Administration, 2021) - 2020-2021 Fellow; and **Emma Davis** (BA in Political Science, 2023) - 2021-2022 Fellow. [Read More](#)

UCA Students commemorate Constitution Day



As part of UCA's commemoration of Constitution Day, more than 25 students in U.S. Government & Politics courses taught by Dr. Mark Elrod recited the U.S. Constitution in Griffin Planetarium on Tuesday evening, September 17, 2024. Dr. Elrod is a lecturer in the Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies. The U.S. Constitution was signed by 38 delegates representing the 13 original U.S. states in Philadelphia on September 17, 1787. The U.S. Constitution officially entered into force on June 21, 1788.

[Read More](#)

Blake Reano awarded 2025-2026 APSA Diversity Fellowship

Blake Reano, a student double-majoring in Political Science and International Studies, was awarded the 2025-2026 American Political Science Association (APSA) Diversity Fellowship for his future PhD graduate studies in Political Science. The fellowship totaling \$5000 will support Blake's studies during the first and second year of his PhD program. The fellowship program is in its 55th year and is a distinguished honor in the field of Political Science. In addition to his double-major, Blake is also pursuing a minor in Honors Interdisciplinary Studies at UCA. He is currently working on a departmental honors thesis on the development of nationalism on college campuses under the direction of Dr. Bailey Fairbanks.

Student Organization News

UCA Model United Nations (MUN) student organization recognized with Bear CLAWS Award



During the December 6, 2024 meeting of the UCA Board of Trustees, the UCA Model United Nations (MUN) student organization was recognized by President Houston Davis with the Bear CLAWS award. CLAWS, which is an acronym for Celebrating the Lofty Achievements of Our Wonderful Students, is awarded to one or more exceptional students or recognized student organizations during regularly scheduled board meetings. Accepting the Bear CLAWS award on behalf of the UCA MUN were President **Jaylan Harris**, Vice President **Emily Temple**, AMUN Secretary-General **Julien Mrad**, and Secretary **Kyle Urban**. The faculty advisers for the UCA MUN are Dr. Mark Elrod and Dr. Mark Mullenbach. [Read More](#)

Department students serve in UCA Student Government Association (SGA)

Several of the department's students are serving in leadership positions in the UCA Student Government Association (SGA) in 2024-2025, including **Phoenix Vu**, **Sanjuana Torres Padron**, and **Ashlyn Billingsley**.



Phoenix Vu, Political Science and Public Administration, SGA President



Sanjuana Torres Padron, Political Science and Public Administration, Junior Class Representative



**Ashlyn Billingsley, Political Science Minor,
Non-Traditional Student Representative**

Public Administration Club Hosts Internship Panel



The Public Administration Club hosted a panel on internships on October 10, 2024. The panelists provided interested students with information on how to get an internship, what to expect during an internship, and other useful information. Panelists included Jasmine Bates, Abbie Asher, Emily Temple, Taya Young, and Georgia Miller.

UCA students participate in 14th Arkansas Collegiate Model United Nations (ACMUN) Conference at NSU



Twelve UCA students representing the UCA Model United Nations (MUN) student organization participated in the 14th Arkansas Collegiate Model United Nations (ACMUN) Conference held at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma on Saturday, November 2, 2024. The ACMUN conference was held jointly with the Oklahoma Model United Nations (OKMUN) Conference. Dr. Mark Elrod and Dr. Mark Mullenbach served as the faculty advisors for the UCA students. [Read More](#)

International Studies Club hosts Fall Scholarly Series with Dr. Zach Smith and Dr. Jesse Butler

The International Studies Club hosted its Fall Scholarly Series during the 2024 Fall Semester. On October 1, 2024, Dr. **Zach Smith**, Associate Professor of History at UCA, gave a talk titled "Debt, Diplomacy, and the 21st Century Silk Road: China's Belt and Road Initiative". Dr. **Jesse Butler**, Professor of Philosophy at UCA, gave a talk titled "Cross-Cultural Conceptions of Self" on November 12, 2024.

Department Internships

Richard Ware (Political Science), Arkansas Department of Transformation and Shared Services, Office of Personnel Management, Little Rock



“I spent about six weeks in Little Rock, working specifically in the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) under the Department of Transformation and Shared Services (TSS). This internship was more than just a typical job—it was a chance to connect with other motivated students, build professional relationships, and gain a closer look at the inner workings of state government. Through various OPM projects and experiences, I developed a much richer understanding of what it takes to support and improve the state’s workforce.”

– Richard Ware

Julien Mrad (International Studies and Linguistics), Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF), Little Rock



“Working with the Syrian Emergency Task Force (SETF) facilitates active participation with the local communities in Arkansas and universities to promote awareness and discussions over accountability and human rights in Syria. Currently, I am working on a policy paper to promote the anti-normalization of the Assad Regime and the proper steps to enforce the Caesar Act and, at the same time, monitor current clashes and bombings of Syrian municipalities by Russian and Assad forces. Interning with SETF allows me to advocate for people's rights while actively being informed about all current global events and further deepening my understanding of the international relations of countries.” – Julien Mrad

**Micah Castleberry (Political Science and Public Administration), Arkansas
Department of Education, Little Rock**



“I interned with the Arkansas Department of Education. I worked with the Fiscal Services and Administration team, running bank reconciliation reports, creating presentations about funding opportunities, and attending audit meetings pertaining to education policy in Arkansas. During the three months I interned, I was exposed to special sessions in state the state legislature as well as committee debates, and I got to speak to multiple politicians. It was a great experience, and I would highly recommend the program to anyone considering a field in government or bureaucracy.” – Micah Castleberry

Mitchell Gray (Public Administration), U.S. Senator Tom Cotton, Washington, DC



“My internship in Senator Cotton’s DC Office was an unforgettable experience that provided me hands on learning regarding the public policy process. During the internship, I lived and worked in Washington, DC, with my work time spent in the Russell Senate Office building, and my free time spent exploring the many monuments and historical locations around the city. In the office, I had the opportunity to write memos regarding policy research, deliver bills to the Senate floor, escort constituents for different meetings around the U.S. Capitol building, and attend briefings for many of the committees that Senator Cotton currently serves on. I had the opportunity to work with staff in the office, and I was given the opportunity to meet many famous Senators across the country. I am blessed to have been given the opportunity to intern within Senator Cotton’s office!” – Mitchell Gray

Faculty News

Dr. Hyo-Won Shin, Assistant Professor in the Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies, co-authored an article, “Ballots beyond borders: attitudes towards external voting in Colombia” that published in the summer issue of the academic journal *Democratization*.

Dr. Heather Yates, Associate Professor, led the roundtable discussion titled, “The 2024 Presidential Election: Understanding Its Meaning and Consequences” at the 120th meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA) in Philadelphia on September 5-8, 2024. Dr. Yates also presented a research paper titled “The Politics of Emotions and Uncertainty in the 2020 Presidential Campaign”.

Dr. Bailey Fairbanks, Assistant Professor, and **Dr. Mark Mullenbach**, Associate Professor, were awarded a \$3000 Faculty Grant from the UCA Foundation to support the travel and expenses of eight UCA students participating in the 2025 Presidential Inauguration Seminar in Washington, D.C. A total of 14 UCA students will be traveling to D.C. with Dr. Fairbanks on January 7-15, 2025 for an immersive academic seminar hosted by The Washington Center (TWC). This will be the third group of students which have traveled to Washington D.C. with Dr. Fairbanks for TWC academic seminars.



Make a contribution!

The Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies encourages alumni and other prospective donors to consider [contributing](#) to one or more of the funds and scholarships listed below. These funds provide needed financial support for the department's students, programs, and activities. We appreciate your support!

[Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies \(GPI\) Fund](#) – The GPI Fund broadly supports the department's academic programs, faculty, and students. The GPI Fund covers expenses that are not able to be covered by the department's maintenance and operation (M&O) account, including classroom upgrades, computers, and other technology. The GPI also covers expenses related to periodic academic program evaluations, including stipends for external reviewers.

[Student Experiential Learning Fund \(SELF\)](#) – The SELF fund provides small grants to students in the Department of Government, Public Service, and International Studies who are participating in experiential learning activities outside of the traditional classroom, including professional internships, service-learning, independent research, academic conferences & seminars, and study abroad. Students majoring in political science, public administration, and international studies at UCA are eligible to apply for a SELF grant to cover some of the costs associated with participating in an experiential learning activity.

[Simms McClintock \(AMUN\) Fund](#) – The AMUN Fund, which was established in honor of the founder of the Arkansas Model United Nations (AMUN) program, supports the ongoing AMUN program and the UCA students who participate in Model UN activities at UCA. Professor Simms McClintock, a former faculty member in the Department of Political Science, coordinated the AMUN program from 1966 to 1996, including organizing the annual AMUN Conference for thousands of high school students at UCA during this period. The AMUN Fund covers expenses associated with hosting the annual AMUN Conference and expenses associated with UCA student participation in collegiate Model UN conferences.

[Mayor Tab Townsell Scholarship for Public Service](#) – This scholarship, which was established in honor of former Conway Mayor Tab Townsell, provides scholarships for UCA students majoring in political science or public administration. Tab Townsell graduated with a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in political science from UCA in 1984 and a master's in business administration (MBA) degree from Texas Christian University in 1986. Tab Townsell served as mayor of Conway from 1999 to 2016.



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