

# MDP Program Newsletter

*Integrating knowledge and skills to  
prepare a new generation of  
development practitioners*

Issue 8 | Fall 2015



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## Feelings of Fall

This fall semester has been fast and full of new professional opportunities, new learning experiences, and of course new friendships. Over the summer, our cohort 5 students completed their interdisciplinary summer practicums where life-changing lessons were learned and adventures were had. In the beginning of the fall semester we welcomed our 15 new cohort 6 students to the MDP program. During this fall semester, the MDP students took part in summits, workshops, and seasonal festivities. We can't wait to see what spring will bring!

### Editors:

Amanda Brinton, MDP Graduate Assistant  
Andy Noss, MDP Graduate Coordinator





## Director's Note

In the following pages, our Graduate Assistant and first year MDP student, Amanda Brinton, has prepared an informative and entertaining update on the University of Florida, Master of Sustainable Development Practice (MDP) Program. This edition of the Fall Newsletter illustrates that, while our students are working hard on their academic programs and taking part in a number of exciting collaborative initiatives, they are also forging friendships and building personal and professional networks. I am certain you will enjoy reading this newsletter that provides a look into different facets of the program and some updates from our graduates in the field.

In many ways, 2015 has been a watershed year for the international sustainable development community. A two year participatory, global process culminated in the approval of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the 70<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly on September 25 in the presence of world leaders, Pope Francis and Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai. The SDGs were developed to transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), implemented between the year 2000 and late 2015, but beyond providing continuity to the MDGs, they have also broadened the global development agenda. An important attribute of the SDGs is their recognition that all countries in the world face sustainable development challenges, including the termed “more developed” nations in the North. This explicit broadening of the sustainable development agenda has important implications for the MDP program, since students participating in the program will understand that their skills and knowledge sets are applicable to different contexts throughout the world, in both “the Global North and South.”

The newsletter highlights the participation of UF MDP students, alumni and faculty in the 3rd International Conference on Sustainable Development Practice (ICSDP) realized in New York City, just prior to the approval of the SDGs in the UN. The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), of which UF is a member, has sustained a close association with the MDP Global Association (Dr. Jeffrey Sachs, Director, The Earth Institute of Columbia University is also Director of the SDSN and President of the MDP Global Association). Since the SDSN spearheaded the development of the SDGs, MDP students worldwide have had the opportunity to witness firsthand the development and approval of the SDGs.

The other important development relates to the historic Global Climate Change Pact approved at COP 21 in Paris, France to address the growing threat of climate change. The international recognition and commitment to steer the world towards a path less dependent on fossil fuels will result in enormous challenges to mitigate climate change and also to foster resilience to adapt to disruptive impacts the planet will inevitably face in the years and decades to come.

As important as these **global** agreements are, the reality is that true change must take place at the **local** level in a vast number of distinct contexts throughout the world. In other words, there is and will be a huge need for development practitioners who are well-informed about global processes and the opportunities these create and capable of applying appropriate skills and knowledge to contribute to local sustainable development, in collaboration with local communities and stakeholders, the true drivers of sustainable development processes. This bridging between global processes and local implementation is a clear, compelling role for graduates of the MDP program.

While the complexity and scope of global development processes can be overwhelming, this feeling can be offset with the recognition that one can make important contributions as development practitioners. There are literally limitless opportunities around the world to make important, meaningful contributions to development challenges and be enriched in the process. As Director to the UF MDP Program, it is extremely rewarding to see the work our students and graduates are accomplishing and to realize that their efforts will continue and evolve in the years to come.



## Director's Note (continued)

I would like to express my deep appreciation to the faculty members (core and affiliates) who have contributed to the MDP Program in the past year; Dr. Michael Morris, our newest affiliate faculty member, is highlighted in this newsletter. Your support is what makes this program the enriching experience it is for our students. I would also like to acknowledge the vital support the program has received from the Tropical Conservation and Development Program, the Center of Latin American Studies, the Center for African Studies, the International Center, and the Office of the Provost. Cross-departmental involvement of faculty in the regional centers has greatly strengthened and facilitated the UF-MDP program. Indeed, Laura Young of the MacArthur Foundation stated the following, after reviewing the final report of the grant we received from the MF to launch the UF MDP Program:

*MacArthur is proud to have supported this important global endeavor, and in particular to have seeded the MDP at the University of Florida. The University of Florida should be congratulated for its university-wide support for this cross-disciplinary degree, a key aspect of its success. This broad support is just what the Commission and the Foundation originally envisioned in 2008 when the MDP initiative was launched. Seeing it in practice is just one of the many highlights of our collaboration over the years and when reviewing this final report.*

It is fitting here to express gratitude to the MacArthur Foundation for their generous support for the creation and consolidation of our program.

Finally, many thanks to our graduate assistant, MDP student Amanda Brinton, who took leadership in the development of this newsletter. Since the beginning of the academic year, Amanda has injected infectious enthusiasm into the program. She has made sure that our international students - in conjunction with their fellow students from the US - have had many opportunities to participate in traditions celebrated in the United States and in the Gator Nation.

Let me finish by wishing all our readers a happy and successful 2016. We look forward to another exciting year, thanks to your generous support and collaboration.

## MDP UF Foundation

The MDP Program is still collecting the \$2,000 of donations needed to begin a UF Foundation Account and any amount given is greatly appreciated. We have all been witness to the invaluable work being carried out by MDP students with broad, cross-departmental faculty support and by our growing body of alumni, and this is an opportunity to contribute to our exciting program! The MDP UF Foundation Account will support MDP students, for example, in the realization of their capstone field practicums and to attend relevant conferences where they can present their work and engage with other practitioners.

Contributions can be sent to the MDP Office, 470 Grinter Hall, PO Box 115560, Gainesville, FL 32611. Please make checks out to the UF Foundation. No contribution is too small and all will be greatly appreciated! We sincerely thank you for your support, as will our students who benefit from your generosity.





# International Conference on Sustainable Development Practice



UF MDP conference participants

## International Conference on Sustainable Development Practice (ICS DP), September 23-24. Interview with Dr. Renata Serra

The ICSDP is an annual conference sponsored by the Global Association of MDP Programs and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), and held at Columbia University in New York just before the United Nations General Assembly.



Ben Christ moderating a panel



UF MDP students enjoying NY and the conference



Seth Marsala-Bell

This year's ICSDP conference included many high level meetings with high-ranking officials, and heads of state to discuss the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were being formally approved by the UN General Assembly at the same time. One noticeable aspect was also the participation of many youth representatives in several plenary meetings, be they youth representatives within the UN system and other international bodies, student and alumni delegates from the MDP networks or young development professionals. Two of our UF alumni and several students participated in these high-profile meetings, which was very impressive. In total, nine students from UF attended. I chaired the panel "*Development, Security, and Climate Change in the Sahel*" that was based on the "Development in the Sahel Project" that was started the year before in conjunction with two other MDP programs based at universities in France and Senegal. Rugiyatu Kane, Whitney Turentine and Irving Chan-Gómez participated in my panel. Irving Chan-Gómez, Kristen Marks, and Gabriela Polo presented their summer 2015 Field Practicums in other panels. Ben Christ also moderated the panel on "*Careers in Sustainable Development*", and MDP alumnus Seth Marsala-Bell (cohort 3) was a panelist for the session "*Empowering Youth for Sustainable Development*". Jessica Horwood and Jennifer Meisenhelder also attended the conference.

In general the conference served as a great place to get together and network with other development practitioners. The conference was packed with options of panels and networking opportunities. It was a mixed conference where people could seek out what they wanted to learn and with whom they wanted to network. Some students were able to meet with other organizations that week in New York and took advantage of UF alumni connections who are working in the city (Camila Pazos, MDP cohort 1, at Echoing Green). Some students chose to go to the panels with the top ranking development practitioners in today's society while other students chose to go to panels that focused on more grassroots NGOs with younger professionals. Overall the students really enjoyed the conference and gained both knowledge and an opportunity to network.

# Fall Festivities

This fall the MDP students enjoyed different fall festivities including a beginning of the semester potluck, an evening reception at the UF president's house hosted by the Center for Latin American Studies and the UF Latino Alumni Association, a traditional pumpkin carving party, a Global Good Time party where music, food, and dance from around the world was shared, ending with a holiday party that also celebrated Little Candle Day from Colombia celebrating the beginning of the holiday season.

These festivities were a great opportunity for the MDP students to share and learn about one another's cultures and countries.



## Welcome Cohort 6

This fall the MDP program welcomed 15 new students into the program. Seven of the students are international students and their home countries include Colombia, Ecuador, Tanzania, South Korea, South Africa, Haiti, and Spain. All of the students bring a rich professional background and the majority has worked in fields related to international development. Some of their work experiences include working at embassies, working for non-profits, serving in the U.S. Peace Corps, and working for national government ministries. You can check out their profiles at: <http://mdp.africa.ufl.edu/people/current-students/>

Shown in the photo from top left to right: Sarah Ward, Russell Anderson, Grace Kihombo, Eunmi Song, Zotha Zungu, Rebecca Starkman, Oswaldo Medina-Ramirez, Pilar Morales Giner, Amanda Brinton, Qwamel Hanks, Iliana Jaimes, RosannaKingston, July Nelson, Rachel Velez. Not pictured: Lacey Harris-Coble





# Workshops, Languages, and a Thank You

## Economic Workshop with Juan Camilo Cardenas



During November, MDP cohort 6 students had an exciting workshop with renowned economist Dr. Juan Camilo Cardenas, visiting from the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogota, Colombia, on behavioral economics. The central focus of his work is the analysis and design of institutions (rules of the game) promoting cooperation between individuals and solving social dilemmas in the most efficient, equitable, democratic, and sustainable ways possible.

## MDP Language Exchange



This semester the MDP program started an MDP language exchange where the students meet for an hour once a week and practice languages they want to practice. This is especially useful to our native English speakers who don't have a lot of opportunities to practice a second language.

## Thank You Andrew Noss!



We wanted to take this opportunity to thank our amazing Graduate Coordinator Andrew Noss for all of his hard work in making the MDP program run smoothly and assisting the students with all of their needs. The program would not be what it is without Andy's kind energy and incredible work ethic to help the students succeed. Thank you Andy!



## Faculty Spotlight

**Dr. Michael Morris is a new affiliate faculty of the MDP program. Dr. Morris leads the Entrepreneurship & Empowerment in South Africa (EESA) summer program that two of our MDP students have taken part in. We are very excited to welcome Dr. Morris to the MDP family! Below is a brief interview with Dr. Morris reflecting on the EESA program and development.**

**Q:** Can you tell me about the EESA program and how it is benefiting businesses in South Africa?

**A:** We take 28 students from the U.S. and 20 African students and we form teams that work for 6 weeks with historically disadvantaged entrepreneurs (non-white, living in poverty) in the shanty towns outside Cape Town. Our objective is to take what are early stage businesses, generally less than two years old, and make them sustainable. The teams follow a methodology and produce problem-solving solutions (deliverables) for these clients, for example simple book keeping systems because they don't track their numbers, marketing programs, better approaches to pricing, signage, dealing with their suppliers, investing in equipment, and others.

**Q:** How do you view the contributions to development from small to medium businesses?

**A:** Small and medium size businesses play an instrumental role in any economy, and in the developing world they play an overwhelming role. The informal sector in South Africa, unregistered businesses, is responsible for 45% of GDP. Combined with the formally registered small business sector, the two represent over 90% of all businesses and 65% of GDP. Most of the opportunity and most of the future lie with these businesses. Often criticized as necessity businesses, where people are just doing it to eat, many can become sustainable. They can provide permanent employment and generate income that is necessary to support families. Many play an instrumental role in building the fabric of township communities, so the indirect benefits are significant. Without the small business sector, the economies of all of these developing countries would simply collapse.

**Q:** How do you see the evolution of support to small and medium businesses?

**A:** In 2015 everyone understands the importance of entrepreneurship. Government after government is allocating more resources to programs that support the small business sector. That is the good news, and also the bad news because government inherently is inefficient and allocates resources in ways that don't necessarily produce results. Many programs to support entrepreneurs--ranging from training programs, to voucher programs, investment funds, and so forth--are not well conceived and are not of high quality. Too often, people who have never started anything and don't reflect on the realities that the business needs just provide a template saying "here is a tool, go use this tool." Furthermore, the tendency is to treat small businesses, especially micro businesses, or businesses with fewer than 10 employees, as a category of business rather than understanding that they are not one homogenous mix. There is tremendous variation in the needs of the stages of development and sophistication of these businesses. In some businesses a guy is cutting hair under a tree and that is his business; other businesses have cell phones, bank accounts, premises, and customers beyond the neighborhood. You have to tailor the intervention approaches, such as the training programs and funding models, to those different stages of development of these micro enterprises, but rarely does that happen. The help these entrepreneurs get is poor quality and insufficient to meet demand. In South African shanty towns, one in four houses has a business running out of it. The level of organic entrepreneurial activity is amazing, and the infrastructure and support to assist those people is paltry.

## Faculty Spotlight (continued)

**Q:** What are the constraints of small businesses?

**A:** Most people immediately would say money, but that isn't their biggest constraint because these entrepreneurs can do a lot with very little. They are very good at boot strapping and leveraging their guerrilla skills. The biggest problem is that they tend to start businesses that are extremely competitive and are in businesses with very low entry requirements. The competition is almost all price-based, so whoever has the lowest price gets the sale and that is not sustainable. They must find ways to differentiate themselves and create sustainability on that side, but at the same time there are a lot of cultural dimensions that you have to address. One entrepreneur a few years ago was making cement blocks to sell as construction materials but there were 16 other block makers within a couple of kilometers, and their blocks were the same as this guy's blocks, so how do you differentiate a block? When the students started talking to him about how you can differentiate a block and certain things you might do, his immediate response was "why would I need to do that" and the students' response was "so you can beat your competitor and put them out of business and you make the money." His response "was why would I ever want to put my competitors out of business, those are my neighbors, this is my community." You are dealing with a different set of values and a different ethic in terms of the nature of competition. A typical entrepreneur is not only supporting himself and his family but also four other people in the extended family and two other families in the community. So they struggle to put money back into the business, to grow it and make more sustainable jobs and buy equipment that will allow them to grow their ventures. The issue of access to finance is also going to be on the top 5 list, but the entrepreneurs that take care of these other issues can find the money.

**Q:** Is there any message you would want to say to an MDP student interested in the EESA program?

**A:** EESA is transformative; it's transformative for the entrepreneurs and it's transformative for the students. The program is extremely hard work. We are there for 6 weeks that go by in the blink of an eye. We intend to make some impact or difference and it's almost impossible to do that in 6 weeks. So when we are there it is a full engagement; it's exhausting, we make a difference and we produce deliverables. Where the typical team produces 4 deliverables per client we produce 6 or 7 deliverables. Consider the challenge of dealing with every facet of business on the ground in a culture where you have not just economic but religious, social, and age differences when dealing with the gap between yourself and the entrepreneurs that you are trying to help. Many of the students don't have business backgrounds. They learn more about business during those six weeks than ever before. And the focus is not on business, the focus is on problem solving. It doesn't matter what is your specialization, all that matters is that you come up with the greatest solution. Can you become comfortable with the surroundings quickly and then take advantage of those surroundings. If that excites you, then this program is for you. We love working with the MDP students. The MDP students that we have had have made a big difference. I encourage students to take a look at the program.



# Cohort 5 Summer Practicums

**Our cohort 5 students successfully finished their summer practicums, working on a wide range of development related challenges.**

(1,2) Irving Chan and Matt Anderson completed their summer practicum in Bogotá, Colombia working for the brewing company SABMiller researching the integration of sustainability into company norms.

(3,4) Kristen Marks worked at Rehab's Rope in Goa, India, where she did leadership development training with young women between the ages of 15-26 who were at risk of sex trafficking

(5) Jessica Horwood worked with the business entrepreneurship EESA program in Cape Town, South Africa. She worked on small business consulting and setting up a business tracking system.

(6) Ben Christ completed extended work in Nazaré Paulista, a rural community near São Paulo, Brazil. He collaborated with Instituto de Pesquisas Ecológicas to apply aspects of Community-based Social Marketing, leading to a better understanding of rural producers' participation in Atlantic Forest restoration programs

(7) Whitney Turientine worked in both Senegal and Tanzania. In Senegal, she researched dissemination of climate change information with the Senegalese Meteorological Service. While in Tanzania, she worked in the Arusha area researching dissemination of information about crop diversification related to climate change.

(8) Gabriela Polo did a joint program in Costa Rica with the law school at UF for the first half of the summer, analyzing the legal and regulatory framework of oyster farming. The second half was on the island of Chira, researching capacity building and communication facilitation with a group of majority women oyster farmers.

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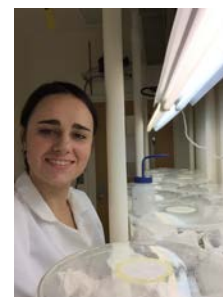


# Alumni Updates

**Four cohorts of UF MDP students have graduated since the program began in 2010.**

**Check out the initiatives they have been involved in since graduating!**

**Jennifer Carr (cohort 1)** says, “Three years after graduating with the first cohort of MDP students I have acquired a staff position as lab manager of the Biosecurity Research and Extension laboratory at the University of Florida in the Department of Entomology and Nematology. It's the perfect blend of computer/lab/greenhouse and fieldwork! Mainly I develop educational material about crop pests and assist the Doctor of Plant Medicine students with setting up their experiments with stink bugs. In other news, I look forward to hosting my in-laws during the holidays who will visit from Costa Rica for the first time to meet their granddaughter.”



**Camila Pazos (cohort 1)** says, “I’m still working for the global nonprofit Echoing Green ([www.echoinggreen.org](http://www.echoinggreen.org)). I’m now Senior Manager of Search & Selection for the organization’s Fellowship Program. On personal news, I got engaged and will be getting married next year to my fiancé Gabe who was there all throughout my MDP years.”



**Elizabeth Poulsen (cohort 4)** says, “I have moved to Portland, Oregon to be close to family and I'm searching for a job in the (very small!) international development sector here. I am currently doing an internship with the director of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning at Mercy Corps, and I am also working temporarily at an international women's empowerment nonprofit called World Pulse. I have also worked on several projects with UF's International Center, relating to "integrating gender" into agricultural services. Currently, I am working with MDP student Lacey Harris-Coble to create a half-day training for agricultural extension agents in Africa on enhancing their services for rural women farmers. I'm finding that lots of things from the MDP program are popping up in my various projects (logframes everywhere!) and I appreciate the program more and more every day.”



**Elihu Isele (cohort 1)** is Director of Research at Royal Hawaiian Orchards L.P. and says, "We grow about 5000 acres of Macadamia and sell our product under the Royal Hawaiian Orchards name. The MDP degree definitely helped me get this job."





# Alumni Updates (continued)

**Antonieta Eguren (cohort 4)** has been doing some work with El Programa Vino, Cambio Climático y Biodiversidad (VCCR) that holds workshops to inform decision-making on the conservation of Chilean wineries. Antonieta also says, “ I’m also finishing a consultancy for the Scientific Millenium Initiative of the Ministry of Economy of Chile. With an interdisciplinary team, we created an evaluation tool to assess the non-academic impacts of research centers and their organizational capacity to conduct research that contributes to the country. I’m also helping with the creation of the Chilean Society of Socio-ecology and Ethno-ecology. Finally I’m expecting a baby!”



**Jeremy Lambeth (cohort 4)** is working in and out of Port-au-Prince, Haiti as a steering committee member for a future [American Overseas Research Center](#) in Haiti. With the guidance of a [council](#) for 20+ AORCs, this center will soon serve as an academic support hub and partner with higher education institutions, NGOs, and government organizations in the United States and Caribbean. Jeremy will spend the next six months collecting data to build an information clearinghouse of research and exchange programs currently conducted in Haiti. He will also address the needs of emerging scholars, such as affiliation documents, transportation, accommodations, translators, etc.



**Samantha Davis (cohort 4)** says, “After graduating, I moved to LA to work on an international documentary called *Living On One Dollar*. It was about living in Guatemala, which was interesting for me since I did my research in Guatemala. I then heard the producers were making a new film on the Syrian refugee crisis called *Salam Neighbor* and I received the opportunity to work on that as well. It was an awesome experience. I was helping to coordinate international partnerships for the documentary release and completed some fundraising as well. Now I live in Arlington, VA and work in D.C. at Capital Partners for Education. It's a nonprofit that works with low-income D.C. students to get them to and through college. One way we do this is by pairing the students with experienced mentors in D.C. and I recruit and train all the mentors and evaluate the demographics and locations of mentors as well as the intake process.”





Happy Holidays and a Fantastic  
New Year. Wishing you all the  
best from our MDP family to  
yours.

