APPAM Public Policy Camp Presents a Roadmap
for Underrepresented Students

Washington, DC – APPAM's Public Policy Camp took place on Friday, September 15th. The inaugural #APPAMcamp event was held to introduce the field of public policy to a group of students who might not otherwise be familiar with it, as well as to increase the pipeline of diverse students into APPAM institutional member graduate public policy and public affairs schools. Nearly 50 undergraduate students from around the DC area joined policy professionals for the day to discuss the study of public policy and analysis, what a career in policy might look like and how diversity impacted their studies and career paths.

Full house here at #APPAMcamp!

The format of the day was a mix of interactive/participatory programming for the students at individual tables, coupled with an opening and lunch plenary session for the entire group. During lunch, the group heard from a panel of APPAM members who work in the policy field, in a variety of positions. They took questions from the students, gave their best advice and talked about how their diverse backgrounds have impacted their career and education choices.

The panel included:

- Moderator: John Martinez, Director of Program Development, MDRC
- Rachel Breslin, PhD Candidate, George Washington University, Senior Operations Analyst at The Lab @ DC
- Crystal Byndloss, Senior Associate and Director, Outreach, Diversity & Inclusion, MDRC
- Emmanuel Caudillo, Senior Advisor, White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for Hispanics
- Sebastian Tello-Trillo, Assistant Professor of Public Policy and Economics, University of Virginia

Each participant gave an overview of their path, on their way to where they are now. Emmanuel Caudillo grew up in Las Vegas, took an undergraduate course in public policy and really fell in love with the topic. He went to graduate school in DC at George Washington University and now works for the White House. There, he shares stories from across the county about what works in education for Hispanic youth in the Bright Spots in Education program. He's extremely proud that he works every day to increase resources for Hispanics students.

Crystal Byndloss started off getting her PhD in sociology from Harvard. There was immense pressure to stay in academia and become a professor, especially from other black faculty members. She didn't want to be a professor and it forced her to really figure out what she liked best about the program at Harvard. It was the research. She was determined to focus on that. She stumbled across MDRC and fell in love with it. As a senior researcher, Crystal spends a lot of time managing the research, not necessarily doing the research, and she cautioned the students in the room to pick a career where the bulk of their time is spent doing something they enjoy. She pointed out the importance of having diverse research teams performing research, "we are studying how black and brown kids learn and it's important that the research teams reflect the population we're studying."

#APPAMCamp speaker @dsebastiantello says students telling him "You're the first minority professor I've had" is why he's in academia.

Sebastian Tello-Trillo always wanted to tell stories. He wanted to go to film school but learned that film school is more about the business of filmmaking, not necessarily making films. He got a PhD in economics; his parents are both economists. He picked the broad path of economics, versus a PhD in public policy, and that had both advantages and drawbacks. He cautioned the group in the room to really decide if they wanted to get a graduate degree, to examine the impacts on family and really understand how much of a commitment it is, "a PhD is great but it's not great for everyone." He mentioned that students tell him he's the first minority professor they've ever had and it reminds him why he went into teaching in the first place.

Rachel Breslin had a circuitous route to where she is now. She went to West Point and served abroad in the military for a decade. She helped build back local governments in war torn areas. When she came back to the states, she needed to reconnect to domestic policy. She worked at the Pentagon and talked a lot about social policy issues there, not necessarily military strategy. Issues like gays in the military, sexual assault in the military, etc. consumed the Pentagon staff. These discussions helped crystalize her focus: she decided to transition from the military to get a PhD. She works at The Lab @DC, as well as goes to school, and reminded the students that action happens at the local level in policy, even though we tend to focus on the federal level. She talked about

"The action happens at the local level." @RachelABreslin from @GWtweets and @TheLab_DC to students at #APPAMCamp

her work at The Lab and how important it is to know if an intervention works before resources are going to spent on it. Rachel talked about the importance of being able to communicate big policy issues and problems effectively, especially to an audience that doesn't always have a PhD or understand statistics. When asked about her path, she said, "there are very few black and brown people in academia, there are even fewer black and brown women in academia. It's exhausting sometimes to be the only me in the room. I aggressively have to stand up and be heard. "

John Martinez went to the University of Virginia on an ROTC scholarship and had every intention of having a career in the military. As part of a Latino family, this was often the path to financial and career security. His scholarship was cancelled in the middle of his time at UVA and he had to get a job in Charlottesville. He worked at the Department of Social Services and it really made him interested in public service. He came to MDRC after getting a graduate degree in New York. He echoed Rachel regarding important skills, "Being able to break down complicated stuff into easy to understand pieces is a huge skill."

The panel was asked about the best advice they've ever gotten:

1) Rachel Breslin: Always build on your past experiences, don't throw them away.
2) Sebastian Tello-Trillo: If you don't ask, you already have a no. Some of the best opportunities are created and you need to make those opportunities wherever you can.
3) Emmanuel Caudillo: Ensure you have a mentor. If you don't naturally have one, ask someone to be your mentor.
4) Cheryl Byndloss: Think about what's important to you, a nontraditional path is okay. A straight, linear path is not the way everyone arrives at where they want to be.

Finally, the group was asked about stereotypes: how do you battle them? They all agreed that constant reminders that they belong and their voices not only belonged as part of the conversation but were vitally needed was important. They agreed that these reminders were certainly necessary at the beginning of their education/career path but become less important as they became more comfortable on their respective paths. Exhibiting confidence and credibility are key.

So impressed with this group of #APPAMCamp students! Engaged with the topics and passionate about the work they want to do.

Finishing the day with an ice cream social! #APPAMCamp