

# Bush School at TAMU Celebrates Its 10th Year

by Michelle Adam

When Nichole Aldape, a Latina Texan, tells people that she attended the Bush School, a confused or concerned look crosses their faces. “A lot of people say, ‘What’s the Bush School? Where is the Bush School? Is it a breeding ground for Republicans?’” said Aldape.

The Bush School has nothing to do with current President George W. Bush, nothing to do with breeding Republicans, and it isn’t in the proximity of the Washington beltway. The school, which just celebrated its 10th anniversary, is housed alongside former and elder President George Bush’s presidential library at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, and attracts master’s-level students from a broad range of political affiliations who are dedicated to public service.

“If you saw our class, you would see all walks of life,” said Aldape, who graduated with her master’s from this institution in 2006. “The faculty, administration, and students who make up the Bush School make it unique. We are a small, tight-knit community within the Texas A&M community.”

The Bush School, also called the George Bush School of Government and Public Service, began in the fall of 1995, when its first director, Dr. Charles F. Hermann, professor of political science, came to Texas A&M University. He began with an office and a mandate to officially launch the Bush School in 1997. Texas A&M had persuaded the 41st president to locate his library at the school, with the promise it would also launch a new school of government there to generate more young people dedicated to serving their communities and country.

“A group of faculty at that time had conceived of a library, museum, conference center, and school as part of a comprehensive package,” said Dr. Sam Kirkpatrick, executive associate dean of the school. “We were interested in creating public leaders, and this was dear to his heart,” he said, speaking of the elder Bush.

“This mission and early vision were important to him. He saw some of the critical strengths of Texas A&M – the facilities, land, and being only 90 miles from Houston, where the former president spends much of his time – and its emphasis on public service and leadership.”

The graduate school began with 17 students in 1997 and has since grown to 161 full-time students in the master’s programs. The Bush School began as an academic unit in the College of Liberal Arts, followed

with its own academic building in 1997, and graduated its first class with a master’s in public service and administration in 1999.

The school became a freestanding academic college in 2000, although it remains a part of the A&M system, and created an Institute for Science, Technology, and Public Policy that same year. In 2002, it launched a master’s program in international affairs, a certificate in advanced international affairs, and a public leadership program. Subsequent to these programs were a certificate in homeland security in 2004; five-year dual-degree program through Texas A&M’s Department of Political Science in 2006; certificate in nonprofit management; and the founding of the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs in 2007.

“That first group grew very rapidly, and recently we have reached a stage in which we are very in sync with what students think and want in terms of public service,” said Kirkpatrick. “The financial support and facilities have all come together, and we have witnessed such fairly rapid growth that we have some space challenges at the moment. This year, we had a 40 percent increase in our applicants, so we brought in a substantially larger class.”

According to Aldape, the factors that attract students include extensive financial support; topnotch, supportive faculty, administration, and students; a personalized hands-on education; and a program that is young enough to adapt its vision to the needs of today’s ever-changing world.

“I looked at a lot of schools in the D.C. area, but none of the schools compared to the Bush school. I like the smaller feel to the school. I wanted the faculty to know who I was. I had 30 students coming into my master’s in public administration program. At the LBJ school in Austin, there were 175 in that class; and at George Washington, they had hundreds at a time,” said Aldape, who studied political science as an undergraduate at Texas A&M.

“I also saw how much work they – Texas A&M – went through in recruiting students and working with them. There wasn’t a lot of precedence set, while at other schools it was a matter of how other students had done things, and that this was the way things were going to be done. At the Bush School, they were flexible with what you wanted to do, and they had an emphasis on nonprofit work that others didn’t have.”

Within Aldape’s program – the master’s in public administration – stu-



dents receive training to become leaders in the public and nonprofit sectors. The two-year program includes two tracks – public policy analysis and public management, and elective areas of concentration, such as nonprofit organizations; state and local policy and management; security, energy, and technology policy; natural resources, environment, and technology policy and administration. Classes are provided in leadership, public policy formation, public management, and finance, in addition to internships, a Capstone Seminar, full-time writing support, and electives.

“We provide newly designed degrees that reflect student’s interests. You won’t find many graduate programs that will have programs like this, and have a domestic and international program in the same school – only Harvard and a few other schools have this. Students in one program can take classes from another program,” said Kirkpatrick. “Our mission is to create leaders in public service. We have an unusual leadership development program. We have leadership built into the curriculum. We put them through a battery of leadership assessments, and during the two years, they are involved in these assessments.

“Harvard has a lot of leadership classes, but you don’t see this kind of well-developed leadership program. You can’t see the curriculum laid out, and extra curriculum development and assessments. We have shaped our curriculum based on what national studies have said we needed in leadership. We are viewed as having the most well-developed leadership program in the country.”

In addition to the master’s in public administration, students interested in mastering in international affairs can choose between tracks in national security affairs and international economics and development. Courses include leadership and public administration; international politics in theory and practice; fundamentals of global econo-



Graduate Nichole Aldape, one of 10 students in her class of 30 who received diversity support, estimated hers at \$63,000.

my; quantitative methods in public management; and American foreign policy since World War II. Some other concentrations offered are international economic development, international politics, and American diplomacy. Students are also able to pursue certificates in homeland security and advanced international affairs that can count toward their master’s. These don’t require residency at the Bush School.

An unusual part of the school’s education plan is the Capstone Research Project that master’s students are required to do, according to Kirkpatrick. Students work hand-in-hand with top-level clients, engaging in research that has practical application. Clients with whom students have collaborated include the National Intelligence Council, the Department of State, the World Bank, the state of Texas, and the Congressional Research Service.

Aldape herself worked on research with the United Way of Texas for a year. Through her experience with the Capstone Project and other research she conducted, she was impressed with the unique attitude of faculty and administration.

“The faculty does not treat you as students. Faculty told us from day one that we were colleagues. They treated us as colleagues. They would include us in projects and research and helped us get ready for real-world clients,” she said. “The administration held town halls and asked for feedback. With faculty hiring, we were invited to listen to potential faculty, and we’d have lunches with them. The faculty cared about public service, and they conducted research and had worked in the field.”

The Bush School has also attracted well-known figures as speakers, such as Tony Blair, Colin Powell, and former U.S. Secretary of Commerce Robert Mosbacher.

Former President Bush “always reminds us to make sure our speaker’s series has lots of diverse views,”



The graduate school began with 17 students in 1997 and has since grown to 161 full-time students in the master's programs.

said Kirkpatrick. "He is on campus now more than once a month, starting in late September through April. Students are so excited when Bush comes that we have tickets for some speaker events. We have two auditoriums, but we have to turn away community, faculty, and students when he is here."

That same emphasis on diverse views holds true for the school's efforts in attracting students from diverse backgrounds. According to Kirkpatrick, the school has typically had 10 percent to 14 percent minority students, about 7 percent of them Hispanic. Through recruitment at major conferences and diversity forums, he hopes to further increase minority numbers.

In the meantime, Texas A&M's Diversity Scholarships have helped open the door to minorities at the Bush School.

Aldape was one of 10 students in her class of 30 who received this diversity support. She estimated the support amounted to \$63,000. "The scholarship covered everything, and the first year, I walked out of there with a 3.75 GPA. The Diversity Scholarship made it possible to go back to school. I didn't think I had a chance at grad school," said Aldape. "I never really felt like an outsider or a minority. A third of my class was on diversity scholarships."

Uniquely, the Bush School has a large endowment for a public institution and is therefore able to help all students with financial support. While Aldape received one of the top scholarship amounts, 100 percent of the most recent MPSA entering class received scholarships ranging from \$3,000 to \$25,000 a year.

"We are fortunate to have a large endowment. We have graduate merit and graduate diversity scholarships, and 14 endowed chairs. We have a \$35 million endowment – for a school our size that is practically unheard of. President Bush's friends also helped endow the school and played a role in the early development of it," said Kirkpatrick. "People who want to go into public service are typically from low-income families. It is important to

keep our scholarships high. Our goal is to keep students from having any debt when they graduate from here. We are quite selective. ... Our average GPA is 3.6 to 3.7."

Graduates from the Bush School have obtained careers in federal, state, and local governments, as well as in nonprofit organizations. Places they are currently working include the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. International Trade Commission, the U.S. State Department, the New York City Mayor's Office, the American Red Cross, and the American Heart Association.

Aldape is now working as a Washington associate and lobbyist for the Texas A&M Research Foundation in Washington, D.C. Her job is to help increase research funding from federal agencies so research can help improve people's lives along the border and elsewhere. Ultimately, Aldape's goal is to become a director of her own nonprofit, and move back to Texas and help her community.

"The master's has really opened up a new area I didn't know was there before. I've learned how interdependent government and nonprofits are, and how they need each other to coexist," she said. "I have fallen in love with it all."

Aldape is now among more than 300 alumni who obtained their master's at the Bush School and can claim a part of the school's 10 years of existence, celebrated on Nov. 10. Alumni, donors, and former colleagues of the 41st president were expected at the event, described by Kirkpatrick as a homecoming for the Bush family.

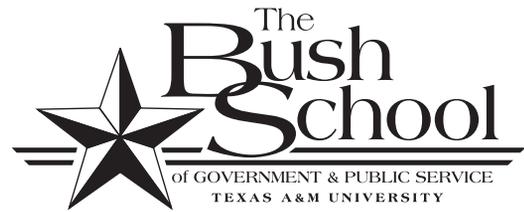
Although the former president visits the campus regularly – talking to students and teaching in classes, fishing on the school's lake, and attending the speaker series – this homecoming honored 10 years of building new leaders who will give back to the larger community. **HO**



4220 TAMU  
COLLEGE STATION, TX 77843-4220



PUBLIC SERVICE  
IS A NOBLE  
CALLING



A LEADER IN PUBLIC SERVICE  
AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

---

<http://bush.tamu.edu>  
[admissions@bushschool.tamu.edu](mailto:admissions@bushschool.tamu.edu)  
979.862.3476