

David Washburn ready to guide MHA program to greater heights

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Accredited by the **Commission for Accreditation of Healthcare Management Education** and regularly ranked in the Top 20 in the United States, the [Master of Health Administration \(MHA\) program](#) in the [Department of Health Policy and Management](#) would seem to have little room for improvement.

But as new MHA program director [David Washburn](#) sees it, the in-person and online experiences at the [Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) can both still grow into something even better, building on its well-earned reputation for being student friendly.

“I’m just seeing the community, and it’s really amazing,” Washburn said. “And I think keeping that going and pushing it forward even further and even pushing it to more of a national stage is something that I would like to do. But it’s just wonderful to be a part of it.”

Washburn, who also serves as clinical associate professor, comes to Tulane from Texas A&M, where he worked extensively with their MHA program as an assistant professor in the School of Public Health.

Prior to that, he served in multiple capacities for several different organizations – including Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Stanford Health Care, and the San Francisco VA Medical Center – often with a focus on planning. That led to a variety of successes, from improving basic hospital processes, to crystalizing sterilization guidance, to soliciting input on physical hospital design.

A giant map of Honduras outside his current office reminds him of his time spent there in the Peace Corps, and where he met his wife, doing public health and environmental health work.

It’s the breadth of different experiences that he thinks aids in a successful health administration career.

“When you’re working in hospitals, there are a thousand different niches that nobody, no matter how smart they are, can be an expert in all of them,” Washburn says. He believes that putting people with different kinds of expertise and backgrounds together is what helps to save lives, and something he tries to get across to students. “I see those things as a puzzle. And what I like to do is to facilitate the communication that helps that puzzle be put together.”

“Really great MHA students and healthcare leaders navigate that very well,” he adds. “It’s the reason why we have a lot of classes in the MHA program on leadership, managerial communication, strategy, those types of things. Because it’s a really complex puzzle. And at the end of the day, the goal is to make sure that people’s lives are being taken care of.”

As an instructor with the mindset of lifelong learning, Washburn has adopted a policy of always soliciting feedback from students. Sometimes that results in the call for less homework, but more often than not, it provides critical guidance to the curriculum and makes the students active stakeholders.

“I just think that that kind of honesty and communication is critical in any organization.”

Long-term, Washburn envisions the MHA program becoming more modern, through the use of specific technologies like virtual reality as well as a constant awareness of current trends like the gamification of education. The key, he says, is to be agile.

For now, he’s excited to get to know more about New Orleans. “The culture, the music, there’s so much happening here, and you just add that together with the fun-loving attitude, and it just creates a magnificent environment that makes it a real pleasure to live here.”