



STENNIS SPOTLIGHT

The latest updates on SIG, policy, and politics

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**John C. Stennis
Institute of Government &
Community Development**

Executive Director: Dr. Dallas Breen

662-325-3328
sig.msstate.edu
382 Hardy Road
Mississippi State, MS 39762



Here at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development at Mississippi State University, we have remained vigilant in our efforts to provide premier research, service, and training. People across our state and nation have come to expect our offerings in our 47 years of operation. We expect 2022 to follow suit from 2021 and see our projects increase, our reach expand to other states, and our staffing change to bring on new talent. We continue to offer in-person and virtual training, service, and applied research to all who request our services and will do so with the same professionalism and unbiased, non-partisan approach as we have throughout our existence. It is an honor to continue to serve the people of this great state and nation, and it is our sincere hope that more will seek out our assistance to enable them to be more informed and educated public officials, government employees, and citizens of this great nation.

Dr. Dallas Breen, Executive Director

2022 CUPSO CONFERENCE

by Gracie Kelley

CUPSO



The Consortium of University Public Service Organizations (CUPSO) is a national association that seeks to support and collaborate with university-based organizations across the country. CUPSO and their partners go above and beyond to serve their communities effectively by continuously learning and adapting to improve their skills. Members analyze trends and government patterns to improve policy making strategies, provide efficient management practices, and build effective leadership skills for leaders in various levels of government.

The John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG) at Mississippi State University is one of the many university organizations dedicated to CUPSO's mission. To better serve Mississippi and skillfully communicate with its residents, SIG partners with CUPSO's resources to provide the necessary tools to work with municipalities in community development projects.

Annual conferences are held for CUPSO members to network with other professionals, find common ground, and address current policy issues to learn from each other and improve their own communities. This year, the organization was excited to announce that the conference would be returning to an in-person format in Nashville, Tennessee, after a two-year hiatus. Most of the plenary and breakout groups were recorded and offered to members who could not attend. This year's conference took place April 6-8, 2022, and was dedicated to learning, exploring, and networking future challenges and opportunities.

SIG's Heston Lollar, Project Coordinator, and Dr. Dallas Breen, Executive Director and past CUPSO president, attended this year's conference and had a chance to learn new skills and hear from others that gave them a hopeful outlook for the future of SIG. Lollar had the opportunity to present his innovative research in his area of expertise: data visualization. This workshop was designed to convey the value of using visuals to present research outcomes, effectively communicate data to individuals with various backgrounds and education levels, and to demonstrate how to use technology such as ArcGIS and ArcMap to generate these research visuals.

CUPSO is proposing a unique offering to many individuals across diverse expertise and education levels. SIG is a proud member of the association, and their employees have been able to find fulfillment and take opportunities because of this organization. Overall, SIG's members thoroughly enjoyed this year's conference. They learned valuable skills and gained insight that they will take with them as they work toward a better future at SIG and for the state of Mississippi.





by Grace Troutman

MEET DR. MATT PETERSON

Dr. Matthew L. Peterson is a Research Associate II at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG). Peterson was born and raised in the Houston suburb of Katy, TX until the eleventh grade, when his family relocated to Atlanta. He remained in the Peach State for college and attended Reinhardt University, where he met his wife Whitney in 2003. He graduated in 2005 with a Bachelor of Business Administration and later moved to Starkville, MS to pursue a Master in Business Administration at Mississippi State University.

Inspired by his parents' work, Peterson had always aspired to work in a field that blended their two careers. His father was a police officer and his mother worked for the Houston Public School District. His first role in Starkville was as a human resource management generalist. While in this role, he was able to begin fulfilling a lifelong dream of receiving a doctoral degree.

When Peterson started taking classes, he became interested in research. He spent time working with the Political Science & Public Administration (PSPA) department and SIG. With the encouragement of former SIG Executive Director Marty Wiseman, Ph.D., he left Human Resources in 2014 and accepted a Research Associate I position at SIG. According to Peterson, SIG was a perfect fit for the career he envisioned. He could work in public service while immersed in a university setting. In 2020, he graduated with his doctorate in Public Policy & Administration. He continues to work in public service-oriented research.

Peterson performs a variety of tasks at SIG. Currently, he is working on numerous salary and compensation surveys. His day-to-day tasks mostly involve data collection analysis and compiling reports. He also assists students in the PSPA department with their capstone projects. His favorite part of the job is helping municipal governments serve their communities more efficiently through interviews and data collection. He enjoys the opportunity to build relationships with people across the state and serve Mississippi.



Mississippi State University has been a true blessing for our family. Both my wife and I have each held several great positions on campus while earning valuable graduate degrees that have expanded our knowledge, skills, and abilities in the workforce. The family atmosphere of the City of Starkville, the University, the College of Arts and Sciences, and most importantly - the Stennis Institute has been felt by Whitney and me since we set foot on campus.



When he is not at SIG, he loves to attend as many Mississippi State sporting events as possible with his family. Peterson proudly claims he has not missed a home football game since 2011. He also loves professional sports and hopes to attend the World Series, Super Bowl, and NBA Finals at some point in his life. He shares this love of sports with his five year old son, Mason, who just began his t-ball career. Also in his free time, Peterson loves to binge-watch TV shows with his wife, attend live concerts, and occasionally play golf with friends.

Peterson is an integral part of the team, and we are incredibly grateful for his hard work, wisdom, and dedication to the Stennis Institute.



FIRST RESPONDER SALARY & BENEFITS SURVEY

by Grace Troutman

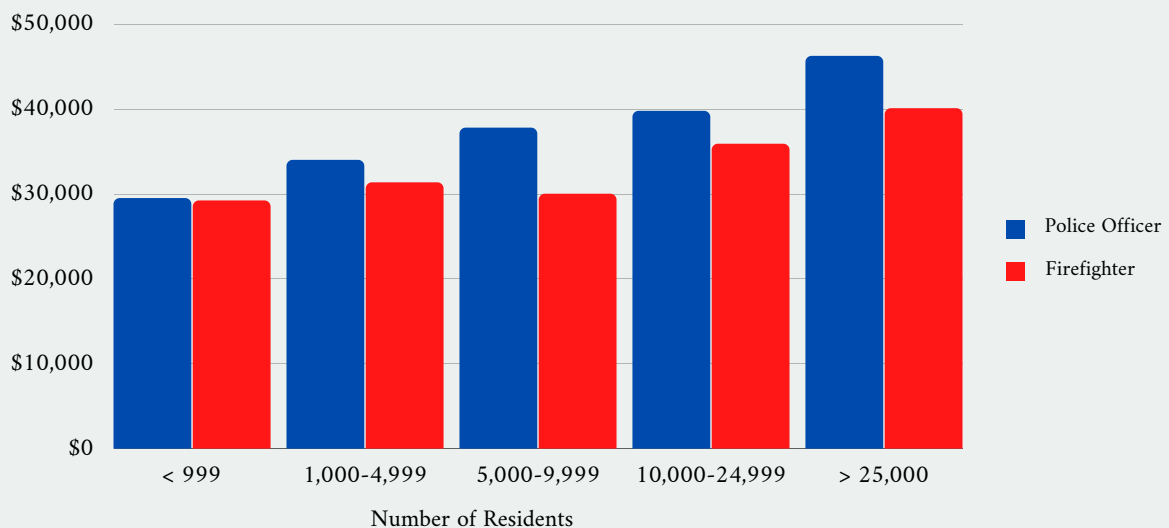
The John C. Stennis Institute of Government (SIG) has always taken great pride in its capacity to serve the state of Mississippi through research. As is our namesake, SIG staff finds value in quality work aimed at community development across the great Magnolia State. A major pillar of community development is economics, and while progress in this area can be cyclical, SIG believes Mississippi has the potential for tremendous growth when armed with the proper tools. Thus, our team is proud to work with cities and counties across the state to obtain salary and benefit data to arm public officials with the knowledge needed to raise Mississippi's economy to a competitive national standard.

The 2022 First Responder Salary and Benefits Survey analyzes salaries and employment benefits for Mississippi's police and fire departments. The data pulled from these reports can better illuminate methods to address pay/benefit issues facing employers. Results were broken into municipalities and counties, due to their differing forms of government. The information analyzed consists of evaluating the survey results' mean and median, as well as the percentiles of 25, 50, and 75 percent. These percentiles will provide entry, mid, and high salaries for each position, all aggregated by population. Additionally, the benefits ratios will also be presented by population.

More populated areas are attracting police and fire from less populated areas, as they tend to offer increased employment opportunity packages. While this benefits larger municipalities and counties, it decreases personnel in smaller ones. This salary survey will be used to educate municipalities and counties on ways in which they can incentivize new employees and better retain their current ones through improved pay and benefits.

Salaries for police vary greatly across Mississippi. Most salaries will reflect the number of residents, as the average salary decreases as the number of residents decrease. For counties and small municipalities, residents often rely on volunteer fire departments. For very small communities, police officers and firefighters are part-time employees and paid hourly.

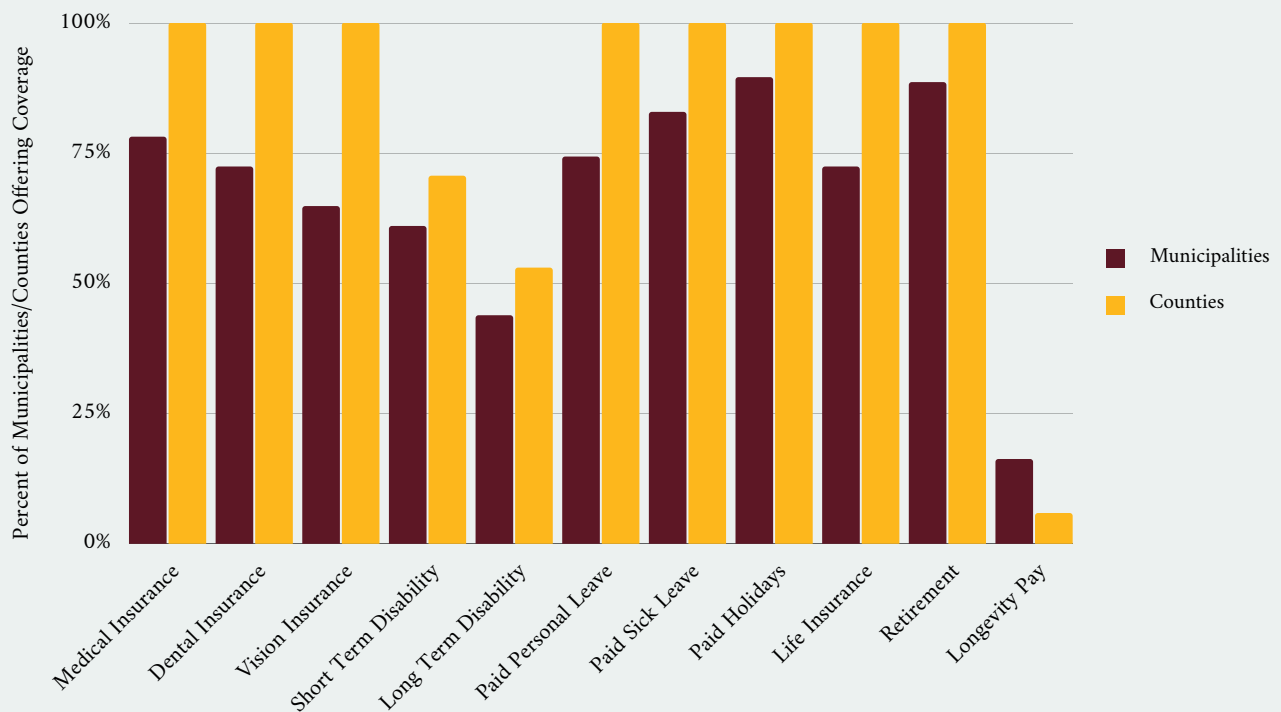
Average Annual Salaries for Municipal Police Officers and Firefighters



Easy-to-read Data to Inform Decisions

As for employment benefits, all surveyed municipalities with over 1,000 residents offer medical insurance. Only 36% of municipalities with under 999 residents provide this same coverage. All municipalities with over 5,000 residents offered coverage for paid personal leave, vision insurance for dependents, dental insurance, paid holidays, and life insurance. The percentage of smaller municipalities offering these benefits varied, but on average, their percentages were far smaller than those of municipalities with 5,000 or more residents. A minor fraction of all municipalities, regardless of population, offered short and long-term disability payments, longevity pay, or miscellaneous benefits such as childcare, child tuition assistance, or performance-based compensation. Based on this data, it is evident that more populated municipalities can offer their employees greater benefits.

Comparing First Responder Benefits on Municipal and County Levels

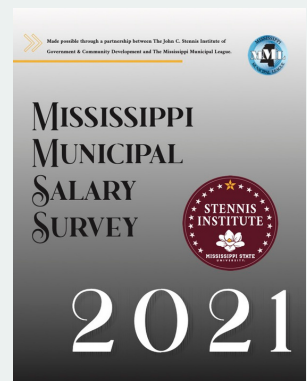


SIG is currently working on numerous other surveys for specific municipalities and counties. SIG proudly sponsors the Mississippi Municipal Salary Survey, its most recent publication in 2021.

A print and digital copy of the 2022 First Responders Salary and Benefits Survey will be available in the coming months.

If you are interested in a salary survey, contact Dr. Matt Peterson at 662-325-7010.

Special thanks to Matt Peterson, Ph.D., Tori Boatner, Austin Franks, Haydn Johnson, Tyler Jones, Megan Kueck, Blair Reed, Chris Thompson, and Kelly Waltman for assembling this research and survey results.



[Click here to access the 2021 Municipal Salary Survey.](#)

STENNIS-MONTGOMERY ASSOCIATION GOES TO D.C.

by Reagan Conner

The Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA) is a student-led organization at Mississippi State University that is sponsored by the John C. Stennis Institute of Government and Community Development (SIG). SMA is a non-partisan student group heavily involved on campus. This organization serves to provide opportunities for students to learn more about governmental and political roles at local, state, and national levels. SMA schedules guest speakers, hosts voter-registration drives, and participates in other events throughout the school year. SMA's primary goal is to allow Mississippi State University's influence in political decision-making to become as prominent as the other great successes of the "People's University." Most notably, this is accomplished each year by taking the most dedicated members of the organization on a trip to Washington D.C. to meet and network with MSU alumni and other prominent political figures.

Students wishing to visit the nation's capital must first be heavily involved in the organization by attending most meetings and events, as well as volunteering in the community. Students must write a research paper on either Senator John C. Stennis or Congressman G.V. "Sonny" Montgomery. To ensure every student has an equal opportunity to participate, SMA partners with SIG to help with the trip's cost. This year, ten students were selected to go to Washington D.C. over spring break, March 14-18. Once in D.C., students had the opportunity to see the city's sights, meet our Mississippi delegation, sit in on panels with MSU alumni and individuals that work in other areas of D.C., and attend a networking reception. This personalized experience helps many students determine if a career in D.C. or in politics is the right fit for them.

After arriving Monday afternoon, SMA used the remainder of the afternoon and evening settling into the hotel and preparing for the big day ahead. Our first full day began with breakfast with Senator Roger Wicker. Following breakfast, we had the opportunity to speak with the senator and his Chief of Staff, Michelle Barlow-Richardson, an MSU alumna. Senator Wicker spoke about his involvement and thoughts on the ongoing events in Ukraine. Mrs. Barlow-Richardson spoke about her journey to her position and life in the city. Following this meeting, the group met with Congressman Michael Guest's Chief of Staff, Jordan Downs. He offered advice on working in D.C. and gave a tour of the congressman's office. We ended the first day with dinner at Hawk n Dove with congressional staffers.



My favorite part of the trip was getting a tour of the Capitol!

JESSICA PETTIS

The next day began with a meeting with Adam Telle, an MSU alumnus, and Tennessee Senator Bill Hagerty's Chief of Staff. While students met with Telle, SMA's executive officers attended a personal meeting with Congressman Bennie Thompson. For lunch, SMA joined Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith and members of her staff at Capitol Hill's first "tablecloth restaurant," the Monocle. In the afternoon, we had meetings with Congressman Steven Palazzo and Congressman Trent Kelly. We ended the day at Capitol One Arena to watch the Washington Wizards take on the Denver Nuggets.

Our final day began with two fantastic panels at 101 Constitution Avenue, the closest commercial office building to the United States Capitol. We started with a panel of Entergy staff, including two Directors and the Vice President of Federal Governmental Affairs. They offered insight into their roles in energy policy and their experience as lobbyists. Our second panel consisted of MSU alumni, Alex Monié and Dr. Marty Fuller. Monié serves as Director of Regulatory, Tax and Domestic Economic Policy at the National Association of Manufacturers, and Fuller is a Senior Consultant at Cornerstone Government Affairs.

As a last-minute addition to our itinerary, we received a tour of the U.S. Capitol from our new acquaintances from South Dakota Senator Mike Rounds' office. A Capitol tour was not originally on the agenda, due to tour restrictions with COVID protocols. Congressman Michael Guest joined us and discussed the most pressing issues in Congress, including the conflict in Ukraine. Later in the evening, we attended the final event of the trip, a networking reception hosted at District Winery. The networking reception gave students an opportunity to speak one-on-one with individuals who work in D.C. This event allowed students with the opportunity to make important connections in D.C. and gain career advice in a less formal setting. Overall, the members of our group had a fantastic time and felt that this trip helped them gain a better sense of their future career goals.



My favorite part of the trip was listening to experts talk about how D.C. operates day by day, and getting to see Nikola Jokic play basketball in person was the cherry on top!

CHRISTIAN FULCHER

This trip opened my eyes to countless opportunities outside of Mississippi that still heavily impacts policy and people back at home.

JUSTIN CHILDS



SMA provided me avenues to make connections that secured me a summer internship in D.C. and a full-time job after graduation.

FLANNERY EGNER



MEET GRACE TROUTMAN



by Mary Martha Willson

Grace Troutman, an Undergraduate Research Assistant at the John C. Stennis Institute of Government (SIG), is from Metairie, Louisiana, a suburb of New Orleans. She is a junior majoring in psychology with minors in political science and Spanish. When she's not at the office or in class, she can be found helping others as a Supplemental Instruction program mentor and a Student Association College of Arts and Sciences Senator. She is also involved in New Maroon Camp, Shackouls Honors College, Psi Chi Honors Society, and Phi Beta Kappa Honors Society. She most recently was elected as the Stennis-Montgomery Association (SMA) President for the upcoming school year. In 2022, she received the Dean Frances Coleman Research and Writing award for her essay on the "Freedom Summer Through the Lens of Senator Stennis' Correspondence."

Troutman began working at SIG in June 2021. She has made it her mission to improve SMA's social media and improve the consistency and volume of meetings offered to members. Quite a bit of her time at SIG is spent making graphics, documenting points, and various SMA-related tasks. Troutman uses these skills to assist in SIG's marketing and research efforts. One project she began this past summer was working on a research project that analyzes women's representation in government.

“ My favorite part about SIG by far is the people. Every person at SIG is exceptional, and they encourage me to be my best and pursue my dreams. They are always quick with a joke, but just as quick with wisdom and advice. The opportunities this job has provided for me are countless, and I would not be where I am without my mentors and colleagues here. I can say with great confidence that working here was the greatest decision I made in my undergrad. ”

This summer she will intern on Capitol Hill with Congressman Trent Kelly. For future plans, she intends to pursue a second degree, either through law school or a graduate program. Immediately after she graduates, she hopes to teach in a Spanish-speaking country so she can achieve two goals in one: to travel and speak Spanish fluently. Troutman hopes to work for a nonprofit or advocacy organization that allows her to blend a number of her interests, whether that means practicing law or writing/analyzing policy.

Growing up in Louisiana, her family has always been incredibly important to her. Her mom is a teacher, and her dad works as a project manager in coastal restoration & protection for the state. Troutman is the oldest of three children and has a sister (Amelia) who is a freshman at Louisiana State University and a fifteen-year-old brother (Jake). She also has a cat (Vernie) and a dog (Ruby). In her free time, she loves to read, watch movies, spend time with her friends, and enjoy the outdoors.



UPCOMING EVENTS



Mississippi Association of Supervisors Annual Convention

*Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center
Biloxi, MS*

Mississippi Municipal League
Annual Conference
*Mississippi Coast Coliseum and Convention Center
Biloxi, MS*



Mississippi Economic Development Council Annual Conference

*Beau Rivage Resort & Casino
Biloxi, MS*

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