

In Brief



GFOA STUDENT CHAPTERS

The Key to Experiential Learning in Government Finance

BY BRIANNA MERLING

In September 2022, GFOA published a report titled “Meeting Demand for State and Local Public Finance Jobs” [available at gfoa.org/meeting-demand-public-finance], which recommended new ways of attracting and retaining talent. Wanting to support GFOA’s efforts to attract new talent to the public finance profession, a group of 16 graduate students from the George W. Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics (Romney Institute) at Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, found a quiet room and officially began BYU’s first GFOA student chapter on October 21, 2022. The group includes an array of diverse undergraduate degrees in public policy,

economics, communication, and more. A large majority of the current cohort of students are MPA graduate students sharpening their government finance skills in preparation for careers in public service.

The BYU GFOA student chapter has already initiated projects within the community to serve and connect while gaining applicable experience. “There is no better preparation for a career in government finance service than getting involved in our community right here, right now. Our GFOA student chapter provides me with opportunities to do just that,” Abbie Sanders, a BYU GFOA student chapter member, shared. Sanders is currently working as a

TOP: Fall 2022 BYU student chapter (Front row, left to right: Erick Bravo, Connor Golden, Nathaniel Loo, Abbie Sanders, Ayanda Sidzatane, Francisco Ordaz, Andres Galan Cajamarca and Vanessa Nakayiki. Back row, left to right: Brianna Merling, Cody Cheney, Junior Mavambu, Bradley Day, Brittnei Anderson, Abi Maccabee, Kaylee Hepburn and Steve Mutombo.

BOTTOM: Winter 2023 BYU student chapter (Front row, left to right: Ayanda Sidzatane, Abi Maccabee, Abbie Sanders, Taylor Nikolaus, Brianna Merling and Francisco Ordaz. Back row, left to right: David Matkin, Erick Bravo, Junior Mavambu, Cody Cheney, Yuber Miranda Macias, Connor Golden and Kaylee Hepburn.

finance associate for Utah County and has found that her GFOA membership has enhanced her work experience. "I was reading a book published by the GFOA just this morning to help me conduct a cost analysis of a government department!"

The student chapter is guided and mentored by two longtime GFOA members and BYU faculty, Francisco Ordaz and David Matkin. Ordaz is the director of MPA career development, and Matkin is a professor at the Romney Institute. Both contribute their expertise from careers rooted in finance to student chapter members seeking and fulfilling projects.

With the GFOA student chapter well underway, GFOA student members are turning their attention to building a strong network with other GFOA members and fellow student chapters. They are planning to invite other BYU students to join the chapter and contribute their experiences to projects. Erick Bravo, a current BYU GFOA student member and graduate student, said: "I would encourage everyone interested in public and nonprofit organizations to join GFOA. Whether they are dealing with humanitarian issues, leading a department, or looking at policy initiatives, knowing which practices promote financial stability is tantamount to ensuring success. GFOA has something of value to learn for everyone who would like help developing their career."

Connor Golden, the current president of the GFOA student chapter, said: "I see the BYU GFOA student chapter having a very bright future. With more student involvement and resources being made available, I believe our chapter will




"We encourage universities across the United States to create GFOA student chapters to support the career development of future government finance officers."

CONNOR GOLDEN, CURRENT BYU STUDENT CHAPTER PRESIDENT

continue to provide valuable education and networking opportunities for its members and community." Golden foresees the chapter expanding its reach by engaging more with other universities and organizations to foster the collaboration of best government finance practices.

"Next fall semester, we look forward to participating in GFOA's fellowship program so our student chapter members can be matched with local governments to help them prepare a popular annual financial report for GFOA award consideration. We also look forward to being matched with local governments that are interested in aligning their financial policies with GFOA best practices. We are grateful to GFOA for supporting GFOA student chapters and their willingness to

match our student chapter members with GFOA professionals who are interested in mentoring them. We encourage universities across the United States to create GFOA student chapters to support the career development of future government finance officers," Ordaz said.

The BYU GFOA student chapter welcomes opportunities to support GFOA members in researching issues that are important to them, and we look forward to contributing to GFOA's mission of advancing excellence in public finance. Our GFOA student chapter can be reached at mpacareers@byu.edu. 

Brianna Merling is vice president of the GFOA Student Chapter and a first-year MPA student at the George W. Romney Institute of Public Service and Ethics at Brigham Young University.