



Hobby School of Public Affairs
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

2024 Public Officials of the Year Award Luncheon

FRIDAY, APRIL 19, 2024
STUDENT CENTER SOUTH
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



PROGRAM

MASTER OF CEREMONIES

James Davidson (M.P.A. '12)

INVOCATION

Leonard Chan (M.P.A. '09), President, Hobby School Alumni Association

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

WELCOME

Jim Granato, Dean, Hobby School of Public Affairs

RECOGNITION OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

Sara Donatto, Executive Director of Operations and Local Relations, Office of Governmental Relations and Community, UH System

PRESENTATION OF AWARDS

Peter Koelling, MPA Program Director

REMARKS FROM THE HONOREES

KATHLEEN RUBINSTEIN BEST PAPER AWARDS

CLOSING

About the Master of Public Administration

A Master of Public Administration degree from the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston provides a high level of training and education for aspiring public servants, public managers and nonprofit professionals to address complex societal challenges and lead organizations innovatively and ethically into the future.

2024 HONOREES

Since 2011, the Master of Public Administration program has honored local elected officials, public servants and practitioners who exemplify the highest standards in public service at an annual awards luncheon. The ceremony benefits the scholarship fund for Master of Public Administration candidates. These exceptional public service leaders improve their communities through dynamic problem-solving, collaboration and innovative and ethical leadership.



AUSTIN BLEESS

City of Jersey Village

Austin Bleess is the city manager for Jersey Village. He oversees the city's day-to-day operations, leads and manages city employees and administers the city's multimillion-dollar operating budget.

His proactive approach to grant acquisition has increased the city's financial well-being and contributed to projects benefiting Jersey Village residents, including federal flood mitigation funds. By spearheading the integration of AI technology, Bleess's efforts have enhanced efficiency, streamlined city processes and improved governance through solutions-oriented decision-making. He has also been vital in promoting employee wellness policies and improved healthcare benefits.

Before joining the Jersey Village administration in 2017, Bleess served as city manager in Caribou, Maine and city administrator in Winnebago, Minnesota. He holds a Master of Public Administration from Walden University in Minneapolis and a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from Bethel University in St. Paul.



GREG BABST

Fort Bend County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management

Greg Babst is the emergency management coordinator of the Fort Bend County Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM). He oversees all aspects of the county's emergency and disaster planning, response, and recovery efforts. Babst began working with HSEM in 2021, first as an emergency management specialist and later as an assistant deputy manager and interim manager.

Babst and his team manage the county's event and incident management resources, which support 17 jurisdictions and more than a million residents, including those in the City of Katy and Sugar Land. In addition to leading various multi-partner safety initiatives and training, his collaborations with local and regional jurisdictions and nonprofits have helped elevate the county's programs to a national scale.

Babst served 24 years in the United States Coast Guard (USCG), where he was promoted to chief warrant officer, earned surfman status, one of the highest qualifications in the USCG for boat operations in extreme conditions, and developed extensive leadership and tactical experience.



JAMES HUGUENARD

Memorial Villages Police Department

James Huguenard is a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Memorial Villages Police Department (MVPD), which provides services to Bunker Hill Village, Hunters Creek Village and Piney Point Village. In his ninth year as commissioner, including two terms as chairman, he has played a significant role in developing budgets, establishing policies and procedures and providing departmental oversight of its personnel and operations.

His contributions include work on redrafting the departmental policy manual, leading to accreditation of the MVPD by the Texas Police Chiefs Association. He has been involved in developing and implementing the department's strategic capital plan to upgrade dispatch telecommunications systems, make infrastructure changes to the station and acquire new records and technological systems. Huguenard took a leadership role in improving the MVPD Texas Municipal Retirement System Plan, including employee service credits and cost of living adjustments. Huguenard received his undergraduate and law degrees from Baylor University.



OLIVERA JANKOVSKA

City of Houston, Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement

Olivera Jankovska is the director of the Houston Mayor's Office of Education and Youth Engagement, a unit dedicated to empowering Houston's youth through programs addressing various needs. In her role, Jankovska manages a budget of \$7.3 million and leverages strategic initiatives and public-private partnerships to create a city-wide educational strategy. She uses research and data analysis to support best practices and align policies and resources.

Jankovska led the bid for Houston to become the first Child-Friendly City in the U.S. as designated by UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. The humanitarian effort focuses on addressing the unique needs of vulnerable children within urban communities.

Jankovska previously served as UNICEF USA's Community Engagement Associate for the Southwest Region, providing youth with the resources and skills to be effective global citizens. She has received recognition for her contributions, including the President's Volunteer Service Award. Jankovska holds a master's degree in applied economics from Virginia Tech and a bachelor's degree in business from the University of Arkansas.

2024 KATHLEEN P. RUBINSTEIN BEST PAPER AWARDS



DAHLIA CHAUDHURY, BEST SHORT PAPER AWARD

"The Administrative State"

In this short memo, Dahlia Chaudhury explores the nature of the administrative state and its impact on public management. Chaudhury considers the big questions of public managers, drawing on theories of Madisonian politics and structural choice politics to consider the nature, role and competing priorities of public managers.



ELISSA MILLER, BEST LONG PAPER AWARD

"Evaluating HISD's NES Program as Scientific Management"

In this lengthy memo, Elissa Miller applies organizational theory to examine education policies introduced since the state takeover of Houston Independent School District. Specifically, Miller examines the new education system (NES), a set of reforms that included changes to school schedules, hiring and termination practices, pay structures, disciplinary procedures, curriculum choices and assessment practices. Miller illustrates how the NES program closely aligns with principles of scientific management and offers instructive insights on the limitations of scientific management when applied to educational contexts.

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