O'Neill Onward

O'NEILL SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS ALUMNI MAGAZINE **FALL 2025**

BRINGING BISON BACK

Alyssa Nyberg, BSES'94, MSES'95, is restoring balance to the ecosystem and reconnecting us to our state's history

At O'Neill, we cultivate **tomorrow's leaders**, one student at a time.

The **O'Neill Alumni Association Scholarship** exists to support undergraduate and graduate students from both the Bloomington and Indianapolis campuses. Your gift supports the leaders who will strengthen communities for years to come. Scan the QR code to make your impact now.

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O'NEILL
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS
Bloomington | Indianapolis

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WELCOME

We're thrilled to share highlights from an incredible year at the O'Neill School. Together, we've continued to build on our strengths—earning top rankings in public and environmental affairs across both campuses, welcoming a record number of students, and adding new faculty who enrich our vibrant and engaged community.

In these pages, you'll see what makes O'Neill so special: our outstanding students and alumni, our first-class faculty, and our evolving programs that prepare students to lead and make a difference in a changing world. You'll find stories of alumni who are shaping their fields, such as this year's award recipients and Alyssa Nyberg, whose prairie restoration work is transforming landscapes and communities. You'll also read about new academic offerings, including our Master of Public Policy degree, and the many ways our students are making an impact—through internships, research, and community engagement across Indiana and beyond.

Our progress continues to be driven by the people who make up the O'Neill community—students who are eager to serve, faculty who inspire and innovate, and alumni who give back and lead by example. I'm deeply grateful for your continued interest, engagement, and support.

We are fortunate to be part of a community that takes on challenges with courage and creativity, relies on one another, and works every day to make the world a brighter place.

Siân Mooney

Warmly,
Siân Mooney, Ph.D.
Dean

ALUMNI HONORS

We are proud to recognize our O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs graduates who have distinguished themselves through their professional achievements, leadership, and service. These outstanding alumni not only exemplify the values of the O'Neill School but also serve as accomplished role models for today's students and for the broader community.

Early Impact Award

Rishard Allen, BSAM'17, is an emerging philanthropic professional, creative consultant, and curator whose leadership practice is deeply focused on promoting, protecting, and preserving culture—particularly culture at risk of erasure, censure, and appropriation. He currently serves as the grants and community manager for the Pop Culture Collaborative, where he spearheads an innovative grantmaking strategy that harnesses the influential power of popular culture to reshape narratives about marginalized communities and work toward a more just and pluralist future. Rishard holds a B.S. in Arts Management from the O'Neill School and an M.A. in Philanthropic Studies from the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy.

Distinguished Alumni Award

Terry Babcock-Lumish, MPA'99, is the sixth—and first female—executive secretary of the Harry S. Truman Scholarship Foundation. Before leading Truman, she founded and led Islay for 15 years, providing strategic guidance for philanthropic foundations and other mission-driven organizations across six continents. During the past 30 years, Babcock-Lumish has served in local, state, and federal government for both Democratic and Republican administrations, and as a researcher for two books by former Vice President Al Gore. From 1999 to 2001, she was a Presidential Management Fellow at the Treasury Department and in the President's Council of Economic Advisers. She completed her B.S. at Carnegie Mellon University, MPA as a Lilly Fellow at the O'Neill School, and D.Phil. at the University of Oxford.

Distinguished Alumni Award

Scott Dolson, BSPA'88, is in his sixth year as IU's Vice President and Director of Intercollegiate Athletics. He spent the previous 11 years as the department's deputy director of athletics and chief operating officer. Dolson has been involved in a leadership role on the Big Ten and NCAA levels. He recently completed a two-year stint as the chairperson of the Big Ten Athletic Directors Group, and he was also named to the NCAA Division I Baseball Selection Committee in January 2024. The Michigan City, Indiana, native graduated from IU with a B.S. in Management from the O'Neill School.

Distinguished Alumni Award

Cherrish Pryor, MPA'05, earned her MPA in Public Management from O'Neill Indianapolis in 2005. Within three years, she joined the Indianapolis-Marion County City-County Council and was later elected to the Indiana House of Representatives, where she now serves as floor leader for the Democratic Caucus and as a member of the Indiana Black Legislative Caucus. Beyond the Statehouse, she co-founded Hoosier Women Forward to train and empower women civic leaders and has served numerous nonprofit and public organizations. Her honors include the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award from President Joe Biden and Legislator of the Year from the National Black Caucus of State Legislators.

Nominate an alum

We invite you to nominate outstanding O'Neill School alumni for our highest honors. These awards recognize graduates who exemplify excellence, leadership, and impact in their fields and communities. Undergraduate, master's, and doctoral alumni are all eligible for consideration. Nominations are accepted year-round, with award recipients selected in early spring. By submitting a nomination, you help us highlight and celebrate the remarkable achievements of our alumni and inspire the next generation of O'Neill leaders. Do you have someone in mind who has made a meaningful difference? We encourage you to share their story and submit a nomination today.

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O’Neill alum restores Indiana’s prairies

While Indiana University Bloomington is bringing back the bison as its mascot, a graduate of the O’Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs has been bringing bison back to the state’s prairies and improving Indiana’s ecology for nearly a decade.

Alyssa Nyberg is the preserve coordinator of the Efroymson Prairie at Kankakee Sands in Northwest Indiana, an 8,400-acre nature preserve owned and managed by the Indiana chapter of The Nature Conservancy. Nyberg, who earned her undergraduate and master’s degrees in environmental science from the O’Neill School, has spent the past 25 years restoring the preserve.

The bison were introduced to manage the prairie, and their arrival has led to a greater diversity of both plants and animals. For instance, as the bison graze, they lower the height of the grass, which provides an opportunity for a larger variety of wildflowers and grasses to grow, which attract a wider range of insects and birds. The bison also create “bison wallows,” which are shallow depressions created when they roll around on dry ground. The shallow basins hold rainwater that attracts animals and amphibians to the area.

“As an undergraduate and graduate student at IU, I studied ecology,” Nyberg said. “The relationship of life forms to one another still excites me today—whether that be the relationship between different plants, or between plants and the animals, animals with other animals, or the relationship of people to the natural world. They are all so important.”

Once upon a time, millions of bison could be found on the prairies throughout the United States, an integral part of the American landscape and Indiana's history. One was even included on the state's first seal. Due to loss of habitat and overhunting, their numbers dwindled. The last known wild bison in the state of Indiana was shot in Orange County in 1830.

For more than 180 years, bison were rarely seen in the state. But in 2016, a herd of 23 was introduced to Kankakee Sands, making it the easternmost Nature Conservancy preserve where bison can be found. Thanks to the hard work of Nyberg and her colleagues, the original herd has grown to more than 100, grazing on 1,100 acres of prairie.

"Bison remind us that we have a history, and that it is a history worth remembering and sharing with the next generation," Nyberg said. "We hope the bison at Kankakee Sands will inspire us all to learn more about and appreciate prairies and conservation, as well as our local and national history."

Nyberg's love of nature began when she was growing up in rural Ohio, but she was unsure of her academic direction when she arrived at IU. Through the exploratory program, she learned about the O'Neill School and was "amazed" at the number of career options in environmental science. Nyberg went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees in that discipline.

"O'Neill gave me the confidence to step beyond what was comfortable and reach for what I wanted," Nyberg said. "The work is complicated and integrated, from land management to habitat improvements. We're managing prairies with grazing bison and cattle while welcoming people to share in the beauty of Kankakee Sands."

But the work is rewarding.

"A career in conservation is much like the tagline of the U.S. Peace Corps: It's the toughest job you'll ever love," Nyberg said. "It can be physically, intellectually and, at times, emotionally challenging. But if you have the ability to be employed in work that you love and were trained for, it can be an extremely fulfilling career and life."

Watching the bison herd grow and start to display behaviors common to bison in the wild is another sign that Nyberg's work is moving in the right direction.

"I've been part of this prairie and wetland restoration almost since it began more than two decades ago," Nyberg said. "I remember first walking onto one of the farm fields at Kankakee Sands and thinking, 'Our job is to one day make this a fully functioning prairie,' and that's what it has become."

David Swindell returns to Public Policy Institute

For David Swindell, the O'Neill School is in his blood.

His mother served on the Indianapolis faculty in the 1990s, and his stepfather, Mark Rosentraub, was an associate dean who helped launch the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment—the organization that would later become the IU Public Policy Institute.

"The apple ended up not falling far from the tree," he said.

Swindell earned his Ph.D. in Public Policy from O'Neill Bloomington in 1997 and conducted his field research at CUPE under Professor Emeritus Roger Parks. After building a distinguished career across several states and universities, he has returned to Indiana to lead PPI—a move he described as a homecoming.

"The O'Neill School represents an incredible collection of intellectual talent among its faculty and a pool of students committed to public service," he said. "I had always wanted to come back to Indiana to be part of that, but the opportunity to also direct the IU Public Policy Institute magnified the appeal."

For the past 12 years, Swindell directed the Center for Urban Innovation at Arizona State University, building partnerships that connected research and practice. At PPI, he plans to expand statewide engagement and deepen collaboration with faculty and students across the O'Neill School and IU.

His research on economic and community development reflects his belief that thriving communities are built not only through economic growth but through meaningful human connections.

"We are thrilled to welcome Dr. Swindell home to O'Neill," said Dean Siân Mooney. "His vision and commitment to community will strengthen the O'Neill School and PPI, as well as the lives of those we serve across the state of Indiana."

New Master of Public Policy program

The O'Neill School has launched a new Master of Public Policy (MPP) program for students ready to analyze, evaluate, and shape effective public policies. Building on O'Neill's top-ranked MPA foundation, the STEM-designated MPP emphasizes quantitative policy analysis and design, preparing graduates for careers in public, private, and nonprofit sectors. Students can focus on one of six concentrations: Health Policy, Environmental Policy, Energy and Climate Policy, Social Policy, Equity and Social Justice, or Public Finance.

New O'Neill Center for Leadership in Public Service

The O'Neill School has launched the Paul H. O'Neill Center for Leadership in Public Service, a transformative initiative dedicated to preparing current and future leaders for service to others and the common good. Established as part of a $30 million gift from former U.S. Treasury Secretary and IU alumnus Paul H. O'Neill, the center builds on the school's strengths while developing new programs to broaden its reach and deepen its impact across Bloomington and Indianapolis.

Professor Sergio Fernandez, an internationally recognized scholar in public management and organizational behavior, has been named the center's inaugural director. Fernandez brings extensive expertise in public sector leadership and will oversee initiatives that include leadership development programs, research collaborations, and student engagement with experienced leaders.

The center supports student leadership training through programs such as the NextGen and O'Neill Leadership Programs, public service scholarships, and the Washington Leadership and D.C. Accelerator Programs, providing students with skills and hands-on opportunities to integrate public service into their careers. It also expands executive education through new cohort-based and online courses and international partnerships that equip professionals with advanced leadership skills. Through initiatives like the D.C. Colloquium, Executives in Residence, and service-learning projects, the center bridges academic research and real-world practice.

The O'Neill Center for Leadership in Public Service cultivates ethical, effective, and impactful public leaders—supporting both emerging and experienced professionals—and advances the O'Neill School's mission to strengthen society through public service.

New interdisciplinary institute to tackle global environmental challenges

The O'Neill School and the IU College of Arts and Sciences have launched the Environment, Society, and Sustainability Institute (ESSI)—a new, interdisciplinary hub addressing urgent environmental challenges. Formerly known as the Integrated Program in the Environment, ESSI unites faculty, students, and researchers to advance sustainability through innovative research, education, and collaboration.

Rural hospital executive brings O'Neill lessons to frontlines of healthcare

As vice president of human resources at Putnam County Hospital near Greencastle, Indiana, Erin Mullin helps solve employee challenges while improving healthcare access for the community. When her CEO encouraged her to expand her impact beyond human resources, Mullin pursued the online Master of Science in Healthcare Management, a joint program from the IU Kelley School of Business and the O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs. The program's flexibility allowed her to balance full-time work with graduate studies.

Through the program, Mullin led projects addressing rural healthcare needs. One examined Putnam County's community healthcare needs assessment, highlighting gaps in preventive care and vaccination due to transportation and insurance barriers. Her team proposed a mobile model to deliver basic medical services, which was shared with hospital leadership and could inform similar solutions at other rural hospitals.

For her practicum and capstone, Mullin partnered with IU Health's Alzheimer's and Dementia Resource Service, helping design a program to connect caregivers and patients with available resources. She hopes to replicate the initiative statewide through Indiana's Area 10 Agencies on Aging.

"Before starting the program, I was in meetings where I knew a little bit about the clinical operations side, but not enough to make an impact," Mullin said. "Now I have this solid foundation, where I went to IU, learned it, tried it, and applied it."

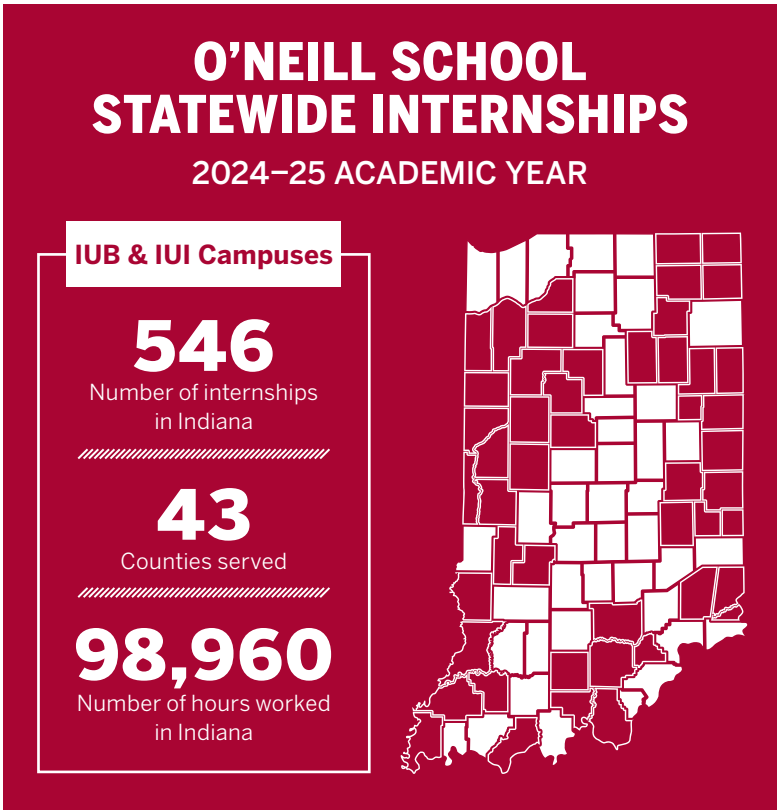
O’Neill student internships deliver real-world experience and statewide impact

O’Neill students are using their education to strengthen communities across Indiana. During the 2024–25 academic year, students from our Bloomington and Indianapolis campuses completed 546 internships in 43 counties, home to more than 75% of Hoosiers. Together, they contributed nearly 99,000 hours of service—an estimated $1.6 million in workforce impact statewide.

In Marion County, where O’Neill’s Indianapolis location places students close to state and local decisionmakers, interns are shaping real-world outcomes. Public Management and Leadership major Madelynn Coy gained policy experience as a legislative assistant for the Indiana State Senate. Criminal Justice major Nyklas Bussard joined both the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives and the Indiana State Police, gaining firsthand experience through investigations and ride-alongs.

Across Indiana, O’Neill interns are building stronger, more sustainable communities. At Riley Children’s Foundation, Nonprofit Management and Leadership student Jessyka Brown supported donor engagement and storytelling. Health Management student Gracyn Bogie interned with Trilogy Health Services, learning about healthcare operations and compliance. Cameron Schilling, an MPA-MSES student and McKinney Climate Fellow, helped expand access to energy-efficient heat pumps.

Through impactful internships, O’Neill students are gaining professional experience, advancing community goals, and making a meaningful difference across Indiana.



O'Neill Online MPA students put passion into action during O'Neill Online Week, tackling real-world projects for the Mypath Trail System and Daviess County Resource Center.

O'Neill Onward is going online!

At O'Neill, we pride ourselves on turning challenges into opportunities. As part of our commitment to sustainability and connecting with our community where they are, *O'Neill Onward* will now bring news, highlights, and stories straight to your inbox each quarter.

As we make this transition, we want to hear from you! Share your successes, update your information, and let us know what you want to read about and how you want to engage. Scan the QR code to complete our alumni engagement survey.

We can't wait to strengthen our connection with you.

go.iu.edu/OASurvey

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Development and Alumni Relations
1315 E. Tenth Street, Suite 312, Bloomington, IN 47405
801 W. Michigan Street, BS 3025, Indianapolis, IN 46202