

Monthly CAPS Feature: Shining a light on one of CAPS instructors



Amy Cole Buehler is an adjunct professor and program coordinator for the Master of Nonprofit Management at the School of Continuing & Professional Studies (CAPS). She recently became the president of Wings of Hope, a humanitarian aviation organization. Buehler previously held the position of interim president and director of development at the nonprofit organization.

Amy has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Studies, Spanish, and History from the University of Missouri-Columbia. She received her Master of Arts in International Relations from Webster University.

Learn more about her journey with CAPS and how Amy uses her real-world experience to educate students about Nonprofit Management at WashU.

How did you come to work at CAPS?

I started in May 2008. I became the program coordinator of the Master of Arts in Nonprofit Management at the School of Continuing & Professional Studies (CAPS), formerly University College, in July of 2013. I've been doing work for this program for 15 years.

For my first evening class, ...I did it, and it turned out that I loved it. I loved teaching with the students, working with them one-on-one, and working with them as a group. When I was asked to teach again, I said yes, and I have said yes every time I have been asked to teach a different class.

I've taught quite a few courses in the program. I enjoy it so much.

How do you incorporate your professional experience when you're teaching in the classroom?

Oh, it's everything that I have to give back. My experiences throughout my career have been vital in the way that I can teach, but also offer real-life anecdotes of how I tackled organizational issues, such as what an organization went through or how a board handled problems.

I weave my stories in and out of every bit of the curriculum. I think one of the questions I'm asked the most is how do I do all of this? I'm also asked how I work full-time at Wings of Hope, and then also teach and run the program, while also raising a family. It's the joy of being able to do that and being able to tell my story and how I got to where I was.

My dad said that I got into the perfect profession. I started really in fund development, so I was raising money for organizations and, he teased me and said, 'Amy, this is the perfect profession for you, because you've been asking me for money since you were able to talk.'

There wasn't a program like CAPS has now when I graduated from college in 1988 – there was nothing. You could not get a degree in nonprofit management. There weren't computers or cell phones.

It is incredible to have degree programs that focus on nonprofit management, fundraising, the importance of the nonprofit sector, and how the sector itself lifts and helps the community. It's an honor to be able to do this work.

What has been your experience in instructing modern learners who have to balance school, work and life?

I really like teaching adult students. They have similar situations to what I have, so I think it's easy for someone like me who has been through working full-time, raising children and taking care of a home. I can relate to them about things going on, like having a sick two-year-old kid so you have to miss class and having to be flexible with meeting later in the week. Adult students have the same challenges, but they want to be there and learn so they soak stuff up the course material quickly.

What motivates you to teach at CAPS?

Each student has their own success story, whether that is what you would see out in the public, like my former student Gabe Angieri who is now the executive director of Arch Grants, or the student that just wants to learn about kind of next level fund development, or wants to understand the legal issues that nonprofit organizations face.

You don't have to be the president of an organization to attend this program. Each student is special, has a goal and a drive that shows they want to be there. This makes it worth it every time. I can tell you that sometimes getting up on a Saturday morning at 7 o'clock to drive down to school doesn't sound very appealing, but once I get there, I'm energized. And when I leave, I'm energized.

The students discover new things as we go, and they're very talkative. When you get a room of people together who have the same experiences at their positions and jobs, most of the people in the program are working full-time.

They are looking to maybe elevate their careers, move up a little bit, or just learn how to run a nonprofit organization. They ask questions like, 'How do you set one up,' and 'What are the components of a nonprofit?' From there, they take what they have learned and then they can kind of mold their career path.

I take a lot of joy from that.

Who is the best fit for the Master of Arts in Nonprofit Management?

The Nonprofit Management Master's Program is designed for experienced nonprofit professionals seeking advancement in the field, those new to the sector looking for entry-level positions, and professionals from another field who are looking to make a transition to the nonprofit sector. The program prepares students to work effectively in the field while enhancing the organizational management skills needed to lead today's productive mission-driven organizations.