Bush School researchers to present study on local Red River flooding

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Students from Texas A&M's prestigious Bush School of Government & Public Service are taking a close look at localized flooding of the Red River to offer potential solutions to government, citizens, and businesses.

Eight graduate students from the Master of Public Service and Administration (MPSA) degree program began their capstone research project in September after Sheriff Steve Prator solicited their assistance through Bush School professor and fellow Shreveporter Dr. Arnold Vedlitz. Now after eight months of research and preparation, the students are set to present their findings to Prator and other parish and city officials at 10 a.m. May 2 at the Caddo Sheriff's Re-Entry Facility. The facility is located at 1121 Forum Drive in Shreveport.

"We are very lucky to have this comprehensive look at our river and the researchers' responses to the increasingly more frequent flooding problem," Prator said.

Ali Mustapha, administrator of the Caddo Parish Levee District; Rich Brontoli, executive director of the Red River Valley Association; and Mary Bicknell, local attorney and environmentalist, were all instrumental in bringing the student researchers to Shreveport.

Over the past months, students have conducted some 50 interviews with citizens and key people in the community, including the Sheriff and other leaders in government, business and industry, and non-profits. The research has included data from the 2016-17 LSU Manship School flood survey; a review of literature including books, reports, and documents on urban flooding and the history of flooding in Caddo Parish; case studies of urban flooding in other communities and the best practices for mitigation and recovery; and a review of surveys and technical studies to identify common problems, themes, and solutions.

By participating in a Bush School capstone project, Caddo Parish has become "part of the instructional process at Texas A&M," Vedlitz said, and in exchange will receive a management study valued at around $250,000. "It's as good or better than those produced in the private sector," he said. The cost to Caddo Parish was around $6,000 for travel and production costs, paid for by the Caddo Parish Levee Board. Similar research projects have been conducted throughout the United States and internationally for other local, state, and federal public agencies and non-profits.

Since 2002, second-year Bush School MPSA students have participated in capstone research courses, allowing them to tackle real-world problems or projects, often while working in conjunction with a government agency or nonprofit organization. "Designed to test the knowledge and abilities students have developed through their previous classes and experiences, capstones necessitate strong teamwork, careful research, writing ability, and often a large amount of ingenuity in identifying ways to approach an issue or find a solution," according to the school.

Students participating in the Red River research project are Steven Hebert, Jordan Christman, Elizabeth Thomas, Amanda Sumner, Mario Martinez, Shelby Poncik, Brandon Kallenbach, and Katie Fields.

Vedlitz said he hopes the students' research will provide Caddo Parish with a report that will be useful in identifying problems and giving community leaders a head start at identifying solutions. The student researchers, in turn, will receive a unique educational opportunity, a chance to work with Shreveport and Caddo Parish leaders, and an opportunity to network and build long-term relationships. But most importantly, they will experience firsthand President George H.W. Bush's philosophy … that public service is a noble calling.

Note: If you would like to interview the Sheriff about the study prior to next week's presentation please contact Media Relations.