Searching for internships that make a real difference, many students often overlook Georgia’s local communities in favor of bigger cities and bigger agencies, but this past summer, several SPIA students put their talents to use at the local level, gaining first-hand experience through high-impact projects throughout the state.

Facilitated by UGA’s Archway Partnership, these internships place students in communities with unique needs. The Archway Partnership is an outreach program that connects Georgia communities with higher education resources through faculty located in portal communities throughout the state. These communities determine their priorities in a grassroots way and then Archway helps them find the students, faculty and resources to tackle these priorities.

"The MPA program at UGA is among the nation's best, so when issues around public administration and policy arise in the Archway communities, we know that the most accomplished faculty and brightest students are working with the community," said Matt Bishop, Archway's coordinator of operations. "Partnering with the MPA program is really a win-win for Archway - it gives communities access to the best resources within the field of public administration and policy, and it provides invaluable learning experiences for MPA students as they interface with high priority community issues and opportunities."

Since Archway's birth four years ago, MPA graduate students have been integral in several projects throughout Georgia communities. Following are several examples from this past summer.

Hart County school administrators want to see an increase in their overall SAT scores. Carrie Shafer, an MPA graduate student working with the Hart County school system, researched SAT initiatives in place within Georgia counties similar to Hart.

Shafer identified what other counties were or were not doing in terms of SAT initiatives and created a list of potential options for Hart County Schools to consider as they work to further enhance student SAT scores. Shafer also learned that many other districts get higher participation by providing incentives to students who use the preparatory program.

"We are very appreciative of the work of Carrie Shafer and the Department of Public Administration and Policy," said David Hicks, the Hart County Schools superintendent. "Through her efforts, we are able to see what other school systems are doing and adapt our educational policies and practices to further help our students excel on the SAT."

Also stationed working out of Hart County, Andrew Farnsworth worked with the Hart County Tourism Task Force to gather data for a potential Georgia State Tourism Foundation grant application. Farnsworth worked closely with the city manager, chamber of commerce and the county administrator to seek out a project that would benefit both Hart County and the City of Hartwell.

Moreover, Farnsworth has been working closely with the Tourism Taskforce to improve local brochures, develop a strategic plan to promote tourism and develop a tourism workshop to be held in late September. Several local leaders credit Farnsworth with bringing many new ideas and new energy to planning sessions as his ideas and skills helped broaden tourism planning.

Alex Morrison’s internship in Clayton County helped the economic development office put together demographic information that will allow the county to provide more accurate work force information to businesses seeking to locate in Clayton. Before Morrison compiled this data, businesses would have to wait days and weeks to receive requested information, but Morrison’s worked has consolidated data and made it easier for local leaders to share information with interested businesses.

For Morrison, economic development means truly understanding an area, its policies and its culture, in order to best understand how to bring successful growth to a city or county. Because each Archway internship allows students to work closely with government officials and local leaders, students are made part of the process and benefit from being given responsibilities they may not find in larger internships, said Dennis Epps, Archway's director of Operations.

"Masters of Public Administration students bring a wealth of experience from their coursework relative to working with government entities and not-for-profit organizations," Epps said. "The ‘MPA programs provides a depth and breadth of training that allows students to quickly and readily plug-in to community needs and to effectively plan, organize, conduct and evaluate activities that lead to the attainment of community goals and objectives."

For information on how you can get involved with Archway, please contact Robin Lunsford, Program Coordinator, at 706-542-1422 or robins@uga.edu.