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## Research Note: Erna Gelles

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## RESEARCH NOTE

Erna Gelles



PHOTO: GALAXY STUDIOS

One of the great debates in contemporary American politics is the role of the state. The 1990s has been a time in which government — its size and its effectiveness — has come under attack. For many the answer to a broad range of economic and social ills is privatization, in the transfer of public sector responsibility to the private sector. Erna Gelles of the Department of Political Science is deeply involved with her research on this critical topic of public-private responsibility. Erna, who last year received her Ph.D from the University of Georgia, wrote her dissertation (with support from the Aspen Institute's Non-profit Sector Research Fund) on non-profit versus for-profit child care providers. In this dissertation, she concluded that the move toward privatization in our society needs more study since she found great divergence in the quality of care provided by private sector operators. This raises concerns about the possible lack of understanding on the part of consumers who utilize private day care services.

Erna is pursuing her interest in privatization and the role of non-profits with the preparation for publication of a paper she delivered at the Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Action. She is also busy preparing seven short articles on the nonprofit sector for Holt's forthcoming *International Encyclopedia of Public Administration*.

Erna's involvement in research on the public-private relationship in our society fits nicely with her responsibilities as lead faculty member in the development of a public administration master's degree program at Bridgewater. Upon her arrival on campus in the fall of 1993, Erna went right to work drafting an MPA proposal. Her professionalism and perseverance paid off since the MPA proposal is now working its way through the Higher Education Coordinating Council. Erna is currently involved in documenting local interest in the program and preparing a series of outreach efforts to alert the region to the new program.

Erna's interest in public administration and public policy has led to a third area of interest. She is currently working on a paper which documents the contributions of women to women's policy issues in the Congress. With a summer research grant from the Center for Research and Teaching (CART), Erna expects to complete her study, adding a third dimension to her professional life.

Erna's untiring dedication to public administration ensures that the new master's degree program will get off to a fine start, and will be anchored by someone who is committed to preparing the next generation of public officials and civil servants.