

THOMAS A. BRYER, Ph.D.

Senior Civic & Institutional Leader | Democracy, Civic Culture, and Public Purpose

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EXECUTIVE PROFILE

Mission-driven executive and internationally recognized thought leader with experience leading mission-driven organizations, stewarding complex cultural and civic assets, and ensuring long-term financial and organizational sustainability. Proven record of strategic planning, executive team leadership, donor and board engagement, and public representation. Proven leader in translating values into strategy. Extensive experience partnering with boards, funders, governments, nonprofits, and academic institutions to steward complex public and philanthropic resources, manage multi-sector initiatives, and cultivate high-trust, learning-oriented organizational cultures. Trusted leader known for balancing preservation of legacy with operational excellence and forward-looking innovation.

PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY

I lead institutions as stewards of public trust. My approach centers on strong governance partnerships, clear strategic priorities, disciplined financial management, and an organizational culture rooted in service, accountability, and collaboration. I believe enduring institutions honor their legacy while continuously adapting to serve future generations, strengthening community connection, and ensuring long-term relevance and sustainability.

CORE LEADERSHIP & IMPACT AREAS

- Mission-Driven Executive Leadership & Strategy
- Integration of Experiential and Scientific Ways of Knowing
- Board Partnership, Fiduciary Stewardship, and Generative Governance
- Organizational Culture, Learning, and Talent Development
- Civic & Democratic Renewal
- Philanthropic, Government, and Cross-Sector Partnerships
- Thought Leadership, Convening, and Public Engagement
- Evaluation, Assessment, and Learning Systems
- Public visibility, media engagement, and community relations

SIGNATURE LEADERSHIP OUTCOMES

- Stewarded more than \$4 million in externally funded, multi-year initiatives supported by federal agencies, state governments, philanthropic organizations, and nonprofit partners.
- Principal Investigator or Co-Principal Investigator on large-scale initiatives funded by the National Science Foundation, National Park Service, AmeriCorps, state agencies, and international funders.

- Designed and led cross-sector coalitions addressing democratic performance, civic trust, volunteerism, migration, environmental justice, and community resilience.
- Built learning-oriented organizations and projects integrating rigorous evaluation with values-based purpose.
- Served as a trusted partner to boards and advisory bodies in fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY (ODU) — Norfolk, Virginia

Senior Civic & Institutional Leader; Professor, School of Public Service (2026-Present)

Launched the Center for Civic Lands and Democratic Stewardship, a center devoted to exploring and strengthening the democratic and civic potential of public lands locally, nationally, and around the world.

UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA (UCF) — Orlando, Florida

Senior Civic & Institutional Leader; Pegasus Professor of Public Administration (2007–2026)

Provide senior leadership within one of the nation’s largest public universities, advancing its civic mission and public purpose locally, nationally, and internationally. Serve as founding co-chair of the Center for Social and Civic Prosperity (2024–2026) and previously as Director of Community-Engaged Scholarship (2020–2024) and Director of the Center for Public and Nonprofit Management (2011–2016).

- Founded, scaled, and led university-wide centers and initiatives focused on civic engagement, nonprofit leadership, and cross-sector collaboration.
- Managed strategy, budgets, staffing, and partnerships for complex civic and community-facing programs.
- Represented the university to federal agencies, local and state governments, philanthropic organizations, and international partners.
- Mentored faculty, staff, and emerging leaders; built interdisciplinary and cross-sector teams.
- Recipient of UCF’s highest faculty honor, the Pegasus Professor Award (2024).

INTERNATIONAL & NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

- Fulbright Core Scholar (Lithuania) and Fulbright Specialist (Russia), supporting research, teaching, and institutional capacity-building.
- Professor and Chief Researcher, Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania).
- Visiting Professor, Edge Hill University (United Kingdom), Stellenbosch University (South Africa), and University of Tallinn (Estonia)

SELECTED FUNDING & RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

- AmeriCorps VISTA Programs — more than \$1.1 million in multi-year funding supporting community capacity and volunteerism.
- National Science Foundation — \$199,999 lead award (with total multinational project funding of approximately \$800,000); \$1.2 million project to democratize air quality data collection and use.
- National Park Service — Principal Investigator, Volunteerism in National Parks: Motivations and Impacts (\$50,604).
- Additional funding from state agencies, local governments, United Way, Salvation Army, and philanthropic foundations.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP & PUBLIC VOICE

- Author or editor of 12 books on civic engagement, democratic governance, volunteerism, and public purpose, including *Volunteers in the Parks: Tensions, Challenges and Opportunities in the National Park Service*
- Published more than 40 peer-reviewed journal articles in leading outlets.
- Frequent keynote speaker and invited presenter for government agencies, nonprofits, universities, and professional associations.
- Regular contributor to public-facing outlets on leadership, democracy, and civic life.

EDUCATION

Ph.D., Public Administration — University of Southern California

Master of Public Administration — George Washington University

Bachelor of Arts, Political Science — American University