

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS  
**LEADERSHIP  
PROGRAM**

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

# VISIONS

VOLUME 20, ISSUE 1.

## A WARM WELCOME TO THE CLASS OF 2017!

by Emily Green '17

All SPA Leadership Program students long remember getting the acceptance phone call from their teaching assistant over the summer. The phone call represents a student's first official welcome to the Program and leaves many students eagerly anticipating the beginning of college and the introduction to AU.

"I was so honored to be able to join a community of leaders who are true catalysts of social change," freshman Monica Gilsanz said about acceptance into the Leadership Program.

The Class of 2017 brings a variety of backgrounds and experiences coming from urban, rural and suburban communities across 22 different states. What they share is a passion and inquisitiveness combined with the desire to create change that is typical of the Leadership Program.

"The people I get to meet and work with, they all bring an amazing background and have a lot to give," freshman Mahdi Khan shared, describing his impression of the Program.

Over Welcome Week the Labor Day Weekend retreat, these exceptional

first-year students began to build fast friends with each other by exploring the nation's capital together and playing a variety of teambuilding and get-to-know you games orchestrated by their Teaching Assistants. Throughout the events of Welcome Week and retreat, the

the start of classes provided a forum for older students to offer the first-years advice on how to adjust to life at American University. It also offered proof to the entering class that they can find a home in the Leadership community while at American as they continue to acclimate to life in college.



The Class of 2017 shows off their animal signs on retreat!

freshman gained a greater understanding of the classmates would join them on a four-year journey ahead. They also built a stronger sense of community among them.

"I feel like we have a really great peer group," freshman Allie Preston said. "There's really good energy."

The first Linner event a few weeks after

For students, an important part of the initial phone call was finding out which of the six freshman issue groups they would join. Each group addresses a different social issue. This year's issues are: education, environmental sustainability, gender and sexuality, human rights and equality, law and society, as well as urban development. The freshmen are now hard at work on choosing the specific social problem their group will address with a year-long social action project.

Teaching Assistant Leilani Harris observed of the freshman class that, "they're so eager to learn and endlessly inquisitive." Student Director Holly Hagerty commented, "They stood out in high school and they are already getting involved on campus and making a difference at AU."

# LEADERSHIP VISIONS

## Publicity Staff

Publicity Co-Coordinator	Maggie Brennan
Publicity Co-Coordinator	Reiter Boldt
Staff Writer	Rebecca Bliss
Staff Writer	Olivia Bullock
Staff Writer	Justin Etheridge
Staff Writer	Sam Garrison
Staff Writer	Emily Green
Staff Writer	Mary Perez
Staff Writer	Shani Rosenstock
Staff Writer	Bob Siegel
Contributing Writer	Benjamin Link

---

## SPA Leadership

Program Director	Margaret Marr
Student Director	Holly Hagerty
Student Director	David Shirbroun

---

## Steering Committee

Director for Inclusion and Outreach	Kandice Simmons
Publicity Coordinator	Maggie Brennan
Publicity Coordinator	Reiter Boldt
Media Coordinator	Jared Costanzo
Mentorship Coordinator	Lori Interlicchio
Mentorship Coordinator	Justin Murry
Mentorship Coordinator	Jessica Murphy
Inter-Class Coordinator	Deborah Collazo
Inter-Class Coordinator	Winston Pigeon
Fundraising Coordinator	Eesha Bhav
Fundraising Coordinator	Alex Bradly
Events Coordinator	Paul Wells
Events Coordinator	Taylor Heath
Events Coordinator	Harry Weiss
Alumni Coordinator	Monica Murthy
Alumni Coordinator	Anthony Torres
Director of Finances	Lulu Chaker

---

“  
THE ONLY SAFE SHIP IN A  
STORM IS LEADERSHIP.”

FAYE WATTLETON



Students grab some famous DC eats at Ben's Chili Bowl after some amazing Welcome Week activities!



Rahi Patel ('16) and Caroline Ladzinski ('15) show off their intensity at the Program's annual Buddy Olympics!



# LEADERSHIP WELCOME WEEK

## Welcome Week Builds New Leadership Bonds

by Benjamin Link '16

The Program welcomed the Leadership Class of 2017 with a whole slew of Welcome Week events, from a picnic on the National Mall to a scavenger hunt around campus and fro-yo in Bethesda. These events provided the new students a week full of Leadership bonding.



The Class of 2017 poses in front of the Lincoln Monument

Since May, the six Teaching Assistants for the class had worked to plan the week's events. They anxiously awaited their opportunity to meet the Class of 2017 at the first. At it, after a few name games, the group trekked to Yogiberry in Bethesda for some delicious frozen yogurt. Dessert in hand, the group headed to a nearby park to engage in get-to-know-you games and enjoy a deeper conversation with the group.

The next day, the group boarded the Metro to the National Mall. Iconic vistas of the Capitol, the Washington Monument, greeted the first year students as they emerged from the Metro onto the mall. After a delicious picnic of Panera sandwiches, the students appreciated some team building games and conversation, sharing many smiles and laughs, before dispersing to the various sites surrounding the Mall.

Later in the week, the competitive side of many SPA Leaders

surfaced as the new students were split into teams in a campus-wide scavenger hunt designed to orient the new students to AU's campus. An ensuing ice cream social allowed freshmen to meet many of the older students of the Program and ask them about their experiences at AU, in D.C. and in the SPA Leadership Program.

An excursion to the National Mall on Friday night for a "Monuments at Night" capped the Welcome Week events. Leadership alumnus Steven Laudone ('11) accompanied the group, sharing his extensive knowledge of the various sites along the tour, including the Vietnam Memorial, the Lincoln Memorial, the World War II Memorial, and the MLK memorial. After visiting all the major monuments and memorials, the teaching assistants led the group to the famous Ben's Chili Bowl on U Street for a late night snack of chili, cheese fries, and milkshakes.

Overall, Welcome Week provided the Leadership Class of 2017 a great opportunity to meet one other and learn about what is in store for the upcoming year. "I was so grateful for the Welcome Week events because that is where I established my base of friends on campus," remarked Wes Young, member of the Class of 2017. Natalie Giron, another first-year, echoed those sentiments when she said, "Leadership Welcome Week events were the beginning of finding my new family, my home away from home."

The Class of 2017 smiling at the White House!



# THE LEADERSHIP FAMILY

## Sunshine at the Leadership BBQ

by Reiter Boldt '16

On a crystal clear, brilliant Sunday afternoon on the eve of classes, the Program sponsored its annual Welcome Back Barbeque on AU's campus. This was the first time in four years the annual event met with sunny skies instead of torrential, tropical storm rains that pushed the event indoors. The beautiful weather meant an unprecedented attendance and amazing community building for students old and new.

Organized by Events Coordinators Paul Wells '16 and Taylor Heath '16, the BBQ allowed first-year students to kindle new relationships with classmates, older students in the program, and alumni while gaining valuable insights into the journey ahead that is college.

"I was glad to see so many faces new and familiar and I was delighted that everyone left with lots of good food in their stomachs and laughter in their hearts. It is the times in Leadership that we can sit back and enjoy food, friends, and family that I most enjoy," commented Wells.

With almost 100 current and former members in atten-

dance, the BBQ offered a grand opening to the freshmen class, and brought returning members together again after a summer apart. Students left with a renewed sense of



Students of all ages strike a pose at the annual BBQ!

community and enthusiasm for the year to come. As Anthony Torres '16 said, "Loved the people, loved the food, loved the moment"

---

---

## Going for Gold at Buddy Olympics 2013!

by Reiter Boldt '16



A team gathers together before some intense Tug-o-War!

For many years each first-year student has been paired with an older student in the program who guides and mentor them as they transition into college. Last year, Cj Murphy the Interclass Coordinator charged with creating and monitoring the pairings, launched a fun and entertaining competition among buddy pairs, dubbed Buddy Olympics.

In a reprisal of that inaugural event, on September 28th 2nd annual Buddy Olympics came roaring back with a display of applied leadership skills, determination, and grit by all involved. Games of Leadership trivia, Buddy knowledge, and various physical exploits such as a relay race, tug of war, and a water balloon toss filled the spirited competition. All involved appreciated the opportunity to bond with their buddies and the leadership community at large.

According to Anthony Torres '16, "I was able to apply my leadership skills in a new way, one that involved mud, ropes, and water balloons. I would highly recommend this experience to anyone." The winners of the 2013 Buddy Olympics were "Buddy Family" Rachel Koretsky ('14), Jessica Murphy ('16), and Rebecca Bliss ('17) who psyched themselves up for the contest wearing matching T-shirts and facepaint.



# FOOD FOR THOUGHT

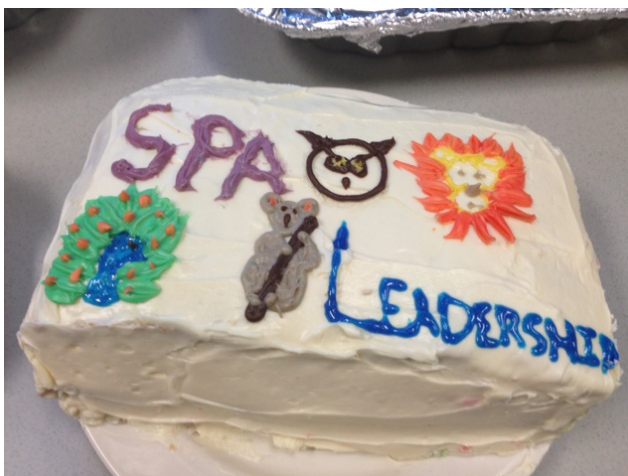
## *Transitions to College* Leaders Share Advice over Dinner

by Bob Siegel '17



Students talk about the reality of college over spaghetti!

The year's first Leadership Dinner - affectionately nicknamed "Liners" - where new students had the chance to learn from, and socialize with, the older students in the program came on Tuesday of the fourth week of classes. The committee of first-year students guided by the Events Coordinators Taylor Heath ('16), Paul Wells ('16), and Harry Weiss ('15) made the night possible, preparing a delicious buffet of pasta, pizza bread, and fresh salad, not to mention an array of homemade baked goods.



Cake courtesy of Events Committee - animals included!

"We worked together really well, despite not knowing each other for very long," said Sharon Lee '17 of the committee's success. "Everyone was so willing to help each other, and we really bonded over the cupcakes!"

Aside from an exquisite meal, the class of 2017 was also treated to the advice and encouragement from older students. Lori Interlicchio, a junior in the Program, gave advice to those in long-distance relationships and how to keep them strong. Sophomore Rahi Patel talked about his own difficulty starting off in college, but how he came to embrace all that American University and D.C. has to offer.

The evening was full of solid advice from older students, from dealing with homesickness, to handling rough roommate situations, to encouragement in following whatever major one wants. The older students' advice left a positive



Elyse Preston ('15) gives sage advice to new students.

impact on the incoming class, and created a stronger sense of community among attendees.

Monica Gilsanz ('17) appreciated the event. "The older students were a wonderful resource, and the advice was helpful and reassuring," she said. The event did wonders in helping the freshman class adjust to life at AU and built stronger connections within the Leadership Program, all over a delicious meal.

# CAMPFIRES AND COMMUNITY

## Building Together on Freshman Retreat

by Justin Etheridge '17

Spending two days in the middle of a Maryland forest can quickly turn 42 strangers into the best of friends. Maybe it was the close sleeping quarters or a mutual fear of bugs that brought this group of Leadership Program first-year students together, but the students admit it must have been something more. First-year student Bob Siegel was originally unsure about the value of retreat, saying, "I honestly thought retreat would just be a distraction, but I really loved getting to know everyone."

The entering class shared icebreaker activities on the first evening, including a speed dating game, teambuilding skits, and a more serious value sharing activity. The night ended with marshmallows and casual conversation over the campfire. The morning of the second day began with a tour of the hallowed grounds at the Antietam National Battlefield.

First-year student Aileen Evans described the opportunity as eye opening. "We were able to see and hear more about the war instead of just Lincoln's decisions," she said. For Aileen and others, the experience served as a solemn reminder of the great responsibility placed on the shoulders of leaders as well as the immense tragedy that can result from the absence of leadership.

The trip to Antietam put the group of young leaders in a thoughtful and reverent mood, which lent itself well to discussion of the the SPA Leadership Program classic, Lincoln on Leadership shortly after their return to the campsite. After a day of reflection and discussion, Saturday evening's revelation of the animal types was exactly what the students needed. The presentations by the different animal personality types has become a Freshman Retreat tradition. The presen-

tation by each group – peacock, lion, owl, and koala – vividly displays the wonderful, and different, attributes of each personality type. .

Sophomore Teaching Assistant London Swift said that, "one of my favorite things about retreat was the animal type presentations." According to London, "the first-year presentations took it to a whole new level," "I almost cried watching the lions," she said, herself a lion.

On the third and final day of the trip, a web-of-gratitude activity and a river tubing ride down the Shenandoah River helped the students relax before their return to campus. For freshman Molly Morabito, it was the cheers of the students as the bus returned to the American University campus that made her realize, "that this place had truly become home and that the people coming back with me in Leadership were now the members of my new family."



The Class of 2017 finishes up their retreat with some tubing down the Shenandoah River!



# SOPHOMORE SOCIAL ACTION



The Class of 2016 gathers on the dock for a picture!

## Reconnecting on Retreat by Maggie Brennan '16

After swinging back into the school atmosphere, the sophomore class packed up their bags, rode the bus over to Camp Maria Retreat Center in Leonardstown, Maryland, and started a weekend of fun community building!

On the first night, the students participated in a Battle of the Issue Groups, where everyone was reunited into their social action project groups from freshman year. After some friendly competition and fun games, the students went out to enjoy the beautiful September weather for a nighttime campfire and delicious s'mores.

Saturday morning started early for some with a sunrise canoe outing before heading in for breakfast. The students then gathered outdoors on the shores of Breton Bay along the Potomac where each student shared the compelling social

problem s/he had selected to work on throughout the year as well as sketches of projects they might complete to address it.

"It was really amazing," said sophomore Allison Heller of the project presentations, "I got to learn even more about what everyone is passionate about, and really got to appreciate how diverse and inspired everyone here is. I don't think I've ever been so confident that a group of people was going to actually change the world."

The afternoon was filled with swimming, sports, and discussion groups. The night ended in a spontaneous dance party and a lot of laughter. On Sunday, after a wonderful brunch and some more free time to enjoy the amazing landscape of the Retreat Center, the students piled into the bus and headed back to campus.

## Inclusion Training Makes Leadership More Welcoming to All

by Maggie Brennan '16

Understanding and incorporating differing perspectives into group efforts is central to good leadership, and something that the SPA Leadership Program is constantly striving to achieve and teach its students. In that effort on September 8 the Steering Committee and Teaching Teams attended a special inclusion training session hosted by American

University's Center for Diversity and Inclusion. The workshop, titled "Creating Inclusive Communities," was designed to help individuals reflect on how diversity and inclusion affect them personally and interpersonally, as well as fortify participants with tools for increasing inclusivity in their everyday lives.

The group participated in a number of activities designed to help them reflect on their own identity and the treatment of others. In the first exercise, for example, participants considered their own identities that they were most proud of, thought most about, and faced the most prejudice for. The participants could share that information in small groups. By the end, participants had gained a refined perspective and new sense of purpose to include all voices in their respective committees, issue

groups, and other social interactions. Paul Wells, a sophomore and Co-Coordinator of Events, said, "In our communication it's important to include everyone in the conversation – to take the people who don't talk as much and make sure they're represented. And you can work so much better together when you learn more about who each person is and what unique perspective they have."

The session was led by Matthew Bruno and Caroline DeLeon of the University's Center for Diversity and Inclusion and organized by Kandice Simmons, this year's Deputy Director for Inclusion and Outreach for the Leadership Program. The session precipitated a lot of dialogue and motivation among the students to become more inclusive and aware of the perspectives of others, a key lesson for any successful leader to understand. The Leadership Program is full of diverse and passionate individuals, with different perspectives based on geography, race, sexuality, gender, and experience. This inclusion training was another step forward in making sure all of those amazing resources are working towards a better world and a better future.



From left: Matthew Bruno (Coordinator of LGBTQ Programming at CDI), Kandice Simmons (Deputy Director for Inclusion and Outreach for the SPA Leadership Program), Caroline DeLeon (Coordinator of

Multicultural Programming at CDI)



# LEADERSHIP IN PHOTOS

The **Leadership Program** encourages students to be **active members** in their communities. The photos below are **snapshots** of the action **Leadership students** are engaged in every day. **SPA Leaders** from all grades **challenge** themselves and their peers to be **socially active citizens**.



Sophomores strike a pose in the pool on retreat!



Students get intense during the Tug-o-War at Buddy Olympics!



Teambuilding on Freshman Retreat!



The Class of 2017 explores DC for their Welcome Week Scavenger Hunt!



Safety first for canoeing on Sophomore Retreat!



Professor Marr poses with her Class of 2017 Teaching Team!



Sophomores meet DC professionals at the Mentorship Reception!