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Freshman Retreat Brings Together First Year Class

Welcome Week Events
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Elyse Preston
Staff Writer

The new leadership class of 2015 returned this year to Sharpsburg, MD for their freshman retreat over Labor Day weekend. The event was widely trumpeted as one of the best freshman retreats to date. TA David Shirbroun shared, “We have a wonderful class of freshmen, and they helped make retreat a great success.”

The first night of retreat laid the groundwork for making lasting, important



The first year class of 2015 tours Antietam Battlefield

relationships among the 42 class members with numerous icebreaker activities, competitive four-square and delicious s’mores by the campfire.

On Saturday, the class took a guided tour of the Antietam battlefield. The enthusiastic tour guide, Keith Snyder, intro-

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Sophomore Retreat Provides Memories, Lessons

Jean Cornell
Publications Coordinator

The sophomore leadership retreat will not be soon forgotten.

The Leadership class of 2014 decided to return September 16 to the site of last year’s sophomore retreat: Camp Merrylande at the southern tip of Maryland on the Potomac River. Everyone spent time catching up and reunited with each other, including the first year issue groups.

“Retreat was great!” said Joshua Halpren (’14). “I



The sophomore class reunited after a long summer

felt like I really bonded with a few of my classmates who I’d only really known in a more academic setting. It totally energized me about

this year!”

Saturday was spent working through their sophomore leadership

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Save the date!

Decemberfest is Saturday, December 10th.

leadership@american.edu

First Year Students Warmly Welcomed

Gabe Menchaca

Staff Writer

Welcome Week brought the newest members of the SPA Leadership Program a series of five events designed to introduce them to each other, to the program, to AU, and to Washington, DC. Organized by the six Teaching Assistants for the first year leadership class, events such as a tour of the Monuments focused on getting students acclimated to each other and with the resources and landmarks in Washington, DC.

“I think it’s really important for [first-year students] to get off campus and start to get comfortable exploring the city they now go to school in,” says Teaching Assistant Sarah Durgin.

“I really enjoyed going down to the monuments at night [on Friday] with the rest of Leadership. It was a chance to go and see some really important landmarks,” recalls SPA Leadership first-year student Sarah Pagliocco. The upperclassmen were invited to tag along on the tour which highlighted DC’s finest, including the White House, the World War II memorial, and the new Martin Luther King, Jr. memorial.

“The picnic on the National Mall [on Tuesday of] Welcome Week represented a memorable moment for our leadership class to bond and get to know the area,” says School of Public Affairs (SPA) Leadership First Year Christine Porter of the exciting event. The mid-day earthquake that took everyone by surprise cancelled the planned tour of the Smithsonians, but the class of 2015 still enjoyed getting to know each other and their teaching team over a delicious lunch on a beautiful afternoon.

Other events, like a first year trip to DuPont Circle to get ice cream on Sunday August 21st were also designed to get new students comfortable with their peers, TA’s, and Program Director Professor Margret Marr. “The ice cream social at DuPont circle was the first time we were together as a group and from that moment on I knew that we were [a] special [group],” says Porter.

Hurricane Irene taught the leaders of Leadership important lessons about flexibility when it forced the cancellation of the culminating BBQ on Sunday. Instead, Student Director Mitchell Duncombe and events coordinators Liza Romanow and Peter Goelz adapted by offering an afternoon of a board game fun for all the students



Maryland Leadership students gather round the Maryland column at the World War II memorial [photo courtesy of Caroline Ladzinski]

in the program.

“It was really nice to meet a lot of the older students and get their perspectives after finishing our first week at AU,” concluded Pagliocco.

The first-year class of forty-two students comes from nineteen states from across the country.

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Freshmen

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duced the students to the battlefield in a unique and interactive way. His military history and knowledge allowed students to make connections between the historic site and their own reading of Lincoln on Leadership by Donald Phillips.

Saturday afternoon and

evening brought team building games, the first meeting of social action project groups, group presentations on the meaning of leadership, and midnight ghost stories in the woods.

Jasmine Jones, a freshman in the program described her retreat experience as a positive one. "The leadership retreat showed me the impor-



The freshmen and TAs prepare to float down the Shenandoah River

tance of communication and team work in becoming the most effective leader that I can be. It was definitely an experience that I will remember!"

On Sunday, the final day of retreat, the group went tubing down the Shenandoah River. The new leaders had the opportunity to connect with one another while enjoying one of the last

beautiful days of summer.

Thanks to the help of the TAs and everyone who organized retreat, the event was quite a success. Freshman retreat provides students with the opportunity to create close bonds with other students in the program, and appreciate what an extraordinary opportunity it is to be part of such a passionate and engaged group of people.



Team building exercises bring the newly formed issue groups together [photo courtesy of Mitchell Duncombe]

Sophomores

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project ideas. Each student in the second year will spend the rest of the year focusing on a problem they hope to address through their own creative social action project. Each student chose a social issue they wanted to focus on and sketched out how they wanted to address it. Each person presented their problem to the entire class most of the morning on Saturday and then worked in two different small group breakout sessions to trouble shoot their

projects and gain greater clarity on their problems.

"Retreat was amazing," said Melissa Stoner ('14). "It showed me once again how amazing the students in this program are and reaffirmed my belief that we are all going to do amazing things."

The rest of the weekend was a relaxing one. Some went swimming in the Potomac, others played endless rounds of Uno and Catchphrase. Everyone spent Saturday evening laughing and dancing at a Latino Music Festival at another area in the compound at Camp Merrylande.

Sunday came far too



The sophomores gather to talk about their social action projects [photo courtesy of Holly Hagerty]

early, and everyone, although energized about their own projects, was sad to leave the oasis on the Potomac.

Many thanks to the weekend organizer, Liza Romanow ('14), as well as the TAs, Student Director Mitchell Duncombe, and

Professors Marr and Bory. The success of the weekend directly correlated to their hard work at securing the location, organizing bonding events, and orchestrating the sophomores' work on their social action projects.

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Each year, the sophomore leadership class has the opportunity to be matched with a mentor, a professional working in Washington, DC. This year was no exception. On October 5th, the class of 2014 enjoyed their reception with more than two dozen professionals, mostly Leadership Program alumni, who have volunteered to serve as mentors.

After briefly mingling and networking over refreshments, the “flash mentoring” event offered quick-fire rounds where students spent eight minutes with each of six mentors getting to know them. Students and potential mentors were paired for these brief interviews based on similar career interests. Sophomores and mentors also wrote brief biographies of themselves that Mentorship Co-ordinators Megan Huber and Catalina Lillo collated and distributed, aiding the students and mentors to become acquainted rapidly, including with those who could not attend or those who were not paired during the event.

“The mentorship reception really built up my hopes for a great semester,” said Phil Scranage ('14). He continued, “I can't wait to get to know my mentor better. Not only was everyone I talked to very accomplished,



Sophomore students meet with a potential mentor

each and every one also seemed like he or she could be a great friend.”

Huber and Lillo worked tirelessly to plan and run the “flash-mentoring” event, including enlisting the potential mentors. The freshmen Events Committee worked with devotion to help set up and break down the event.

Emily Yu ('14) remarked that while the mentors were very impressive on paper, “they were even more fantastic in person.” Yu was grateful for the mentors' willingness to share their experiences with the students. “They are all so open to sharing their lives with us,” she explained. “[They] were great people to talk to, whether it be about our college experiences or giving advice about grad schools.”

Each and every one of the mentors promises to be a positive role-model and source of valuable advice to the sophomore they are assigned to.

“I can't wait to have my own mentor,” concluded Emily. “I think it will really help to have a young professional to look up to and to get a glimpse of what my life might be like 5, 10 years from now.”



The students had several eight minute rounds meeting with possible mentors