



a look inside... Sophomores Start the Year Off On the Right Foot



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Nancy Lavin
Publications Co-Chair

Among SPA Leadership students, the sophomore year is widely believed to be the most challenging of the program, but also the most rewarding.

The main feature of the sophomore curriculum requires each student to design and implement a social action project around any topic he or she feels passionate.

During the fall semester, the sophomores work on a policy memo describing the problems they are addressing and a project proposal describing the response they will create to address these problems. These papers culminate in a grant application, in which sophomores learn how to research and write grant proposals to provide the funding needed for their projects. These ideas will then be turned into action during the spring semester.

Current projects span a variety of topics, all reflecting the passions and talents of the students creating them.

Danielle Pullan was inspired to create a project that fostered relations between students and senior citizens after realizing the benefits these groups can bring to each other from time spent with her grandfather this summer. "I love the idea of passing on oral histories. History is so much more powerful when there's a real person you can attach to it."

Her project, entitled "Intergenerational Interactions" will pair up students from American

University with residents of the Armed Forces Retirement home.

Already, she has had several informational sessions on campus to recruit volunteers. Her project has also been featured on the front page of the DoSomething.org website, to which she applied for a grant.

Inspired by his own interest in music, Tommy Hunt has created a project to provide music education for children at an elementary school by bringing in a band and holding a workshop to expose them to music.

He strongly believes, "it's important that everybody have some experience and some knowledge in the arts. Elementary school is the perfect place to begin that process."

Erin Cady is using social media to create a grassroots organization aimed at promoting a strike-free education movement in her homestate of Pennsylvania.

Adam Daniel-Wayman hopes to create a "student voting guide" to essentially walk students through "the bureaucratic end of registering to vote in DC by setting up the legal and media connections to help them when they have problems beyond the basics."

Beyond this span of impressive projects, sophomores are also required to immerse themselves in a new culture and to learn a new life skill over the course of the year, presenting their findings to the class.

This semester, many of the "cultural challenges" focused on religious groups. Danielle Pullan chose to focus on SGI Buddhism by attending on

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Civil Rights and Diversity

Peter Goelz
Staff Writer

From the first time the Civil Rights and Diversity group met, the members knew whatever they would eventually choose to make their project, it would be a project the entire group would truly be passionate about. Finding that logistically possible project has been more of a challenge than finding that inner passion, something this group is not lacking.

Civil Rights and Diversity's members include first-year students Ki'tay Davidson, Allie Cannington,



Rachel Dockery, Liza Romanow, Sarah Durgin, Tyler Sadonis, and Peter Goelz. Their teaching assistant and mentor is sophomore Christina Khan.

This group's journey to determine its project has been filled with endless ideas, immeasurable passion, and a few unexpected obstacles. In meetings full of idea critiquing and deliberation, the group moved its focus from sex trafficking to its current issue: juvenile justice.

Subsequently pouring over research, contacting countless detention centers in the DC area, and establishing legitimacy with the constituents, the group created a unique proposal. Partnering with DC Youth Services Center, the local juvenile detention facility, the group intends to create a poetry program

and offer embattled students the opportunity to turn poems to music, using a wide range of DJ programs downloadable to the service center's computer lab. Utilizing the various connections obtained by group members, the proposed idea will be heard by the director of the DC Youth Service Center before the students leave for holiday break.

Reaching consensus on a single project and successfully navigating the challenging obstacles faced thus far, the Civil Rights and Diversity group members have become all the more invested in their project. Being given the opportunity to establish this program will be a proud memory indeed. The group looks forward to offering guidance to youth looking for a second chance.

Poverty

Emily Yu
Staff Writer

The Poverty Issue Group also has a strong interest in education, so it decided to combine the two topics, and work to improve education for impoverished youth. To select a project, the group conducted research into the problems of impoverished youths. One of the most eye-opening experiences for the group was visiting a recreation center in Southeast DC hoping to survey middle school-aged kids about their experiences

with stress in school.

Creating a project was a little difficult at first; however, once the group members learned to communicate effectively and give the group ownership, the exchange of ideas went smoothly.

After much deliberation and collaboration of the many original ideas, the group decided on a five-week long workshop, each targeting a different way to help youth learn different depression prevention skills. Such skills include: learning academic success tips, stress and anxiety reduction methods,



and healthy living habits. bonded and created effective

working relationships with each other, getting along as well when working on the latest project assignment as they do while just enjoying each others company. Group members include: Emily Yu, Kenneth Whitley, Franky Irwin, Megan Huber, Deon Jones, Melissa Stoner, and David Shirbroun. In addition to the group's experiences working together to create their project idea the group has had many fun and interesting experiences together this semester. The members of this group have grown and learned to work well with each other, producing a promising and ambitious project proposal. They have also

Leadership Year Three: Internships

Leslie Kodet

Publications Co-Chair

Third-year Leadership Students along side some fourth-year students returning from studying abroad have been hard at work in their internships as well as in the classroom. They have enjoyed working under the instruction of our new adjunct professor, Jackie Norris, former Chief of Staff to First Lady Michelle Obama.

In the classroom, these students study organizational behavior, and compare the theory to what they observe in their internships, using analysis to better understand leadership, power, motivation and change

in organizations.

Junior Abby Matousek works at ML Strategies, LLP, a government relations consulting firm. "The curriculum has helped me to focus in on details in the office that I would not have thought about otherwise," she said, "For example, we analyzed power structures and dynamics in class and it



Georgette Spanjich '10, Abby Matousek '12 and John Sonsalla '11 on break at ML Strategies, LLP

opened my eyes to how the firm operates in reality in comparison to how it works on paper." Students intern throughout the DC metro area in a variety of fields, including with the federal government, like Meg Miraglia who works at the Department of Health and Human Services. Others, like Matousek work for lobbying firms or in non-profits such as EMILY'S List. Other students are exploring their interest in law interning in law firms, courts, or professional organizations such as the American Bar Association. Others still are

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Lessons in Literature

New to the first year curriculum this year was a unit on leadership lessons in literature. Early in the fall semester, the first-year students chose six literature genres: children's literature, short stories, philosophy, political commentary, mystery, and graphic novels. They then broke into small groups and exercised their decision making skills to select specific readings in their genre.

Two class sessions were devoted to their analysis of the literature. Before Thanksgiving break each group presented to the whole class the leadership lessons they had derived.

The presentations were lively, theatrical, and en-

gaging, including stage props, a fog machine, PowerPoint, and didactic dialogue.

Harry Potter, chosen by the children's literature group, offered an opportunity to consider supportive leaders. With an entertaining puppet show, the group taught the class that while the main characters present the archetypal leader personalities, the supporting characters bring possibly more dynamic leadership traits to the novel. Draco Malfoy, for example, turned his hatred for Harry Potter to civility and remained true to himself. Other characters exude strengths in dedication, giving ownership of ideas to others, and fully using

available resources.

The graphic novel group studied *V for Vendetta*, and examined the question: When is vigilantism justified? Literary works such as *V* and *Batman*, and history such as the American Revolution, sanctify the practice. Criminal law does not. The presentation sparked an engaging discussion about vigilantism and civil disobedience and their role in social change, excellent questions for developing social leaders to consider.

Malcolm Gladwell's recent piece in the *New Yorker* offered important lessons in leading social change in the era of new technology. Students concluded that online resources are not a good primary method to motivate the masses, but

can be effective supplemental reminders and an avenue for passive information presentation. From Plato's *The Republic*, the class was taught that good leaders may be unpopular from hard decisions, and even righteous leaders may be corrupted. Everyone is subject to human error and has a weakness that may be turned against him or her.

Some of these lessons can be used immediately in the first year social action projects, (which you can read more about on pages 2-6), while some need to be tucked away to remember when these students become the driving force of the social movements in years to come.

Gender and Sexuality

Cristina Kladis
Staff Writer

It is no secret that the Gender and Sexuality issue group has finally come out of the closet. After hours upon hours of researching, brainstorming and discussing the inordinate number of suicides within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT), the group was inspired to give

D.C. LGBT youth a place where they can learn to nurture the positive attitudes about themselves and their sexual orientation.

Through a peer mentoring program, the group intends to help high school students who may need guidance from someone who is not only willing to listen but who may have relevant experience and knowledge to impart.



Focusing specifically on issues within the LGBT community, the project will pair American University students with students from surrounding public high schools. Topics such as safe sex, coming out, and many others will be discussed in a safe, open environment that will foster learning and a feeling of acceptance.

The Gender and Sexuality Issue Group was honored to receive a Martin Luther King Jr. Eagle Endowment Grant which will provide the much needed financial support. The group hopes the grant will not only

make its project a success this year, but enable it to continue operating in the future.

The Gender and Sexuality Group is now working on finalizing details in the project, such as exactly how many schools will participate and ascertaining the precise transportation needs.

The group consisting of Zachary Baldwin, Zachary Cady, Jean Cornell, Joshua Halpren, Danielle Nispel, Cristina Kladis and Malea Otranto and sophomore TA Danna Halfinger look forward to the project's launch in February 2011.

Health, Food, and Nutrition

Philip Scranage
Staff Writer

When a child sits down to an incomplete meal, society has failed that child at some level. After speaking with a focus group, reading nutritionist studies, and studying hunger issues, the HF&N issue group decided to address the "nutritional deficit" in DC. Group members Linnea Jordan, Philip Scranage, Joe Payne, Lucy Bertocci, Russell Gillis, Rachel Koretsky, and Nate Seeskin aided by TA Katie Hansen plans to launch the Snack'smart program in January 2011.

The program will focus on educating middle school-aged students in southeast DC on innovative

ways to make healthy snacks. By teaching students these methods, HF&N hopes to improve demand for healthy products. In its research the group found that as supermarkets leave an area, they are often replaced by convenience stores, selling fewer fresh vegetables and fruits, and more prepackaged, high-calorie foods.

The Snack'smart program will be implemented through the Life-Pieces to Masterpieces after school program. Life-Pieces is an arts-based organization helping to educate young African-American boys in the DC-Metro area since 1996. The program works in one of the poorest areas of DC and offers its services



primarily to the population HF&N is trying to reach.

The group will be staging its lessons as among the broad range of Life-Pieces' broad range of services. The students will lead a group through a curriculum encompassing fruits, vegetables, healthy cooking, vitamins, minerals, healthy drinks, and a snack competition. At the beginning and end of the program, the group will administer surveys with the students to gauge the impact of the nutrition course. The group was honored to receive an MLK Eagle Endowment, making the healthy snacks and necessary transportation possible.

Alumni Reminisce at Parents' Weekend

Holly Hagerty

Staff Writer

During "All American Weekend" celebrating AU's families and alumni, the SPA Leadership Program kicked off its 20th Anniversary celebration.

Attendees were pleasantly surprised when President Neil Kerwin made an unexpected appearance at the Family and Alumni Reception. President Kerwin, who established the Leadership program in 1990 during his tenure as Dean of the School of Public Affairs, expressed his warm feelings towards the program and his pride in all past and present Leadership students and their accomplishments.

"President Kerwin's visit definitely showed the program how important SPA Leadership is to AU and how it developed since President Kerwin began it 20 years ago," said Alumni Relations co-chair Lauren Hickey ('13), who worked with her partner David Silberman to plan the reception.

As part of the afternoon's events, current students gave an overview of the curriculum at each stage of the program. "The representatives who spoke

from each class let parents learn about the program, gave younger students a taste of what's to come, and let older students and alumni reflect on previous experiences," said Hickey.

Among the alumni who spoke was Alli Gold ('10), who shared the President's Award last May with fellow Leadership student Seth Cutter. Gold, now a fellow at the EPA, explained the curriculum of the senior seminar.

Several of Gold's classmates attended the reception, including Georgette Spanjich, now a lobbyist with ML Strategies. Parents paid keen attention as Spanjich explained her firm has learned Leadership students are top quality interns.

Other alumni included Bill Debaun ('09), now working in an education policy think tank, as well as Carl Seip ('09), currently working on the hill for Senator Cantwell from Washington. "We were very impressed with the level of commitment and enthusiasm shown by the Leadership Alumni speakers," said some first-year parents. "It says a lot about the quality of the program that so many talented graduates were willing to give up their time to go back to American University to encourage the new class."

A Message from the Student Director

Amanda Merkwae

Student Director



As we kicked off the 20th Anniversary year of the program, I was incredibly excited to meet the new freshman class and welcome them to our Leadership family. I can't imagine going through my first year at American without the friendship and support of upperclassmen in the program, and my fellow Spladers and I hoped to pass on that support to the Class of 2014.

It's amazing to look back on the accomplishments of Leadership students over the past 20 years and see how our alumni are still tied to the program. An impressive number of alums have even volunteered this year to serve as mentors for sophomores in the program.

We also had a fantastic turnout for the 20th Anniversary reception held during Family and Alumni Weekend this fall thanks to the Alumni Relations Chairs and rest of the Steer-

ing Committee. It's no wonder why Leadership students feel a strong connection to the program—they feel a connection to the people in it. Throughout their time at AU, students in Leadership study together, run campaigns together, intern together, and many even live together. Leadership is all about making personal connections.

None of this would be possible without the meaningful friendships made during the first year of the program that last throughout college and life after AU. During Welcome Week, the TAs, Steering Committee, and Professor Marr put on great events for the freshmen to get to know each other and older students. The TAs also did a phenomenal job facilitating the freshmen retreat back in August.

We all remember what it was like to be a bright-eyed freshman, ready to make friends and change the world as soon as we got to DC, and thanks to the TAs, members of the Class of 2014 were able to form bonds with their fellow Spladers that will truly last a lifetime.

This year we've also welcomed Professor Jackie Norris to our family. Sharing the trials and tribulations of our internships each week while learning about organizational behavior has

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Education

Leslie Kodet

Publications Co-Chair

The first step for the Education Issue Group was to narrow the topic of education. The group discussed three major problems: low literacy rates, lack of student voice, and motivation. Research and discussions with local high school teachers revealed possible projects for the group including: effective reading, student government and failed motivations.

Since the research led the group in many directions, the group searched for a topic they could tackle that would improve education even

in a small way. Through discussions, the group finally decided on reducing the dropout rate. The topic is perfect, because though it's broad, the project can be designed to address the three major problems identified at the beginning of the semester.

After selecting a topic, the group spent many evenings challenging each other's ideas and formulating what would be called "Future Counseling." The project is to work with students in middle school in detention to help them find ideas for their future.

The project took this form because research showed students fail to see the importance in education and they do not understand how the

material they are learning in school will affect their lives causing them to be unmotivated in school.

The goal of the project is to give the students in detention a motivation to work in school and determine or understand their aspirations. Students will take aptitude tests to help figure out their interests and what they may be good at. Everything the Education group learns from these tests and conversations

will be used to help teach the students in detention why staying in school is important.

The group's members Francisco Ramirez, Cheria Funches, Dorothy Joseph, Holly Haggerty, Alyssa Franke, Dan Raymer, and Katherine Maddente are very excited to get started on the project because they will help students realize why it is important to stay in school by showing them the futures that lie ahead of them.



This year's environmental sustainability issue group has been very excited to explore many of the threats endangering the planet we all call home. The group, guided by sophomore TA Stephen Bronskill, consists of Marissa Kibler, Joe Wisniewski, Michael Panek, Evan Brown, Catalina Lilo, Julia Kinsey, and John Caddock. After much research, discussion, and consultation, the issue group has decided to focus on restoring the

Environmental Sustainability

John Caddock

Staff Writer

Chesapeake Bay for their action project this upcoming spring semester. The group's goal is to spread awareness about the environmental threat that nutrient pollution and mass agriculture pose to the biodiversity in the bay. They hope to reach to college students and citizens across the Washington, D.C. metro area in an attempt to rally support for protecting the bay's natural value and

beauty. The members of the group have been so inspired by what they have seen that they are considering advocating for the passage of the Chesapeake Clean Water and Ecosystem Restoration Act on their own time, outside of their duties as students. Environmental Sustainability is very excited to begin their work after the holidays, and is looking forward to a lot of hard work educating citizens and fighting for the future of the bay.

12.15.2010

Leadership Wins Big in Electoral Politics

Leslie Kodet

Publications Co-Chair

The Class of 2014, following in the well-traveled footsteps of many Leadership students before it, sent many of its students into the Student Government.

Last year, Nate Bronstein, Class of 2012, was elected President of the SG. He is the third AUSG President in a row to be a Leadership student. Seth Cutter ('10) and Andy MacCracken ('11) served before him. Each of the three also served as Leadership TAs before being elected SG President.

Like Cutter and MacCracken, Bronstein selected some members of the cabinet from Leadership. Most notably is his Chief of Staff, Phil Cardarella ('12).

This year, all 10 Leadership students who ran for

elected seats won, including eight from the Class of 2014.

All students who won a seat as a senator were also appointed to other committees, such as the Special Committee on the Budget, Committee on Campus Life and Programming, Committee on the Review of University Military Policy, and the Committee on Student's Rights, University Affairs, and Academics.

Sophomore Eric Reath, former Senator for the Class of 2013, won his campaign for Speaker of the Undergraduate Senate.

Other members of the Class of 2014 ran successfully for their Class Council. Malea Otranto won the presidency, and Megan Huber won the vice presidency.

Deon Jones of the 2014

class became one of the youngest elected officials in the country when he won his write-in campaign for DC Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner. In this position, Jones will represent the students and neighborhoods surrounding the American University campus when advising the District's government on issues these communities face.

Older members of the Program also gained or changed positions within the SG. Senior Kathryn Baxter, the Director of Communications and Outreach for Women's Initiative was recently appointed to be an SG Senator for the Class of 2011.

10k.

Though almost every student in the class describes the workload as "intense" and "challenging," they are quick to add that the benefits are just as significant. As Erin Cady comments "it lets us put to use the skills and lessons we developed in our freshman year on a whole new level."

Regardless of the culture chosen, all of the students agreed that these explorations had been very valuable to their understanding of others and of themselves.

Life skills spanned a variety of topics, though cooking and car maintenance were both recurring choices. Jeff Eyler chose to study how to create and decode ciphers, while Sarah Robinson challenged herself to run a

Internships

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Professor Jackie Norris

exploring international relations, like Kristen Pionati who works at the Canadian Embassy.

Some students find internships through older Leadership students; a few get the chance to work with other Leadership students. Matousek has the rare experience to work with two Leadership fellows. John Sonsalla, Class of 2011 is an intern along side Matousek, and Georgette Spanjich, Class of 2010, works full time at ML Strategies.

Matousek commented on her unique experience, stating, "working with others who had been and who are currently in the Leadership Program is great. Everyone at my office is highly motivated, but you can tell that those in Leadership go above and beyond everyday."

Sophomores

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on-campus chanting session and an off-campus World Peace Prayer at the SGI Buddhism Cultural Center.

Lauren Hickey defied this trend of religious exploration and instead immersed herself in the culture of the Coast Guard Auxiliary by attending several of their meetings and even completing tests to become a member of the US Coast Guard Academy.

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Message from the Director: What an Amazing Program!

Margaret Marr

Program Director



I had the privilege this fall of attending the International Leadership Association Conference in Boston with more than 1,000 leadership educators, scholars, and practitioners. I left confident in the knowledge that our Leadership Program is truly excellent. Though there are schools with multi-million dollar endowments, and the buildings to match them, the content of our program stands among the best in the nation, indeed the world.

What we read, what we learn in the classroom, and the retreats and exercises we engage in all match theirs. What makes this program really stand out though, and give it excellence in developing leadership, is the social action projects that our first- and second-year students so proudly own, author and deliver.

Other leadership programs in the world

require their students to engage in community service, but few require the students to design their own social action projects; and none I have encountered require students to go through the professional process of really researching the problem, crafting a project proposal driven by that careful examination of the problem, and seeking a grant.

Other attributes of our program that cause us to stand out include the leadership lessons in literature group presentations in the first year and the cultural and life skill challenges of the sophomore year. I watched as educators took note of these aspects of our curriculum, as well as our social action projects.

This is not to say there isn't room for improvement; there always is. That is one of the reasons I went to the conference was to discover those ways.

But above it all, what really makes us stand out is how student-centered, student-directed and student-driven this program is. Honestly, having talked with and listened to leadership educators from all over the globe, and having looked carefully at scores of their programs, while others do incorporate some measure of student-direction and peer-learning, I have found none

that comes close to matching our level of true student ownership and execution of the program, including our Student Director, our many TAs, our student Steering Committee, the peer-teaching of the sophomore and senior years, and our first-year pay-it-forward committees.

So, this is all to say that we have a truly excellent program here, and we have achieved that level of distinction through the good work of our past and present students.

Our students are the ones who make and own this program. Our students are the ones who make it great. They are doing terrific, cutting-edge work.

So, good for you, SPA Leaders! Keep up the good work.

Student Director

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been a blast, and Professor Norris's professional experience and teaching abilities make her a perfect fit for the class.

After 20 years, the Program has put on events, and touched lives through the work of social action projects, taught important lessons in the classroom, and created connections among truly amazing students.