

SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS

LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

VISIONS



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LEADERSHIP WELCOMES FAMILY AND ALUMNI

On AU's Family and Alumni weekend, past and present members of the leadership community gathered to celebrate another promising year for the program. More than 130 current students, family members, and alumni attended the event. They heard from an array of students, faculty, and alumni who have found success and support from the Leadership Program.

Director of the Leadership Program, Professor Marr introduced the program highlighting the successes of the program in bringing together and training a new generation of leaders in public service. She noted the program's growth along with new initiatives to build commu-

nity and support students in their projects through the thoughtful contributions of adjunct faculty, teaching assistants and steering committee members.

Sophomore, Elyse Preston who currently serves as a freshman teaching assistant reflected on her first year in the program that made her feel at home at AU and empowered her to pursue a passion for social justice. Junior, Deon Jones recalled his sophomore social action project as a springboard for action on juvenile justice issues that led him to a role as a national spokesperson and enduring advocate for the movement.

Tommy Hunt, a senior in the program shared stories from the leadership internship class where he spent his term at the White House.



This stint led to a full time position with the White House Council on Economic Advisors. Recent alumna of the program, Carol Foster who now serves a Legislative Assistant on Capitol Hill, shared her experiences in the senior year of the program and the benefits to her of the ever-expanding Leadership Program network.

Adjunct Professor Melissa Bradley tied the program together as she shared the passion and power of leadership students pursuing careers in public service and social justice. Her description of immediate impacts in the Washington DC community combined with long term learning for social change, clearly illustrated the impact of the Leadership Program.

Families and alumni of the program had an opportunity to contribute to a fund for sophomore social action projects to purchase critical supplies and fund basic transportation for their work. Significant funds were raised and grants will be awarded in the spring to sophomores for their projects.

Invaluable to the event's success were senior, Rachel Dockery and sophomore, Jack Szeltner, who serve as co-alumni coordinators for our Program, and organized the event. They worked together alongside a fantastic team of a dozen first year students who constitute the Alumni Relations Committee. The well organized, welcoming, and inclusive gathering embodied the kind of change that the leadership community hopes to see in the world.

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“We’re the generation
We can’t afford to wait
The future started yesterday
And we’re already late.”
—John Legend

PHOTO

“What is your favorite winter activity?”



ANTI-POVERTY

by Kandice Simmons '16

When tackling a complex issue such as poverty, it is important to take a step back and reflect. This is how the Anti-Poverty issue group began their year. During their first meeting, students reflected on poverty issues and how they impacted their lives. The group agreed that poverty is an important issue in America especially in the D.C./Maryland/Virginia region. With guidance from sophomore teaching assistant Kendall Karr, students conducted research on poverty in the local community and wrote an extensive constituents report. Group member Sarah Gardiner noted the importance of collecting this data in recognizing that "poverty is a huge issue in our society and without the proper information, we will not be able to fix it."

With the help of community members and D.C. non-profits, the group learned more about the root causes of poverty and the effects on communities. Students became interested in the issue of a lack of healthy nutritious foods in urban communities, particularly in Wards 7 and 8 of the District. The issue group came to a consensus around working to reduce food deserts in D.C. to help combat poverty.



Team member Chris Choban is excited about the group's social action project and is "looking forward to engaging with D.C. and being able to give back to the community." Although they are still working to finalize a specific project, the group is looking forward to working with local leaders in neighborhoods lacking access to affordable and healthy food and the AU community as they attempt to tackle this issue.

—HUMAN RIGHTS & EQUALITY

by Reiter Boldt '16

decided to address the issue of human trafficking, with a special interest in labor trafficking.

The group has been reaching out to organizations seeking to combat this issue within D.C., the nation, and abroad and is seeking a direction towards which they can act to better their constituency: trafficked persons within the District of Columbia. To raise awareness, the group has chosen to create an art contest at AU themed around human trafficking and will combine that with a drive for clothing and supplies trafficked persons need upon rescue for recovery. The group is optimistic about its potential to make an impact and, as freshman Lulu Chaker puts it, they are looking forward to doing "wonderful, challenging, but incredible things."

The Human Rights and Equality issue group is comprised of freshman Karlee Ursta, Keila Campos, Lia Gargano, Lulu Chaker, Michelle Le, Rahi Patel, and Reiter Boldt as well as sophomore TA Elyse Preston.



Like many of the issue groups, the first question the Human Rights and Equality issue group faced was where to begin. With such a broad issue area, the group set out to find a cause that each group member feels passionately about and where the group could create real and lasting good. After much deliberation, the team

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

by Jared Costanzo '16

Although the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age in the U.S. to 18 more than 40 years ago, youth disenfranchisement is still a problem in America. This has inspired the Youth Empowerment issue group to take it on as their leadership social action project.

Team member Kaitleen Dougherty notes that in deciding on a topic, "it was difficult to come to a consensus, but we worked it out and know our issue now." The group chose the issue of youth disenfranchisement because they feel passionately about it and are confident that they can effectively impact the D.C. community.

When interviewing constituents that could potentially be affected by their project, the group found that D.C. students feel that they are not represented in government and politics. As a result, the issue group argued in their policy memo that "youth feel like



there is no way... to become involved in the legislative and policy making process despite many already existing outlets. When people feel as if their voice isn't being heard, they stop actively trying to be a part of the process, and thus stop voting and believing in a process that has worked for more than two centuries."

After considering a wide variety of possible projects, the group has decided to create a Youth Advocacy Leadership Conference, or YALC, at which D.C. high school students will be instructed on policy advocacy techniques and

then participate in a town hall with Washington, D.C. policy makers, including some from D.C. Department of Parks and Recreation. The conference is slated for March 23 at in the Ward Circle Building at American University.

POLITICAL JUSTICE

by Edward Shine '16

This year, the Political Justice Issue Group will work to improve personal constitutional literacy among under-served D.C. youth. To learn more about issues facing youth in DC, the group partnered with the Marshall Brennan Project at the American University Washington College of Law (WCL). Through a high school moot court competition hosted by the WCL, the Political Justice group was able to survey groups of adolescents about personal constitutional literacy.

By interviewing community members, the group found that knowledge of one's constitutional rights may change one's interactions with law enforce-



ment. To address this, the students have decided to partner with the FBR Branch @ THEARC of the Boys and Girls Clubs to start a constitutional literacy pro-

gram. This program will consist of four sessions that combine the best aspects of a constitutional literacy program and a mentorship program in order to educate the students in a fun manner. The students are marching full speed ahead creating lesson plans and arranging transportation to implement this important work.

The students in the Political Justice issue group include: Grace Austin, Deborah Collazo, Nolan Deming, Monica Murthy, Melissa Ramos, Eddie Shine, and Paul Wells.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

by Edgar Ortega '16



It is a challenge to tackle an issue of “environmental sustainability” without first thinking about what those words mean. The Environmental Sustainability issue group sought to define sustainability. The group decided that sustainability means using resources in a way that would not risk future generations’ use of those resources. The group assigned each member an environmental sustainability issue to research. Then each student presented his or her issue and came to a consensus on what prob-

lem their project would address. The group decided to focus on the Anacostia River, which, due to the sewage system in D.C., is severely polluted by sewer water runoff.

The group has decided to tackle this problem by raising awareness about the pollution of the river and to educate children in what steps they can take to help fix the problem. The group will go to a middle school to instruct students about how the Anacostia river is affected by the students and their families and how the Anacostia affects them. At the end of their multiple-week lesson plan, students will be invited to join the Anacostia river clean up on April 20. This event acts as a gateway for Anacostia residents to become more involved and passionate about the river they live along. The group hopes to inspire and empower the younger generation of environmentalists.

The group consists of first year students Emily Andre, Edgar Ortega, Nick Scida, Jessica Murphy, Kasun Kulathunga, Lucas Wright, Taylor Heath and sophomore teaching assistant Christine Porter.

EDUCATION

The Education issue group seeks to improve graduation rates amongst minority high school students in the District of Columbia's public schools. Through interviews with students and scholarly research, the group gathered evidence that illustrates existing challenges in the D.C. school system. Their plan is designed to specifically target students experiencing an opportunity gap that creates divides in high school graduation rates along racial and class lines.

Each member of the group brings a unique educational experience to the table. With school experiences ranging from an American educational system to the British Dominican educational system, these students are acutely aware of the successes and challenges that are a part of the educational process. Issue group member Maggie Brennan believes that D.C. “needs a school system that is future-focused.” This year, the Education Issue group has decided to execute a project that is centered on hosting an event that will address the academic and social aspect of college for African

by Amber Lewis '16



American high school students. Inviting various clubs, organizations and programs that range from academic counselors to multiple fraternities, this issue group is determined to bring the general perspective of the true college experience to the high school attendees. This promising event is sure to be not only very informative, but enjoyable all the same.

GENDER & SEXUALITY

by Emma Wall '16

The Gender and Sexuality issue group learned an early lesson in consensus building when deciding on an issue for their social action project. While proposing topics, the team realized each member had widely varying ideas. Many students were passionate about LGBT rights while others were adamant supporters of the gender equality movement. At first the group worried that with such seemingly competing interests they would never find a project that would interest all of them. But as each member presented their ideas for possible projects, the team soon realized just how interrelated their issues really were.

With this insight, the group was able to decide on an area that excited all the members and gave a chance for each person to research and discuss something they loved. The topic of college hook-up culture seemed to connect the struggles faced by young women, the LGBT community, and anyone else who feels pressured by this culture.

To learn more about the college hook-up



culture, the group surveyed more than 400 students and conduct focus groups. The issue group also interviewed organizations on campus, including sports teams and the Greek life chapters. In conducting this research, the group found an alarming disregard for and misunderstanding about sexual assault on college campuses. To combat these challenges, the group plans a program which would better educate students about the many resources available on campus to

learn of the signs of sexual assault and empower students to step-in when they see these signs.

The Gender and Sexuality issue group's members include Anthony Torres, Alex Bradley, Leilani Harris, Winston Pingeon, Joelle Appenrodt, London Swift, Emma Wall and their teaching assistant Josh Parrish. All are committed to learning more about this issue at AU and finding a way to significantly reduce sexual assault.

by Maggie Brennan '16

Leadership students poured into the McDowell Lounge on November 12 to share advice and ideas about the upcoming semester. Freshmen mingled at tables and talked to the more experienced students about their favorite classes, professors, and experiences at AU. First-year students benefitted from the older students' advice.

"By planning our schedule for next semester," Stephen Bronskill, Student Director of the program, told the group, "it means we have already found success in this one. So congratulations on a great fall!"



This future-oriented attitude was reflected across the room as students munched on pizza and talked about their favorite aspects of AU. Freshmen had a chance to learn from upperclassmen across a broad array of interests from secondary education double majors to environmental science programs.

"It's great to hear what they have to say," Anthony Torres, a freshman, said of the evening. "It makes me feel better to know that I'm not the only one who runs into these problems."

LINNER ON COURSE REGISTRATION