

# Visions Newsletter

School of Public Affairs Leadership Program

Volume XXI Issue I



## Leadership Welcomes New Program Director; Professor

Adele Ackert ('19)

aa5190a@student.american.edu

This fall the Leadership Program welcomes two new faculty members to the Program. Professor Anthony Miller, a university alum, will be teaching the sophomore class, and Doctor Kenneth Jones, a retiring Army Colonel will be instructing this year's freshmen class. The Professors, although from strikingly different backgrounds, share a similar philosophy of creating safe and comfortable environments where students of leadership can thrive.

Professor Anthony Miller graduated from American University and the Leadership Program in 2008. During his freshman year Professor Miller was in the Public Health Issue Group, which addressed flaws in the veterans claims process.

Outside of the classroom, Professor Miller works for the United States General Services Administration

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Sophomore Professor Anthony Miller with Senior Teaching Team and Alumni Assistant Zach Baldwin

## A Sampling of Teaching Assistants

Sophia Duke-Mosier ('19)

sd7869a@student.american.edu

Despite the old adage, "Those who can, do. Those who can't do, teach," most educators prefer to teach what they do best and what they know. But in the case of the SPA Leadership Program's teaching assistants, they teach something that they are still learning themselves. The program's teaching assistants, a group of sophomores and seniors, are charged with the task of teaching younger students about leadership.

Leadership is a nebulous, ever-changing concept. The leaders throughout the program are still developing.

For the teaching assistants, this puts them in a perplexing position because they have to teach younger students about something that they are still developing within themselves. In this way, the teaching assistants grow and learn with their students rather than just presenting memorized information. Eesha Bhavne ('16) says that she, "isn't necessarily teaching leadership. Each person develops their own leadership style through triumphs and hardships [and her] role is to be there as a support [and to] offer constructive criticism."

Many of this year's teaching assistants did not see themselves in their current position as freshmen. Jessica Hoag, class of 2018, mentioned that she "saw [herself]... helping out now and again, but...did not see [herself] as a TA."

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# Dean Waters: Leader, Educator, Mother

Cameron de Matteis ('19)  
cd6941a@student.american.edu

Dean Waters is more than the Associate Dean of the School of Public Affairs. She is a dedicated professor, caring mother, and passionate advocate for women's rights. Dean Waters, an alumni of American University, is one of the leading members of our school community.

Dean Waters' leadership story began when she got her first job at a non-profit focused on women's health advocacy. She recalls one of her first leadership initiatives, "I remember there was an idea I had for a project and no one really wanted to take it on." Young and ambitious, Waters wouldn't take no for an answer. She took a risk and decided to present her project in front of the organization's executives. "It was the first time I had taken ownership of a project in a professional setting and I remember that giving me confidence," Waters said.

Before becoming a Dean, Waters worked as a litigator, a position that forced her to confront the reality of occasionally losing cases. "The cases you lose you learn from tremendously," she explained "...that's a sign of a successful leader, not that you're perfect or that you never screw up, but that you take ownership of those mistakes and make sure it doesn't happen again."

A pivotal part of Waters' leadership growth was becoming a parent. "Becoming a mother is one of the most defining things that can happen to you because you recognize that the things you may have thought were emergencies before, aren't," Water shared candidly. Although Waters realizes her priorities have shifted, she firmly believes that it is possible to balance work with parent-

hood. In fact, she believes the skills she's gained from parenthood have translated into efficiency at work.

Waters' describes her leadership style as open and collaborative. Yet, she realizes it is also essential to have the ability to make tough decisions when needed. She admits being a strong leader wasn't always as simple: "I trust my instincts more than I did when I was younger. I think ten to fifteen years ago I wasn't quite able to do that," Waters admitted.

Waters noted that she was greatly influenced by one her greatest leadership role models, American University's Dean of Academic Affairs, Mary Clark. Waters, who was once Clark's student in law school, has a tremendous amount of respect for Clark's work. "She has the ability to really listen to people, give people her full attention, and then make reasoned decisions," Waters admired.

Today, Waters pays it forward by influencing students and educators every day. "I left litigation because I love teaching and I love students. I like hearing their stories and I really like mentoring," Waters stated. Additionally, Waters strives to empower young women. "I think it's helpful to be candid with the young women that come to me," Waters admitted. She actively keeps up with her advocacy work by teaching "Reproduction and the Law" and writing about issues regarding reproductive rights.

Waters is an integral part of the American University leadership community. Her daily influence empowers the student body to attain their full potential as the leaders of tomorrow.



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Professor	Ken Jones
Professor	Claire Griggs
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# Barack Obama Living In Lincoln's Shadow

Shawn Bond ('19)

db6101a@student.american.edu

First year students coming into the SPA Leadership Program are required to read Lincoln on Leadership, a book that reflects on leadership lessons that can be learned from President Abraham Lincoln. As the book suggests, Abraham Lincoln is often the standard bearer for "leader" in the United States. Lincoln's legacy and accomplishments are indisputable, the general consensus is that Lincoln is one of the more accomplished Presidents in U.S. history. As a result, Presidents, pundits, and historians often attempt to draw comparisons between themselves and President Lincoln, who now has a near mythical status.

As we near the end of President Obama's term, the media is beginning to turn toward the President's successor while reflecting on his legacy. That said, the question must be asked: what will this President's legacy be? On Obama's legacy, Sam Shumate, Vice President of College Republicans and a member of the SPA Leadership program, said, "[The President will] be remembered most notably for being the first African American President this nation [has] had."

Such initiatives like gun violence, criminal justice and health care reform have been core pieces of the Obama agenda throughout both of the President's terms. Chika Ekemezie, Vol-

unteer Coordinator for the AU College Democrats, noted that President Obama will likely be remembered best for his unusually charismatic personality and his genuine nature as opposed to specific policy initiatives - charisma similar to that of Abraham Lincoln.

Both Ekemezie and Shumate agreed that Lincoln's leadership style was of an exemplary nature and focused on improving the nation, but disagree on whether his leadership style can be compared to the leadership style of President Obama. Ekemezie argued that parallels may be drawn from President Lincoln to President Obama and applied to lessons from Lincoln on Leadership. Lessons related to Lincoln being the type of leader charismatic enough to essentially force his agenda for the good of the nation.

**"Parallels may be drawn from President Lincoln to President Obama and applied to lessons from Lincoln on Leadership"**

Ekemezie highlights Obama's use the lame duck period. A lame duck President is defined as one in the close of their term - usually following the midterm elections. Mr. Obama exercised his presidency during this time to force an agenda far more ambitious than that of several of his predecessors, highlighting issues like climate change, gun control, and other social issues. Shumate, on the other hand, argues that Lincoln was more of a bold uniter, connecting with

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## Servant Leadership: Spladers in AUSG

Matthew Klucher ('19)

mk8381a@student.american.edu

If there is one concept that Leadership students learn from the very first day of class, it is that leadership is created not by helping yourself, but rather by serving others.

Most members of American University Student Government agree that the primary focus of their office is not included in the title on their resume. Leadership students who joined Student Government did so in order to connect with the student body and relate to the issues more intimately, a quality of leadership which becomes embedded in the SPA Leadership community from the beginning.

Members of SPA Leadership began their time in office because of a dedication to service, and many offered unique and personal goals which they hoped to accomplish through their office. Sam Shumate, ('18) and member of the Undergraduate Student Senate - the primary legislative body representing students at AU - discussed his desire to represent as many student's views

as possible. "I joined the Senate because I wanted to make a difference on campus and represent ideals [that] people haven't touched on," he noted. Representing the underdog opinion also embodies the quality of leadership that goes against the grain, instead opting to stand up to the crowd in order for others to be heard. Sam also reflected on what leadership means to him personally: "Leadership takes shape by who shows initiative, dedication, and a desire to help others. I used my leadership to become a Vice Chairman of a committee after only 3 weeks of work." Sam noted that he will keep fighting for goals in the Senate, despite what others may think.

Alexandra Mosenson ('18) currently serves as the Associate Comptroller for Budget Management in the Executive Branch of SG. Mosenson joined the Undergraduate Senate in March. Her goals have developed along with her experience in order to achieve better conditions for the student body. As Mo-

# Word on the Street!

Kali Jennings ('19)  
aj1962a@student.american.edu

Welcome to Word on the Street! This corner of the newsletter offers a way for students to voice their views on leadership. For our debut, we chose to put the spotlight on some premier leadership students in the class of 2019. We asked the following questions:

## Maureen Smith ('19)



*Q: Who is your leadership role model and why?*

*A: "Malala Yousafzai. Because, in the fact of conflict, she still manages to be honorable and graceful and eloquent."*

## Danielle D'Amore ('19)

*Q: Describe your first leadership memory.*

*A: "My first leadership memory is when I spoke in front of my entire school on why they should participate in Relay for Life. I was a senior in high school. Now I'm not afraid to talk in big groups!"*



## Brandan Persaud ('19)



*Q: What traits do you find most admirable in a leader?*

*A: "Communication, because I feel that it is important for the leaders to communicate their concerns so it can be a two-way street between them and their subordinates in order to find a common ground."*

# Buddies: Making Connections Across Classes

Andrew Alban ('19)  
aa3378a@student.american.edu

Having a friend by your side is a reliable way to help adjust to a new environment or experience. Thanks to the Buddy Program within SPA Leadership, my fellow members of the Class of 2019 and I each have one. The Buddy Program is one of the most cherished parts of the Leadership Program; not is it a reliable way to adjust to life at American University and DC, it continues throughout the undergraduate years. Each first year is paired with an older Leadership student (sophomores, juniors, and even seniors). The program is only a few weeks in, but it is off to a good start.

Abby Mitchell and Sam Garrison, our Inclusion Co-Coordinators, deserve recognition for a host of great buddy pairs. When asked what the goal of the buddy program is, Abby replied, "to give first years a chance to have relationships with upper-classmen." Abby and Sam's work has bridged the gap normally felt between younger and older students.

First years are optimistic about their buddy pairings. Ishmam Mirza said, "The Buddy Program builds on an inclusive and friendly atmosphere. The Buddy Program makes freshmen feel more welcomed and provides a great resource to keep new students on their leadership tracks." Adjusting to college can be difficult, and having a mentor who was previously in the shoes of first years at American University is an invaluable asset.

The Buddy Program is an extension of the purpose of the

Leadership Program, to develop the leaders of tomorrow. Erin Hampson touched upon this. She said, "Yes, I feel like having a buddy will develop me as a leader. Having another sounding board that I can go to for advice about leadership or school in general is invaluable." Older leadership students can offer advice and counsel on which classes to take, how to navigate internships or careers, and how to make the most of American University.

Teaching Assistant Alain Xiong-Calmes proves the difference a buddy can make for a leadership student. Alain, now a sophomore, has a very positive relationship with his buddy Rahi Patel (senior). Alain said "My buddy Rahi is an absolutely amazing human being. He's been so influential on me as a mentor and helped me to grow as a person. He has helped me to maintain positivity despite adversity and showed me really the best parts of this program."

The Class of 2019 is looking forward to how their relationship with their buddy will progress throughout this year and beyond. Leaders build other leaders, and the Buddy Program exists for that reason. As the year continues, the buddies will grow together, improve themselves, the Leadership Program, and our campus community as a whole.



The sophomore class of 2018, which Professor Miller teaches, poses at retreat

as a Special Programs Assistant. In this capacity, Professor Miller describes leadership as having the, “bravery to have difficult conversations with people in places of power and influence.”

In the classroom, Professor Miller strives to prepare students to face the challenge of channeling a passion into action. Professor Miller helps students, “step outside of their comfort zone and tap into passions.” While teaching leadership can be a daunting task, Professor Miller rises to the challenge by focusing on establishing a classroom environment that fosters personal leadership growth. He also strives to create an inclusive environment and safe space, which “allows and encourages students to participate as full self.”

Dr. Jones is entering the program with a background rooted in graduate level instructions and military service. Dr. Jones is returning to undergraduate teaching for the first time in over ten years. Most recently, Dr. Jones has taught leadership at the graduate level through The Key Executive Program.

Of all Dr. Jones’ varied experiences in leadership, his most valuable lessons came at a much more person-

al level: his wife and children. He stated, “I’d like to think that I learned a lot about leadership from everything from the classroom ... to leading in combat. But there’s just not quite anything as [impactful] as having to manage a one on one relationship with another human being for twenty five years.” Dr. Jones’ emphasis on communication and relationships as an integral part of leadership is also evident in his leadership philosophy, which he describes as being centered around getting to know subordinates on an individual level. According to Jones, “the simple step of learning someone’s name,” establishes a sense of care and helps build the foundation of leadership in a community.

This year Dr. Jones hopes to establish an environment where students facilitate their own learning experience. He remarks that students can explain leadership lessons to each other in ways he would, “never be able to articulate.” This process is rewarding for him and for the students. He reflects on this: “to me, that’s ... why I do what I do, that’s why I get up in the morning.”

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*TA’s continued from pg. 1*

Similarly, Natalie Hedden (‘18) was initially “uninterested in putting in all the hours. But as [her] experience continued throughout the year, [she] realized how awesome and powerful the program is and wanted to guide students to the same realization.” Looking at the teaching assistants’ journeys from freshmen to their current role demonstrates the transformative power of the program.

The teaching assistants have demonstrated leadership to be more than standing in front of an audience and receiving applause. All of the teaching assistants work behind the scenes to keep the program running. They make individual connections with their students in their day-to-day lives and in the issue groups. Conchita Garcia, class of 2018, cites “a common misconception of a leader is that the lead-

er is the face of the event or the person telling others how to get things done.” Instead, Garcia prefers “having more candid, one-on-one conversations with [students in her issue group] in order to build a solid relationship,” citing the issue group as a “more inclusive environment.”

This year’s teaching assistants, whether sophomores or seniors, new or veteran, give the community a diverse group of peers to look up to and to work with.

The teaching assistants, collectively define leadership as a desire and a mission to give back behind the scenes, and to connect more deeply with individual students. This group of incredible students works to build a stronger Leadership community and experience in order to give back to the program that made them who they are today.

# Sustainable Leadership: A Look at Neil Kerwin



University President Kerwin

Emily Pullen ('19),  
John Vodrey ('19)

In the SPA Leadership Program, we always say that great leaders inspire new leaders. As the President of American University and the founder of the Leadership Program, part of Dr. Neil Kerwin's job is to cultivate the leaders of tomorrow. He recently took some time to discuss his leadership experience and philosophy with us.

Kerwin ('71) started his journey at AU nearly half a century ago as an undergraduate student. After attending graduate school at the University of Rhode Island, he returned to AU in 1975 as a professor. Kerwin has been here ever since, climbing the administrative ladder all the way to the top.

Kerwin didn't originally plan to seek leadership positions. "I had no great expectations to be doing the kind of work that I'm doing now," he reflected. "I was preparing myself to be a scholar and a teacher."

However, then-Professor Kerwin's career trajectory was altered when the Dean of what is now the School of Public Affairs asked if he would be willing to become the Director of Political Science Programs. "I said I was. From that point on, people in positions above me would turn to me and ask [if I would accept a higher position], and it seems like every time they asked, I said yes."

Kerwin would go on to become the Dean of SPA in 1988, the Provost

of AU in 1997, and finally President in 2005. He did not go through any leadership program as a student, so he had to learn about leadership as he went. "At each successive step of the way, I had the opportunity to observe people in leadership positions above me, and what I liked and what I didn't, and what I thought was successful and what I thought wasn't."

Dean Kerwin established the SPA Leadership Program in 1990 after he noticed that SPA students had many leadership roles on campus, and realized that they would benefit from more substantial direction on leadership principles and, "the costs and benefits that accrue to the individual who's looking to take these kinds of leadership positions on."

At the outset, Kerwin was unsure that the program would be popular enough to last very long. Looking back, he said, "I am not only delighted, but also pleasantly surprised that 25 years later it's still going strong."

Another project that Kerwin took on as a leader was the ten-year Strategic Plan (adopted by the Board of Trustees in 2008), which aims to facilitate AU's mission through six goals. The Plan works to "diversify revenue sources, employ technology to empower excellence, enhance the library and research infrastructure, forge partnerships within the D.C.

area, continue as a model for civil discourse, and align the facilities with the transformational goals," according to the AU website. Kerwin considers this ambitious, 40-million-dollar project one of his greatest accomplishments, noting that the most recent accreditation team applauded its implementation and success thus far.

"I'm very proud of the University's Strategic Plan, and the extent to which it appears to be shifting the overall direction of the institution," Kerwin said. "It was the first major thing that I undertook as President and I am pleased that in the view of the Board of Trustees, and the others that pay careful attention to it, people see it as successful."

However, Kerwin cautioned leaders to avoid monopolizing accomplishments, and said that it is important to remember that an entire institution achieves such successes, not one individual. He praised the collective wisdom of American University and said he considers it a resource for guidance.

"The more I learn on the job, the more I realize that leadership is a collective act. The fact is that everything from the mission on down to the most mundane administrative transaction is reflected by a large number of people, and the more I, as President, can draw on the talents and experiences of those people and see to it that the University is using those resources as a maximum benefit for the University, the more successful I will be as a leader," Kerwin said.

Success cannot always be expected however, and Kerwin said he believes that a large part of leadership is accepting failure from oneself and one's colleagues. "Failure is a great

**I had the opportunity to observe people in leadership positions above me**

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# Dorian Russell: *Action, impact and a leader's footprints*

Maham Kamal Khanum ('19)  
mk7012a@student.american.edu

Dorian Russell's freshman-year trip to Nicaragua became a pivotal moment in her life and in the lives of her hosts. Now, as a Junior in the SPA Leadership Program, Russell has made a dream come true for many young women. She is the proud founder of The Alcanzame Si Podes Girls Soccer Clinic in El Castillo, a twenty minute drive from the Makengue Reserve in the virgin rainforest of Nicaragua.

Russell visited Nicaragua to conduct Biological research as part of the American University's Makengue project when she realized that many young women had a burning passion to play soccer. "Listening to young women describe that their desire to play soccer was not met, I decided to meet the need the community itself was asking for," Russell said.

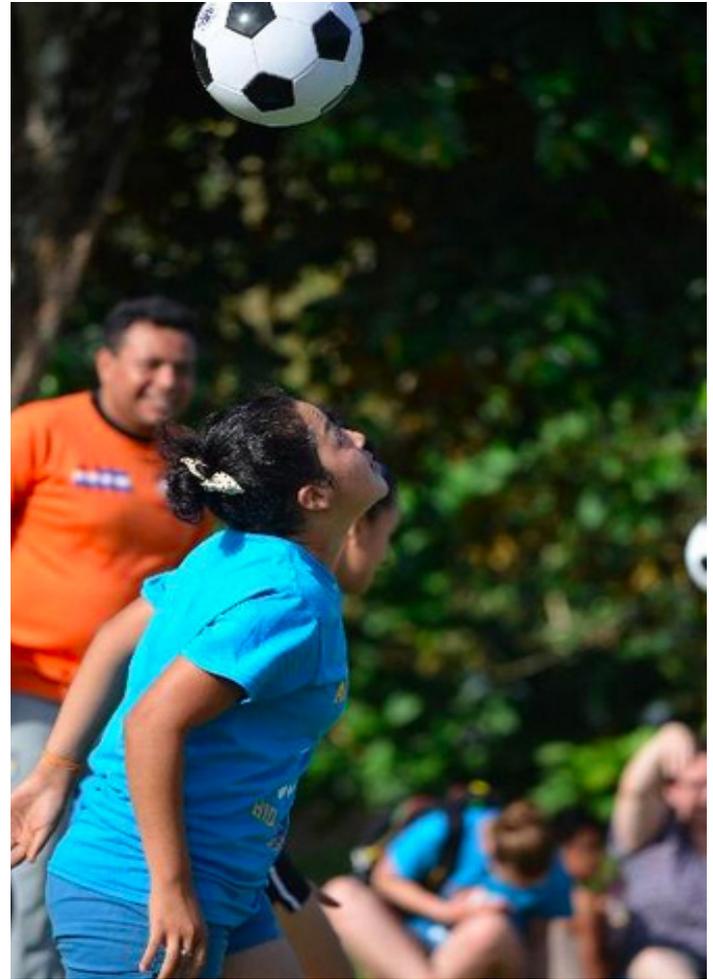
She took the initiative to mobilize the community setting up an intensive soccer clinic for the girls. She engaged 20 participants from nearby schools, hired a professional- Coach Correa , and provided soccer balls and tee shirts for the participants to keep. The availability of gear, guidance and opportunity became the start of a lasting journey for these girls as they went on to practice and participate in another season of games.

But Russell's was not just providing what was absent. She was battling stereotypes through this two-day camp. "One girl I worked with in the environmental education outreach project commented that the boys will punch us if girls tried to go on the soccer field," she said.

The camp definitely turned the tables. "When surveyed anonymously on paper, 17 out of 20 participants answered the question "Are you more likely to play soccer now that you've completed the clinic?" with "definitely" while the remaining three responded with "probably;" no "no" or "maybe" responses were received," said Russell.

After returning from Nicaragua, Russell researched the society, culture and children of Nicaragua to take the initiative forward. She had a cause and a motivated community of American University. As the program assistant for Makengue, Russell led a team of research students to Nicaragua and obtained an opportunity to work on her project also. "Serving as the program assistant and completing my leadership project

*continued on pg. 9*



(Left to right) Girls at Russel's soccer camp practice technical drills

'Shadow' continued from page 3

Americans in ways that Obama cannot.

In 2014, Democrats lost control of the Senate and faced deeper losses in the House of Representatives. This led many to believe that Barack Obama's ability to push his agenda, and thus, his effectiveness was essentially over. He surprised many in his 2015 State of the Union when he laid out an ambitious platform for his closing years - effectively redefining the lame duck President. Shumate points to Obama's use of executive orders bringing to issues previously ignored, such as climate change, as a source of leadership lessons. Ekemezie, on the other hand, argues that the best leadership lesson that can be learned from Obama's recent actions is that a President does not have to be ruled by politics and can be ruled by conscience. It can be argued that Lincoln acted similarly, often doing what is unpopular, such as passing the 13th amendment, for the sake of preserving the Union.

While many may find it fun to predict the President's legacy and may attempt to compare him to his predecessors, history will be the ultimate test for Barack Obama. His Presidency is marked with key legislative achievements such as the Affordable Care Act, however, many pieces of his Presidency, namely foreign affairs, cannot be judged until years out when we can see the long lasting effects. Regardless of political ideology or how one may view the President's accomplishments, it can be said that his use of executive orders and negotiation points to him being an effective leader - even if he may not end up on Mt. Rushmore.



'Senate' continued from page 3

senator notes, her favorite memories from her service include, "those where we pass bills that have real impacts on the students," including providing tampons in the Student Health Center and addressing mental health issues through on-campus symposiums. She also takes pride in the formation of the Academic Access Funds which allow students to request financial assistance from AUSG. Alexandra noted, "Leadership in AUSG is all about communication, teamwork, and finding common ground. Leadership in any organization requires constant and clear communication, as it does in SG."

The current Elections Commissioner for AUSG, Peter Hutchinson, is another leadership student who finds his position to be both challenging and rewarding. Peter's primary goal is to ensure open and fair elections within AUSG for the student body, and therefore serves as the primary source of accountability. Peter reflected, "The primary goal I set for myself was to work on syncing all the SG rule books... I was able to do so, and I think we're going to have a smooth election process." Peter accomplished these goals through exemplifying yet another leadership trait taught in Leadership: coordinating with others. "I think I demonstrated a lot of leadership skills, specifically communication [and] organization." Although he began with limited experience as a freshman, he wasn't deterred; instead, he did his research and proved his abilities in order to receive more opportunities to serve. "I had to prove myself, but you can do just about anything if you prepare," he noted.

American University SPA Leadership students have challenges to overcome, obstacles to surmount and a passion that drives them forward. When those goals cannot be achieved alone, though, the students count on the fine-tuned leadership lessons instilled in their elected officials of the Student Government.



(Above, left to right) Greg Pratt, Sam Shumate and Alexandra Mosenson

'Dorian' continued from pg. 7

went hand in hand," she said.

During the process, detailed research on her project and a well-framed policy memo led her to create a focused project proposal, securing a grant to execute her dream.

However, Russell did not have smooth sailing throughout. "Flight delays, stranded teams, currency and financial issues, all gave me constant adrenaline rushes," said Russell. "Most shockingly the non-profit I had been working with formally shut down the day I landed there." She also reflected that cross-cultural communication was an integral take-away from the project.

Nevertheless, the uncertainties became learning experiences in her progress as a leader, even for her work in D.C. Currently, Russell interns at the Department of Energy and is also a resident assistant on campus. The variety of her experiences reflect the enthusiasm she has as a leader.

Along with all these achievements, Russell is a promising leader due to her humbleness and versatility. A testimony of her humbleness is that she agreed to answer questions for this interview despite being in the middle of flights! Her versatility comes from the many feathers in her cap.

Apart from prestigious internships, Russell worked in customer service and proudly associates the experience to developing interpersonal skills. "I am a firm believer that every twenty-something needs to have customer service experience," she said. "Jobs that push your buttons, frustrate you and force you to decide quickly are the ones that develop you."

"If you ever stop your leadership journey, you're no



longer a leader." With this leadership philosophy, Russell has come a long way and urges future leaders to lead their way. With this motto, Russell is an unstoppable leader who would not rest until every girl who wants can kick a soccer ball.



University President Kerwin delivers an address to the student body.

'Kerwin' continued from pg. 7

learning experience if you treat it that way. It can be devastating in the moment, but if you are willing to step back and take the lesson that it teaches you, you will always move on to a better place."

In the Leadership Program, we like to categorize our young leaders by animal type: the assertive lion, the charismatic peacock, the analytical owl, and the empathetic koala. Kerwin identifies as a lion, as he prioritizes being clear and direct in communicating what he expects from others.

He emphasized that leadership requires characteristics from each of these animal categories, however. "Your role as a leader is situationally defined. You always have to modulate where you fit as leader into a particular set of circumstances, and they're going to be highly varied," Kerwin said. "Your role can be the lion role, which is taking control of the situation because it requires immediate, aggressive, and direct action, or being able to step back and let the community wrestle with an issue long enough so you can determine whether an informed consensus and the correct direction is emerging."

In a broad context, Kerwin defined leadership by its complexity, but believes that it is manifested in preparedness, communication, and in the responsibility of making tough choices.

As Kerwin put it, "Leadership is ensuring that you are prepared at whatever level you're exercising decision-making. You are prepared to step up, make a difficult decision, make it clear to people why you did make the decision you made and then be willing to be held accountable for it."

# - Leadership in Photographs -

