



### a look inside...

### Leadership Students Join Teach for America in Force



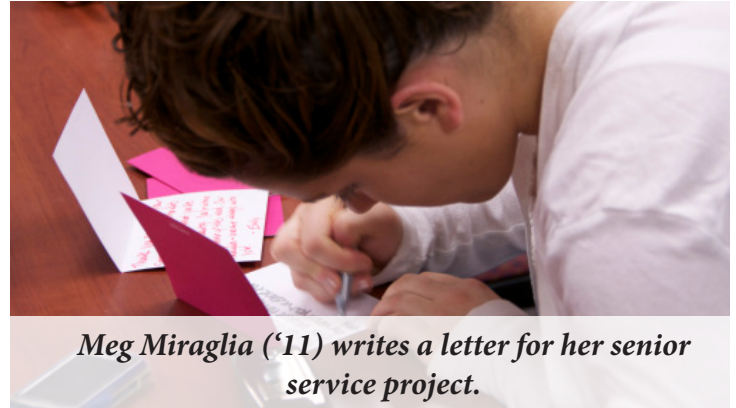
Freshmen Issue Group Updates

pg. 2, 3, 6

Jean Cornell  
Publicity Coordinator

Leadership students accomplish great things. While it is impressive to see what they do at American University, it is even more astounding to see what these students do once they graduate. A growing group of Leadership alumni join the elite Teach for America Corps. TFA places top-ranked recent college graduates in low-performing schools to teach for at least two years. Leadership alumni have taught in schools across the country.

For example, five 2009 SPALeaders, or about a quarter of the class, joined the TFA Corps. Jacob Shelly and Ryan Post are



Meg Miraglia ('11) writes a letter for her senior service project.

both members of the 2009 class who worked with TFA. Shelly now attends Stanford Law School. He hopes to combine his understanding of law with policy analysis. Post currently attends Seton Hall University and works at Latham and Watkins law firm.

Meg Miraglia, a 2011 Leadership alum, currently teaches mathematics at Cesar Chavez Public Charter School for Public Policy in

DC. Miraglia's classmates, Amanda Merkwae and Natasha Pereira, also answered the TFA call.

In the graduating class of 2012, Leadership students Mitchell Duncombe, Olivia Stitilis, and Kent Hiebel were recently honored to receive TFA offers. While Hiebel considers his offer, Duncombe, the program's Student Director, has decided to accept the challenge and will teach in

*continued on page 4*



Alumni & Family Weekend

pg. 5

John Legend  
pg. 8

We're online!  
[www.american.edu/spa/leadership](http://www.american.edu/spa/leadership)

### Sophomores Start A New Year on the Right Foot

Zach Baldwin  
Guest Writer

The sophomore year in the Leadership Program is arguably the most challenging and growth-filled year of the four year program. Second-year students serve as TAs, as members of Steering Committee, in internships, and in

leadership positions in student groups across campus – all in addition to the rigorous requirements of the class.

The primary focus of the sophomore year curriculum is the design and implementation of a social action project by each student. These projects are meant to address any issue

that the student feels particularly passionate about. During the fall semester, students brainstorm problems that they wish to resolve, research the problem, talk to constituents, and then write a policy memo detailing the problem. From here, students write a project proposal that outlines

*continued on page 7*

## Civil Rights and Diversity

Elyse Preston

Staff Writer

After much discussion and debate, the Civil Rights and Diversity issue group decided to focus their efforts on hate crimes in the DC Metropolitan area. The group's research revealed that recently in the District the transgender community has been heavily impacted by hate crimes, suffering brutal beatings and murder because of how they identify.



The seven passionate group members, Jasmine Jones, Virginia Bosio, Tripp Frank, Lydia Manchester, Tyrees Smith, Gabe Menchaca, and Elyse Preston, want to promote respect for and understanding of transgender people. By reaching out to professionals in the area who advocate on behalf of transgender rights, the group gained insight into how to best serve this community. Members plan to attend a DC Trans Coalition meeting to talk to trans individuals about their experiences and receive feedback about the kind of project that they feel would be beneficial.

At this point, the group plans to create a project that will facilitate dialogue between transgender people and the community at large. The event will include speakers, small discussion groups, and activities to engage people in understanding this marginalized population.

A semester of hard work has developed close connections among the group. TA Sarah Durgin has been a great inspiration and a lot of fun to work with. The group looks forward to organizing a project to diminish intolerance and hate through communication and understanding.



## Education

Sam McBee

Staff Writer

The seven members of the Education issue group have reached consensus that community service is essential to a student's education. They want to inspire and empower local DC students to become passionately involved in community service and volunteer work. Their research has found that DC public schools require 100 hours of community service from every student in order to graduate. Even more significantly, DCPS students believe overwhelmingly that community service has been beneficial to their life and education outside of the classroom.

However, they found that DCPS students believe that community service opportunities are not promoted strongly enough at school.

The group is now speaking with administrators to begin planning a program that would help make community service opportunities easier to find and more enjoyable for DCPS students. They intend to deliver more effective ways to bring together needy non-profits with DCPS students who share the organizations' passions over meaningful volunteer opportunities.



1.27.2012



## Environmental Sustainability

David Stauffer

Staff Writer

The Environmental Sustainability Issue Group has been hard at work building a project proposal. After identifying several key issues regarding less sustainable lunch practices in the DC school system, the group is working hard to develop a solution in tandem with school officials in the DC Public Schools. These issues include the lack of fresh, locally grown foods, a heavy reliance on imported foods, the massive amount of Styrofoam trays used in the D.C. lunches, and the fact that two thirds of D.C. public schools don't recycle at all.

The group talked to influential members of the green movement within the D.C. community including Mieka Wick of the CityBridge Foundation and AU Professor Anastasia Snelling, who works with members of the D.C. community to attempt to address the lack of fresh and local foods in many areas of D.C.

The group will emphasize the importance of education in solving this problem—ensuring that no matter how the lunch process is made more “green” (reusable trays, more recycling, more locally grown foods), students understand the effects of their decisions—and their community's actions—on the environment as a whole.

## Gender and Sexuality

Jean Cornell

Publicity Coordinator

The Gender and Sexuality issue group decided to tackle the issue of the gay blood ban, a law that prevents men who have sex with men from donating blood. The group plans to address the issue in a multi-step process. First, group members will host a blood drive with videos and posters they prepared which draw attention to the ban and draw supporters to their cause.

Secondly, the group hopes to enlist supporters in a letter writing campaign directed toward elected officials to encourage a change in policy.

“The thing I am most excited about is just getting the information out and educating people about this discriminatory policy,” said group member Caroline Ladzinski ('15). “Our goal as a group is to focus on safe sexual practices and not on sexual partners.”

The group, made up of freshmen Tyler Bowders, Joanna Heaney, Emily Horowitz, Caroline Ladzinski, Marc Lewis, CJ Murphy, and Josh Parrish and TA Dani Nispel, is excited to implement their project this spring.



## Leadership and TFA

*continued from page 1*

Mississippi.

Stitilis, a TA to the sophomore class, has set her sights on Baltimore. She is also the current Campus Coordinator at American for TFA and has worked for TFA on the operational staff in Chicago and Los Angeles and their recruitment staff in DC.

Stitilis explained why she sees TFA as so important. "I think the way in which Teach For America hopes to tackle education reform -- recruiting the nation's top college seniors to teach for two years in the nation's lowest performing schools -- is spot on. These schools need young people who are dedicated, passionate and energetic to enact change."

Post agrees that these young, energized graduates provide a good education for their students. "I made sure I did everything I could to get my kids where they needed to be."

He goes on to say that while he felt the five-week training session was not enough preparation to teach, TFA provided him with plentiful resources and he "worked [his] butt off" to give his students a good education.

"Maybe I wasn't ready on the first day, but I don't think my kids were short changed because of it," says

Post. "They had a teacher who was willing to do whatever it took to get them to proficiency. TFA finds those types of people." Leadership students are clearly among them.

Post also said that while a third of TFA participants remain as teachers, the rest remain involved in education "in one way or another".

He emphasized, "We need 'TFAers' to take their experience and become doctors, lawyers, politicians, etcetera because such occupations open new avenues to help kids and create change."

Post has since created a non-profit that helps give supplies to inner-city schools.

Most learned about TFA via the Leadership Program. Duncombe heard about it from Shelly. Post's roommate, Will Herman another 2009 Leadership alum in TFA, was a TFA campus coordinator. Stitilis was encouraged by her older buddy in the program, Molly Kenney ('09). Miraglia became interested after a presentation about it in her sophomore leadership class.

Even if they do not wish to go into education, these alum find the job



**Leadership Student Director Mitchell Duncombe (pictured here addressing the crowd at the Alumni Weekend Reception) is one of the most recent Leadership TFA members.**

rewarding and important. Shelly says, "Even though I don't plan to work in the education field long term, I think the problem of academic inequity is one of the greatest challenges this country faces."

Miraglia echoes his sentiments. "I was very interested in the prospect of teaching for a few years without feeling compelled to make teaching my life-long career and I loved the idea of serving deserving children and parents in the city I had grown to love after four years at American."

The students note that the Leadership Program ensured they were well prepared to become stand-out TFA Corps members. "Being a great teacher means being an effective

leader," offered Miraglia.

Shelly concurred. "Strong leadership is one of the most important skills necessary to be a successful teacher," he said. "Teachers have some formal authority in the classroom, but much more important is the ability to lead by gaining the trust, respect, and cooperation of students."

Post echoed his sentiments. "More than anything, Leadership taught me how to work with others. You need to bring people together around a common goal and guide them to success. That's what teaching is. It's constantly reflecting, it's learning from your students, it's realizing you don't have all the answers, and it's instilling a feeling in your students that we can never give up because we are in this together."



1.27.2012

## All-American Fun: Family and Alumni Weekend

Harry Weiss

Staff Writer

Leadership students were joined by their family, faculty, and program alumni at the annual Leadership reception during AU's All American Weekend this fall. As part of the afternoon's events, current students gave speeches outlining each year of the program.

"It was great to hear about the program from people who have recently experienced it," said Tripp Frank ('15).

Speakers included Tyler Sadonis ('14), who spoke about an engaging and challenging year as a freshman that gave him a wide variety of leadership skills that continue to help him today. Stephen Bronskill ('13), another speaker, talked about his

experiences during his sophomore year, writing his policy memo and carrying out his social action project. Freshmen, including David Shadburn, found it very useful to hear about the experiences of older students.

Leadership alumni also spoke. Georgette Spanjich ('10), now a lobbyist with ML Strategies, and Truman Scholar Kelsey Stefanik-Sidener, ('11) now in government relations with the American Heart Association both talked about the value of Leadership in getting internships and jobs, as well as the positions they have today. Stefanik-Sidener also spoke of her engaging year as a senior, studying



*Tyler Sadonis ('14) addresses the crowd.*

leadership on the Supreme Court.

There were also speeches from both Professor Marr and Professor Norris, who discussed the hard work the students put into their projects, their internships, and the dedication they exhibit inside and outside the classroom.

The parents enjoyed the opportunity to hear about the program, and the activities and coursework of their students.

"The insight we gained into what exactly our daughter does in this

fantastic program was invaluable. It was also great hearing about all the opportunities made available to alumni of the program, because of their participation," said Joel Horowitz, the father of freshman student Emily Horowitz.

Overall the event was one of the largest and most successful receptions to date, due in large part to the hard work and extensive planning put in by Alumni Coordinator Zach Baldwin ('14) and his committee members



*Students mingle before the presentation.*



*Students, family, and alum listen intently.*

## Politics and Empowerment

Madison Mullen

Staff Writer

For the members of the Politics and Empowerment issue group, the first step was to empower themselves. Fortunately, that first step was the easiest one. At their first meeting in early September, the group agreed that in order to implement a meaningful project, it would have to address a constituency whose voice was not being heard. With so many options, the group decided that it would focus on a group of people who were largely overlooked by politicians and the media: United States ex-prisoners.



The group found that when prisoners are released from prison, they enter back into society without access to many resources necessary for their reintegration. After talking to professionals dedicated to helping reentrants in Washington, D.C., the group decided that ex-prisoners lack the computer skills needed to get a job and to succeed in the 21st century.

The Politics and Empowerment group is currently in the process of organizing a class to teach reentrants how to use Microsoft Word, create Email accounts, and develop other computer and Internet skills. As well as implementing this class, the group will also be documenting their project by interviewing reentrants and others dedicated to their successful reintegration into society through Podcast interviews, photos, and video. This will all be shared with the public through an online blog.

The group, by empowering themselves to make a powerful change, is working to give a voice to a group of people not being heard. The group consists of first-year students Harry Adler, Ben Derby, Madison Mullen, Ian Powell, Julia Reinstein, Jack Szeltner, Chandler Thornton, and sophomore Teaching Assistant Tyler Sadonis.



## Poverty

Harry Weiss

Staff Writer

This year, the Poverty issue group wanted to focus on the problem of homelessness in Washington, D.C. Freshmen Cassandra Henry, Kendall Karr, Christian Knoch, Emily Kvalheim, Trevor Langan, Ta Lynn Mitchell, and Harry Weiss, as well as sophomore TA David Shirbroun, conducted research that revealed the extent to which poverty is a growing problem in the District.

In addition to their research, the group visited and contacted community organizations such as Community Council for the Homeless at Friendship Place and Students Fighting Homelessness and Hunger. The issue group also visited the most impoverished areas of DC where homelessness is particularly pervasive to talk to those on the streets, as well as those trying to help the homeless.

The poverty issue group concluded that they wanted to help the homeless by giving out care packages of toiletries and other essential items the homeless lack. The care packages include information to help direct the homeless to any resources they might require.



## Sophomores

*continued from page 1*

their plans to address the problem, followed by a grant proposal to gain the funding needed to support their projects. In the spring semester, all of these ideas and proposals will be turned into action as students implement their social action projects.

This year's projects once again address a wide range of social issues, including voter participation and registration of young adults, student's rights and voice on campus, education reform, gender and sexual equality, nutrition, poverty, racial diversity at AU, and much more. Each of the nearly forty students has a unique project that fits his or her own passion. Students enjoy the support, encouragement and guid-

ance of one of five seniors in the program serving as teaching assistants and one of two professors.

In addition to these social action projects, students are required to spend time learning about a new life skill and a different culture over the course of both semesters and then share their experiences with the rest of the class. These life skills and cultural challenges are meant to broaden the students' horizons by encouraging them to learn a valuable skill they had always wanted to learn, or to immerse themselves in a culture they had always wanted to know more about.

Skills included learning how to swim, change a tire, meditate,



*Sophomore Alyssa Franke mingles with a potential mentor.*

crochet, and many more. Cultural challenges propelled students to explore the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) community, a secular humanist community, and various religious communities.

Interested sophomores are also paired with a professional in the community who serves as their mentor throughout the year and sometimes well beyond.

During the fall semester, sophomore students also took two personality tests: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) Personality Type Assessment, and the Strengths Based Leadership assessment. These tests encouraged students to further examine themselves and learn more about strengths to build upon and weaknesses to compensate for.

"The MBTI and personality assessments allowed me to formulate a better understanding of

myself as a person and a leader," second-year Evan Brown explains. "While I had some ideas about my strengths and weaknesses, these tests helped me to realize how to best use these traits and how I can fit in with my peers in school and professional activities."

Sophomore year is a challenging year on its own, not to mention the requirements of the Leadership Program. However, most students would agree that it is well worth the late nights and extra effort.

As sophomore student Franky Irwin comments, "Leadership has taken AU's trend of connecting theory with practice all the way and given me the tools and motivation to pursue my goals and personal development, taking them to new levels."



*All smiles in the sophomore class.  
[Photo courtesy of Linnea Jordan]*

## Our Staff

### *Publications Committee*

*Coordinator*

Jean Cornell

*Staff Writers*

Amanda Casoni

Sam McBee

Gabe Menchaca

Madison Mullen

Jenny Newman

Elyse Preston

David Stauffer

Harry Weiss

### *SPA Leadership*

*Program Director*

Margaret Marr

*Student Director*

Mitchell Duncombe

*Deputy Director*

Ki'tay Davison

### *Steering Committee*

*Alumni Coordinator*

Zach Baldwin

*Events Coordinators*

Peter Goelz

Liza Romanow

*Fundraising Coordinator*

Rachel Koretsky

*Finance Coordinator*

Danna Hailfinger

*Interclass Coordinator*

Linnea Jordan

*Media Coordinator*

Franky Irwin

*Mentorship Coordinators*

Megan Huber

Catalina Lillo

## A Legend Among Us: Award-Winning Singer/Leader Comes to AU

Philip Scranage

Guest Writer

This fall, the SPA Leadership Program helped bring to AU's campus John Legend, an inspirational musician and education reform advocate. The singer-songwriter, whose many honors include nine Grammy awards and a starlight from the songwriters hall of fame, spoke for about 45 minutes on political and social issues, and then performed a few of his greatest hits for the next 45 minutes.

Legend discussed education reform extensively, urging that now is the time to increase, not decrease, investment in education and infrastructure that make America great. Legend emphasized that to continue investing in these valuable institutions, we must make our tax structure more fair.

"We need our politicians to put students first," Legend said. He talked about his own experiences, how he felt out of place in school and the value arts and music education had to him.

In the Q&A period, SPA Leader Josh Halpren ('14), asked how schools can put students first while



*Leadership students Olivia Stitilis ('12) and Deon Jones ('14) with John Legend*  
[Photo courtesy of KPU]

still respecting teachers.

"Seeing John Legend speak and sing was pretty incredible," said Halpren. "He even answered my question about teacher moral; and even though we have different opinions on some things, I thought he was phenomenal."

Nate Seeskin ('14) explained, "I liked his discussion on the tax code of the United States. I think he gave a very realistic image about it and how lately we've been talking about making cuts when we should consider helping people. That's what leadership is all about: helping people."

SPA Leaders also had the opportunity to

meet with Legend in the reception after his presentation. The Kennedy Political Union and Student Union Board co-presented the Legend event. Our SPA Leadership Program joined other groups in co-sponsoring the event.