I cannot believe that it has been a year since I became the Director of the Women & Politics Institute. It is even harder for me to believe all that we have accomplished in the last twelve months. Our academic research, classes, leadership training programs, and special events are closing the gender gap in political leadership! Please take a look at some of the 2009 – 2010 academic year highlights and consider supporting our efforts in 2010 – 2011. With your help, we can offer more courses, enroll more students, train more leaders, spearhead more discussions, and ensure that more women enter political life.

I really appreciate your support,
Jennifer L. Lawless

August 2009

At an event held on Capitol Hill, and hosted by American University and Women & Politics Institute alumna, Danielle Hohos, the Institute welcomed the 2009 – 2010 WeLead class. The innovative, intensive WeLead program equips young women with the skills they need for success in politics. To date, the program – which is bipartisan and free of charge – has graduated 250 women who are now employed in the White House, congressional offices, campaign consulting firms, lobbying firms, and non-profit organizations.

The WeLead participants were joined at the kick-off event by Feminist Majority Foundation president Eleanor Smeal and former National Organization for Women president Kim Gandy.

September 2009

Campaign College, the only program in the country that focuses specifically on training women to seek positions in student government, began the 2009 – 2010 academic year strongly. We hosted two training sessions and prepared dozens of students to run for office, 11 of whom threw their hats into the electoral ring.

With the valuable experience of running for and serving on student government that Campaign College provides, more women are now prepared to run for public office when they graduate from American University.

October 2010

The Women & Politics Institute, with American University’s School of Communication, welcomed Linda Tarr-Whelan, who discussed her new book about women’s leadership.

Tarr-Whelan then took questions from an audience of students, faculty, university administrators, alumni, and members of the DC community.

http://www.american.edu/spa/wpi/
November 2009

As a way to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Women & Politics Institute, we launched our “10 in 10 Campaign.” We invited former students and program participants to give back by donating $10 per month for 10 months. The program has been a huge success!

December 2009

We finished the semester having enrolled hundreds of students in our core and weekend classes. Not only did we offer more weekend classes than in any previous semester, but we also increased our number of semester-long classes.

Students had an impressive menu from which to choose:

**Semester-Long Courses in Fall 2009:**
- Women and Political Leadership
- The Role of Latinas in American Politics
- Feminist Political Theory

**Weekend Courses in Fall 2009:**
- Introduction to Women and Politics
- The Politics and Economics of Sexual Harassment
- The Politics of Violence Against Women
- Women and the United Nations

January 2010

We rang in the new year with a massive survey research project. With a grant from the Provost’s office, and supplemental funds from the School of Public Affairs, we began conducting a broad national survey of political ambition.

The team of undergraduate research assistants probably did not know what they were in for when they began compiling the sample of “potential candidates” and devoting endless hours to data entry and spreadsheet maintenance.

It all became clear, though, once the sample was completed. We spent months preparing the mailings. I hand-signed and noted 27,000 pieces of mail; and the research team worked tirelessly stamping, stuffing, and sealing 18,000 envelopes. In addition, they stamped and affixed labels to 9,000 reminder postcards.

We are eagerly awaiting the return of completed surveys, not only because we are interested in the results, but also because we want to get rid of the dozens of boxes of mail that have taken over our workspace!

This project will result in several academic articles and policy reports. Of equal importance, the project provides unique research opportunities for the students who work, intern, and volunteer at the Institute.

February 2010

The Institute hosted an event to discuss the status of women in electoral politics. The evening began with a book signing for Washington Post White House correspondent Anne Kornblut, who recently published Notes from the Cracked Ceiling: Hillary Clinton, Sarah Palin, and What It Will Take for a Woman to Win.

After signing a roomful of student, faculty, and engaged community members’ books, Anne joined CNN’s Jessica Yellin and MSNBC’s Norah O’Donnell for a panel discussion on women’s experiences navigating the campaign trail in the United States.
March 2010

To celebrate Women’s History Month, the Women & Politics Institute co-sponsored an event (with the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies) that focused on the Obama Administration’s efforts to advance women in the United States and around the world.

The Honorable Melanne Verveer, Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues, and Tina Tchen, Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement and Executive Director of the White House Council on Women and Girls, served on a panel moderated by Anita McBride, Executive-in-Residence at American University, and former chief of staff to First Lady Laura Bush.

The audience included students, faculty members, community residents, and more than a dozen ambassadors to the United States.

April 2010

We concluded the 2009 – 2010 WeLead program, throughout which participants gained exposure to a variety of political workshops and opportunities to meet and learn from well-respected, well-known, and well-connected women in politics and public policy.

Among this year’s guest speakers and panelists were women from the following companies and organizations:

- AFSCME International
- American Legacy Foundation
- The Bocskor Company
- CH2M Hill
- The Chadderdon Group
- International Republican Institute
- Laguens, Kully, and Klose
- Mission Control
- Momentum Analysis LLC
- National Democratic Institute
- RBI Strategies and Research
- Roll Call
- Senate Foreign Relations Committee
- State Department
- Verizon Wireless
- Women Thrive

May 2010

Perhaps because of our broader course listings, we graduated more students from the Women, Policy, and Political Leadership program this year than in any previous academic year. Twenty-eight students received the certificate in 2009 – 2010. We also enrolled 26 new students since January 2010, so we anticipate an even larger graduating class next year.

Several of this year’s graduates received impressive school-wide and university-wide awards and recognition – even more evidence that the program attracts and trains American University’s most diligent, hardworking, well-rounded women and men.

To highlight just a handful of these achievements, we congratulate:

- Kyrie Bannar: Fletcher Scholar Award and Truman Scholarship for graduate training in law and public policy
- Allison Dunatchik: Achievement Award for Outstanding Service to the Women & Politics Institute
- Alexandra Jacobs: Paul A., Paul H., & Isabella A. Clarke Scholarship
- Georgette Spanjich: Kinsman-Hurst Award and WPI Award for the Best Undergraduate Research Paper
Jen took over as editor of *Politics & Gender*, a leading political science journal that publishes the highest quality scholarship pertaining to gender, women, and politics. Housing the journal at the Women & Politics Institute provides numerous research and editorial opportunities for both graduate and undergraduate students.

School of Public Affairs alumna, Jan DuPlain, welcomed the audience and served as mistress of ceremonies. Speakers included ambassadors from Bahrain, Croatia, Congo, and Senegal. Their remarks were so powerful and riveting that we hope to make this an annual event!

We were thrilled to receive a copy of Jen’s new book (co-authored with Richard L. Fox), *It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don’t Run for Office!* Based on a national survey of nearly 4,000 eligible candidates, Jen and Richard find that women, even in the highest tiers of professional accomplishment, are substantially less likely than men to demonstrate ambition to seek elective office. Women are less likely than men to be recruited to run for office. They are less likely than men to think they are qualified to run for office. And they are less likely than men to express a willingness to run for office in the future.

This gender gap in political ambition persists across generations and over time; the gender gap in 2008 was the same size as it was in 2001. Despite cultural evolution and society’s changing attitudes toward women in politics, running for public office remains a much less attractive and feasible endeavor for women than for men.

The mission of the Women & Politics Institute is to close the gender gap in political leadership. We provide young women with academic and practical training that encourages them to become involved in the political process, and we facilitate research that enhances our understanding of the challenges women face in the political arena.