

Fall 2006

For the Record

N.E.W. Leadership

Hannah Brenner

Director of Women's Leadership Programs

N.E.W. Leadership, a civic education initiative of the Carl Albert Center, has been educating, inspiring, and empowering women to become political leaders for the past five years. To date, the program has impacted the lives of one hundred and sixty one undergraduate women, many of whom have gone on to attend top graduate and law schools or pursue exciting careers in politics, the nonprofit, and business sectors. In addition, N.E.W. Leadership has expanded its educational model and now also works with women who are beyond college and in the workforce. The program's overall mission—to address the historic under-representation of women in politics and public service—has remained in sharp focus since its inception. The N.E.W. Leadership program in Oklahoma is part of a national network of similar initiatives created by the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

Each spring, at least thirty undergraduate women are selected through a competitive process to participate in the five-day residential institute, which takes place on the University of Oklahoma's campus in Norman. The program exposes participants to women officeholders, politicians, and community, business, and nonprofit leaders through a series of panel discussions, workshops, trainings, campaign simulation, and networking opportunities. Participants spend a day at the Oklahoma State Capitol meeting with lobbyists who are passionate about their issues, hearing from women legislators who tell their story about being a woman in politics, and meeting with a handful of other elected and appointed politicians and judges. It is not uncommon for strong mentoring relationships to develop from these interactions, and students often find internship and employment opportunities after the program with the women leaders that they have met.

The N.E.W. Leadership five-day residential institute is offered free of charge to each selected participant. The costs of running this and other women's leadership projects of the Carl Albert Center are covered through fundraising efforts that take place throughout the year. A combination of Oklahoma-based foundations and corporations as well as individual donors provide the monetary support necessary to fulfill the mission of educating, inspiring, and empowering women to become political leaders. Last year, three major fundraising events rounded out the year, including a special evening at the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame in Tulsa; an event hosted by former Governor David and Rhonda Walters to raise funds

for the Claudia Tarrington Scholarship Fund benefiting N.E.W. Leadership; and a Five Year N.E.W. Leadership Anniversary Dinner Celebration in Oklahoma City.

In response to numerous requests and inquiries from women already in the workforce who want to participate in a similar program, Carl Albert Center Director Cindy Simon Rosenthal and Director of Women's Leadership Programs Hannah Brenner created a new initiative entitled Pipeline to Politics. The Pipeline Project debuted in March 2006 with a reception honoring women in Oklahoma politics. The event was well-attended by conference participants and Oklahoma public office holders, judges, policymakers, and other leaders, and set the stage for an outstanding one-day conference focused on women's increased participation in politics and other leadership roles. Participants of the Pipeline Project chose from one of two distinct curriculum tracts: Fast Track to Politics or Alternative Leadership Opportunities. The event also included a special roundtable discussion focused on Native American Women and Politics. The next Pipeline to Politics event will take place in early 2008.

N.E.W. Leadership Graduates Tell The Story . . .

Aminta Ossom, class of 2006: "NEW Leadership really helped to give me the confidence to accept my ambition. It reinforced my passion for community involvement in political action. It also equipped me by educating me on the amazing impact that women have by simply involving themselves in the political process. I have found myself preaching N.E.W. Leadership's gospel quite naturally since the program ended, and even today, during my first day at Harvard Law School, I was able to discuss some aspects of the N.E.W. Leadership program with fellow classmates. One classmate even asked if I would ever consider running for public office in Oklahoma, and I didn't hesitate to answer in the affirmative. A few months ago I would have hesitated, intimidated by the process, the nature of holding public office, and the lack of women in office in Oklahoma. However, NEW Leadership reassured me that overcoming these obstacles would not be impossible. In fact, it would be empowering."

Ebonee Gilliard, class of 2006: "When I opened my acceptance letter for the 2006 N.E.W. Leadership class, I had no idea what opportunities were in store for me. The five days I experienced at the conference were inspiring and educational. I learned so much from the wonderful women that participated this year, but I also made life-long connections with the women I came in contact with that week. I've even been offered a job by one of our sponsors. I truly appreciate being given the chance to share my knowledge with others and to learn from others. Before the N.E.W. Leadership institute, I was not confident about what I wanted to do with my future. I met so many successful women that week that inspired me to go for my dreams, and now I have the confidence to know that no one can stop me from achieving all of my goals. I was once told that two of the most powerful words in the English language are "thank you". I cannot thank the directors of N.E.W. Leadership enough for accepting me into the program. I would not have wanted to spend a week of my summer any other way."

Brooke Wilson Stokke, class of 2004: "When I first completed the National Education of Women's Leadership conference I believed in myself more than I ever had before. It gave me the confidence to dream big – that I could be anything I wanted to be. It might sound cliché but to a young woman just two years into college it was the confidence I desperately needed. It made me want to become involved for the first time in my life, and it made me want to stand up for myself and other women. My N.E.W. Leadership class was comprised of a dynamic group of women, some older with children, who were all following their own paths. Each participant had her own dreams, ideals, and pursuits – witnessing that diversity really showed me that my life did not have to fit into one particular mold of success, that success is something we feel for ourselves, which is not always recognized by others. I take that confidence with me now into interviews for prospective jobs, and my passion about this experience was one of the things that helped me land my current position. They were impressed with

my love for education, diversity, and change – all of which were spawned from my experience with N.E.W. Leadership.”

2006 N.E.W. Leadership Class Mission Statement

*32 voices
have come together,
from 12 colleges and universities,
7 ethnic backgrounds,
2 political parties,
and 22 cities,
with the passion to persevere,
the education to excel,
the encouragement to empower,
the confidence to continue,
the skills to succeed,
the training to transform,
the initiative to inspire,
the courage to campaign
and the power to progress!
32 voices, 12 colleges and universities,
7 ethnicities, 2 political parties, 22 cities,
1 mission...
EMPOWERING WOMEN!!!*

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