

Women's Leadership Center produces wage gap project

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The Alfred University Women's Leadership Center (WLC) researched and presented a major project during spring semester titled "Dreams to Reality," a documentary about the pay gap in today's society. The project was launched with the help of a grant from the American Association of University Women (AAUW). The central idea of this project came from Catherine Lynch, an '08 AU graduate who majored in art and design. Lynch was looking at a photography book that helped capture the economic issues for families in the United States. Along with Lynch, fellow Alfred University students Jessica Barnthouse, a 2008 communication studies and English graduate; Catherine Aiello and Grace Stewart, recent art and design graduates; Leah Houk and Cori Pignatelli, senior psychology majors; Laura Reyome, a junior English major; and Kristen Rubisch, a junior political science major, all helped to develop the documentary. Amy Jacobson, director of the WLC and this project, along with Dr. Karen Porter, AU professor of sociology, and Becky Shick, Alfred-Hornell AAUW secretary and director of communications and operations at Howell, Liberatore and Wickham, Inc., all assisted the seven female students with organizing, researching, and putting together the documentary. Jacobson noted, "We could have done this whole project without the students involved, but the process of student involvement is what is so critical about it. [This project] is shaped to be more interesting to students." Student interest resulted in the project addressing two issues, finding jobs and the pay gap. The project was launched with a grant from the Leadership and Training Institute of the AAUW. The WLC received \$4,700 to support research on the pay gap that exists between men and women after college graduation. The WLC also spent \$1,000 of its budget for the project. The capstone project kicked off with an alumni survey, resulting in received 186 responses. Seventy percent of the responses were from women, while the other 30 percent were from men. Jacobson noted, "we were looking for really interesting stories" which led to choosing people to interview for the documentary. Five alumni were chosen to share their stories: Cheryl Hurst '98, a social science major who is a NYC social worker; Natalie Krauser McCarthy '98, a business and theater major who is now a NYC business sales director; Sheila Flanagan '79, an education major currently a teacher in Newfane, NY; Erin McKenna Nowak '95, an art and design major who is a graphic designer in Syracuse, NY; and Peter Wall '95, a business major who is now president of a health services company in Hornell, NY. Each alum shared his or her story about their personal experience of the wage gap in today's society. Research from the AAUW was also included in the documentary. One chart showed women only earn about 80 percent of what men earn, a pay gap that shows up just one year after graduation from college. To help inform fellow students of the problem with today's pay gap, the WLC brought Evelyn Murphy, founder and president of The WAGE Project, Inc., to campus to present her "Start Smart" workshops. The WAGE Project is a national organization devoted to ending wage discrimination against working women. Murphy is also a Resident Scholar on leave from the Women's Studies Research Center at Brandeis University, just outside of Boston, MA, where she researched and authored a book on women's wages, published in October 2005. Murphy introduced the students to www.salary.com, an online tool that will help determine a fair salary for the area and business a student enters. She also gave them four key points to remember when negotiating a salary: never be the first to name a salary figure, aim high and be realistic, talk about your strong points, and don't jump at the first offer. Due to the positive outcome of Murphy's visit, Mark McFadden, director of the Career Development Center, Jill Ninos, internship and co-op coordinator, and Jacobson will be trained to give "Start Smart" workshops in the fall to help deliver Murphy's message. Jacobson noted, "You can't replace Evelyn Murphy. She's this fireball woman, but we will be offering the content of her workshops in our own way." The WLC has several plans to share results and show the documentary to the public. It has already been presented at the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders in Washington, D.C. on June 5-7, 2008. The WLC was able to send four students to the conference thanks to the Mildred Pape Endowment. There are plans to show the DVD in "First-Year Experience" classes at AU; at the AAUW's NYS Leadership Conference at Delta Lake, near Rome, NY; at the Alfred-Hornell Chapter of AAUW; and at surrounding high schools. The documentary may also be shown at the WLC Summer Institute, a program for young women. Copies of the documentary are available for \$1 plus shipping and handling. For any additional information contact Jacobson at jacobsona@alfred.edu, or by phone at 607.871.2971.