

PLEN

The Public Leadership Education Network | Preparing Women to Lead



WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGE

Preparing Women to Lead

2021

Geneva, New York 14456
www.hws.edu

A Message from Current Leaders

Preparing Women to Lead

Dear Friends,

At William Smith, the Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN) strives to embody the value of women supporting women through mentorship and empowerment. Over the last 10 years, PLEN at William Smith has grown into a community of collegiate women who exemplify these ideals. Members of the PLEN community bring a variety of perspectives from their various campus and life experiences to our meetings and events, where we have conversations surrounding female empowerment and leadership. A focus of ours is to always include aspects of self-care and intersectional feminism into every conversation, as these were our chosen goals for the chapter.

To maintain and enrich our network, we invite alums, faculty, staff, students and guest speakers to our biweekly breakfasts to share stories of their successes, obstacles conquered and lessons learned. It is our hope that these stories inspire and connect William Smith women through shared experiences. In recent years, we have hosted salary negotiation workshops, helped first-year and sophomore William Smith students with course registration and career guidance, hosted panels with inspiring women (from former U.S. Representatives to faculty in male-dominated majors), and facilitated discussions on prioritizing commitments. We consistently seek to include our core values of intersectional feminism and self-care in each conversation that we host.

In addition to our breakfasts, we have organized and hosted the PLEN/Leadership League of Women (LLOW) Leadership Conference for female-identifying high school and college students on campus. More recently, we held a Sunday Series seminar on campus, where we had three sessions with diverse female leaders in their respective fields. This brought access to PLEN seminar materials to every William Smith student on campus. We also held a window painting event that celebrated the 14th Amendment and the diversity of the women who helped it come to fruition. We also hosted several self-care nights that gave students a well-deserved break during the intensity of the semester. These events are opportunities for members of our greater community to learn about PLEN and build an even larger and closer-knit network of women on and off-campus.

Now more than ever, it is important to support, encourage and build platforms for women — whether they are your daughters, sisters, friends or peers — to have their voices heard and validated. PLEN has been a steady presence on campus and in Washington, D.C. It was amazing to see how we were able to adapt to ever changing conditions, which is the true demonstration of what it means to be a PLEN woman. We are strong, resilient and capable, and PLEN helps us channel that into successful careers and lives. We at PLEN work hard to create this positive and sustainable change that we hope to see in the world.

Best,

The PLEN Leadership Team (Fall 2021)

Litzy Bautista '23

Allie Bonagura '22

Fatou Diokhane '23

Ashly Johnson '22

PLEN

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WILLIAM SMITH COLLEGE

PLEN at William Smith

As highlighted in the HWS 2014 Middle States Commission Self-Study report, William Smith is an institutional member of the nationally recognized Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN). In 2010, William Smith was invited to join PLEN, a prestigious consortium of colleges (including Mount Holyoke, Smith College and St. Lawrence University) as an institutional member. **PLEN is the only national organization with the sole focus of preparing college women for leadership in the public policy arena.** Through exposing college women to role models, career paths and skills training before they enter the workforce, PLEN's mission is to increase the number of women in top leadership positions in the nation's public policy process.

Each year, PLEN brings hundreds of female students across the country to Washington, D.C. They experience firsthand how public policy is shaped and implemented at the national level. Students engage with and learn from female leaders who are currently making and influencing public policy at the highest levels in Congress, the courts, federal agencies, the private sector, policy research and advocacy organizations, and the media. These women serve as teachers and mentors for PLEN students. In addition to learning how systems work at the policy level, PLEN seminars also provide education on important skills, like salary negotiation, professionalism



Chapter Leaders Lorena Robelo-Lara '21 and Litzy Bautista '23 at the celebration of Ruth Bader Ginsberg receiving the Elizabeth Blackwell award.

and networking. The seminars are a great opportunity for William Smith students to start building their own networks, as the women at these seminars are willing to help students in any way they can.

Reflecting the Colleges' commitment to prepare citizens for lives of consequence, the William Smith Dean's Office provides gender-specific leadership programs for students, including the opportunity for William Smith students to attend PLEN seminars in Washington, D.C. and network with powerful women in the public policy community. The Dean's Office also sponsors an active college chapter of PLEN led by William Smith student PLEN leaders who coordinate empowerment and development opportunities specific to women on campus while also communicating with the PLEN office in D.C., offering feedback on PLEN programs and helping plan future PLEN initiatives and seminars.

Many PLEN attendees from William Smith now work in offices at the Washington Post, The American Federation of Teachers, The Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester, and the U.S. House of Representatives, to name only a few. All William Smith students who have attended PLEN can attest to the transformative experience of this all-female networking opportunity available to them through their access to PLEN while students at William Smith.

Current Leader Testimonies

Rylee Wernoch '21

Majors: Biology and Environmental Studies

Minor: Africana Studies

After a particularly rough start to my first year due to a concussion, Dean Kaenzig recommended that I attend the STEM PLEN seminar over winter break. At the seminar I was not only impressed by the speakers, but also by many of the students who attended. I met women who I wanted to emulate both in the long and short term. I then attended the PLEN STEM seminar over my senior year, and one of the women I met as a student was a speaker on a panel! It was a great full circle moment that spoke to the power of PLEN.

Wanting to continue the energy and support that I felt at PLEN in D.C., I joined the William Smith PLEN chapter my first-year spring. I was surrounded by an inspiring community of women who I likely never would have met if it was not for PLEN. I loved the interdisciplinary community and getting time to reflect at PLEN breakfasts. After not having the athletic career that I had expected due to a variety of injuries, PLEN continued to be a space where I was able to re-ground myself, listen to other perspectives, and think about the best ways for me to contribute to the communities of which I am a part.

Given the impact that PLEN had on my personal growth during my first two years at HWS, and the importance that it had for me to understand my identity beyond athletics, I decided to apply for the PLEN leadership board with the personal goals of expanding the impact of the PLEN community and connecting women interested in supporting women. During my time as a Chapter Leader, we had many conversations about who we wanted to be, and how we wanted to interact with our community- we made sure that every event was intentional in growing a community of women supporting women. During my junior and senior years, we constantly addressed our two main goals of self-care and intersectional feminism, two especially important topics as we navigated the 2020 election and COVID-19.

My time with PLEN over the past four years has shown me the importance of community, reflection and supporting others. I learned that it is important to take time for yourself, and the importance of lifting those who surround you.

Lorena Robelo-Lara '21

Major: American Studies

Minors: Philosophy, Writing and Rhetoric

I had no idea what I was getting myself into when I entered my first PLEN breakfast. I just went because my friend dragged me along and said it aligned with my personal interests of female empowerment and a possible career in policy. I entered the space, and I was one of the few women of color in the room. That was not an uncommon occurrence for me at HWS. However, the only difference between me being in a predominantly white classroom and me being at a PLEN breakfast is that in PLEN, I did not feel less than and I felt heard. Attending PLEN was one of the best decisions I could have made in my college career. I met many fascinating students who had similar interests and passions and wanted nothing but the best for me and those around them.

PLEN is the environment that provided me the tools to command the room, know my worth, and believe in my own capabilities. Whether it is the PLEN chapter here at William Smith or PLEN in Washington, D.C., PLEN has maintained an environment of support and strength that I have yet seen in most spaces. I am grateful to have had the pleasure of being a PLEN Chapter Leader for three years and to be surrounded by many accomplished and remarkable women, whether they are esteemed guests or the other students sitting in the room with me who have been there along the way. PLEN provided me so many opportunities that I did not think were possible, and I wanted to share that with other students like me, women of color from low-income backgrounds that want to start a career in policy. So, I made it my mission to make PLEN a more diverse space and give back to the communities that encouraged me. With the support of the other Chapter Leaders, we increased our diversity in every sense of the word and can see it continuing to improve.

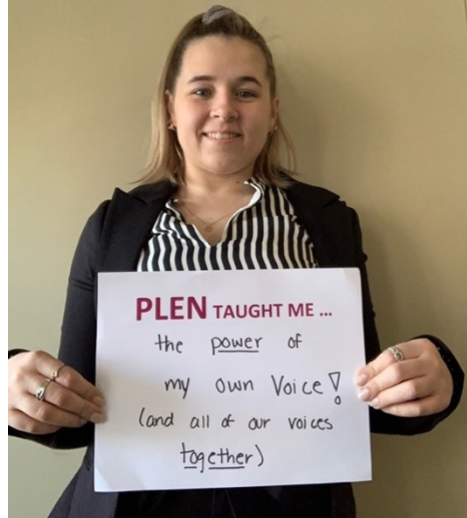
PLEN has given me so much to take with me in my journey post grad: lessons that will forever be applicable, relationships that I will cherish forever, and resources that help women like me. I have seen PLEN grow from 10 students sitting in the Blackwell Room to 40 women gathered in Bartlett Theatre. I hope PLEN continues to grow and flourish, and that other students can look back and see the change they made from when they first entered the space to when they set out on their own endeavors. I hope PLEN can continue to be the space of unconditional support and growth that it has been for me throughout my college career and beyond.

Allie Bonagura '22

Major: Healthcare, Identity, and Equity (Ind. Major)

Minor: Biology

During my sophomore year at HWS, I was looking for an activity that would help me meet new people. Being a member of the JV soccer team was a great way to meet people, but I wanted to expand my circle outside of William Smith athletics. My teammate, and one of the Junior Chapter Leaders of PLEN, Rylee, took my roommate and me to a PLEN breakfast about going abroad. I was immediately hooked. It was so nice to sit and be inspired by the wonderful women around me, and I was meeting new people while learning important life and leadership skills. When I applied to be a Chapter Leader of PLEN, I really just wanted to be involved in making it even better. Being a leader has taught me many skills and offered me the opportunity to meet and learn from incredible and successful women. I am very grateful for my experiences and for every friend I have met through this wonderful organization.



Chapter Leader Allie Bonagura '22 sharing what PLEN taught her during the Women in Health Policy Seminar (March 2021).

Ashly Johnson '22

Major: Biology

Minor: Writing Colleagues

From my early days at HWS, as I connected with my advisor and the William Smith deans about my interests, I was encouraged to look into joining PLEN. I was unable to join breakfasts due to class conflicts during my first year. When I was finally able to attend in my sophomore year, I immediately knew there was something special about the space PLEN had created. Growing up, I was never taught about and never really experienced the power of community and mentorship among women. So, when I found this space where I was able to experience it, PLEN began to fundamentally shift my outlook on my time at William Smith. I realized that I wanted to be a part of maintaining, growing and further improving this space on campus. This is why I applied to be a Chapter Leader. I really believe that the experiences I have had and the people I have met through PLEN have changed me forever. I hope to always carry the values of mentorship, community and intentionality with me to affect positive change in the world.

Litzzy Bautista '23

Major: Political Science & Latin American Studies

I grew up in a very community-oriented household and environment, where everyone helps uplift and encourage others to be the best version of themselves. My move from Los Angeles to Geneva was one of many roadblocks where I dealt with homesickness and not knowing how to make Geneva feel like home. One day Lorena, a Chapter Leader of PLEN, came to my Posse meeting to discuss PLEN, and it instantly drew my attention. PLEN has become a place of comfort for me, where similar to my home in LA, we prioritize mentorship, collaboration and uplifting women. PLEN is a space where women can feel safe and share similar sentiments of imposter syndrome in the workplace and other experiences that are specific to women. I am forever grateful for the opportunities that PLEN has brought forward, and the friendships that were created. Being a PLEN Chapter Leader has given me the amazing opportunity to have and lead the important discussion topics of women of color in power and community building.

Fatou Diokhane '23

Major: Political Science

Minor: Africana Studies

As a new member of the HWS community, I yearned and looked forward to a space like PLEN: a community that was empowering, like-minded and resourceful. I can say without a doubt that PLEN exceeded those expectations. The mission of PLEN is one that speaks to me personally because I come from a family embodying women leadership. PLEN feels like a place to lead and be led. To be a Chapter Leader has allowed me the opportunity to witness and take part in pushing our PLEN chapter to centralize intersectional feminism, self-care and holistic women's empowerment. We have created a community of women who relentlessly uplift each other, and I could not be more grateful. Here I have found and fostered amazing friendships and an incredible network that keeps expanding. I am so excited to continue to grow and develop our PLEN chapter!

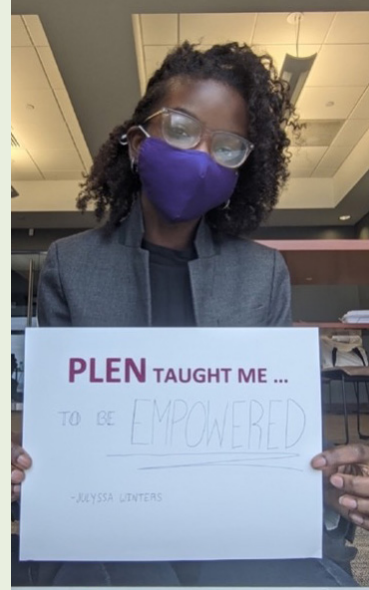
Seminar Attendees Testimonies

Julyssa Winters '24

Major: Architectural Studies

Women of Color Influencing Washington

I am so grateful for the opportunity to attend my first ever PLEN seminar! As someone who was not incredibly engaged with public policy before coming to college, this seminar really opened my eyes to civic engagement. It was truly inspiring to hear from so many amazing women doing important work on Capitol Hill. I participated in a Saturday morning panel that was a candid discussion about the realities of being a woman of color in political spaces. The perseverance, passion and grace these women leaders showed us is something that resonates with me to this day.



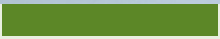
Irini Konstantinou '23

Double Major: English and Writing and Rhetoric

Minor: Dance

Women in Public Policy Seminar

My favorite experience from the Women in Public Policy Seminar was the privilege of listening to one amazing speaker, who shared an inspiring anecdote of her personal journey of advocating for herself while working her way up the ranks of her company. She refused to allow others to look down upon her or classify her in a certain way because she was a woman. As a result, she became respected and looked up to by her colleagues. It was in this moment that I realized why I signed up for the seminar: to hear and learn from other amazing women and to be part of an uplifting community that celebrates the ambition of aspiring female leaders.



Julyssa Winters '24 sharing what PLEN taught her during the Women of Color Influencing Washington Seminar

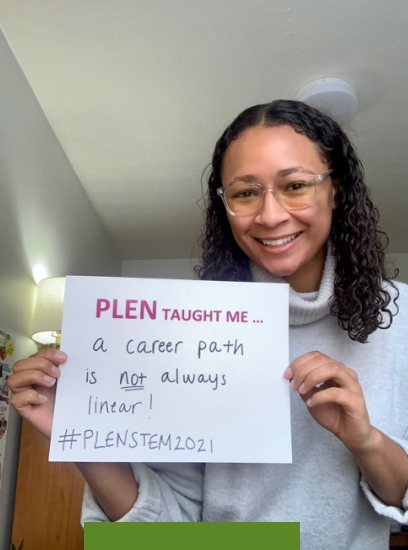
Natalie McCarthy '22

Major: Biology

Minor: Economics

Women in STEM Policy Seminar

Women in STEM Policy taught me that I am more capable than I thought. The connections that I formed with both students and speakers over the course of the week proved that I am capable of networking. And, the twists and turns those various speakers had taken over the course of their showed me that my career path does not have to be linear. Even if I do not plan to work in policy right now, I can work in that arena in the future. In the meantime, I can advocate for policy changes in other ways like writing to my representative and getting involved in various organizations and associations.



*Mimi Smith '21
sharing what
PLEN taught
her during the
Women in STEM
policy seminar.*

Mimi Smith '21

Major: Biology

Minor: Economics

Women in STEM Policy

This past winter, I had the incredible opportunity to attend the PLEN Women in STEM Policy Seminar and learn from some of the most accomplished female leaders in science policy, engineering and more. It was a week full of panels and interactive sessions to put the skills we were learning to work. One of the biggest takeaways from the seminar was the networking with my peers and panelists. I was able to connect and meet with Chloe McPherson, a Science and Engineering Fellow for Representative Houlahan in the U.S. House of Representatives. She provided me with helpful knowledge and advice for a career in D.C.. After this meeting, I was inspired to

continue looking into possible careers on the Hill in science policy. My experience at the PLEN seminar ultimately led me to apply for my current role, where I am serving as a summer intern for the House Committee on Natural Resources. I am so grateful for PLEN, as I was inspired and motivated to follow my dreams regardless of how daunting they might seem.

Breakfast Attendees Testimonies

Audrey Platt '21

Double Major: Political Science & Latin American Studies

PLEN means growth mindset: for the Colleges, for William Smith, for the professional network, respect, mutual support and building community. You put effort into PLEN, and it will put out for you --> exponentially! The candor and generosity through PLEN's consistent programming, time and dedication leads as an example for student engagement.

Maddie Hasbrouck '22

Major: Biology

Minors: Psychology, Child Advocacy, and Public Policy

PLEN has provided me with the opportunity to create a diverse network of strong women, all working to improve women's leadership both on campus and in our future careers. I attend PLEN breakfasts not only for the connections and friendships I have made but also to learn about all the information PLEN has to offer. I have benefitted

from these breakfasts by learning about topics I would not have otherwise been exposed to including budgeting, salary negotiation, self-care advice, etc. PLEN is also where I first made a connection with Dean Kaenzig! My favorite breakfast memories have been the senior spotlights where we were able to learn more about the seniors, as well as opportunities where I have spoken to underclassmen about my experiences at HWS. I'm hoping to return to pre-Covid times soon so we can all sit around one big table again and eat the famous cinnamon-sugar butter bagels that made Friday mornings that much sweeter!



A screenshot of the Sunday Series session.

Katelyn Oswalt '24

Intended Major: Political Science and Psychology

PLEN is a space where I can be prepared to lead in the future. By attending breakfasts, I have been able to consider my career goals and how I want to shape my professional future.

Britta Wilkerson '24

Intended Double Major: Sociology and Education

Intended Minor: Spanish

Also participating in Teacher Education Program working on a dual certificate in childhood education and teaching students with disabilities

Coming into HWS as a first year, I am very grateful to have found an organization that is so open and accepting. Joining PLEN was a great way for me to meet other strong, empowered women on campus. At the very first meeting I went to, I immediately knew I wanted to be a part of PLEN and spend time with these women. Besides the fact that the club is centered around getting women into positions in power and supporting the women around us, they had such a welcoming attitude. Also, it does not hurt that there is always food at PLEN meetings. So far, my favorite meetings to go to have been the senior spotlights. I love hearing the stories of current seniors' empowerment.

Emma Bilton '22

Double Major: Psychology and Sociology

Minor: Child Advocacy

The PLEN events, especially the breakfasts, have been programs that I look forward to on campus! These events have given me a community and a support system of strong women, each with different experiences and strengths. I am able to ask questions, look for support and have fun with a group of like-minded women. These events have also helped me to grow as a William Smith student, an athlete and as a person.

Megan Rooney '21

Major: Political Science

Minor: Writing and Rhetoric

When I started coming to the PLEN breakfasts as a first year, it was a way for me to make new friends and learn about women's issues on campus. It turned out to be an even greater resource than I realized as I heard other women on campus offer solutions to time management, burnout, and more. As a senior, the breakfasts grew exponentially in attendance, and it was amazing to see how many women joined the chapter. One of the best things that prepared me for the job search and post-college life was PLEN. Attending meetings, and a conference in D.C. taught me it is okay not to have a set life plan and that my voice matters. I would recommend PLEN to every single woman on campus looking for a strong group of women who will lead the future.

Hannah Bilton '22

Double Major: Biology and International Relations

PLEN has provided me with a family on campus. Coming to college I was unsure of myself and my place on campus; so, when I found PLEN, it completely changed my experience. PLEN is a safe space to connect with other women on campus, talk about everything from politics, networking, and daily life with a group of diverse women who all share the same drive. This group not only helps you on campus but connects you to a network of women across the nation. I was lucky enough to go to a PLEN seminar in D.C. and learn about all of the jobs for women in STEM who are also interested in politics. I was inspired finding women in the professional world who are making a difference and how to learned everyone's path is unique.

Alum Testimonies



Morgan Hamre '20

*Major: Computer Science
Minor: Environmental Studies*

The William Smith chapter of PLEN was a great space for me to get to know other phenomenal women of William Smith. In my first few years of college, I loved hearing from upper-class women about their experiences and advice. In turn, I also enjoyed sharing my experiences and advice with younger students. PLEN meant having a community of thoughtful, intellectual, inspiring, and all-around wonderful women who support and lift one another.

Current Position:
*Software Engineer,
Nordstrom*



Sarah Walters '19

*Major: Genocide, Human Rights, and Peace Action (Indiv. Major)
Double Minor: Writing Colleagues and Religious Studies*

PLEN remains one of the most impactful opportunities I have experienced. I bookended my time at HWS with seminars, attending my first one in the spring of my first year. That was the jumpstart of my time with PLEN, leading me to become a Chapter Leader through my senior year and attend my final seminar after graduation. The community I found through PLEN's network (at school and beyond) and my time as a Chapter Leader emboldened me as a student, as an advocate, and as an activist. I am so much more empowered because of the people I found through PLEN, the lessons I learned, and the leaps I was able to take. Everything I learned and did through PLEN has allowed me to grow myself and my community, and to champion greater change for the world around me. I think about PLEN often in the work I do now. I know that it is largely because of my four years with PLEN that I have the tools I need to trust and better myself, and to help others in compassionate, dynamic and forward-thinking ways.

Current Position:
Holocaust Education Director and Community Relations Program Director at the Jewish Federation of Greater Rochester

**Current
Position:**
*Senior
Program
Manager at
the National
Collaborative
for Health
Equity*



Jalisa Whitley '11

*Double Major: Public Policy and Sociology
Double Minor: Political Science and Peer
Education in Human Relations*

I participated in PLEN in my senior year after spending the Fall in Washington, D.C. for an HWS off-campus program there. I fell in love with the city, and PLEN was my re-affirmation that I wanted to do social justice and policy-related work here. Getting the chance to hear from and connect with women who were doing this work was an invaluable experience during my start in the city and many were willing to help me get my start. I've definitely learned the importance of making meaningful and mutually beneficial connections. These will continue to serve you throughout your career - even beyond the initial meeting. Since participating in the program, I have spoken at and participated in multiple PLEN events in D.C. and am always excited to connect with other William Smith women who are preparing to make a big splash in the world.

**Current
Position:** *J.D.
Candidate '23
at Albany Law
School*



Allison Magnarelli '18

*Major: Sociology
Double Minor: Entrepreneurial Studies and Public
Policy with a concentration in Law*

PLEN provided an opportunity for me to connect with women in the field in which I was interested (Law and Legal Advocacy) and to learn of opportunities outside the traditional path. There were many jobs and opportunities that I learned of through this experience that I previously did not know existed. It was also a way to get out of my comfort zone and network with professionals outside the HWS community. I attended the Women in Law and Legal Advocacy seminar twice and took away valuable insights both times. I learned that there is so much time to accomplish your goals and there are many different ways to get there. No one path is the right answer.



Taylor Piva '17

Major: Writing and Rhetoric; War, Warfare, and the Soldier Experience
Minor: Writing Colleagues Program

My initial experience with PLEN was attending the Unlocking Nonprofits seminar in February of 2015. I arrived back to campus with renewed energy for my research interests and an increased confidence that my

passion could turn into a meaningful career. While that has had a lasting impact, as I now continue my research interests in a doctoral program, the way in which I benefited the most from PLEN was by serving on the leadership team and being an active part of the PLEN chapter on campus. The community inspired me by the way it lifted womxn up, created space for meaningful conversations, and supported--and sometimes challenged--one another on a journey of development. I not only learned about being a leader, but I learned about being a better listener, communicator, colleague, and friend.

Current

Position:

Ph.D. Student in Higher Education at Warner School of Education (University of Rochester); Editing Consultant for Upfront Books



Rose Cherubin '15

Major: Public Policy
Minor: Anthropology

PLEN taught me the power of self-advocacy and community. While I am still learning and cultivating my career, I have learned that these two attributes are essential to personal and professional development. I am also deeply appreciative of the transparency

shared by PLEN panelists at conferences and my fellow PLEN alumnae. Transparency has provided spaces for vulnerability and clarity while on this journey and to share it with future generations of women.

Current

Position:

College and Career Access Coach at BUILD NYC, Graduate Student

Current Position:
Legislative & Political Assistant at the American Federation of Teachers



Maeve Kline '19

Major: Economics

Minor: Public Policy, Teacher Education Program certification

PLEN was my happy place on campus. It was where I could connect with other William Smith students, engage in challenging and eye-opening discussions, be vulnerable and feel empowered. PLEN provided me the

opportunity to explore D.C. my first year at William Smith during the Women in Law and Public Policy Seminar— where my work is still based today. PLEN taught me how to look at issues and approach solutions with intersectionality front and center, which is critically important in the work I do now. Most importantly, PLEN ingrained in me to pay it forward, lean on other women when you need it and lend a helping hand when you are in a position to do so.

Current Position:
Associate Dedicated Advisor to the Hill, National Journal



Emma Consoli '20

Major: International Relations

Minors: Women's Studies, Public Policy, and Writing Colleagues

PLEN became my community after my lacrosse career ended. From my first meeting, I could tell that it was a safe and open space full of kind, vibrant and intelligent people who really cared about what the other members had to

say. The conversations that were had during our breakfasts were so impactful, whether the discussion was about course registration or the importance of Juneteenth or anything in between. The bonds that were built during our events were some of my favorite moments of my HWS career. PLEN was an opportunity for me to develop relationships with people on campus that I never would have known otherwise, both students and faculty members. Bringing together community members of all levels, from all disciplines, and from all corners of campus, I truly looked forward to waking up early on Friday mornings. I will never forget one of our breakfasts my senior year in which we had three professors and the provost share their experiences as women in their fields. The conversation ended up taking a deeply personal turn which was so heartfelt and sincere that it left several people in tears. It is moments like that which make PLEN so special. Even during the pandemic, our continued virtual meetings helped to maintain some sense of normalcy, for which I am so thankful.

Balancing & Engaging:

our civic engagement beyond November 3rd

maintaining and remaining politically engaged following the 2020 Election season



A special topics conversation with President of the Newcomb Alumnae Association and Advocate Lisa Rice, Washington D.C., on how to continue to be engaged after such a hard election season. Lisa has given many talks to our PLEN students, and we appreciate her knowledge and experience for these difficult, but incredibly important conversations!



The 14th Amendment window that was painted by PLEN attendees to celebrate the progress we have made, and who has contributed to that progress, and to discuss what is still left to be done. This painting stayed up in the Scandling Campus Center for most of the Fall semester to help spread the word!



WILLIAM SMITH
COLLEGE

Office of the Deans
Smith Hall
Geneva, New York 14456

www.hws.edu