

May 30, 2009

Program encourages women to lead

*Rachel Gallegos
Iowa City Press-Citizen*

Iowa is one of only two states -- Mississippi is the other -- to have never elected a woman as governor or to Congress.

"That's kind of embarrassing," Kelly Dauplaise Thornburg said.

Thornburg is program coordinator for the state's National Education for Women's Leadership network, or N.E.W.

The Iowa N.E.W. Leadership program encourages young women to become elected officials or take on other public leadership roles. This year's intensive six-day residential institute starts Sunday. This year's class will include 26 participants, half from the University of Iowa and half from other institutions, Thornburg said. Students from any Iowa two- or four-year undergraduate institution or Iowa residents who attend college out of state are eligible to apply.

This year, there were more than 200 nominations and 74 applications to be part of the second Iowa N.E.W. Leadership class, doubling the number from last year, she said.

One of the goals for Iowa N.E.W. Leadership is to develop a network to have women in public leadership roles as mentors and resources, Thornburg said.

In Iowa, "there is a good ol' boy network," Thornburg said. "We do not have a good ol' girl network."

Thornburg said she thinks there will not be as much progress as is possible without both men and women in leadership roles.

"Women do not envision themselves as leaders. They envision themselves as worker bees," Thornburg said. "We want to be able to train young women to step into a public role."

The University of Iowa was the 17th university to join N.E.W., which was established in 1991 through the Center for American Women and Politics in the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University.

During the intensive six-day residential program, women learn how to fundraise and network, improve their public speaking skills and participate in cultural competence activities and discussion. The hope is to make stepping into leadership roles more of a reflexive action, Thornburg said.

Research shows that women will run for office if asked but aren't as likely to initiate it on their own, Thornburg said.

"If we can extend that invitation early in their careers, ... then that allows them to better accept and engage that invitation," she said.

Additional Facts

If you go

The Iowa N.E.W. Leadership program will host two public events during the six-day residential program.

- A screening of "What's Your Point, Honey?" followed by discussion with director Amy Sewell at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the Bijou Theater.
 - A reception followed by remarks by Bonnie Campbell, former Iowa attorney general and member of the Iowa state Board of Regents. The reception begins at 5:30 p.m. Thursday with Campbell's address from 6:30 to 7 p.m. at the Old Capitol Museum.
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