



## Women are 'ready to run' for the top

Female leadership and political campaign conference comes to UVM

By Hayley Johnson, Staff Writer

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UVM's first Ready to Run conference brought women together, not for a jogging session but for political campaign and leadership training this past weekend.

Ready to Run: Campaign Training for Women was a program created by Rutgers University in conjunction with their Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), according to professor of women and gender studies Felicia Kornbluh.

It is a conference focused purely on political campaigning at Rutgers, but the UVM conference focused on female leadership in general to increase the number of women who might be interested in attending, Kornbluh said.

"You don't have to think about running for office tomorrow to come," organizer, welcoming speaker and former Vermont governor Madeleine Kunin said. "It is also for people who want to know more about leadership."

After Kunin invited the head of CAWP to UVM, "[the Women and Gender Studies department and Kunin] decided to bring some of the work that they do at Rutgers down here," Kornbluh said.

"One of the things they do is train women how to get into electoral politics in a very hands-on, practically oriented way," she said.

Kunin said that this type of training is important for women because they sometimes undersell themselves.

"Women often underestimate their own qualifications, and they're just much tougher on themselves," she said. "They'll say I can't do that. I'm not qualified. Whereas a man is more likely to consider himself qualified."

Kunin was the first woman elected as governor in Vermont, and in her book "Pearls, Politics, and Power," she calls women to act and become involved in politics, according to her website, mkunin.org..

"I think, first of all, the leadership of the country should reflect the population in the democracy, so just from that simple arithmetic, I think it is important for women to be there," Kunin said. "I think it is important for minorities to be there."

The conference had two keynote speakers — Christine Jahnke, Michelle Obama's speech coach, and Celinda Lake, a leading political strategist — according to the event's poster.

"I learned a lot of new things, especially from the outside speakers," Saint Michael's senior and current Miss Vermont Caroline Bright said. "The information they presented was really valuable, and I loved the duality of the Vermont focus but also the external focus, looking at the federal level, looking at Vermont."

UVM attendees said that the conference proved valuable to them as well.

"I think that they gave real life applicable advice that you can use ... in your own life — from something as simple as how to dress all the way up to how to recommend yourself to somebody you might not know as well," junior Jessica Bullock said.

Both Bright and Bullock mentioned their connection to the focus on female leadership.

"Being able to comment on personal experiences that other women have had going into what has been a somewhat systematically biased political system [was useful]," Bullock said.

"My platform as Miss Vermont is all about getting young women to run for public office, and ... to close the gender gap that exists in politics today," Bright said.

Kunin had one point she wanted to convey. "The big message is 'you can do this.' If you want to get involved, you can do it and this is how," she said.



MARY DONOVAN The Vermont Cynic

Women get ready to run for public office at the Ready To Run Campaign Training for Women in the Davis Center on Saturday, April 16.