

Funding the Future of Public Policy: Newcomb Institute provides grants for Tulane University students to attend PLEN conferences

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Tulane University students at the PLEN Global Policy seminar | Courtesy of the Newcomb Institute

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For the past 40 years, [The Public Leadership Education Network \(PLEN\)](#) has brought thousands of students from across the country to Washington, D.C., to meet with

and learn from distinguished leaders who have made major contributions to public policy.

PLEN is a national organization that hosts a series of seminars in Washington, D.C., to prepare women and marginalized gender groups for careers in public policy through learning sessions, site visits to the nation's capital, and meetings with industry leaders.

Newcomb Institute provides 20 to 30 [grants](#) for students attending PLEN conferences each year.

Dr. Julie Henriquez Aldana, the administrative assistant professor of women's leadership and director of student leadership and engagement at Newcomb Institute, said that PLEN offers a vital experience for undergraduate women interested in public policy.

"PLEN gives students an opportunity [...] to explore their interest in careers around public policy and learn about the experiences of those who do this work on a daily basis to help inform their decisions about their future career," Henriquez said.

PLEN now offers seminars in public policy, global policy, STEM policy, and health policy.

Henriquez said that applications for grants can be competitive and that Newcomb Institute attempts to provide opportunities for as many students as possible.

"We ask students how participating in this seminar would benefit them and what they could take away from it. We look at their involvement and how [the grant] would help them advance in their career paths," Henriquez said.

Grace Harsche, a senior at Tulane University and a Newcomb Scholar, attended the five-day PLEN Public Policy seminar in January.

"A lot of the people at PLEN were younger women who had been in my position at one point. [...] I just felt like a lot of the information that I received was really valuable. I wasn't expecting to learn as much as I did, so that really exceeded my expectations," Harsche said.

Harsche said that while many public policy seminars can feel competitive, PLEN nurtured a supportive environment.

“PLEN did a really good job of showing that there's room for everyone in this field and that it's actually better if we all work together and lift each other up. I enjoyed connecting with women from across the country, and it was wonderful to know that I would likely be seeing them again,” Harsche said.



Tulane University senior Susan Worley at the PLEN Public Policy seminar in Washington, D.C.

Tulane senior and Newcomb Scholar Susan Worley said that her favorite part of the PLEN Public Policy seminar was the panel presentation that she did at the Microsoft Policy Center in D.C.

“The women were so candid with us, discussing how they got to where they are today and what they would have done differently. Instead of leaving the event feeling stressed about my career path, I left feeling invigorated and inspired,” Worley said.

PLEN's 2024 [Women in Global Policy](#) seminar will take place in Washington, D.C., from May 13 to 17, and Newcomb Institute grant applications will be open from April 8 to 19.

"We want to make sure that our students feel prepared and equipped to enter into their future careers, so it's important that we facilitate experiences like PLEN that help them build their skills and seek to increase the representation of women, particularly in public policy spaces," Henriquez said. "By sending them to these conferences and starting to foster their interest in these career fields, we can help guide and increase the number of women and gender-expansive folks in the policy sphere."

Newcomb Institute has been participating in PLEN and providing grants to students for over 25 years.

"We have seen our students benefit from these spaces. It's rewarding to see that these seminars are helpful to students and that they can network and make connections that help them as they advance professionally," Henriquez said.