

PLEN: Women in Global Policy

|
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Meet Paige Montfort! Paige majors in Political Science-International Development and Public Health. She is interested in a career in human rights work. Thanks to a grant from Newcomb College Institute, she attended Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN)'s Women in Global Policy seminar. Read about her experience below:

Describe yourself and why you wanted to attend the PLEN conference:

I am a rising sophomore double majoring in Public Health and Political Science-International Development. This past year at Tulane, I discovered the field of global health policy and thought it sounded absolutely perfect for me, but I didn't quite know what the next step to take should be. When I heard about the PLEN Women in Global Policy Conference, I knew I had to attend it. I was looking for advice, mentors, information about the field and about jobs and internships, and networking opportunities. The PLEN conference provided each of those things and more and was the perfect springboard for my academic and professional careers.

What were your favorite parts of the conference?

The people were, without a doubt, the highlight of this conference for me. From the nearly sixty incredible college-age women hailing from Tulane and a number of other schools across the nation to the powerful female diplomats, foreign service officers, and more—I could not have dreamed a better week for myself. I created a nation-wide network of friends and began to sink my roots into the Washington DC bubble. I am incredibly excited to grow and develop those relationships over the next few years. The women that I met over the duration of the PLEN conference inspired me, encouraged me, and assured me that there are women in important places in Washington who, if I continue to be passionate and hard-working, will be by my side throughout my career and my life.

Highlight a speaker or a job site you visited:

I loved every single one of the panels I had the opportunity to listen to at PLEN, but one that was exceptionally memorable was the panel called "Diplomacy in Action." Four incredible female ambassadors (Constance Morella, Lisa Gable, Marie Carmen Aponte, and Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley) spoke to us at this panel and their stories were all unique, inspiring, and exciting. I was able to see the humanity and normal-ness in each of these women who, before this conference, I would perhaps have thought of as powerful, influential figures with no personal lives, problems, families, etc. They spoke candidly, stayed afterword to speak with us individually, and really made me believe that I can do whatever I put my heart into. The best advice from this panel included the following:

1. First listen. Then learn. Then finally, lead.
2. Diplomacy is all about understanding people—their feelings, cultures, and motivations. I have to be not just perceptive but also extremely considerate

and articulate in this field.

3. I, as a female especially, must SPEAK UP at meetings, briefings, and events. I need to make my voice heard and amplify those of other females in order to demonstrate my knowledge and capabilities among sometimes louder, but not necessarily more educated or experienced, voices.

Tell us what you learned that you hope to never forget:

I kept a journal throughout the week to jot down all of the useful and unique tips that I received regarding academics and my future career path. One insight that was consistently shared at almost every panel—that I DEFINITELY don't want to forget—is the value of REAL experiences. Many speakers encouraged us to take a year or a couple of years before graduate school or law school to attain some work experience, go abroad, or intern somewhere. I will never be so free to do this again, I now realize, and I need to take advantage of this time in my life. Furthermore, I learned the great value of simply getting up and talking to a speaker after an event. I became more confident in my ability to do this throughout the week and by the end had compiled a long list of amazing contacts in the DC area with whom I intend to maintain relationships and perhaps work one day. Finally, I learned a number of very practical, tangible things at the PLEN conference that will be helpful to me right now. One bit of advice that was especially important was that I should include a fun, unique list of interests at the end of my resume because it is the last thing employers see. They want someone with whom they WANT to work—someone with hobbies, insights, and a friendly personality. In addition to these points, I have an entire notebook filled with other suggestions, stories, internships, and contacts—all of which I owe entirely to PLEN.

Why should other students attend a PLEN conference?

Every student should attend a PLEN conference! There are so many different programs covering a wide range of fields and topics. PLEN conferences are empowering, exciting, and incredibly helpful. For younger students, they are a great way to begin to meet people and to decide on a path. For older students, they are opportunities to meet potential employers and to gain important contacts in Washington DC. I spent evenings talking with the other attendees about their goals and dreams over Ethiopian and Salvadoran dinners, explored the rich history and way of life within Washington DC (including becoming a pro at the Metro!), and received invaluable advice. I hope to attend more conferences in the future, and I

certainly encourage every other college-age female to do so as well!

Does this sound like something you might be interested in? Tulane undergraduate students can apply to NCI for funding to attend PLEN conferences. Email Betsy Lopez at elopez@tulane.edu for more information.

Responses have been lightly edited for length and clarity.