

# PLEN: Women, Law, and Legal Advocacy

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Meet Rayne Pestello! Rayne is majoring in economics and international development and minoring in political science. She also recently attended Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN)'s Women in Law and Legal Advocacy seminar.

**Describe yourself and why you wanted to attend this PLEN seminar:**

Like any good female political science student, I had intentions of becoming president as a child. While I have changed that dream (and my major) many times, the need to be involved in the policy making process and the events happening all over the world has not faded. I wanted to attend the PLEN conference because I knew that in addition to the technical skills that classes give you, I had to address the practical skills as well. Meeting like-minded people, networking, and understanding what a career may look like were all important to me. In addition, every person I know who attended a PLEN conference returned raving about the experience, so I knew it was something I had to do.

**What were your favorite parts of the conference?**

My favorite parts were hearing from and meeting all of the wonderful women speakers who participated in the question and answer panels. Many were PLEN (and even Tulane) alumnae and hearing about their positions and career paths was not only fascinating but also relieving. Right now, I do not have a clear idea of what I want my future to look like. Hearing that they also felt like they made it up as they went in the early stages of their careers was humanizing and made me feel like I was less directionless. It is possible to have a successful and meaningful career even if you do not know initially how to begin.

**Highlight a speaker or a job site you visited:**

While there are so many incredible women who spoke about their lives, the one that sticks out in my brain was the panel on Careers on the Hill. It was fascinating to hear how many different roles there are in the government and how exciting these jobs are. While I knew I was interested in working on the hill, I had no idea how badly I wanted it until I heard them speak. It was hard to wrap my head around the idea that the women in front of me played an active role in shaping the law that affects us every day and that I could do it, too.

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

The lesson I learned that I will go back to for my entire working life is to stop doubting yourself. Imposter syndrome is overwhelmingly present in women; you have to know you are qualified for jobs you may feel you are not, and you do have something valuable to contribute. You deserve to be in the job you are in, and you also deserve more.

## **Why should other students attend a PLEN conference?**

In addition to meeting so many wonderful women, both students and professionals, there are also concrete skills to be developed. Salary negotiation, networking, and assertiveness are wildly important, and I more wholly developed these skills at PLEN. They are often boring and even uncomfortable to learn, but having them under your belt is empowering (an learning them by making a mistake is more uncomfortable for sure).

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](mailto:elopez@tulane.edu) for more information.

Responses have been lightly edited for length and clarity.