

PLEN: Women in STEM Policy

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Meet Annelise Blanchard! She's a psychology and gender and sexuality studies major, with a minor in French.

Tell us about yourself and why you wanted to attend this Public Leadership Education Network (PLEN) conference:

I'm a senior graduating in May, and I'm still trying to nail down exactly what type of job I want to pursue next year. I want to eventually work in psychology, and hopefully help women and LGBTQ individuals. I've been considering a future as a psychologist or social worker, but I was interested in learning of other potential career paths, such as with science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM)

policy, that would lead to the same outcomes.

Describe your favorite parts of the conference:

I enjoyed hearing how our speakers all came to STEM policy from a wide variety of backgrounds. Many had PhDs in biology or chemistry, and later went on to work in health care policy, or at different governmental agencies, such as the NSF or FDA. Others studied policy in college, and later went into STEM policy fields. I also really enjoyed speakers who gave us concrete advice and techniques for scenarios all students will be facing in the future, such as networking or negotiating a raise.

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

My favorite panel spoke on “Minority Health Research and Health Disparities.” We had three different speakers, one who worked in the Office of Minority Health, another who worked with a clinic specializing in LGBTQ health, and a speaker from the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health. They spoke about using research and data to identify health disparities, and then working to address the health disparities. I’ve always wanted to work in psychology helping women and LGBTQ individuals, and it’s so heartening to see that there are also ways to affect minority health through policy work.

What did you learn that you hope to never forget?

Be open to new opportunities and career paths. Many of the women we spoke to started out with a different career in mind, but stumbled across an opportunity to start working in STEM policy. Also, always send thank you notes (or emails).

Why should other students attend a PLEN conference?

At PLEN, you meet so many driven and influential women, who are doing their best to affect STEM policy in important ways. We heard so much helpful advice about applying to grad school, and then pursuing jobs and careers after grad school. Equally as important, students who attend PLEN meet fifty other students from schools across the country who are equally as passionate about science and STEM policy.

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.