

PLEN: Women, Law, and Legal Advocacy

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Meet Anna Bauman! She is a senior who is interested in environmental law and policy.

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

I am a senior from Jacksonville, FL and I am very interested in working in policy and possibly pursuing a law degree. I'm currently interning for the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic and the work has given me insight into the field. Being from Florida and now living in Louisiana, I am particularly invested in the environmental challenges

the Gulf States face and I want to work for environmental justice in this region. I wanted to attend this conference to learn from women who have made decisions like whether to seek work or another degree after undergrad. I have an idea of what I'd like to do after graduation, but the advice of professionals who have been through the process is so helpful.

Describe your favorite parts of the conference:

My favorite aspects of the conference are the panels that have policy-specific discussions. It is such a valuable learning opportunity when panelists who work in the same field, but have different professions; delve into the specifics of a certain issue. For example, there was a panel on election law that brought together professionals from a think tank, a voter's rights non-profit, and the Federal Election Commission. Discussing voter disenfranchisement through the experiences and knowledge of these three professional backgrounds was engaging and enlightening.

I also enjoyed getting to know the other students in attendance. PLEN brings together a diverse group of women from all over the country and it is incredibly inspiring to hear about their areas of interest or campus involvement. Everyone brings a unique perspective to the conference. Hearing the various questions other attendees asked the speakers or learning about a certain issue they are passionate about was one of the best parts of PLEN.

Highlight a speaker or a job site you visited:

One of the highlights for me was the panel on careers at the intersection of law and policy. The panelists discussed how their law degrees translate in policy work, and the different turns in their career paths that got them to their current positions. One panelist, Diane Piche, particularly had an impression on me. Diane is an attorney specializing in civil rights and education and she previously served in the Obama administration in the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. One of her passions is education equity and she utilizes her legal background to impact that. It was inspiring to hear about legal professionals working outside of a firm. I am currently writing my senior thesis on education policy in New Orleans and I had the chance to discuss some of that with her. Talking with her gave my research additional context and relevance.

Detail what you learned that you hope to never forget:

The most important takeaway for me is that a career path is not always linear. All the speakers discussed how a career in law and policy will take you across sectors and into fields you did not plan to be in. It is okay if your path does not follow an obvious progression. I learned that hard work and flexibility will bring exciting opportunities, and that we should relish in the fact that we can't necessarily anticipate the next step.

Why should other students attend a PLEN conference:

I would encourage other students to attend a PLEN conference because it provides a wonderful community of peers, staff and professionals that share similar interests and passions. The speakers are volunteers who genuinely want to be resources for young women looking to enter the field. The other students in attendance are intelligent and inspiring; learning about their experiences and aspirations made me excited about our generation entering the law and policy field. The conference also provided me with valuable guidance. Nearly every speaker advised us to seek work in the field before attending and investing in law school. It was so helpful to hear from different women about how they made the choice to attend law school and what they would've done differently in hindsight.

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.