Message from the Director

This has certainly been a challenging time for all alumni, faculty, staff, students, and friends of Penn State. The tragic events surrounding the sexual abuse charges have shaken all of us. What began as shock, sadness, and anger has gradually begun to turn to resolve—resolve to help the alleged victims, resolve to come together as a community, and resolve to show the world what a wonderful university this is and what vital contributions we make.

Our students have felt the support of the Penn State community, and they need this support more than ever. If you currently mentor a WLI student, or have contact with students, perhaps you’ve heard their own thoughts on the recent events. As WLI supporters, you can play a key role in helping our students think through some of the issues surrounding these events. Surely there are lessons that our students can learn as they observe leaders in action, develop their own leadership styles, and think through issues pertaining to values and ethics. Thank you for all that you do to guide our students toward greater understanding of themselves and of others.

As we move forward, I am confident that many of the issues addressed in the WLI curriculum will help our students to better understand the issues our university is facing. Topics such as values assessment, individual leadership styles, ethical leadership, service, and more are all relevant. While this is a tremendously difficult time, my hope is that the students will learn valuable lessons from this tragedy that they will carry with them throughout their lives. Our WLI students, the next generation of leaders, will carry the Penn State name out into the world and make us all proud.

Sincerely,

Abigail Diehl
Meet the Women’s Leadership Initiative Class of 2011-2012

Meghan Brennan
Major: Athletic Training
Hometown: Mays Landing, NJ

Kate Campbell
Major: Nursing and Psychology
Hometown: Erie, PA

Hannah Carroll
Major: Nutritional Sciences – Basic Sciences option
Hometown: Whitehall, PA

Elizabeth Catlin
Major: Kinesiology – Movement Science option
Hometown: Chicago, IL

Stephanie Mitchell
Major: Nutritional Sciences – Applied Sciences option
Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA

Farhat Nejrabi
Major: Nursing
Hometown: Hershey, PA

Carina Osborn
Major: Athletic Training
Hometown: Olney, MD

Samantha Salvatora
Major: Nutritional Sciences – Basic Sciences option
Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA

Adrienne Straw
Major: Nursing
Hometown: Hershey, PA

Megan Taylor
Major: Health Policy and Administration
Hometown: Willow Grove, PA

Joanna Urban
Major: Biobehavioral Health
Hometown: Millersville, MD

Julie Vardaro
Major: Health Policy and Administration
Hometown: Lancaster, PA
Brianna Weeks  
Major: Nursing  
Hometown: Philadelphia, PA

Suzanne Venezia  
Major: Health Policy and Administration  
Hometown: Collegeville, PA

Kristina Foldes  
Major: Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Management  
Hometown: Bethlehem, PA

Stephanie Schoen  
Major: Kinesiology – Movement Science option  
Hometown: Akron, OH

Amy Kalajainen  
Major: Athletic Training  
Hometown: Manassas, VA

Kristen Smith  
Major: Health Policy and Administration  
Hometown: Allentown, PA

Alex Koller  
Major: Communication Sciences and Disorders  
Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA

Lauren Lissenden  
Major: Human Development and Family Studies  
Hometown: State College, PA

Madeleine Southern  
Major: Nutritional Sciences – Applied Sciences option  
Hometown: Reeders, PA

Emily Stevenson  
Major: Nursing  
Hometown: Hanover, PA

Kristine Smith  
Major: Health Policy and Administration  
Hometown: Allentown, PA
Alumni Profile – Alyssa Todaro

Alyssa Todaro (WLI 2009-10) won the title of Miss Appalachia and competed in the 2011 Miss Maryland pageant, finishing in the Top 10. She recounted her experience in a special Q&A for WLI:

How did you become involved with the Miss America program? What made you decide to compete for Miss Appalachia?

I competed in a local pageant in Pennsylvania when I was still in college, but I did not understand the breadth and depth of “Miss America” and what she truly represents. When I moved to Maryland, I knew next to no one in the area and was looking for additional scholarship money, so I searched for upcoming local pageants and decided to give it another shot. I firmly believe that you are happiest and most successful when your personal values line up with your actions. The four points of the Miss America crown represent “Scholarship, Style, Service, and Success,” and I do my best to live those four points every day. I realized that it isn’t about making yourself fit a mold of what you believe Miss Appalachia or Miss Maryland should be like, but to live as if you already have won the crown and take the core values to heart in your every action. I went into the competition with nothing to lose and viewed it as a way to perform my talent and spread the word about what I believe in and what I’m passionate about, which is preventing alcohol abuse. When my name was called as the new Miss Appalachia, I knew it was my time, and I was completely ready.

Tell us about your platform, “Strides for Change: The Prevention & Awareness of Alcohol Abuse.”

Raising awareness about alcohol abuse has always been near and dear to my heart. It is much more than a platform to me, but a way of life. Through a career in public health research, I hope to be an advocate for change. In high school, four of my peers were killed as a result of drunk driving. I watched people “celebrate” their memory by drinking, which made no sense to me. At Penn State, I got involved with the Prevention Research Center and worked on several NIH-funded alcohol prevention projects. In my current position at the NIH I am studying how to improve sleep quality in alcoholics in order to reduce chances of relapse after treatment. Through my campaign I have spread the word about making healthy choices at a young age and conveying positive social norms in order to promote drug and alcohol abstinence among youth. Through my coursework at the University of Maryland I am studying behaviors and cognitive processes of teenage alcohol users who make destructive decisions. I called my platform “Strides for Change” in order to convey a sense of urgency.

What are some misconceptions that people have about the Miss America program?

I could go on for days about this! I got so tired of people asking if I watched “Toddlers and Tiaras.” The answer? A resounding no! If I had a daughter I would never subject her to something like that. People don’t realize just how hard you have to work to get on the Miss America stage. Swimsuit and evening gown are the two least important categories when it comes to scoring. Sixty percent of your score comes from talent and interview. The girls I competed against are undoubtedly some of the most intelligent, poised women I have ever met. Contrary to popular belief, we don’t rip each other’s dresses or put on a front for the judges. Everyone is genuine and extremely dedicated to her cause.

How did your WLI experiences help prepare you to compete in Miss Appalachia and Miss Maryland?

My WLI class collected and assembled “hygiene kits” for homeless women in Centre County. Helping to coordinate such an elaborate project taught me the importance of networking. Also, WLI stressed the importance of first impressions and of portraying yourself professionally. Miss Appalachia is a job and I treated the interview as such. Also, I will always remember Abby’s and Careen’s session on time management, which comes in handy in all aspects of women’s busy lives.

What was the most challenging part of the actual competition?

I bet you’re expecting me to say “the swimsuit part!” Actually, the on-stage portion was only four nights, and most people don’t realize that all of the contestants stay in the host city for an entire week. We visited most of our sponsors, filmed interviews for local news channels, rehearsed almost 10 hours a day, had private interviews with the judges, and got very, very little sleep. It was strange to be away from school and work for that long, but at the same time it was a blast. In rooming with fellow contestants, you really get to make connections with the girls, and all of them would do anything for anyone.

Do you plan to compete in future pageants?

For now, I am taking a break. I am getting married in June and afterwards I definitely plan to compete for “Mrs. America.”
How were you able to balance your duties as Miss Appalachia, and your preparation for the Miss Maryland pageant, with graduate school and your work at NIH?

Very, very carefully! If you know me at all, you know that I'm totally and completely obsessed with my day planner. To others, it looks like a jumbled mess of highlighters, stickers, post-it notes, and colored pens, but it tells me absolutely everything I need/want to accomplish and hasn't failed me yet. I've always been big on time management (thanks, WLI!). I worked three to four days each week at NIH, worked weekends as a graduate assistant, went to class three nights a week, and am proud to say that I was still able to visit over 40 local elementary schools with the “Giant Steps for Change” campaign that I launched in March as well as raise thousands of dollars for the Children's Miracle Network. My mentors and professors were all very supportive, largely because my platform had a lot to do with my research and future career.

Alyssa is currently in her second year of the Ph.D. program for Behavioral and Community Health at the School of Public Health (SPH) at the University of Maryland (UMD). Her graduate assistantship is funded through the Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation, where she manages field data collection for a breathalyzer study being conducted on the UMD campus. She also serves as the chair of the Deans Student Advisory Committee and a student representative to SPH faculty members. At the National Institutes of Health, she serves as an intramural research trainee award recipient. She currently is analyzing data from a study examining the efficacy of hypnosis as a pain management strategy for sickle cell disease patients as well as the sleep study for alcoholics in rehabilitation at its research hospital.

Class Notes

2010-11
Nicole Shelton currently is employed as a communication skills trainer by Woods Services, a residential school in Langhorne, Pa.
2009-10
Emma Cowie is a dietetic intern at the National Institutes of Health and is also studying for certification as a birth doula through Childbirth International.
Amanda Maples is teaching middle school math and special education for Teach for America in San Antonio, Texas.
2008-09
Rachael Ference recently moved to Atlanta, Ga., to work as an assistant director of admissions with the Art Institute of Atlanta. She also volunteers with the Fox Theatre and a non-profit agency, called Adoption Discovery, helping them with their event and fundraising planning. She writes, “Hopefully, once I get settled into my new position with the Art Institute I’ll be able to help them with some event planning for things going on at the campus too.”
Julie St-Merand is working as a registered nurse at Harbor View Health Care Center in the greater New York area.
2007-08
Esther Chung is an administrative resident at St. David’s Healthcare in San Antonio, Texas.
2006-07
Roberta Murray graduated with a master’s degree in occupational therapy from Temple University in August 2011. She moved to San Diego, Ca., and accepted a position as a school-based occupational therapist in the San Diego Unified School District.
Lauren Thumm got engaged July 2011 to Paul Saxton on top of Mt. Nittany. They are planning an October 19, 2013 wedding in New Jersey.
2005-06
Sarah Hantz recently became engaged; she and her fiancé are planning a wedding for October 20, 2012. Hantz also recently went back to school to study diagnostic medical sonography.

Amina Gilyard selected as Miss Black District of Columbia USA 2012

Amina Gilyard (WLI 2005-06) has been selected as Miss Black District of Columbia USA 2012. She was selected directly by the Miss Black USA Scholarship Pageant Organization because D.C. does not have a state pageant. As Miss Black D.C. USA 2012, Gilyard will spend the next year promoting her platform—“Wellness Ambassadors: Bringing Health Education Resources to Medical Communities.”

Amina writes, “As a certified health education specialist (CHES) with a master’s degree in health education, this is definitely an issue I am extremely passionate about. Also, I have never actually been in a pageant, so I am excited to have this opportunity!”

Alana Henry will be graduating from medical school (PCOM) in June 2012 and pursuing a career in pediatrics. She also recently was engaged to Bart Rickard and is planning a fall 2012 wedding.
2004-05
Kimberly (Schmura) Firestone and her husband Ian had their first child, a son, named Connor Ian, born September 24, 2011. Firestone is currently the administrative manager of finance and planning for the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.
Jennifer Regester, RD, CDN, CDE, opened a private practice called Eat With Knowledge, a nutrition counseling and consulting company, located in Nyack, NY. For more information please visit www.eatwithknowledge.com. She also became engaged to Pat McGurk ’06 LIB on New Year’s Eve.
2003-04
Erica (Davis) Dunklebarger and her husband moved from Pittsburgh to Chambersburg and had a baby, named Noah Kyle Dunklebarger, on June 29.
**WLI Class Selects Service-Learning Project**

Service learning plays an important role in the WLI: it allows the students to work with community leaders, it provides them with an opportunity to practice their leadership skills by planning the project and working as a team with their classmates, and it helps orient them to the importance of giving back to one’s community and the ways in which leadership and service are interconnected. Each fall, students select a service-learning project to undertake in the spring semester. Students break into small groups to develop proposals for a service-learning project, which must follow several criteria: the project must be a partnership with an existing cause or organization, the students must partner with the organization in order to execute the project, and the project must uphold the ideals and mission of the College of Health and Human Development.

The groups each presented their proposals at the last Friday Session of the fall semester and then ranked the proposals. The winning proposal was “Girl Scouts Wellness Program.” For their project, the WLI students will partner with local Girl Scout troops to undertake several activities that fulfill requirements for three badges: “Eating for Beauty,” “Science of Happiness,” and “Good Sportsmanship.” The students will draw upon their particular skills, talents, and interests to plan a fun and informative day for the Girl Scouts.

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**2011-12 Mentors**

Mentoring is at the heart of the WLI program. Mentors devote their time and talents to WLI students for the entire academic year, and often beyond. Thank you to the 2011-12 mentors for their outstanding service:

- Cheryl Achterberg
- Renee Brooks
- Sherry DelGrosso
- Judy Dillon
- Deirdre Dlugonski
- Joey Frengel
- Jenny Jackson
- Mary Lou Kanaskie
- Ida Laquatra
- Kristin Lundy
- Monica Manning
- Stephanie Mazzeo-Caputo
- Elaine McKenna
- Kathy Misunas
- Joelyn Niggel
- Lynn Parker-Klees
- KerriLaine Prunella
- Miriam Powell
- Ellen Reuben
- Emily Santini
- Sloane Veshinski
- Renee Vonada

**New Faculty Mentor – Darlene Clark**

Darlene Clark, senior lecturer in the School of Nursing, has been appointed to serve as the WLI faculty mentor for the 2011-12 academic year. Clark replaces Careen Yarnal, associate professor of recreation, park, and tourism management, who served as the WLI faculty mentor for three years. Yarnal was named a Penn State Administrative Fellow for the current academic year and is shadowing Rob Pangborn, acting executive vice president and provost.

Clark held various nursing positions in hospitals and other health care facilities before beginning her career at Penn State as a research assistant/teaching assistant in 1991, and then an instructor in 1992. She is also an adjunct clinical assistant professor at the University of Arizona.

Clark is the 2011 recipient of the Janet Williamson Teaching Award from the School of Nursing and the 2005 Diversity Achievement Award from the College of Health and Human Development. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau nursing honor society.

Clark received bachelor’s and master’s degrees in nursing from Penn State. She has two children, Molly and Bryan, and one granddaughter, Olivia Jane, with one more on the way. She is married to Paul Clark, head of the Department of Labor Studies and Employment Relations at Penn State. She loves to knit, quilt, and travel.
Advisory Committee News

Dean Appoints New External Advisory Committee Chair
Eileen Soisson ’93 R P M has been appointed chair of the WLI External Advisory Committee. Soisson follows Kay Salvino ’69 I F S, who served as founding chair of the committee and who is now serving as vice president of the Penn State Alumni Association. Soisson is president of The Meeting Institute, a company she founded that provides professional training programs, seminars, and consulting services in a variety of areas, including team building and customer service. Soisson has a long history of service to the College of Health and Human Development; she was the founding president of the Recreation, Park and Tourism Management Affiliate Program Group and then served on the board of the HHD Alumni Society, completing her term as a member of its executive committee. She lives in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina.

External Advisory Committee Members
Eileen Soisson ’93 R P M (Chair)
President, The Meeting Institute

Renee Brooks ’05 BBH
Research Manager, The Ohio State University

Denise Orwig ’98g BBH
Assistant Professor, University of Maryland School of Medicine

Lauren Thumm ’08 NURS
Clinical Research Coordinator, Division of Cardiology, Jefferson Coordinating Center for Clinical Research, Thomas Jefferson University

Jennifer Tracy ’95 HR&IM, ’05g BUS
Director of Field Operations, Comcast Corporation

Internal Advisory Committee Discusses Recruitment of Students from Commonwealth Campuses
The internal advisory committee provides valuable guidance regarding curricular matters and student recruitment and selection. During the committee’s fall meetings, a focus of the discussions was outreach and recruitment to students at commonwealth campuses who plan to transfer to Penn State for their junior and senior years. Because students must apply to WLI during their sophomore year, students at other campuses are often unaware of WLI or the opportunity to apply. The WLI office has been working to identify students who plan to transfer into an HHD major at Penn State for their junior year and to contact those students about WLI.

Internal Advisory Committee Members
Faculty Mentor/Curriculum Adviser
Darlene Clark, Senior Lecturer in Nursing

Student Representatives
Sarah Kach (Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Management)
Christine Simcox (Nutritional Sciences)

Adviser Representative
Susan Sanders, Academic Adviser, Department of Health Policy and Administration

Biobehavioral Health
Dr. Lori Francis, Assistant Professor

Communication Sciences and Disorders
Dr. Krista Wilkinson, Professor

Health Policy and Administration
Dr. Jessica Mittler, Assistant Professor

Human Development and Family Studies
Dr. Daphne Hernandez, Assistant Professor

Hospitality Management
Dr. Marja Verbeeten, Assistant Professor

Kinesiology
Dr. Lauren Kramer, Instructor and Program Director, Athletic Training Option

Nursing
Barbra McDill, Academic Adviser

Nutritional Sciences
Connie Rogers, Assistant Professor

Recreation, Park and Tourism Management
Dr. Shawna Doerksen, Assistant Professor
Dear WLI Alumni: Please keep us updated by sending us information about a new address, new job, special accomplishment, etc.

Fill out the form online at www.hhdev.psu.edu/wli/Alumni-Update or mail the form to the address below.

Name _________________________________________________________________________________________________

Address _______________________________________________________________________________________________

City _______________________________________________ State ___________________ Zip __________________

Phone _____________________________________________ E-mail ___________________________________________

New Job/Accomplishments: ____________________________________________________________________________

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_______________________________________________________________________________________________________

Mail to: Women’s Leadership Initiative
College of Health and Human Development • The Pennsylvania State University
201 Henderson Building • University Park, PA 16802