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April 29, 1999 **Contact:** Bob Aaron, 309/556-3181

From Intern to Employee

IWU Senior to Launch Career with Washington, D.C. Group

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. For Elizabeth Raboin, an Illinois Wesleyan University sociology and political science major who will graduate next month, an internship last summer has turned into that critical first job right out of college job that will take her to Washington, D.C.

In mid-July, Raboin will launch her career as a field representative for the Feminist Majority Foundation, a group dedicated to creating innovative, cutting-edge research, educational programs, and strategies to advance women's equality.

Raboin's job will be to help kick off new Feminist Campus Leadership Alliances nationwide, while bolstering the 60 alliances already in place. The goal is to have 200 alliances by 2000. These alliances conduct the foundation's Campus Campaign for Choice, a four-pronged effort focusing on reproductive choices, leadership choices, career choices, and saving choices, an educational component dealing with women's-rights foes. Alliances are grass-roots groups that deal with state, local, and campus issues in their community.

"I'll act as a liaison between the national organization and faculty and students on campuses," Raboin explained. "I'll be spending half my time on the road and half of my time in Washington."

She will work with campuses in a yet-to-be determined geographic region.

Part of Raboin's work is targeted to developing a new generation of informed and active women's movement leaders.

The job will test and hone Raboin's ability to organize events, inspire students and others, and develop her presentation skills. Other critical skills needed for the job, according to Raboin, are a commitment to feminism and advancing women's rights, as well as a passion for working at the grass-roots level.

The job is a one-year position in a program launched three years ago. Annually, the Feminist Majority Leadership Foundation hires five-to-10 field representatives.

"Field representatives," Raboin points out, "leave with a strong work background from a respected organization."

Some of Raboin's predecessors are now enrolled in prestigious law schools like Harvard and the University of Virginia while others have gone on to graduate school and other jobs in the women's movement and elsewhere.

Raboin knows her first year on-the-job will be rugged.

"One year in Washington," she observed, "is like a dog year [seven years] since it is so fast-paced. You're working with movers-and-shakers, the best and the brightest. Washington is filled with over-achievers."

Raboin sees several feminist issues particularly affecting young women, including eating disorders, date rape and other violence against women, and reproductive rights.

Raboin's appetite for working in Washington was whetted last summer, when she snagged an internship with the Feminist Majority Foundation, an organization she characterizes as on the cutting edge, bolder than most interest groups, and an organization with a management style that allows rookies to work with top brass.

The Feminist Majority Foundation, Raboin said, is small enough that it can move fairly quickly on issues compared with larger, less mobile umbrella organizations.

As an intern, Raboin worked on three key projects: an effort aimed at highlighting abuse of women in Afghanistan by a revolutionary government; the Clinic Defense Project, dealing with preserving the rights of abortion clinics guaranteed under a 1994 federal law; and opposition research, monitoring and analyzing the activities of groups she characterized as "right wing."

"The key to an internship," Raboin explained, "is what you make of it. Some people look at an internship as a great opportunity, others see them as time fillers. Interns need to set goals and ask everyone questions."

Raboin characterized her Feminist Majority Foundation internship as educational, especially in the sense that she worked for an interest group less involved with directly lobbying Congress and the White House, and more geared toward education, public-policy development, and outreach programs.

She also had the chance to meet and observe Eleanor Smeal, Feminist Majority president, and a former three-term president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), a pioneering women's rights group. Raboin describes Smeal as a "visionary" in terms of the women's movement.

"It was interesting to be around her," Raboin said, "and to hear her thoughts and how they advance the women's agenda. It was also interesting to see whether various women's groups collaborate" or collide in working on women's issues.

Referring to an end-of-summer-internship luncheon, Raboin said, she enjoyed hearing first-hand Smeal's stories about the unsuccessful effort to add the Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and other issues something, she said, that we read about in history books.

Raboin also commented on times when Smeal would mention at staff meetings recent conversations she had with Betty Friedan, Patricia Ireland, and other women's movement icons.

"She would say how they were coming together on issues," said Raboin, referring to Smeal's conversations with other feminist leaders, "and what they were going to do about things."

Raboin's interest in women's issues was sparked by a freshman women's studies course, a course that made her "heart beat faster." The course, she said, "opened my eyes about what was going on in the world and who I was as a woman." She became fascinated by social and political activities that can help "women reach their potential."

Her Feminist Majority Foundation internship culminated three years of activities, including internships with the YWCA of McLean County, a social service agency, and the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) of Illinois in Chicago, a more political group, as part of a semester-long urban-studies program, sponsored by the Associated Colleges of the Midwest.

The Feminist Majority Foundation, based in the Washington, D.C.-suburb of Arlington, Va., has about 40 full-time staffers in the nation's capital and Los Angeles. It defines feminism as "the policy, practice or advocacy of political, economic, and social equality for women."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 2,000 students in a College of Liberal Arts, and individual schools of Music, Theatre Arts, Art, and Nursing. Since 1994, these facilities have been added to the IWU campus: a \$15 million athletics and recreation center, a \$25 million science center, a \$6.8 million residence hall, a \$5.1 million Center for Liberal Arts, and a \$1.65 million baseball stadium.