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# Popular Summer Program Develops Student Leaders

Aug. 9, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— For the 12 students in Illinois Wesleyan University's [Summer Enrichment Program](#) (SEP), Wednesday became their favorite day of the week.

On Wednesdays the students selected for SEP came together to hear guest speakers, discuss current events and debate questions such as “do women have to possess masculine characteristics to be considered effective leaders?” Students learned about professional development from experts and talked about their SEP internships.

SEP is a longtime Illinois Wesleyan program for students of color and was extended to international students two years ago. The 10-week summer program focuses on academic, professional and personal growth. Participants complete a paid internship, learn from formal training workshops and work together on a service project in order to enhance students' team building and leadership skills. This year's theme was “Women at the Intersections” which complemented Illinois Wesleyan's annual theme of [“Women's Power, Women's Justice”](#) for 2016-17.

The program's highly regarded reputation inspired Ayrren Calhoun '18 to apply. “I just felt like it would be a really good fit for me,” said Calhoun, noting SEP has exceeded her expectations.



A cherished SEP tradition is lunch each week at a different ethnic restaurant in the Bloomington-Normal area.

Students also noted they learned from each other. Emani Johnson '18 said she recognizes that her views as a black woman will differ from those of her peers of a different race, gender or culture. “Everyone has some type of privilege, so it's been very eye-opening to hear from other people in acknowledging that privilege, whatever it may be. I like the fact that we talk openly about those things,” said Johnson, a sociology major from Berkeley, Ill.

SEP Wednesdays also served as an opportunity for students to lift up each other. On a recent Wednesday, students were encouraged to give a tap on the shoulder to a peer who has had an impact on their lives in some way.

For Hunain Anees '19, a simple tap on the shoulder turned out to be something that had a tremendous impact on his entire summer. “I was very surprised by the number of taps I received and I felt very happy about it,” said Anees, an accounting and economics double major from Karachi, Pakistan. “I later realized we all can make a change in people's lives in more ways than we can imagine.”

The 2016 group of SEP participants are:

- Hunain Anees '19, accounting and finance double major, Karachi, Pakistan
- Anuvrat Baruah '18, economics and financial services double major, New Delhi, India
- Cindy Basilio '17, mathematics major, Streamwood, Ill.
- Shravya Bommaveddi '18, biology major, Bloomington, Ill.
- Meri Brown '18, accounting major, Chicago
- Ayrren Calhoun '18, International Studies major, Homewood, Ill.
- Ruby Garcia '17, Hispanic Studies and educational studies majors, Evanston, Ill.
- Guadalupe Hernandez '18, business administration and computer science double major, Chicago
- Emani Johnson '18, sociology major, Berkeley, Ill.
- Tung Nguyen '17, International Studies and political science double major, Hanoi, Vietnam
- Nancy Qu '17, art major, Changshu, China
- Alani Sweezy '19, philosophy and political science double major, Chicago



Ayrren Calhoun '18 explains her favorite aspects of SEP.

“It's a really inspiring and really encouraging program,” said Calhoun, an International Studies major from Homewood, Ill. She said the group interactions during “SEP Wednesdays” opened her eyes to varying points of view held by those from different backgrounds or ethnicities.

Internships are an important component of the program. An aspiring attorney, Calhoun interned at local law firm Allison & Mosby-Scott. She secured the position with the help of her Titan Leadership Program mentor, attorney Matt Majernik '07. Calhoun said she's grateful for the opportunity to get an inside view of a legal practice, but has also discovered family law is not the area for her. “I just don't have the heart for it,” she said of the specialization, “but that's what the learning experience is about, determining what you like and what you don't like and following your passion.”



(Top row, from left) Alani Sweezy '19, Anuvrat Baruah '18, Meri Brown '18, Hunain Anees '19 (Middle row, from left) Emani Johnson '18, Ayrren Calhoun '18, Shravya Bommaveddi '18, Ruby Garcia '17, Tung Nguyen '17 (Bottom row, from left) Nancy Qu '17, Lupe Hernandez '18, Cindy Basilio '17 (Photo by Kim Hill)