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GSU Students Learn to Make a Difference

University Park, IL, August 9, 2007 - For one week, the two women hobnobbed with political and civic leaders. For one week, they left their children, jobs, and studies behind. For one week, they saw the possibilities and promise of leadership.

Priscilla Southern and April Nickson are both of Chicago, both students at Governors State University studying social work, both mothers of young families, and both eager to learn whatever they can to change their world for the better. With 18 other young women from Illinois universities, they participated in the New Leadership Illinois Summer Institute sponsored by the Institute of Government and Public Affairs and the Conference of Women Legislators of the Illinois General Assembly.

Southern and Nickson, chosen for their interest in social policy, learned about how public policy is developed and how the Illinois legislative and legal system works. Politicians from state and local levels shared their expertise and experience with the women as they navigated the process of policy creation, political compromise, and legislation.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Ann Burke, Attorney General Lisa Madigan, Chicago City Treasurer Stephanie Neewly, and Illinois State Representative Kathy Ryg (D-59th) were among the many governmental, legal, and political leaders whose participation and information were greatly appreciated by the students involved.

"These are females in high-powered positions, willing to give back to individuals who are just learning. They gave their time to answer our questions and be involved," said Southern. "They helped me see myself doing more things. I feel good about the possibilities."

"We did not just talk policy procedures, we learned about leadership styles and how to balance work and family," added Nickson.

As part of the weeklong event, the students participated in a mock legislative hearing deliberating a bill on education funding reform currently under consideration in Springfield.

"We needed to present our research and opinions to actual legislators. We had speech and debate coaches to help us prepare and we had to be ready for their questions. It was a lot of work but we learned so much," added Nickson.

After their summer experience, both women have returned to their part time jobs at the university and full time work as students and parents with renewed interest in getting involved. Both are leaders in several student organizations and both plan on expanding their involvement and leadership in the coming year.

"There is so much work to be done at so many levels. We are committed to getting involved. We have seen what can be accomplished and want to be a part of it," added Southern.

For more information about the Institute of Government and Public Affairs, call (217) 244-6762.