University of Missouri - St. Louis

Sue Shear Institute for Women in Public Life

Institute History & Mission Statement

In May, 1998, the Missouri Legislature and the University of Missouri Board of Curators approved naming the Institute in honor of State Representative Sue Shear. Completing 26 years in the Missouri House of Representatives, Sue holds the record for legislative service for women in elected office in Missouri. This official naming makes the Sue Shear Institute the first university public policy center nationwide to be named after a woman office holder.

On August 1, 1999, the Institute officially gained a presence on the western side of the state with the opening of a second office at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Although women are a majority of the population, the voters, and current college graduates, they are minority participants at every level of public policy leadership. The Institute's goal is to help women break down both the external and internal barriers to embracing the rights and responsibilities of a representative democracy. To accomplish this end, the work of the Institute is focused around several key objectives:

1. **Tracking the participation of women at various levels of government.** The Institute collects data on the historical and current status of women in a variety of public policy making roles including elected office, service on public boards and commissions, and senior government positions.
2. **Increasing the presence of women appointees on boards and commissions.** Many successful public policy makers have their first experience in the field when they serve as an appointed member of a volunteer public board. These appointments generally arise through informal networks of contacts. The Institute maintains a talent bank of individuals interested in serving on such boards and commissions and provides periodic training for individuals interested in effective board membership.
3. **Training college women leaders.** To strengthen young women's interest in public policy, the Institute annually hosts the 21st Century Leadership Academy. This one week residential program for Missouri college students is designed to develop leadership skills and increase participants' awareness of the impact of public policy in their lives. The faculty for the program features women who are role models through their participation in the public sector.
4. **Increasing the number of women employed in policy making positions in government.** The Institute provides skill building programs to facilitate the success of women in state, county and local governments. Program content includes enhancing leadership ability, public policy analysis, impact of decision making on women, communication and networking skill development, coalition building and mentoring responsibilities and opportunities. In addition, women who have reached a leadership position in government will be tapped to share their experiences in order to encourage women making career decisions to consider public sector employment.
5. **Encouraging women to seek public office.** The Institute provides

nonpartisan campaign training on campaign basics and organizing to help women overcome their reluctance to run for office, and advanced campaign training for individuals who have filed for local or state legislative office.

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