

NCCWSL 2018

by Katie Murray

As recipient of the Irene Keyes Scholarship, I had the honor of attending the National Conference for College Women Student Leaders this past May 30 - June 2 at the University of Maryland, College Park. It was a great opportunity to meet young ladies from all over the world, attend insightful panels and seminars, and honor some of the most distinguished women of our time.

The keynote speaker of NCCWSL 2018 was Tarana Burke, the founder of the Me Too Movement. She gave an outstanding speech on her roots as an activist, and how her simple act of empathy became an international movement. Burke explained that when she was a camp counselor, she encountered a young camper who told her she was sexually assaulted by her mother's boyfriend. Burke wanted so badly to say, "I understand, this happened to me too," but couldn't bring herself to speak. After this experience, she realized that showing her support to the girl could have made all the difference, and decided that no one should ever feel like they have no one to listen or relate to them. Burke saw a need to take action, and immediately began her quest to start Me Too.

The Me Too Movement has impacted thousands of lives, and having the opportunity to hear from such an amazing woman firsthand was an experience I will carry with me for years to come. Tarana Burke made me feel like I am capable of anything if I put in the hard work and never take no for an answer. Tarana saw the need to bring attention to the topic of sexual violence, and she managed to create a movement that has impacted countless lives and brought about so much discussion and awareness about how we treat one another. And she is one person. It's so easy to use the excuse, "Oh, I don't have the time," "I'm only one human, I can't make that big of an impact," "If this person says no, I don't think I can do it," and other similar statements. What makes Tarana different is she just says *I will. I know what needs to get done, and I won't stop until I've achieved it.* She doesn't let anything or anyone get in her way, no matter how difficult it may seem to overcome a race barrier, a gender barrier, or any other obstacle. And that is the kind of spirit that we need to instill in ourselves, our peers, our family, and our friends. We are all capable, we just need to put our minds to it.

My favorite seminar at NCCWSL was the workshop on Confidence by Erin Fischer, CEO and founder of the Leadership Training Studio. Fischer discussed the things that are holding us back from achieving our dreams: more often than not, it is our own limiting beliefs and way of thinking. She also discussed the female tendency to say "sorry" for things we shouldn't be apologizing for.

This workshop opened my eyes to some of my own limiting thoughts, and made me realize how I might be letting them hold me back from reaching my maximum potential. I am constantly striving to improve as a young woman, and confidence is definitely key to being able to tackle any tough situation or chase after my wildest dreams and ambitions.

I believe that NCCWSL has greatly impacted my life for the better. My weekend in College Park taught me a so many strategies that will help me lead my peers and be a more productive and efficient employee, both in my campus office and college leadership roles, and in all of my future career endeavors. I attended an awesome workshop on handling conflict and disruptive conversation, learned how to create

my own business plan, and enjoyed a panel discussion on the dangers of social media in regards to body image. I currently run a blog, puregracemurray.com, where I discuss my struggles with anxiety and body positivity, and aim to inspire others to love themselves and practice good mental health. I can't wait to try all of the workshops tips and tricks for improving my online presence, branding, living confidently, and speaking up for injustice. NCCWSL was an experience of a lifetime, and I am extremely grateful to the Poughkeepsie Branch AAUW for giving me the opportunity to attend.