

Forming leaders: New program at Maryvale Prep offers experience beyond classroom

LUTHERVILLE - As director of Maryvale Preparatory School's Leadership Institute, Mary Ellen Fise is dedicated to developing innovative methods that will form the lions of society.

The institute, entering its fifth year, sports a new addition for the 2018-19 school year: the Leadership Certificate Program. According to Maryvale, it is the first independent all-girls' school in the Baltimore area with such a program.

Maryvale's administration consulted with its network of leaders for new ways to empower its students, thinking that it might result in a new course offering. The response was consistent: beyond the classroom, students need more training and experience.

That, Fise said, resulted in the Leadership Certificate Program, where select students will complete a set of in-depth coursework, at least 30 leadership service hours, a leadership portfolio and a graduate interview. Each student will have a mentor.

"We wanted to empower our young women once they leave here to step up in their communities," said Fise, a 1974 graduate of Maryvale.

Five seniors and 10 juniors signed on for the program's inaugural year. An additional 17 sophomores and freshmen indicated an intent to apply. Nearly all gathered for breakfast May 17.

"Seeing the room (full) of you is a dream come true," said Tracey H. Ford, school president.

Ford said the program will give aspiring leaders opportunities that were not there for her generation.

“I wanted to be one of the first to experience the program, and to lead it myself,” said senior Peyton White, a captain of the Athletic Association and a leader of the Lunch Bunch, which makes meals for people in need.

Senior Caitlyn Weinstein likewise wanted to be one of the first to graduate with the new designation. She aspires to run a nonprofit serving children in Haiti, and said the concrete skills learned in the program, along with her personal advisor, will help her accomplish that mission.

“It’s more individual attention so it can be tailored to you,” said Weinstein, whose advisor will be Fise. “You build a sense of trust and a relationship.”

Requirements include Foundations of Leadership, an elective open to 11th- and 12th-graders, where students use outside speakers, self-evaluation tools, research, field trips, career coaching and more to foster individual leadership.

In their final semester, students must complete a Capstone Independent Study. Working with a faculty advisor, they will conduct a research project, complete a related internship, and craft a paper and presentation. Topics chosen for the inaugural year include “Pay Equality for Women: Achieving Change through Law and Leadership,” and “Women, Leadership and the Federal Bureau of Investigation: Past, Present and Future.”

Students also choose two electives, from offerings that include Innovation, Entrepreneurship and Creativity, and 1804 Ministry of Peer Leadership.

Grace Apostol, a junior, spoke of the 1804 elective, named for the year the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, who founded Maryvale, were established. She plans to organize Masses and retreats for other students, and figures that the new program will “give her a boost” in a passion that began at St. Stephen School in Bradshaw.

Junior Olivia Magaletta, a parishioner of St. John the Evangelist in Columbia, expects the program to advance her science aspirations.

“I thought it would give me an edge,” she said, “academically, professionally and spiritually.”

Email Emily Rosenthal at erosenthal@CatholicReview.org