Academy Trains Western Legislators, Strengthens Legislatures

Mary Lou Cooper and Rich Lindsey

With 36 handpicked members of the Western Legislative Academy (WLA) Class of 2001, CSG-WEST launched the second year of its intensive professional development course for Western lawmakers. The goal of the WLA is to help newer legislators become more effective and to build stronger legislative institutions.

The three and a half day Academy took place in Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 2-5. Legislators in their first four years of service from Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming were chosen by the Executive Committee of CSG-WEST to receive the training.

Classes ranged from sessions on term limits and initiatives to media skills, time management, decision-making, negotiating and team building. “Winston Churchill” put in an appearance to offer lessons in the language of leadership. Legislative leaders plus media and lobbyist representatives added practical insights into legislative effectiveness. A day spent at the U.S. Air Force Academy exposed participants to the same personality profiling and outdoor adventure training that cadets and officers receive.

Western Legislatures Are Under Scrutiny and Under Siege

A lively discussion on threats to state legislative institutions kicked off the WLA. Gary Moncief, professor of political science at Boise State University; David Magleby, professor of political science at Brigham Young University; and Alan Rosenthal, public policy professor at Rutgers University discussed trends—both historical and current—that prevent state legislatures from performing effectively.

Moncief said the move to term limits, the growth in constituency numbers and increasing workloads have led to the rise in legislative turnover rates. Term limits, he said, have diminished the institutional memory of the legislature and given rise to greater influence by lobbyists, interest groups and administrative agencies. Both Magleby and Rosenthal said that the initiative process has encouraged voters to do end runs around legislatures to enact laws.

All three academic experts agreed that government by ballot measures is not a viable substitute for legislative deliberations.

The WLA was held at the historic Penrose House on the grounds of the El Pomar Foundation’s retreat center. El Pomar is dedicated to the promotion of excellence in nonprofit organizations, and its generosity with facilities, amenities and funds helps make the WLA possible.

This issue of Western Legislatures is devoted entirely to stories and photos from CSG-WEST’s Western Legislative Academy. For information about how to apply for the Academy in 2002, please call 505-424-3322 or 916-553-4423.
It was my very great privilege last October to shepherd the second class of CSG-WEST’s Western Legislative Academy through three and a half days of intensive professional development training. We had two goals at the Academy—to help newer lawmakers become more effective and to give them the tools to build better legislative institutions back home.

The WLA Class of 2001 met and exceeded all our expectations. Chosen by the CSG-WEST Executive Committee based on their commitment to the legislative institution and their desire to improve personal legislative effectiveness, 36 legislators from the region’s 13 states gathered at the El Pomar Foundation’s retreat center in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

From sessions with leading academics to outdoor team building exercises at the U.S. Air Force Academy, each day brought Western legislators lessons in effectiveness, ethics, leadership and more. As I watched this class of lawmakers from all walks of life, I was struck as much by the informal benefits of the WLA as I was by the formal training.

Legislators of diverse backgrounds and beliefs reached across state and political lines to learn from and about each other. In the wake of September 11, we were acutely aware that our common support for American democratic institutions outweighed and indeed embraced our differences.

In my view, legislators need additional training now more than ever. That’s because in the West, term limits and increased turnover in states without term limits, mean that most legislative careers are now compressed into much shorter time frames than in the past. We no longer have the luxury of long, on-the-job apprenticeships.

Legislators also need time out to remember why we ran in the first place. Legislators need a place to think about the legacy that we want to leave behind. CSG-WEST created the Western Legislative Academy to respond to those needs, especially in newer lawmakers.

As chair of CSG-WEST, I want to encourage Western legislators in their first four years of service to apply for the 2002 Western Legislative Academy. Just as many other occupations place a high value on professional development education, so must state legislators.

Assemblyman Lynn Hettrick
Nevada Assembly Minority Leader
CSG-WEST Chair
Time Management Critical for Busy Lawmakers

Laura Tomaka

With her keen understanding of the competing demands legislators face each day, Pam Vacarro, president of the St. Louis-based Designs on Time company, offered WLA participants a refreshing take on time management. Her presentation, “Balancing Obligations and Opportunities” challenged traditional approaches to time management and getting organized.

Vaccaro’s “be a planner first, and then buy a planner if needed” training ranged from practical quick fixes to real changes for the long haul. She offered participants useful tips on how to organize their desks, how to file and track paperwork, ways to keep up with e-mail and techniques to manage voice mail. She also suggested various ways to say “no” to requests that can’t be met.

Vaccaro asked legislators to change the way they think about the people, projects and priorities that compete for their time. She encouraged participants to prioritize those activities that embody their personal goals, missions and values. Twenty percent of what you do gets you 80 percent of the results you seek, she said. Regardless of individual decisions about how time is used, people need to know what’s in their 20 percent zone of urgent and important activities. And they need to “have the time of their life” while they focus on that 20 percent.

Laura Tomaka manages the Bowhay Institute for Legislative Leadership Development for CSG’s Midwestern region.

Case Study Provokes Ethics Discussion

Mary Lou Cooper

Eagleton Institute Professor Alan Rosenthal taught one of the most thought-provoking classes at the Western Legislative Academy. Author of *The Ethics Process in State Legislatures*, Rosenthal presented legislators with an authentic ethics case study based on a Maryland legislator in the late 1990s who used his office for personal gain. The case is one he has taught legislative leaders throughout the nation.

The issue addressed by the case study was not so much what the individual state senator did, but how leadership should handle the situation in light of a newspaper expose, upcoming elections, duty to the Senate and the Legislature and the potential for outside criminal justice action.

Rosenthal invited lawmakers to consider what they would do and why if they were in the Maryland Senate president’s shoes. In the real-life scenario, Maryland lawmakers voted to expel the wayward member and then called for a major review of state ethics laws.

Academy participants debated such issues as how soon should leadership have taken action, what were the impacts on the Legislature’s reputation and whether or not the member received due process.
David Palenczar, Vice President of Operations for the El Pomar Foundation, warmly welcomes the WLA Class of 2001. The El Pomar Foundation generously supports the Western Legislative Academy with funds and in-kind donations. In addition, the foundation opens wide the doors of the historic Penrose House in Colorado Springs to serve as the campus for the WLA.

The WLA Class of 2001 elected Alaska Rep. Lestil McGuire as class president.

Nevada Assemblywoman Barbara Cegavske was president of the Class of 2000, the first-ever training Academy for newer Western lawmakers. Here she welcomed the Class of 2001.

In their first Academy assignment, legislators were asked to introduce classmates in memorable ways that wouldn’t likely show up on official resumes. Montana Rep. Joey Jayne offered amusing comments about Colorado Rep. Jim Snook as he prepared to retaliate.

Montana representatives Linda Holden and Mark Noennig led the Class of 2001 as it sang “America the Beautiful” in honor of the victims of the events of September 11.
Lawmakers Learn from

When put to the test, the Class of 2001 got serious. Lawmakers spent three and a half days working to build their own skills and learning valuable lessons about strengthening their institutions.

In addition to discussing public cynicism toward state legislatures, Eagleton Institute’s Alan Rosenthal taught a case study in legislative ethics and leadership.

Oregon Rep. Janet Carlson followed instructions during an experiential exercise at the Air Force Academy. Focus and commitment were required to get the job done.

Team-building training at the U.S. Air Force Academy required some participants to play “blindfolded” members of the rank and file, while other lawmakers were assigned leadership and liaison jobs. Newer legislators noted that “feeling in the dark” wasn’t an entirely new experience.

U.S. Air Force Major Danny Miller administered the DiSC personal profiling system to WLA class members. DiSC assesses individuals based on predominance of Dominance, Influence, Conscientiousness or Steadiness traits. This exercise helped lawmakers capitalize on behavioral strengths, understand weaknesses and increase their ability to work with people of different behavior profiles.
Members of the Class of 2001 found much to applaud in sessions with professional trainers. Pictured left is the oldest class member, Hawaii Rep. Helene Hale and right is the youngest, Alaska Rep. Lesli McGuire. Center left is New Mexico Sen. Mary Kay Papen and center right is Hawaii Rep. Mindy Jaffe.

Author and Churchill scholar, Professor James Humes stayed in costume and in character as he taught "The Sir Winston Method" of language as a tool of legislative leadership. Humes teaches at the University of Southern Colorado.

Arizona House Majority Leader Carolyn Allen (left) and Oregon Senate Minority Leader Kate Brown debriefed after teaching a session on lessons from leaders at the WLA. These experienced and successful legislative leaders—one from the majority and one from the minority—shared insights on how to work effectively with both chambers and both parties. Armed with anecdotes, the two leaders engaged their audience in lively discussion on "the right stuff" for lawmakers to be effective. Each leader offered advice on topics ranging from dealing with the media, lobbyists and staff to use of parliamentary procedure, coalitions and minority reports. The leaders talked about the importance of picking your battles. Both emphasized the importance of integrity. They urged legislators to keep open minds to be able to learn and grow. If you do change your mind, they said, be candid and forthright in explaining your reasons to leadership, constituents, lobbyists and the media.

Brigham Young University Professor David Magleby (left) and Boise State University Professor Gary Moncrief are national experts on legislative institutions and processes. Magleby spoke about the influence of direct democracy on legislative power, and Moncrief addressed the impacts of term limits.
Networking and Knowledge

Legislators said that sharing friendship and contacts across state borders was one of the biggest benefits they took away from the WLA. From left to right, Assembly Member Jenny Oropeza (CA), Rep. Gretchen Guess (AK) and Rep. Mindy Jaffe (HI) pose for a farewell photo.

New Mexico Sen. Diane Snyder expressed strong feelings during the ethics case study. Active debate and discussion by lawmakers enhanced the WLA experience.

Questioning speakers and each other was encouraged at the WLA. Utah Rep. Patricia Jones made a point, as Washington representatives Glenn Anderson (left) and Bruce Chandler (right) and Idaho Sen. Patti Anne Lodge (center back) considered it.

“I like your tie,” and “I like yours.” Colorado Rep. Jim Snook (left) and Idaho Rep. Gary Young found something in common during the first few minutes of the WLA.
Go Hand in Hand

Utah Sen. Carlene Walker (left), Nevada Assemblyman John Oceguera and Nevada Assemblywoman Debbie Smith spend time together outside class.

Kent Briggs, Executive Director of CSG-WEST, explained his views of the common roots and unique values shared by Westerners.

Hawaii Sen. J. Kalani English (left) and Washington Rep. Mark Milosca "bonded" during an exercise at the Air Force Academy. Milosca was a U.S. Air Force graduate and former B-52 pilot. English served as an adviser at the United Nations. When events became confusing, even pilots and diplomats needed outside help.

Idaho lawmakers Darrell Boiz and Patti Anne Lodge took a minute to catch up on issues brewing back home.
Working with the Capitol Gang

Cheryl Lee Duvauchelle

As a part of the WLA's legislative effectiveness training, a “capitol gang” panel—made up of a political columnist and a legislative lobbyist—offered participants insights from their perspectives as key players on the capitol scene. Ken Strobeck, former TV news producer and former Oregon House Speaker Pro Tem, moderated the panel. Strobeck, now vice president of public affairs for a Portland lobbying firm, kicked off the session with a hypothetical situation that could easily happen today.

Colorado lobbyist Wally Stealey and retired AP writer and political columnist Carl Hilliard responded to the hypothetical situation and then gave their own rules of the road for working with the capitol gang.

The Hypothetical Situation

Senator Michel Green, a moderate Republican elected from a suburban district, is serving in his fourth term and may face both a primary candidate and a strong Democratic opponent in the general election. Green has always run on an environmental platform, which his district supports.

Economic decline and rolling energy blackouts have hit Green's district hard. Unemployment is high. The power companies are held in low regard—first for cutting off power and then for raising rates.

Green has accepted a $1,000 campaign check from Worldwide Electric Company, which has announced plans to build a new electricity generating plant in a rural part of the district. The plant will provide jobs and stabilize the electricity supply picture, but opponents will likely accuse Green of waffling on the environment.

Green has asked our capitol gang panelists for assistance. He has asked the newspaper to run an editorial in favor of the new plant, downplaying Worldwide's spotty environmental record. And, he has asked Worldwide's lobbyist to have the corporation delay or downplay announcements of controversial construction impacts until after the election.

The Capitol Gang Responds

Lobbyist Stealey advised lawmakers that Sen. Green should not have taken the check. Once into the situation, however, he says, it is too late for Green to back out of his commitment to the power company.

Political reporter Hilliard told legislators that the editor would print the story. While it may not be illegal to accept a $1,000 contribution, Green is accountable for any negative outcome.

This hypothetical, but realistic scenario, introduced the capitol gang panel to legislators. Stealey and Hilliard then offered their views on how lawmakers can develop appropriate relationships with lobbyists and the press corps.

Rules of the Road for Working with Lobbyists

According to Stealey:

- When you take money, you must be able to eat the lobbyists' food, drink their whiskey and still be able to say "no" to their positions.
- It is not a legislator's job to get votes for a lobbyist. While the lobbyist would like the legislator to support his/her position, what is most important is for the lobbyist to be heard.
- Lobbyists need to be truthful. Legislators should listen politely and not burn bridges.
- A lobbyist who attempts to twist a legislator's arm is usually ineffective.

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Legislators Learn Negotiating and Decision-Making Techniques

Rich Lindsey

In order for legislators to be better decision-makers, they must understand the context of the situations they enter and have definite goals as to what they want to accomplish. That was the advice offered by Kare Anderson, co-founder of The Compelling Communications Group, during a session on negotiating and decision-making.

By understanding each party’s context during a conversation, legislators can use that power of understanding to get desired results as opposed to reacting negatively. Simply reacting lets other people determine your behavior and outcomes. Anderson pointed out that there is power both in silence and in being specific. Really listen to others, and then be brief when making a point, she suggested.

Anderson also briefed lawmakers on effective negotiating techniques. Being a better negotiator, she said, means getting people to work with you, not to act like you. Getting people to work with you can increase the size of your constituency and increase your position of power. Before going into a negotiating process, legislators should do a stakeholder analysis to find out who has an interest in the issue but as yet is not involved. This “unlikely audience” will increase the power of your negotiations.

For negotiations to succeed, everyone must agree on the process before proceeding. Successful legislators at the outset indicate what they want, how long it might take and in general what they expect. Legislators, Anderson concluded, should always be authentic, specific and show respect.

The Capitol Gang continued

Rules of the Road for Working with Media

According to Hilliard:

- If you do not want it in print, don’t do it.
- Go to the press office, meet the political press and get to know them.
- Meet with editors and explain your positions, since editorial writers do not come to the legislature.
- Simple news releases are usually better than press conferences.
- Saying something is “off the record” does not suffice, unless the reporter agrees.

Stealey and Hilliard agreed that neither lobbyists nor the press could be friends with legislators. Such friendships compromise the jobs of each.

Legislators Learn to Survive Hostile Media Interviews and Make Great Speeches

Laura Tomaka

With equal quantities of humor, interactive video and practical advice, Washington, D.C. media trainer Arch Lustberg brought his common sense communications methods to this year’s WLA class. Lustberg taught sessions on public speaking and on media encounters to Western lawmakers.

Four class “volunteers” worked with Lustberg to simulate real life examples of hostile media interviews and speech making. He showed participants how to go beyond mastery of their material and “what they say” to become fully aware of and in control of “how they say it” and how they are perceived by others.

Arguing that “likability” is the key to winning over an audience of any size and to winning elections, Lustberg offered techniques for becoming an effective, memorable and likable communicator. From body posture and facial expressions, to maintaining composure and control, to the use of stories and anecdotes, to personalizing the message and involving the audience, this session offered clear lessons on how to improve speaking and interviewing skills.

Lustberg has coached governors, congressional leaders, presidential appointees and corporate executives in the art of successful communications.

Washington D.C. media trainer Arch Lustberg spoke with passion about “making intellectual love” to audiences to get and keep their attention.

Alaska Rep. Gary Stevens pounded the table during a session on how to make effective speeches.

WLA class members cheer as colleagues are interviewed live, on-camera by CSG-WEST’s own “Mike Wallace,” otherwise known as Arch Lustberg. It was a good time to be in the audience.