When lawmakers gathered in Colorado Springs for the 13th Western Legislative Academy, national communications expert Bill Graham delivered speech and media lessons targeted specifically to elected officials. He taught participants how to be more likeable by speaking with an open face, warm voice and energetic body language. As well as being likeable, he showed lawmakers how to become memorable communicators—by telling stories and making emotional connections rather than regurgitating facts. Graham also worked with legislators on media interviews, even when questions turn hostile. He reminded participants to stay positive, avoid buzz words and demonstrate to the audience beyond the interviewer that you are a caring person.

To vividly illustrate these points, legislative “volunteers” were asked to give speech excerpts and handle negative interviews on camera.

In addition to Graham’s class, lawmakers participated in sessions on leadership, ethics, negotiations, time management and legislative institution building. A highlight was the half-day spent at the U.S. Air Force Academy working on team building exercises.

The Western Legislative Academy is a product of the Council of State Governments-WEST. Since its creation in 2000, 488 Western state legislators have graduated from the WLA. Many alumni have gone on to leadership positions in their own chambers, in statewide offices and in Congress.

The 2013 Western Legislative Academy will take place November 13-16. Admission is competitive and limited to legislators in their first four years of TOTAL legislative service. Applications are due April 26. For more information, visit www.csgwest.org or call 916-553-4423.
Senator Ogden Driskill says that being a rancher is great preparation for serving in the state legislature. In Wyoming on a single day, the weather can go from 60 degrees and sunny to 20 degrees below zero with a foot of snow. A rancher’s plans change by the minute, and so must a legislator’s. Agility is the key to success in either realm.

In November, Driskill was elected class president of the 2012 Western Legislative Academy by peers from around the West. He’s beginning his second term in the legislature representing one of the largest legislative districts in the lower 48 states. When he’s not in Cheyenne making public policy (Wyoming meets only 40 days in odd years and 20 in even ones), Driskill manages his 18,000 acre ranch in the northeastern part of the state. He wears a big hat and rides a horse but says ranching these days is mostly a mechanized business. Driskill volunteers with a number of non-profits and charities, and his passion is land conservation.

When asked what advice he would give newer lawmakers coming behind him, the Wyoming senator recommended finding a mentor and getting to know members of the legislature on a personal basis before the official work begins.

Driskill visited the Wyoming Legislature off and on for 30 years before he ran for office. He says he eventually decided to quit whining and start serving.

What’s next for the Wyoming lawmaker? Driskill says between ranching and public and community service, he and his wife Zannie are living the good life already. But he still finds time to reach out to young people, not just as voters, but as future public servants.

“I live on good opportunities, and WLA was a big one.”

Senator Ogden Driskill

Past presidents of the Western Legislative Academy are:
Nevada Assemblywoman Teresa Benitez-Thompson (2011)
New Mexico Senator John Sapien (2009)
New Mexico Representative Thomas Garcia (2007)
Idaho Representative Rich Wills (2006)
Nevada Assemblywoman Heidi Gansert (2005)
New Mexico Representative Jose Campos (2004)
Alaska Senator Lesil McGuire (2001)
Nevada Senator Barbara Cegavske (2000)

Special appreciation goes to the El Pomar Foundation and Penrose House which play a large role in the success of the CSG-WEST Western Legislative Academy. The Foundation’s ongoing investment in the WLA helps newer Western legislators acquire the skills and networks to be more effective policy makers. The campus environment created by the Penrose House provides a place where participants can step away from their busy lives and immerse themselves in intensive skill building classes. El Pomar fellows serve as independent evaluators of the WLA and are an unbiased resource for course corrections in the curriculum.
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Dr. Thad Kousser gave WLA’ers the historical context of the legislative institutions where they serve.

Pam Vaccaro helped lawmakers learn how to prioritize when they’re pulled in too many directions at once.

Dave Landis dramatically demonstrated how to build consensus in the legislative arena.

Clay Jenkinson delivered lessons in leadership from Thomas Jefferson.

Jeff Carney applied 7 Habits of Highly Effective People lessons to best legislative leadership practices.

Rosie Berger (Class of 2004) led the WLA Class of 2012 on their journey to become better legislators.
Danny Miller
During an afternoon at the U.S. Air Force Academy, Ret. U.S. Air Force LT. Col. Danny Miller ran WLA’ers through some of the same team building exercises given to officers and cadets.

Edgar Ruiz
CSG-WEST Executive Director Edgar Ruiz explored the unique policy issues of the Western region and invited lawmakers to become part of the CSG family.

Bill Graham
Communications expert and former TV producer Bill Graham worked with lawmakers on the art of speech making and media interviews.

“You want to live your life so the preacher doesn’t have to lie at your funeral.”
Jeff Carney, Leadership trainer, WLA 2012

Jack Marshall
Using humor and real-life scenarios, ethicist and author Jack Marshall taught the “Secrets of Virtuous Lawmakers.”

Daniel Butler
Yale University political scientist Dr. Daniel Butler led a budget game designed to demonstrate how to meet the challenges of building trust and cooperation in 21st century legislatures.