

UWO hosts government experience for high schoolers

UW-Oshkosh Today

A civic leadership experience focused on government, elections, public service, debate and leadership development played out last month at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh for hundreds of high school seniors from across Wisconsin.

American Legion Auxiliary Badger Girls State has a long history at UWO, and Executive Director Joanie Dickerson, who has volunteered 31 years, says her expectation from the week is always that the girls take what they learn and experience and apply it to their lives as involved citizens of their community, state and country.

“To build a strong America, we need people to be leaders in our country,” Dickerson said.

The delegates are chosen by their schools and sponsored to attend—there is no cost to the student—and they are assigned to the “Nationalist” or “Federalist” political party in a week-long mock government activity. They are assigned to one of 10 cities, including such names as Balsam, Hemlock, Hickory and Pine, as part of the mythical state of Badger.

Organizers say the girls were dropped off the night of June 21 and often wonder what they are getting involved with and if it’s right for them. They end the week after cultivating leadership skills, many new friendships and tears flowing when they head separate ways back home.

On Monday morning, students took group photos before kicking off campaigns



Photo from UW-Oshkosh

Badger Girls State delegates running for office were seeking nomination signatures.

for various offices and holding caucus debates on platform issues. State nomination papers with the required signatures needed to be turned in by the 10:15 p.m. Monday deadline.

There are Primary and General elections for Federalist and Nationalist offices of Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Secretary of State, Treasurer, Attorney General, Superintendent of Public Instruction and Supreme Court Justice.

The week included political party conventions, Senate and Assembly Bill writing sessions, lobbying opportunities, an evening flag ceremony, hearings on bills and visits from Wisconsin’s elected officials.

Debate on platform issues the afternoon of June 22 included topics such as housing, green house gas emissions, property and income taxes.

A fun “State Fair” lunch event Thursday included lots of traditional Fair foods and a State Fair talent show showcased delegate abilities on Friday.

There was a three-hour future college/career day on Thursday afternoon and a highlight of the week took place Thursday night, when Senate, Assembly, State Officers and special guests are part of the highly-anticipated Inaugural Dinner at Blackhawk Commons. The week wrapped up Friday.

Leadership-in-action

“For a very long time women were not visible in politics,” Dickerson said. “They need to realize they have a voice and its value and impact.”

Delegate Claire Li of Madison West High School, who was part of the Federalist Party, was seeking a few more signa-

tures (30 were required) on her nomination papers for Governor.

Another Delegate, Erin Cassady of Verona, was running for Supreme Court Justice. She had her 30 signatures but wanted a couple extra, just to be sure she would be eligible to be on the ballot.

“My mom is a public defender,” she said of her decision to run for a judgeship. “Being a Justice—I’d want to bring an unbiased view.”

Madison Cotton, a student at Divine Savior Holy Angels High School in Milwaukee, said she plans to take in as many opportunities as possible throughout the week. She wants to meet people and network. A forensics team member, she said said her personal “strong suit” is public speaking. She said she plans to pursue a degree in political science at UW-Madison, UW-Oshkosh or UW-Whitewater.

Dickinson said students today have many competing interests and opportunities during the summer. At one time there were 750 delegates, but the number has dropped since the COVID pandemic, to around 500.

This year marks the 81st session of the American Legion Auxiliary Badger Girls State.

“I think it’s (Badger Girls State) as important as it ever was, in the world,” Dickinson said, adding that she hopes delegates will take what they learn and experience at ALA Badger Girls State and apply it to their lives as involved citizens.