

# GU Student Task Force On Diversity Attends Summit To Learn About Education Policy

March 17 2023 9:44 AM



**GREENVILLE** - A group of Greenville University students met with legislators, learned how to advocate for education policy, and more at a spring summit last month.

Project L.E.A.D. (Leaders in Education Advocating for Diversity) is a task force of Greenville University education students who participate as student ambassadors, meeting monthly to discuss critical issues in diversity and equity in the field of

education. Key events include two student summits in the fall and spring. Those summits bring students and faculty from multiple institutions across Illinois together to share ideas about diverse recruitment and scholarship, culturally responsive teaching and learning practices, and taking collective action toward social justice issues.

During the 2022-23 school year, the Project L.E.A.D. group focused on learning how to be an education policy advocate, specifically receiving training on how to tell their story and meet with legislators to advocate for specific policies. This year, the ambassadors learned how a bill becomes a law and have been following the Racism Free Schools Act (IL Senate Bill 90/House Bill 2049), which proposes protections for students and teachers who experience acts of hate in the school setting. They also submitted witness slips in support of the bill to the Illinois Legislature.

Student Ambassador Vanessa Compton, an elementary education and special education double major, shared that the mock conversations with Kansas State Representative Tim Johnson and Teach Plus Fellow Bill Curtin at the spring summit helped her understand what a professional policy conversation could look like.

After meeting with GU L.E.A.D. ambassadors, Representative Johnson noted that the opportunity to share advocacy issues with the students may have benefited him more than the students.

“First, I picked up legislative ideas to share back in Kansas,” Rep. Johnson says. “Most of all, I had a chance to experience diverse individuals who deserve a fair voice in state government.”

The Project L.E.A.D. work this year will culminate in “A Day on the Hill” at the capitol in Springfield, Illinois where ambassadors will meet directly with legislators and other educators to advocate for the Racism Free Schools Act.

Heather Gilmore, an elementary education professor at GU, serves as the faculty liaison for Project L.E.A.D. at GU.

“Through these experiential learning opportunities, I have seen an incredible fostering of leadership skills, empathy, and an ability to communicate in hard, but professional conversations about diversity and equity,” Gilmore says. “We are grateful for the ability to apply for experiential learning funds because without them we could not attend these powerful summits with a strongly diverse group of peers, faculty, and presenters.”

Project L.E.A.D. is piloted by President Katie Chavez, a junior physical education major and Vice President Ashley Smith, a junior early childhood and elementary education double major. Both have led incredible growth in participation with highly dedicated members.

For more information, on Project L.E.A.D., email Heather Gilmore at [heather.gilmore@greenville.edu](mailto:heather.gilmore@greenville.edu).

### **About Greenville University**

Greenville University is an accredited Christian liberal arts university with more than 1,000 students, including traditional undergraduate, graduate, and adult degree completion students. Founded in 1892 and affiliated with the Free Methodist Church, the University is located in Greenville, Illinois, 45 miles east of St. Louis, Missouri. Visit [www.greenville.edu](http://www.greenville.edu).