



## **20 Lehigh Students to Present at the UN Commission on the Status of Women** **By Timmy Dillard, LU/UN Communications Intern**

Eighteen Lehigh UN Youth Representatives will amplify the voices of seven Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) by presenting at a major United Nations conference. The United Nations' Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) will hold its 67th annual two-week session in early March. For many Lehigh students in the UN Youth Representative Program, this is an opportunity to advance the missions of the partner NGOs they serve by providing a voice and representation at the UN and beyond.

Throughout the conference, more than 700 hybrid events will focus on progress made in policies enhancing women's rights, and emerging issues surrounding gender equality. Participant NGOs will host these events to draw attention to their missions and offer solutions in relation to CSW67's priority theme: "Innovation, technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls." This year, Lehigh University students will make eight such presentations.

To prepare for their NGO's events, Youth Representatives from Lehigh must not only conduct the necessary research, but also manage logistics such as marketing their event, introducing speakers, moderating Q&A discussions, or conducting surveys to advocate for their NGO's mission and engage the audience. Tess McGinley, representing the Centre for Public Health (CPH) in Nigeria, said, "The theme is really interesting for us because we're focused on rural communities, and technology isn't always accessible." CPH plans to showcase their effort to build hotlines for women in danger, especially in these rural areas.

Nikki Pasterczyk represents Australia-based Caring and Living as Neighbors (CLAN), which focuses on equal access to newborn screening for communities in resource-poor areas. "Ours is such a niche mission," she said. "Some people might wonder why this is an important issue, so we have to show statistics that demonstrate why it's so important for girls to get equal, early diagnoses."

Nikki is grateful that her brother has been able to receive the necessary treatment for a rare condition. What CLAN will discuss in their event, however, is that many lower-income countries do not screen for treatable conditions like his. "This research means a lot to me," she said. "Not everyone has the treatment they need, and I want to expand it to as many people as possible."

The Youth Representatives also need logistical preparation. "The benefit of the event is in the conversation that it starts for people," said Emma Hartman, a fourth-year student in the program. But, "Passing a microphone is much easier in person than virtually," said Elena Reiss, Assistant Director of Fellowship Advising and UN Programs and

manager of the Youth Representative program in a preparatory meeting with the Youth Representatives. The students will need to practice with microphones, cameras, and connectivity to ensure their events run smoothly. Still, even if technology is unproblematic, “Any conference can have issues with scheduling, location, the organizers putting something incorrectly in some of their forms. You need to learn how to handle these situations” said Elena.

Houry Geudelekian, the chairwoman of NGO CSW and Lehigh’s long-standing partner, advocates strongly for amplifying young voices, and relies on Lehigh as a resource: “For years we’ve known Lehigh was a place to reach out to if we needed youth involvement and participation.” After years of involving youth on the global advocacy stage, Geudelekian is adamant about the importance of global conventions like CSW67. “A lot of times, we’re introverted,” she said. “When you learn about what’s happening in the rest of the world, it actually helps you improve your local situation. It’s the global - local connection that’s important.”

In addition to giving Lehigh students access to attend in person events in New York, CSW also provides opportunities to bring NGO representatives to Lehigh campus. The Founder and Director of CPH, Dr. C’Fine Okorochukwu from Nigeria, plans to visit Lehigh’s campus and speak to students about public health in Sub-Saharan Africa in March - a plan that is being resumed after halting for the pandemic in 2020. Similarly, two representatives of CLAN will travel to Lehigh from Australia to connect with Lehigh Youth Representatives and prepare for their NGO CSW presentation.

McGinley, who has worked with Dr. C’Fine as a Youth Representative for three years now, thinks that there will be many opportunities for students to connect with him, especially within the College of Health. “We have a lot of students getting trained in public health analysis,” she said. “There are fundamentals of public health that need to be implemented in Nigeria, and Lehigh students can help with that.”

Several on-campus groups, including the Youth Representatives, will collaborate with The Center of Gender Equity (CGE) for a comprehensive celebration of International Women’s Day on March 8th. From 10 am to 3 pm in the EWFM Library, there will be many open and interactive educational opportunities for attendees to learn about gender inclusion and equity, followed by a keynote speaker that afternoon. Two student interns for the CGE will also be presenting CSW events.

Lehigh Youth Representatives will hold pre-CSW events on campus to raise awareness for NGO CSW, which is free and open to the general public. On February 24th from 2 to 5 o’clock pm, the UN Youth Representative Program will provide an overview of their NGO CSW presentations during an event titled *A Global Perspective on Gender Equity: Technological Change, Innovation, and Education* in the Global Commons at Williams Hall. This will not only be an opportunity for the Youth Representatives to present their research and share their efforts in advancing gender equity, but also to practice with the technology necessary for their event. The following week, the Youth Representatives will host a CSW informational table in FML advertising the event.

Each of the UN Youth Representatives who are working with their partner NGOs to prepare for CSW have gained experience in advocacy research, logistical coordination, and presentation skills, and will continue to do until their events in early March.