Ballard encourages students to serve

Lawrence's state representative teaches women’s studies class for second time

By Sasha Roe

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Lawrence Rep. Barbara Ballard said one quotation had inspired her political work: “Service to others is the rent you pay,” spoken by Shirley Chisholm, the first African-American woman in the U.S. Congress.

Ballard has passionately represented Lawrence, the state of Kansas, and the University of Kansas with her civic service.

Dr. Barbara Ballard, state representative and Associate Director of the Dole Institute of Politics, is teaching "Women in the Legislative Process" through the women's studies department. Ballard will be hosting guests such as Kathleen Sebelius and other female state political leaders. During the course, Ballard said students will get a plear picture of who they are individually and what the status is of women in the United States.

This fall Ballard will teach “Women and the Legislative Process,” a women's studies class at the University. Ballard has been a state representative since 1993, served on numerous University boards and is an associate director at the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics. This is the second semester she'll teach the class. She last taught it in Fall 2005.

Ballard said the class would prepare students for a possible spring internship in the legislature. The class also will help them understand political processes, formulate pieces of policy and discover their view on current issues. Most importantly, Ballard wants students to become responsible citizens and leaders.

“There are so many areas where people need leaders,” Ballard said. “I hope the students will understand you have to give back, and we can do it on our own level.”
Ballard said in-class speakers added something unique to the class. Visitors to the class will include Governor Kathleen Sebelius as well as women members of her cabinet and the state senate.

“Students will be given a very vocal viewpoint of the status of women in leadership,” Ballard said.

Ann Cudd, director of women’s studies, first heard about a similar class in a presentation at a National Women’s Studies Association meeting. The class was taught by a Minnesota legislator and was tied to a spring internship.

“It sounded so great,” Cudd said. “I thought, how could we not do this, especially with Dr. Ballard.”

Cudd said Ballard was perfect for the class. Ballard has been a longtime supporter of the women’s studies department, and served as the Emily Taylor Women's Resource Center director.

“Even better than the class from Minnesota, Dr. Ballard has taught a lot of courses at the University,” Cudd said. “As a director at the Dole Institute, I think she sees this as part of her work.”

Only elected people can impact policy, and that always has driven Ballard. When approached about serving in the Kansas Legislature, the possibility of representing women and making a difference appealed to Ballard.

“Women want to see women in strong leadership roles,” Ballard said. “When people see someone like themselves, they say, ‘Wow, that makes me feel proud, that’s my perspective’.”

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Graduate teaching assistant Heather Yates is looking forward to working with Ballard because of her contributions to the political process.

“Dr. Ballard has experience with her background of being a state representative,” Yates said. “She’s definitely a commodity to the class.”

Yates said the class would be very valuable for young women to understand the contributions of women politicians in the 21st century. She said women today have more representation and more support.
“In 2006, more women gained seats in political offices,” Yates said. “Women have made significant strides.”

Student Senate President Hannah Love, Dodge City senior, said she became interested in the class after being elected last semester.

“It really hit close to home, I became very interested in women and their role in politics,” Love said. “I deal with gender issues on a daily basis.”

Love said she looked forward to the real world strategies Ballard would bring to the class.

“I think it’s very important to understand how politics relates to women and affects us every day,” Love said.

Ballard said women brought new perspectives to policy making. She said the goal of the class was to encourage and prepare young women to take part in internships and leadership positions.

“Don’t be afraid to get involved,” Ballard said. “The payoff is so great.”

— Edited by Kyle Carter