

# FROM THE EDITOR



**I**n the second year of the Newcomb Scholars Program, scholars are introduced to the case study method, and we are asked to supplement our practice of case analysis by authoring our own. A case study is a piece of writing that initially poses as an academic paper but upon deeper analysis reveals itself to be a narrative. As a cohort, we covered cases about individuals' lives and their struggles with career choices or personal dilemmas, and often a mixture of both.

As academic scholars we read about the experiences of countless women and were asked, "what would you have done?" Our conversations arced and flowed, met barriers, and then circled back as we all volleyed different thoughts and "what-ifs," ultimately finding that our class period had come to an end and we, as a collective group, were no closer to an answer. Being a feminist cohort, we wrestled with large but important conceptual questions: Who do we consider a feminist? What are the qualifications to be considered as such? Does perfect feminism exist, and if so, is it even fair to hold someone to such a lofty benchmark?

We confronted the conflict that arises when prioritizing a choice that may benefit one's own career ultimately reinforces patriarchal norms. As emboldened scholars ourselves, we begrudgingly accepted the irrefutable fact that female leaders are forced to find their own balance between social progress and personal sacrifice. Case study analysis was not only an academic exercise but proved to lay an analytical foundation we could use for the future choices we may be confronted with.

As the semester unfolded, we encountered the stories of women of different races, sexualities, and professional experience. Each woman had a separate definition of feminism and differed in their stance on whether feminism should be a daily concern of women. Exposed to a wide array of influential women and their experiences, we were once again challenged to reflect on which case we had resonated with the most. The Scholars Program gifts students with the opportunity to sit across the room from other feminist-minded students who bring their own academic expertise to the table. My peers' academic studies and personal pursuits became evident as we all approached the cases from our respective fields of study.

To the readers, I believe you will find that although these cases share a common theme of women leaders navigating the political landscape, the lens of analysis varies with each unique author. Zoe Frieze examines the fight against residential displacement and severe health issues among Black New Orleanians in Cancer Alley and Sharon Lavigne's ignition of grassroots activism to fight institutionalized racism. In a different context, Navya Murugesan examines the tenuous relationship between state leadership and local resistance in urban politics. Murugesan tells of Mayor-President Sharon Weston Broome's friction with residents who tried to secede from their parish because of the pressure they faced to integrate their school. Ava Buras and I follow vastly different female political figures, but both women attempt to enter a field dominated by white male leadership. My own case considers the influence of Sarah Palin's conservative definition of feminism on women's engagement with national politics. Buras details the barriers Bernette Joshua Johnson faced to earn her position as a Louisiana Supreme Court Justice and advance the fight for diverse representation among the court's justices.

Collectively, these cases bring to light the work of influential women leaders, but each individual piece reminds us that these conflicts are encountered by women in all contexts, and sometimes feminist figures emerge when someone occupies a leadership role out of necessity to fight for their desired change. From all of these stories I think you may find, as I did, that there is no "right" answer to political activism and leadership as we may hope there to be, and the women striving to alter political norms face an onslaught of double standards. Please join me in congratulating the authors for the immense amount of work they have poured into these pieces over the past several months. Their insights are thoughtfully crafted, and, I believe, will hold lasting relevance.

Sincerely,  
Molly Shields  
Newcomb Scholar  
Class of 2024