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Step Up

FELLOWSHIP PREPS DEPARTMENT'S FUTURE FEMALE LEADERS

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To address gender gaps in leadership and groom women for leadership roles worldwide, the International Women's Forum in 1994 launched its Leadership Foundation program. The IWF says the program aims to help "high-potential women of ethnic, professional and geographic diversity... become tomorrow's women chief executive officers and principal leaders."

PHOTOGRAPH: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S FORUM



At the IWF Gala in Chicago in 2007, several IWF recipients gathered for a photo, including the author, back row, second from the right—and the tallest person in the photo.

I am honored to have been the IWF's 2007–2008 fellow from the federal government. Congress has allocated funding for the annual participation of a federal employee, and I have spent the past year learning with and from 20 amazing women from six countries. This group of “wickedly smart women”—the words of former Leadership Foundation President Rosalind Gilmore—is determined and capable of rising to the tops of their professions and committed to taking other women, and men, with them.

Above Average

This was not the average leadership program. We addressed matters such as diversity and the need to change leadership styles as one's career advances, as well as moral leadership and globalization. We experienced an intense program that, in

three one-week sessions, challenged our perceptions of success, dared us to be courageous and encouraged us to be more open. One exercise involving an electronic maze reinforced our understanding that progress sometimes requires lateral or backward movement, and if you are going to lead, make sure you are being followed.

We also contributed to monthly newsletters and did public speaking. Additionally, the Leadership Foundation offered the fellows once-in-a-lifetime opportunities, including executive education at the Harvard Business School and the Cambridge University's Judge Business School, as well as being paired with an IWF mentor.

Personal Directors

The most significant part of the program, and what I appreciated most, was

being given a “personal board of directors.” These five-person boards were formed during our time at Harvard to work on common professional or personal goals. They generated the spark for changes the fellows made over the year. I identified what motivates me and how to better use my talents.

As a result, I've raised my personal and professional aspirations and plotted a different career path. I also made four new wonderful friends who are invested in my success.

The IWF Leadership Fellowship was physically and emotionally exhausting, but intellectually stimulating. It made me braver, more caring, less judgmental, more open and more aware of my personal needs.

The author is the economic counselor at the U.S. Embassy in Amman, Jordan.