



Friends of the Denise Taber Finard '80 Women's Institute,

I am pleased, honored, and excited that Russell Sage President Matt Shaftel has invited me to continue as interim executive director of the institute for 2026-27.

As I reflect on the 2025-2026 academic year, the words that come to mind are growth, connection, creativity, and change. We are becoming more visible both on campus and off. On campus, our ambassadors have gained confidence in their leadership abilities and capacity to make a difference, whether they have been in the program for years or just joined last fall.

Meanwhile, in the community, we launched the Russell Sage College-Women@Work Leadership Development Program this month, and eight students completed the first module on Change and Innovation. Several students have already been sharing positive reviews of their experience, including one module graduate who wrote on LinkedIn, "I can honestly say it exceeded my expectations...The conversations, activities, and practical application challenged me to think differently about leadership, change, and innovation."

You'll find details about our activities in the rest of this newsletter and in our annual Women's Institute report, which will come out this summer.

What's next for 2026-2027? Exciting changes are ahead with Russell Sage faculty Dr. Tonya Moutray and Professor MaryEllen Tedesco joining us as Faculty Fellows. Dr. Moutray's focus will be in the area of women's studies, and Professor Tedesco will be instructing and supporting the ambassadors over the academic year. We're also working on a number of programs for our alumni and community, including a speaker series and virtual book club, so stay tuned for that schedule in the next few months.

This summer, I'm creating a new leadership program for the ambassadors with a focus on leading from the heart. This program will take into account rapid advancements in technology – particularly artificial intelligence – and the pressing need to focus on mental health, including grounding practices and team-building experiences within the institute and with Russell Sage clubs and organizations.

Leading from within leads to positive outcomes in our community, and I can hardly wait for the new academic year!

Warmly,

Eileen

Dr. Eileen V. Brownell | Interim Executive Director
Denise Taber Finard '80 Women's Institute



Study Away Experience in Seneca Falls

In April, the Women's Institute ambassadors, joined by several Russell Sage alumnae, traveled to Seneca Falls, New York — the site of the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848.

The Women's Rights National Historic Park's visitors center offered an inspiring journey through the history of women in the United States. In the historic Wesleyan Chapel, where the first convention was held, the ambassadors heard the story of how this groundbreaking event came to be.

An unexpected opportunity arrived when we were invited to participate in a social justice protest on the front steps of the visitor center that afternoon. Protesters warmly welcomed our group, sharing protest signs, stories, and fellowship as we stood beside them in solidarity. One ambassador reflected, "We just

learned about women's history, and now we are making it!" as she raised her placard high. It was a reminder that honoring the women who fought for our rights also means continuing their work.

The trip concluded with a visit to the National Women's Hall of Fame, a museum dedicated to celebrating the achievements of distinguished American women. The ambassadors were delighted to discover that our own Emma Hart Willard was included in the hall.

We're excited to offer this trip to students and alumni again in the future.



A Strong Launch for Our New Leadership Microcredential

We recently wrapped up our first microcredential, Change and Innovation, in the Russell Sage College-Women@Work Leadership Development Program, and what an incredible experience it was.

The microcredential program includes three two-week modules designed for busy professionals that focus on change and innovation, relationships and persuasion, and entrepreneurial thinking. Utilizing in-person instruction, online discussions, and simulations, the modules are taught by Russell Sage's School of Management faculty and practitioners from the community. The program also provides students with a valuable network, as they move through the modules together.

The program has two more modules to go in October and November, and there's still time to register.



The Ambassador Program is Growing!

We're excited to welcome 16 new Russell Sage students to the ambassador program this fall, surpassing our cap – and generating a waitlist.

Of the 12 ambassadors from 2025-2026, three have graduated and will be replaced with current Russell Sage students. There's a waitlist for current students, too. All of this means the 2026-2027 cohort has doubled in size this year, so the word is out!

Our ambassadors will be ready to be a catalyst for leadership development activities for all Russell Sage students, participate in community service projects, and build their own professional networks while they learn and grow.



Celebrating Our Work and Graduates

In May, we honored the work of our Women's Institute ambassadors and friends at our end-of-the-year celebration. And we followed up on Reunion Weekend by honoring former institute director Shelly Calabrese, who now serves as the college's assistant vice president for major gifts.

The end-of-the-year celebration included three research presentations "Reimagining Education: How bilingual education can help change the future," by Joanna Chan, "CRISPR Genetic editing and the current political climate," by Dua Sadiq, and "When survivors are villainized: The exoneration of women and misinterpretation of self-defense," by Gianna Viscusi, as part of her women's studies capstone.

In addition, the ambassadors presented Dr. Michelle Napierski-Pranci, former faculty director, with a plaque recognizing her

contributions to the Women's Institute. Thanks to the faculty and advisory board members who attended and provided feedback to the presenters. The evening concluded with the traditional parade around the Troy campus.



Reunion Weekend

During Reunion Weekend last month, we celebrated the opening of the Denise Taber Finard '80 Women's Institute Gallery and the extraordinary generosity of artist Valetta, whose work will now inspire the Russell Sage community for generations to come.

Valetta, who directs the nonprofit organization Regional Center for Women in the Arts in West Chester, Pennsylvania, is a graduate of Pratt Institute, New York, and has done graduate work at Tyler School of Art and the University of Pennsylvania. She has been included in numerous juried and group shows in cities across the United States and Europe, where she has won top prizes.

Valetta was introduced to the institute and Russell Sage by former college trustee and Women's Institute Advisory Board member Ann Duffield, and we are so grateful for the connection.

More than a gallery located in Finard House on the Troy campus, this Women's Institute Gallery is a place for creativity, reflection, conversation, and connection – values that are central to the Women's Institute's mission of empowerment and advancing women's leadership.

LinkedIn Workshop

At the Russell Sage College board of Trustees fall meeting, I met MaryAnn Publicover Kniska '91, president of the Russell Sage College Alumnae/i Association Board, and from that point on, we have been creating ideas for programming to support continued professional development for Russell Sage alumni.

Teaming up with Carleen Pallante, director of the Career and Self-Discovery Center, and Geoff Miller, executive director of strategic partnerships and chief values officer, we invited Brittany Lawton from Lawton Social to present, "Harnessing the Potential of LinkedIn."

We had a fantastic turnout of 15 engaged participants, and the chat was full of positive comments and questions for Brittany. What's next? We're thinking about a workshop on artificial intelligence in the 2026-27 academic year.



Honoring Two Advisory Board Members

Congratulations to Women's Institute Advisory Board members Ann Duffield, who was recognized by the Russell Sage College Alumnae/i Association with the Friend of the Association Award, and Mary Altpeter '71, who received the association's highest honor, the Doris L. Crockett Medal during Reunion Weekend.

Book Club Recommendations

We had a wonderful time talking about *The Correspondent* by Virginia Evans at Reunion Weekend as our book club selection. The discussion focused on a number of themes, including aging, family, love, and transformation. After the discussion, alumnae shared books they recommend, including:

Sipsworth by Simon Van Booy

The Huntress by Kate Quinn

Wintering by Katherine May

The Many Lives of Mama Love by Lara Love Hardin

The Lion Women of Tehran by Marian Kamari

Small Things Like These by Claire Keegan

Carnegie's Maid by Heather Terrell



Hello Beautiful by Ann Napolitano

The Briar Club by Kate Quinn

The Bright Years by Sarah Damoff

Wild Dark Shore by Charlotte McConaghy

Take Me With You by Catherine Ryan Hyde

Theo of Golden by Allen Levi

Barbara Bush by Barbara Bush

Stay tuned for the September edition of the newsletter, when we'll share programming for the year.

UPCOMING EVENTS



The second floor of the Women's Rights National Historical Park Visitor Center in Seneca Falls houses museum exhibits on the history of women and gender in America. (Photo courtesy of National Parks Service)

Join Us for a Trip to Seneca Falls!

We hope you'll join us for a bus trip to the Women's Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls.

When: Saturday, April 11, depart from the Russell Sage College Troy campus at 7 a.m., return at approximately 5:30 p.m.

What: Hear from the Women's Institute ambassadors on the way to Seneca Falls, then tour the historical park, enjoy a box lunch, and head back home.

Cost: \$65, includes boxed lunch

Registration: Seats are limited, so register today! https://alumni-community.sage.edu/s/1804/bp20/interior.aspx?sid=1804&gid=2&pgid=1473&content_id=2775

Questions: Contact womensinstitute@sage.edu



The Correspondent: A Novel by Virginia Evans surprised critics when it came out in 2025. (Photo courtesy of Crown and Austin Joffe)

And the Reunion Book Club Selection Is ...

The tradition of a book club selection continues for Reunion 2026, and this year's reading is *The Correspondent: A Novel* by Virginia Evans. The book focuses on a retired lawyer whose self-exploration comes through all of the letters and emails she writes to various people in her life. The book was called a "hidden gem" for 2025 by The New York Times.

You can join the book discussion with the Women's Institute at Reunion on Saturday, May 30, from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

Find all the Reunion 2026 details on our website.

And Speaking of Books

In the previous newsletter we shared some book recommendations and asked for yours. Thanks to Dr. Judy Galza Di Mattia '66, who sent us this selection:

I highly recommend *The Personal Librarian*, a book club favorite here at the Sovana, in Stuart Florida.

The Personal Librarian [by Marie Benedict and Victoria Christopher Murray] tells the true story of an extraordinary woman, Belle da Costa Greene, who curated the magnificent collection of art and manuscripts for J. Pierpont Morgan's private collection. The library stands today on the corner of 36th and Madison in NYC and is open to the public.

Belle was the daughter of Richard Greener, the first Black graduate of Harvard, and a well-known advocate for equality. Belle's complexion isn't dark because of her alleged Portuguese heritage, that allows her to pass as white and enter the world of high society and prestigious connections in the world of art.

It is a story of racism, personal loss and gain, and a lasting legacy that enriched our nation. I hope you enjoy it as much as I have.