

What I've Done With My Life

Rita Laden '96Ed.D.

Rita (Mann) Laden earned a doctorate in educational leadership at Nevada in 1996, but she has been shaping student leaders at the University of Nevada, Reno since 1984. Rita has served the University and its students in many different capacities: as the University's judicial officer, Greek adviser, Associated Students' manager and as the associate vice president for Student Life Services. She was awarded the Distinguished Service Award and the Thornton Peace Prize in 2006. She was and remains a trusted advocate for Student Life. Students honored Rita for her dedication to their success by naming the Rita Laden Senate Chambers at the Joe Crowley Student Union after her. She currently teaches educational leadership courses at the University.

What is your fondest memory from your days at the University of Nevada, Reno?

My fond memories start from the day I arrived on campus in August 1984. I had just driven from my home state of West Virginia bringing everything I owned in a 1980 Chevette. It was the opening day of fall semester and things were crazy. But my colleagues made time to make me feel welcome as I transitioned into my role as coordinator of student conduct. When I made the decision to come to Nevada it was with the intent that I would immediately begin my doctoral program while working full time. I got so involved in campus and community life that it took several years to actually start my academic work, but with much encouragement from faculty and supervisors, I completed my doctorate in 1996.

What have you done that you're most proud of?

The thing that gives me most satisfaction is seeing students I've advised and mentored now in positions of leadership within the state and around the country. I take pride in thinking that I might have influenced them in



Photo by Theresa Danna-Douglas

Rita Laden '96Ed.D. (educational leadership) was so beloved by students that they named the ASUN Senate Chambers after her.

some small way to get where they are today. I see familiar faces as teachers, community activists, lawyers, doctors, business leaders and politicians. I remember the long talks we had about the hard work it takes to accomplish a goal, about always doing the right thing for those you serve. I know that some of it sunk in because I watch them today making a difference in other peoples' lives. I'm also proud of my family and hope that I have had some impact on their success. My husband is generous with his time and talents in the community and I wouldn't trade my son, Aaron, for another in the world.

What advice would you give someone just starting out after college?

Take the privilege you have as a college graduate and use it to make a difference in your world. Don't think you're entitled to fame and fortune (or whatever you seek) just because you have a college education. You still have to work for it. With a degree from

Nevada—and hard work—you can accomplish a lot. Know your strengths and use them; learn your weaknesses and try to overcome them. When you aren't able to overcome them all (and you won't) then surround yourself with people who are strong in your areas of weakness (and don't be threatened by them). You received a good education, but you still didn't learn everything. Continue to be open to learning. Explore the world and get to know people different from you. You will, at times, need to lean on someone else, whether it be your former faculty adviser, the good friend you made in college, or your God. Don't forget those who helped you through the tough times of college, and don't forget your family! Most importantly, I would hope that graduates would look inside themselves and get a sense of who they are—their faith, their hopes, their dreams—and not let anybody or anything take those away.