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From the Director

The Athena Center has had a wonderful year. We are proud to have 167 wonderful Barnard women participate in the Athena Scholars Program and are inspired as they mature and develop their capacities for leadership.

This spring we were thrilled to welcome the White House to campus as we hosted the Urban Economic Forum and 350 entrepreneurs from across New York for a day of extraordinary panels and workshops. And the second annual Athena Film Festival was successful beyond our expectations. Three thousand people attended the weekend filled with an awe-inspiring Awards ceremony, workshops for filmmakers and the screening of 37 features, documentaries, and shorts, all focused on women’s leadership. We had sold out audiences and industry buzz—all at the most sought after women’s college in the nation.

Perhaps most satisfying to me, however, is to see how Athena has challenged women to become leaders in their communities and careers—indeed, in all aspects of their lives—and to dedicate their energies to making the world a better place. These programs—from leadership lab workshops to conferences and Athena Power Talks—have generated a robust conversation about what it means to excel, collaborate and lead and provided women new skills that open doors to advancement. Many thanks to the exemplary team of staff, educators and consultants, dedicated members of our advisory board and leadership council, wise faculty advisors, and our stellar students for helping us accomplish these wildly ambitious goals.

In less than three years, Athena has established a reputation for excellence, an infrastructure, and funding base that will enable the Athena Center to increase our impact and effectiveness. We greatly appreciate all of you who have contributed your energy, vision and financial resources to the effort and look forward to working together to advance leadership and create cultures of inclusion that value and utilize the talents of all women.

Kathryn Kolbert
Constance Hess Williams Director
The Athena Center for Leadership Studies
Executive Summary

A distinguished leader in American higher education since 1889, Barnard College at Columbia University provides a world-class liberal arts education to nearly 2400 undergraduate women, many of whom go on to become world leaders in diverse fields. The College’s dedication to the advancement of women and its setting in New York City make Barnard an ideal home for the Athena Center for Leadership Studies, a multi-disciplinary center devoted to the advancement of women’s leadership.

Launched in 2009 as a special initiative of Barnard President Debora Spar, the Athena Center uses a wide-range of strategies to advance women as leaders in the public and private spheres and in the political and civic life of communities around the globe. Kathryn Kolbert, the Constance Hess Williams Director, joined as its founding director in fall 2009. Since then, the Center has provided education, research, professional development and public education programs both in New York and internationally. As detailed more fully below, in 2011-12, we have:

- Enrolled a diverse group of accomplished Barnard students in the Athena Scholars program that includes academic courses, experiential learning and mentoring;

- Provided 62 Leadership Lab workshops that helped over 600 Barnard students (over 20% of the student body) learn practical leadership skills;

- Provided leadership development programs across the globe: for individuals and companies in New York both on campus and mid-town; at the Barnard Global Symposium, Women Changing India in Mumbai, India; at the G(irls) 20 Summit in Mexico City; and for women leaders from the Middle East and North Africa at the Women in Public Service Institute at Wellesley College;

- Teamed up with the White House Business Council, the White House Council on Women and Girls, and the U.S. Small Business Administration, to host an Urban Economic Forum at Barnard. Over 350 aspiring entrepreneurs from across the region heard from successful women entrepreneurs, senior White House officials, and noted journalists;

- Produced the second annual Athena Film Festival: A Celebration of Women and Leadership which attracted over 3000 people to the Barnard campus for a weekend of films and conversations about women’s leadership on and off screen;

- Sponsored two academic conferences: The Baraza: Young African Women’s Leadership Initiative, organized by Barnard students, and a colloquium with faculty from Rutgers University, Spelman College and Barnard;

- Created opportunities for public dialogue about leadership by hosting a visiting scholar, Power Talks lectures, and numerous other co-sponsored events in New York and Washington D.C.
The Athena Scholars Program: Where Theory, Practice, and Action Meet

Through an innovative, interdisciplinary program that connects leadership theory, practice and action, Athena Leadership Scholars learn to take an active role in their own lives and make informed and strategic decisions that reflect their personal and professional aspirations. The program helps Barnard women prepare for positions of leadership at the highest levels of achievement, and nurtures leaders in all fields of endeavor.

This academic year, 167 Barnard students enrolled in the Athena Scholars Program—18 seniors, 50 juniors, 65 sophomores and 34 first year students. Studying in diverse disciplines from the social sciences to the humanities to STEM fields, Athena Scholars hold a wide variety of leadership positions on campus as class officers, elected leaders in student government, resident advisors and in a multitude of student organizations at Barnard and Columbia. They are a diverse group by race, class, national origin, and sexual preference. Currently, over one-third of Athena Scholars are women of color or international students, significantly higher than the Barnard population as a whole. Ten percent are HEOP students.

Academic Exploration: The Scholar’s Program offers a range of academic courses that examine aspects of women’s leadership in both historical and contemporary life. Students take five courses, two of which are required of all participants: Women and Leadership, and the Athena Senior Seminar. Through their three electives, students explore how women lead, research organizational and power relationships in order to better understand the common and systemic barriers that women face, and examine how leadership is communicated orally, aurally, physically, and in written formats, and by doing so, strengthen their social and analytical skills.
**Practical Leadership Skills:** Scholars take at least three workshops in the Athena Leadership Lab to learn practical leadership skills (see page 12).

**Experiential Learning and Reflection:** Athena Scholars also participate in an approved practicum during the school year or summer. By gaining exposure to the working world prior to entering it, students examine leadership styles and strategies and explore their own aspirations. What types of leaders do they want to become? What careers and work environments do they envision for themselves? What do they need to do to make these goals a reality? A student’s practicum, which might include physician shadowing, supervised laboratory work, or an internship in a nonprofit, business, or start-up, make students more aware of their own strengths and ambitions, more attractive job candidates, and more prepared to achieve.

The Athena Center also provides summer fellowship opportunities for sophomores and juniors that are open to all Barnard students. This year, ten students were selected as Athena Summer Fellows. They received stipends, participated in a weekly seminar, and lived together in free campus housing. In addition, Athena offered three fellowships through the Williams Internship Program for Women in Politics and one fellowship for the Non-Profit Leadership Program. Through the Public Leadership Education Network, the Center provided enrichment activities for students participating in seminars in Washington D.C. that enable Athena Scholars to meet women leaders from the public sector.

In addition, Scholars must complete a social action project during their Senior Seminar. The project is based on the student’s interests and course of study, but mere participation in an existing civic engagement program will not suffice. Rather, the student must play a significant leadership role in creating a social service, advocacy or entrepreneurial project with a community partner. Students present their projects to their peers, obtain both positive feedback and critical response, and then work collaboratively in teams to improve the effectiveness of their projects.

**Women’s Leadership Matters.** Increasing the number of women in leadership will make organizations more successful, innovative, and productive and thus more economically sustainable. Women’s visibility in leadership roles also sends the strong message that women count—boosting the self-esteem and confidence of current and future generations of women.

**Mentoring:** Athena Scholars are offered two different mentoring programs. The Scholar to Scholar Program paired 10 sophomores with seniors in order to further campus involvement and leadership, serve as a sounding board on academic decisions, and strengthen the Athena Scholars community. The Athena Mentoring Program connected 32 scholars in their junior and senior years with specially-selected mentors (members of the Athena Leadership Council, Barnard alumnae, and other women leaders) allowing students to learn first-hand about leadership styles and strategies. In addition, three Leadership Council members hosted mentoring dinners for 12 seniors in the spring semester.

Abigail Lewis, Director of the Scholars Program, has recruited students and provided individualized counseling to ensure that they are on track to complete the program requirements. She oversees the Athena Student Advisory Board, meeting biweekly to discuss and plan upcoming events, review Scholar participation, and strengthen Scholar requirements. She has also developed opportunities to foster community among the Scholars, including a weekly newsletter, major mixer, social events at the end of each semester, and a dinner for graduating seniors.
The Athena Leadership Lab for Barnard Students

The Center’s Leadership Lab program for Barnard students offers interactive workshops that teach students the practical elements of leadership. Course themes include communications, management, financial fluency, negotiation, risk-taking and resilience, technology, and entrepreneurial skills. Every Leadership Lab session includes opportunities to network with others and share secrets of success in an informal setting. Scholars take a minimum of three Lab courses, under any theme they prefer.

In 2011-12, 619 Barnard students registered for 62 of these workshops. Most participated in only one workshop, but 140 students registered for more than one. This represents over 20% of the students who are on campus during the year. The workshops, taught by professors of business and communications, industry professionals, and professional trainers, are highly interactive. A student-led evaluation process found that students overwhelmingly believe that the workshops were excellent or very good.
During the past year, the Athena Center provided professional development workshops for 225 women at the early to mid-stages of their careers both on campus and at convenient mid-town locations. Workshops on entrepreneurship and financial fluency were the most popular. Athena also created customized programs for several Fortune 500 companies, including ING, Barclays, and HSBC, who were interested in promoting the advancement of women in their organizations. In recent months, the Center has been talking with a number of foundations, non-profits and businesses with the hope of designing programs to meet their specific needs.

Athena approaches leadership education and professional development through a gendered lens. Gender affects how a leader is perceived and what leadership opportunities are available to her or him. In addition, stereotypes about how women and men lead may hamper relationships and communication between them. Understanding these dynamics, pointing out covert bias, and alerting male and female leaders to their presence can improve a leader’s effectiveness and strengthen communication, thereby improving working conditions for everyone.

Inclusion is the Responsibility of All Leaders. They have an obligation to breakdown systemic barriers to advancement and help others to succeed. Strategies aimed at the inclusion of women are the responsibility of both male and female leaders. The search for solutions cannot be solely relegated to diversity officers, women’s networks, identity groups, or high-ranking women.
Sustaining Entrepreneurs

This year, the Athena Center developed programs for women entrepreneurs, who are significantly underrepresented among successful business owners. Not only is this an important way for women to contribute to the U.S. economy and create jobs, young women are considering social entrepreneurship as a great way to create social change both in the U.S. and around the world. The Center offered workshops that taught basic entrepreneurial skills such as writing a business plan, finding financing, establishing a governance structure or developing an exit strategy. Nearly 200 women—144 Barnard students and 55 adults—participated in the workshops.

**White House Urban Economic Forum:** In February, 2012, the Athena Center teamed up with the White House Business Council, the White House Council on Women and Girls, and the U.S. Small Business Administration, to host an Urban Economic Forum on Barnard’s campus. Over 350 women entrepreneurs from across the nation heard from a host of successful women entrepreneurs and other leaders including Valerie Jarrett, senior advisor to President Obama; Tina Tchen, Chief of Staff for First Lady Michelle Obama; Maria Bartiromo, CNBC anchor; and Arianna Huffington, Huffington Post President and Editor-in-Chief among many others. The Forum highlighted public policies that create private-sector jobs and support a growing number of women entrepreneurs who will strengthen our economy and compete globally.

**Collaborations with the Columbia Venture Community:** Athena collaborated with the Columbia Venture Community to ensure that Barnard students have access to mentors, counseling, forums and informal social events with entrepreneurs from across New York. Athena co-sponsored CVC Speed Networking Events in October, 2011 and February, 2012 which used an app called Cnvrge (cnvrge.com) to make introductions for participants and co-sponsored with Health 2.0 and the Department of Biomedical...
Informatics at Columbia University, a two-day code-a-thon competition: *Health Hacking and Big Data*. Held in January, 2012, the event brought together developers, designers, innovators, and entrepreneurs to build new applications and tools to improve healthcare.

**Leadership Development Across the Globe**

**Barnard Global Symposium: Women Changing India:** In March, the Athena Center traveled to Mumbai for the fourth annual Barnard Global Symposium, *Women Changing India*, which brought together exceptional leaders in government, commerce, academia, media, and the arts. After introductory remarks from Mihir Doshi, Managing Director and CEO of Credit Suisse India, the event sponsor, Barnard alumna Saloni Chand Jhaveri ’86 and President Debora Spar, the 400+ members of an enthusiastic audience were treated to three engaging panels on social activism, arts and culture and civic engagement.

*Conversations on Social Activism* showcased women whose work is affecting change and improving conditions for women and children. Moderated by Athena Center Director, Kathryn Kolbert, the speakers included Kiran Bedi, India’s first and highest ranking woman police officer; Mirai Chatterjee, director of social security at the Self Employed Women’s Association; Shaheen Mistri, founder of Teach for India; and Gita Sen, a professor at the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore.

Women leaders from the arts and media sectors participated in the *Voices of the Region* panel: Nandita Das, actress and activist; Mallika Kapur, CNN’s international correspondent; Farah Khan, film director and choreographer; and Brinda Somaya, architect and conservationist. The panel was moderated by Shayoni Mitra, assistant professor in Barnard’s Department of Theatre.

*Empowering Women through Enterprise* gathered high-profile leaders in business and government. Speakers included Vedika Bhandarkar, managing director and vice chairman of Credit Suisse India; Shaina NC, fashion designer and politician; Zia Mody, corporate lawyer and businesswoman and Chhavi Rajawat, Sarpanch of Soda. President Spar moderated.
Young Women’s Leadership Training: The day before the symposium, six Barnard students, including two Athena scholars, created and led a leadership program for 100 local high school and college students from Mumbai. The young women participated in a town hall simulation based on questions raised by redevelopment plans for a Mumbai slum. The Indian students played differing roles: government workers, developers, people being forced to relocate, and learned persuasive communication skills as they presented arguments in support of their views.

G(irls)20 Summit: The Athena Center joined Google, Nike, NOVO, Avon and Women for Women International among others as co-sponsors of the G(irls)20 Summit and Athena’s Erin Vilardi, taught leadership development workshops to the delegates. The conference, held in Mexico City in advance of the G20 meeting, brought together one girl, aged 18-20 from each G20 country and the African Union. The delegates participated in panel discussions, attended workshops and met together to discuss and promote tangible, scalable solutions that will promote the economic and political empowerment of girls and women. A delegate led press conference and communiqué ended the conference, providing a blueprint on how the G20 leaders can engage one of the best resources in the world—girls and women.

Women and Public Service Institute: Barnard College has partnered with four other women’s colleges—Wellesley, Bryn Mawr, Mt. Holyoke and Smith and the U.S. State Department to sponsor the Women and Public Service Institute. Launched last December at the State Department with Secretary of State Hilary Rodman Clinton, this year’s Institute provided leadership training to women leaders from the Middle East and Northern Africa at a two-week program held at Wellesley in June. Athena Center Director, Kathryn Kolbert participated in a workshop, Women’s Rights Are Human Rights, providing practical advice on ways to combat domestic violence and met extraordinary women leaders.
Changing Culture: Celebrating Women’s Leadership in Film

Athena Film Festival: A Celebration of Women and Leadership:
Over 3000 people attended the second annual Athena Film Festival held at Barnard Feb. 9-12, 2012 representing a 20% increase from the previous year. Developed in partnership with Women and Hollywood, the Festival screened films from across the globe, featuring stories of courageous women leaders. Highlights included:

Awards Ceremony: At the Thursday night awards ceremony, emceed by comedienne Lizz Winstead, Athena Film Festival Awards were presented to:
• The Fempire writers, Diablo Cody, Liz Meriwether, Lorene Scafaria and Dana Fox;
• Broadway playwright and creator of the TV series Smash, Theresa Rebeck;
• Dee Rees and Nekisa Cooper, director and producer of Pariah; and
• Moneyball producer Rachael Horovitz;

In two inspiring moments, feminist activist Gloria Steinem presented an Athena Award to Julie Taymor, director of stage and screen and Katie Couric ended the evening with a stirring tribute to the late Hollywood producer, Laura Ziskin. Couric then presented the first Laura Ziskin Lifetime Achievement Award to Laura’s daughter, Julia Barry and announced that the award will be given annually to inspiring women leaders in the film industry.

Great Films and Stimulating Conversations: The festival screened 37 movies to enthusiastic audiences. Directed by both men and women, the films told stories of courageous women in leadership roles—as change agents and heroes in their countries and communities. Q & A sessions with directors, producers or other intriguing panelists followed most of the screenings. There was a Q & A session with feminist activists Gloria Steinem and Amy Richards ’92 following the screening of HBO’s film Gloria: In Her Own Words and a
great discussion about *Black Butterflies* with the noted Dutch director Paula Van Der Oest and Hollywood producer Susan Cartsonis. Highly regarded feature films and documentaries were screened including: *The Whistleblower, Tomboy, Oranges and Sunshine, Wish Me Away, Circumstance,* and the Festival's closing film, *The Lady.*

**Workshops for Filmmakers:** Two workshops for filmmakers sponsored by the Ford Foundation’s JustFilms, explored ways to produce and market films in the rapidly changing digital age. Panelists included a number of extraordinary producers from Susan Cartsonis (*Beastly; What Women Want*) to Lisa Cortés (*Precious*) to Ted Hope (*Martha, Marcy, May, Marlene; The Savages)*.

**Excellent Media Coverage:** From the *LA Times* to *Variety* to the *New York Times* and *Huffington Post*, the festival attracted much media coverage. Social media was buzzing about the festival as well—Katie Couric and many others tweeted about the festival and there were numerous mentions in blogs and Facebook postings.

**Enhancing the Intellectual Life of the Barnard Community**

This year, the Athena Center brought to campus notable leaders from academia, public service, business and the media who challenged and inspired us and contributed to the intellectual life of the Barnard community. We sponsored two academic conferences, a visiting scholar, and three *Athena Power Talks* and co-sponsored 5 other events with women’s organizations and community groups. These have included:

**CONFERENCES**

**Baraza: Young African Women’s Leadership Initiative:** In November, 2011, the Athena Center sponsored a student-run conference organized by Athena intern Claire Korir, that brought together passionate female African students studying in the U.S. with exceptional leaders from across Africa. It was an opportunity for young women to share ideas for improving education, the environment, and women’s health, as well as increasing the participation of young women in business and politics.

The Keynote Speech was given by Athaliah Molokomme, Attorney General, Republic of Botswana. Other speakers included: Carroll Bogert, Deputy Executive Director for External Relations at Human Rights Watch; Kim Feinberg, CEO of Tomorrow Trust; Peg Snyder, Vice President of the Sirleaf Market Women’s Fund; and Susan Mboya, Coca Cola Executive and founder of the Zawadi African Educational Fund. The Baraza also honored exceptional students who have contributed to bringing positive change to Africa.

**Rutgers/Spelman Faculty Collaboration:** In May, Athena partnered with Rutgers University and Spelman College, to bring over 40 faculty and administrators from our respective institutions, as well as guests from Princeton, Brooklyn College, and Columbia Medical School, to discuss the idea of women’s leadership as an
academic discipline. This autumn, Spelman will host the follow up discussion on this very important topic.

**VISITING SCHOLAR**

Charlayne Hunter-Gault: In September, noted journalist, Charlayne Hunter-Gault was the Center’s second Visiting Scholar. An award-winning journalist with more than 40 years in the industry, her many books include *In My Place*, a memoir of the civil rights movement fashioned around her experiences as the first black woman to attend the University of Georgia and *New News Out of Africa: Uncovering the African Renaissance*. A global journalist, Hunter-Gault is currently a Special Correspondent for NPR. She has spent six years as CNN's Johannesburg Bureau Chief and Correspondent, was NPR's chief correspondent in Africa, and was with PBS for nearly 20 years, where she worked as a national correspondent for *The NewsHour* with Jim Lehrer. Her numerous honors include two Emmy awards and two Peabody awards. Hunter-Gault spent three days on campus, meeting with Athena Scholars, teaching classes and delivering the first *Athena Power Talk* of the school year.

**ATHENA POWER TALKS**

During the spring semester, the Athena Center sponsored two additional *Power Talks*. Mary Kay Henry, the International President of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the fastest-growing union in North America, with 2.1 million workers in healthcare, public and property services, came to campus in February. Henry has devoted her life to helping North America's workers form unions and strengthen their voice at work. In 2010, Henry was unanimously elected International President and became the first woman to lead SEIU.

In April, Dr. Helene D. Gayle '76, President and CEO of CARE USA, a leading international humanitarian organization, joined Athena Center Director Kathryn Kolbert, to discuss her experience
as the leader of a highly influential international aid organization. In the last year, Gayle oversaw approximately 10,000 staff whose poverty fighting programs reached 82 million people in 87 countries. Since joining CARE in 2006, Dr. Gayle has led efforts to reinforce CARE’s commitment to empowering girls and women to bring lasting change to poor communities.

PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout the year, the Athena Center co-sponsored a number of other events with allies across New York, including:

*Everyday Johns: Exposing the Underbelly of the Sex Trade*, a screening of *Demand*, a documentary that analyzes the international human trafficking market and exposes the buyers of sexual services who create demand, followed by a panel discussion on the sex industry and what activists can do to help end human trafficking. In association with NOW-NYC (July 2011);

*The NY Go Lead—Fueling Your Fundraising Skills*, an interactive session aimed at giving career women and Barnard students fundraising and organizational development skills. Co-sponsored with The White House Project (September 2011);

*Running Start: Bringing Young Women to Politics*, an all-day event aimed at local high school girls to encourage them to run for elective office. Numerous Athena Scholars worked with these young girls, and they all heard from speakers including Congresswoman Yvette Clarke; Krystal Ball, former congressional candidate and MSNBC contributor; and Tiffany Dufu, president of the White House Project. Co-sponsored with Running Start (October 2011);

*Great Expectations: Dreams of Choice, Sex, and Beauty at the Edge of the Feminist Era*, a conversation with Barnard President, Debora Spar. In association with the Columbia Business School Social Enterprise Program (November 2011);

*War Redefined*, an episode of the acclaimed PBS series, *Women, War and Peace*, was screened, followed by a panel discussion moderated by broadcast journalist Maria Hinojosa. Panelists included Clemencia Carabali and Francia Marquez, Afro-Colombian leaders featured in the film; Pamela Hogan, co-writer of the film and co-creator of the PBS series; Gimena Sanchez, senior associate, Washington Office of Latin America; and Oriana Zill, producer of the film. Co-sponsored with Black Communities Process, Fork Films, and the Washington Office of Latin America (January 2012);

*The National Council for Research on Women's Annual Conference*, set over three days in Washington D.C., the conference offered panels, workshops, networking, and strategy sessions that focused on strengthening women’s economic security and advancing women’s leadership (June 2012).
Building a Strong Infrastructure

Communications: Athena has attracted much media attention for our work, particularly with the White House Urban Economic Forum, the Athena Film Festival and the Barnard Global Symposium. This year, we have continued to distribute a newsletter for Athena Scholars, launched a bi-weekly newsletter about Center activities for friends of the Center, and have begun a detailed assessment to find ways to broaden our reach.

Funding and Governance: The Athena Center’s growth would not be possible without the generous support of its donors. We remain thankful that in April 2011, Constance Hess Williams ’66 agreed to endow a Chair for the Director of the Athena Center. This is an extraordinary gift that will enable the Center to prosper and attract other significant contributions and endowments.

In addition, the Center is thankful for a number of endowment pledges and individual gifts that support the Center and its ambitious programs. Over the last year, we have been fortunate to have the support of forty-two members of the Athena Leadership Council, who have given both their time and expertise, serving as mentors, film festival volunteers and getting to know the scholars and each other. Co-chaired by Pat Nadosy and Azita Raji, the council members have also generously pledged donations to the Center.

In addition, the Athena Center has been fortunate to attract significant support for the Athena Film Festival, both individual gifts and corporate sponsorship. Particular thanks are due to the Ford Foundation and Girls Club Entertainment's Regina Kulik Scully and Jennifer Siebel Newsom for their signature gifts.

The Athena Center has been lucky to have the sound guidance of a committed group of faculty advisors who have shaped the direction of the scholars program and the advice of an illustrious Board of Advisors from business, law, media, academia and the non-profit sector. And we are grateful as well to the dedication and hard work of the Center staff. In the past year, we have been blessed with a dedicated staff including Center Director, Kathryn Kolbert, Program Director of the Scholars Program, Abigail Sara Lewis and Administrative Assistant, Maria Perez-Martinez. We have also employed numerous other consultants, part-time workers, students and volunteers to help with specific projects, including Melissa Silverstein, Artistic Director of the Film Festival and Erin Vilardi, Interim Program Director of the Center’s Professional Development programs. Dorothy Weaver also joined us for a part of the year as Associate Director of the Leadership Lab. Their extraordinary work has enabled the Center to grow and prosper.

Many Thanks. These ambitious programs would not be possible without the generous support of many donors and sound guidance from our Faculty Advisors, Advisory Board, Leadership Council, and exemplary staff.
Conclusion

As the Athena Center grows, we are learning a great deal about what women need to advance to positions of leadership, building upon Barnard’s 122 year legacy of providing a top-flight education to women. Demand for our programs is one measure of Athena’s success. A base of strong support from faculty, college administrators, advisors, donors and Barnard alumnae is another. As we move forward, we will continue to build upon our early achievements, provide inspiration and thanks to wonderful women leaders who share their wisdom and creativity with us, and experiment with new ways to advance women’s leadership within the Barnard community, across New York and around the globe.

Center Staff

Kathryn Kolbert, the Constance Hess Williams Director of the Athena Center for Leadership Studies and Professor of Leadership Studies, has directed the Athena Center since its founding. Kolbert is a public interest attorney, journalist and leader in the non-profit sector, who brings to Barnard extensive experience in collaborative leadership, educational programming, and civil-rights advocacy.

Abigail Sara Lewis is the Program Director of the Athena Scholars Program where she uses her extraordinary counseling and organizing skills to recruit, advise and nurture the Athena Scholars. Prior to Barnard, she worked at Rutgers University, New York University, and the CUNY Graduate Center. She currently teaches the Athena course Women and Leadership, and has taught in both the History and Women's Studies departments at Rutgers. Abigail received her B.A. and M.A. in African American Studies from Columbia and U.C.L.A. respectively. She completed her Ph.D. in History at Rutgers in 2008. A chapter of her dissertation was featured in the anthology, Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement (University of Kentucky Press: 2012).

Maria Perez-Martinez is the Athena Center’s Administrative Assistant. She holds a Master’s degree in Publishing from New York University and a Bachelor’s degree in English/Drama from Northwestern University. She also served as the Administrative Coordinator for the 2012 Athena Film Festival. Prior to working at the Athena Center, Maria was a stay-at-home mother of two. In her spare time, Maria is an avid reader and writer; currently finishing up an adapted screenplay as well as a young-adult novel. Maria is also co-founder of GoodChoiceReading.com, a book reviewing blog.

Sara Leger, Events Manager for Development and Alumnae Affairs, works part-time for the Center as its Logistics coordinator for the Athena Film Festival, center conferences and Leadership Council meetings.
Erin Vilardi is a leadership development strategist working globally with companies and organizations to advance the position of women in leadership. Formerly the Vice President of Program & Communications at The White House Project, she created Vote, Run, Lead—the nation’s largest political training program readying women for public office and civic life—training over 14,000 women since 2004. Erin also serves as a National Delegate to Vision2020, a ten-year strategy with Drexel University, to attain gender equity in leadership and on the Advisory Board of the New American Leaders Project working to increase the number of immigrants participating in U.S. democracy. Erin graduated from New York University with a BA in Politics and Gender Studies.

Melissa Silverstein is the Artistic Director and co-founder of the Athena Film Festival. She is a writer, blogger and marketing consultant with an expertise in the area of social media regarding women and Hollywood. She is the founder and editor of Women and Hollywood, one of the most respected websites for issues related to women and film as well as other areas of pop culture. She has been featured on CNN, the BBC as well as in Newsweek, Salon, Chicago Tribune, Washington Post, NY Times, and many other publications. In 2011, Melissa was named one of the Top 100 Arts tweeters by the Times of London and Women and Hollywood was named one of the top 100 websites for women by ForbesWoman.

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