

Annual Summary Academic Year 2025-26

The Birnbaum Women's Leadership Center builds on NYU Law's rich history at the forefront of advancing women in the legal community. We are strategic leaders who work to catalyze meaningful systemic change. We develop, empower, and inspire the next generation of leaders in the law. We are a hub for thought leadership, incubating and championing ideas that foster equality in the workplace and society.

The BWLC's mission is defined by three key pillars:

- *Leadership Development* – a top-quality curriculum delivered to the NYU Law community, primarily through the BWLC Fellows program, with recent expansion to law firms and the broader legal profession, including an annual *Leadership Summit*.
- *Hub for Thought Leadership* – sparking conversation and generating new ideas through public events and symposia at NYU Law. The BWLC also hosts scholars and practitioners as Visiting Fellows-in-Residence and organizes a summer internship program.
- *Advocacy through Strategic Leadership* – by advancing equality and democracy through public policy reform; as women's rights and reproductive justice movement partners and conveners; and as bold voices in the media.



In May 2025, the BWLC proudly welcomed the ERA Project, the nation's leading think tank advancing sex equality under the law. We are enormously grateful for Marcy Syms and her 2026 legacy gift that permanently endows this work at the BWLC and NYU Law. Now named the Marcy Syms Equality Initiative (MSEI), Marcy's vision helped shape the Initiative from its founding at Columbia Law School; her generous support ensures it will long endure. (Read more in this [NYU Law article](#).)

Leadership Development

At NYU Law: This year marks the eighth cohort of BWLC Fellows – 12 JD students selected each year from the 1L class early in the Fall Semester. The Fellowship experience kicks off with the *Sara Moss Women's Leadership Intensive* which takes place in January and features a full week of programming and engagement – interactive sessions on effective communication, emotional intelligence, grit and resilience, and building a brand and network; opportunities to craft and workshop individual elevator pitches; interaction with leaders in the field, NYU Law alumni/ae, and mentors; and camaraderie-building activities.

Year-round leadership development for Fellows includes executive coaching to complement and reinforce key themes; pairing with accomplished NYU Law alumni/ae mentors; and an array of social and networking events, celebrations of milestones, and tools to connect across cohorts, including for and with BWLC alumni/ae.

The BWLC community makes us proud in many ways – so much so we launched *Profiles in Leadership* to highlight the work of our Fellows and alumni/ae. This year three BWLC Fellows were also featured on the NYU Law student spotlight page: [Vanessa Attah '26](#); [Maria Weston Kuhn '28](#); and [Emille Taylor '28](#).

Campus-wide programming available to all NYU Law students includes *Lead With Your Strengths* at the annual 1L orientation, as well as *Suddenly Silent: Strategies to Speak Up and Stand Out*, an interactive improv-based workshop for newly-minted law students, which takes place each October. Every year we also welcome admitted students at a reception co-hosted by BWLC Co-Founder Sara Moss '74 at Estée Lauder Companies.

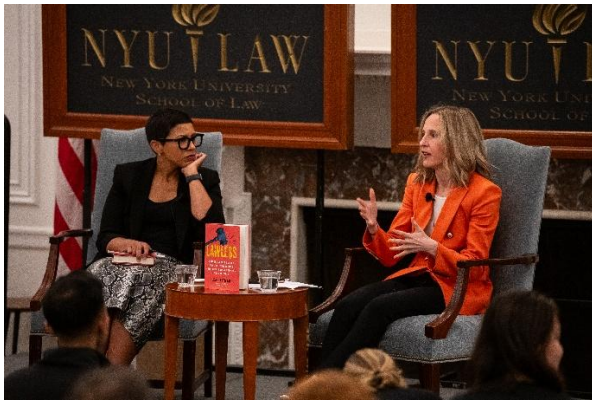


In the Legal Community: In October 2025, NYU Law launched an inaugural *Leadership Summit* designed to showcase the BWLC's programming. The stellar full-day agenda included retired Canadian Supreme Court Justice Rosalie Silberman Abella in conversation with BWLC Faculty Director Melissa Murray; *Communicating With Impact*, BWLC Advisory Board member K.M. Zouhary's master class in communication skills; *Pathways to Leadership* with Lisa Marie Boykin '95 of Netflix, Legal Aid Society CEO and BWLC Advisory Board member Twyla Carter, and BWLC Fellow Fernanda Oliveira, '27; and *Leadership and Business* with Estée Lauder General Counsel Rashida La Lande and Sara Moss.

Hub for Thought Leadership

The BWLC holds public events over the course of the year, featuring the nation's leading thinkers, writers, and doers – sparking conversation and generating new ideas. Among the 2025-26 highlights:

- University of Michigan law professor Leah Litman, author of the best-selling book *Lawless*, in conversation with Melissa Murray.
- Rebecca Bloom '92, author of *When Women Get Sick*, in conversation with BWLC Executive Director Jennifer Weiss-Wolf and Boston Consulting Group.
- *New York Magazine* senior correspondent and author Irin Carmon to discuss her award-winning book, *Unbearable*.
- Moms First CEO Reshma Saujani, one of *TIME Magazine's* 2026 Women of the Year, presented "The Motherhood Lectures," followed by a fireside chat with Melissa Murray.



Our annual Dechert Symposium, *Constitutional Equality: The ERA and the Promise for Reproductive Rights and Justice*, was held on February 27, 2026. Organized by the MSEI, it featured a full day of expert panels exploring constitutional doctrine, state ERAs as laboratories of gender justice, and lessons from international human rights frameworks, as well as a fireside chat about public engagement strategies. U.S. Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan provided closing remarks.

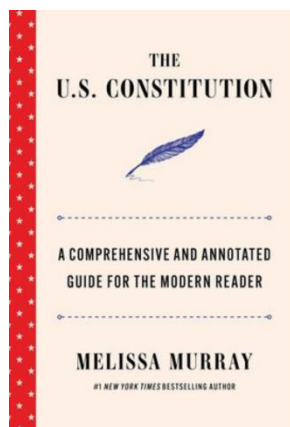
The BWLC Visiting Fellows-in-Residence Program welcomed Brooklyn Law Professor Cynthia Godsoe and Lynn Paltrow '83, founder of Pregnancy Justice for the 2025-26 academic year. Together we engaged students across campus by co-leading a 1L Reading Group, participating in NYU Law's Reproductive Justice Clinic, and hosting a series of lunch-and-learn sessions.

Advocacy through Strategic Leadership

BWLC leaders are prominent public voices who contribute regularly to research, advocacy, and media – with the goal of ensuring professional and societal commitment to gender equality and democratic ideals.

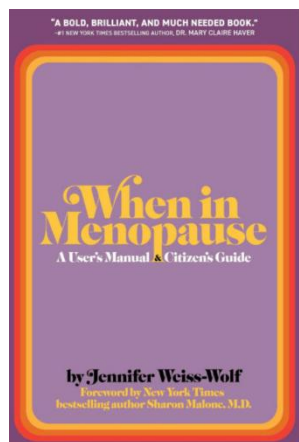
- The Marcy Syms Equality Initiative, our signature project, co-sponsored *Examining Frontline Strategies for Abortion Access*, held at Columbia Law School in November 2025; throughout the year, MSEI Director Ting Ting Cheng presented at an array of symposia, including Northwestern Law School's *The Future of State Constitutional Rights*, as well as at events hosted by Rutgers Law School, the New York Civil Liberties Union, the American Bar Association, and the New York City Bar Association, among others. As state ERAs take on heightened significance, the MSEI provides counsel to lawyers and advocates across the country. In May, the MSEI filed an [amicus brief](#) in *Miller v. State of New York*, now before the New York Court of Appeals; the Pennsylvania Commonwealth Court issued an important ruling in April that affirms reproductive rights as a sex equality issue under the state ERA (citing the [amicus brief](#) submitted by MSEI Director Ting Ting Cheng).
- Together with NYU Law's Reproductive Justice Clinic and the nonprofit Pregnancy Justice, the BWLC co-convened *Personhood and Pregnancy*, an online symposium with the NYU *Review of Law and Social Change*. Held on October 10, 2025, it featured legal scholars, law students, advocates, and media. The BWLC and Yale Law School's Gender and Reproductive Justice Clinic have joined forces over the past three years in launching *Democracy and Reproductive Rights and Justice*, an annual closed-door strategy session, followed by a public-facing virtual series at the g2NY. On March 10, 2026, we brought together 150 reproductive and LGBTQ organizational leaders, scholars, law students, and funders to explore key issues and challenges in the current political moment. This work is funded by the Overbrook Foundation.
- BWLC leaders regularly write for and appear in high-profile outlets like the *Los Angeles Times*, Katie Couric Media, and MS-NOW. Jennifer Weiss-Wolf also publishes a weekly column at the popular Substack, *The Contrarian*, and *Ms. Magazine*; this year she led op-ed workshops for the Fellows program, BWLC summer interns, and partner organization Pregnancy Justice. Midlife women's health is a core focus of her writing; as an advocate, she played a key role in several policy advances, including FDA regulatory reform and state legislation.
- The BWLC is committed to leveraging art and pop culture to promote gender justice. This year we held talk-backs at two feminist theatrical productions: Jennifer Weiss-Wolf with Bess Wohl, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright of *Liberation* on Broadway; and Ting Ting Cheng with *SUFFS* creator Shaina Taub at Waterwell's limited-run of *The Ford/Hill Project*. Ting Ting Cheng served as a commentator on the film [Ratified](#), which premiered on PBS in October. The MSEI hosted former South African Constitutional Court Justice Albie Sachs to discuss his legacy of justice, art, and constitutional law (Ting Ting Cheng previously served as his foreign law clerk).

We are especially proud to have two important BWLC-authored books out in the world this year:



Melissa Murray's *The U.S. Constitution: A Comprehensive and Annotated Guide for the Modern Reader* (Simon & Shuster, 37 Ink) was published in May and an instant *New York Times* bestseller. As per Sherrilyn Ifill, civil rights lawyer and founding director of the 14th Amendment Center for Law & Democracy at Howard Law, "Melissa Murray does the hard work of distilling the meaning of our Constitution into a book that should be in every home library, on every desk, and in every school."

Elie Mystal, the Justice Correspondent for *The Nation*, summarizes: "Murray does so much more than annotate the Constitution, she illuminates it, and in the process exposes its dark secrets and hidden myths. She tells us not only what the Constitution says, but what it really means."



Jennifer Weiss-Wolf's *When in Menopause: A User's Manual & Citizen's Guide* (Hachette US, Sheldon Press) is due out in October. OB-GYN and menopause expert Dr. Sharon Malone calls out Jen's "singular talent for turning women's lived experiences into legal change. *When in Menopause* brings that fierce clarity to midlife health, and will do what her work always does: shift the conversation – and the law."

From Rachel S. Rubin MD, Urologist & Sexual Medicine Specialist at Georgetown University Hospital: "This book arrives at exactly the right moment. We are living through a historic shift in how we talk about menopause... *When in Menopause* is part manual, part rallying cry - blending medical clarity with civic action in a way no one else is doing."

Supporters

We would like to thank the following for their support in 2025-26:

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