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Fashion Icon and Activist Diane von Furstenberg to Speak at 38th Annual Simmons Leadership Conference Other Keynote Speakers Include Marlee Matlin, Diana Nyad, and Nina Tassler

BOSTON, Mass. (February 15, 2017) - [Simmons College](#) will showcase exceptional women who are “Leading with Purpose” at its premier [Simmons Leadership Conference](#), the longest-running women’s leadership forum in the country.

The conference will feature fashion icon, women’s rights advocate, and philanthropist Diane von Furstenberg; actress and humanitarian Marlee Matlin; long-distance swimmer and journalist Diana Nyad; former CBS Entertainment chair Nina Tassler; Girls Who Code founder Reshma Saujani; and Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe, a CNN Hero and director of a transformational Ugandan girls’ school. The sold-out event will be held on April 13, 2017 at the Seaport World Trade Center Boston. More than 3,300 business and professional women and men are expected to attend.

Press passes are required. Reporters who want to cover all or a portion of the conference must contact Liz Sullivan at elizabeth.sullivan2@simmons.edu or at 617-521-2369.

This year’s conference features presentations by more than 20 nationally and internationally prominent leaders who will share candid stories and offer practical advice around the conference theme “Leading with Purpose.”

Proceeds from the Simmons Leadership Conference are dedicated to Simmons College graduate program scholarships, furthering the development and advancement of future corporate, organizational, and civic leaders.

“This year’s speakers have persevered through difficult circumstances to achieve seemingly impossible goals, driven by a commitment to a purpose larger than themselves,” said Judy Benjamin, Executive Director, SimmonsLEADS, Simmons College. “In spite of challenges, these multifaceted women have remained committed to redefining the meaning of power and success. Through their inspiring stories, our information-packed workshops, and informal networking opportunities, attendees can expect an energizing day that will motivate them to achieve their goals.”

Simmons College has presented this conference continuously for 38 years, and it is the premier women’s leadership conference in the country. The conference has featured such notable speakers

as Madeleine Albright, Christiane Amanpour, Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Carly Fiorina, Arianna Huffington, Billie Jean King, Toni Morrison, Anne Mulcahy, Queen Noor, Jehan Sadat, Oprah Winfrey, and the late Benazir Bhutto.

The Conference is the capstone event of SimmonsLEADS, a set of dynamic programs and events developed by Simmons College that focus on the empowerment and development of women leaders.

Notable 2017 Speakers

[Diane von Furstenberg](#) is founder and chair of DVF. She revolutionized fashion in 1972 with the launch of her iconic wrap dress. Since then, she has expanded her company into a global luxury brand offering an extensive collection of clothing, accessories, and home furnishings. She has consistently worked to empower women through philanthropy, including establishing the DVF Awards to provide grants to activists who have displayed leadership and courage in their commitment to their causes. She sits on the board of Vital Voices, a nongovernmental organization supporting female leaders and entrepreneurs around the world.

For her debut film performance in *Children of a Lesser God*, [Marlee Matlin](#) became the youngest actor to receive an Academy Award for Best Actress, as well as the first hearing-impaired person to be given that honor. Among her long list of television credits are the lead in her own series, *Reasonable Doubts*, the Emmy Award-winning *Picket Fences*, and *Switched at Birth*. Matlin is a longtime champion for those struggling against domestic abuse and addiction and has helped to raise awareness for better hearing health for millions of people in developing countries.

In the 1970s, [Diana Nyad](#) was the greatest long-distance swimmer in the world. In one epic feat after another, she broke time or endurance records. Nyad then built a successful career as a sports broadcaster, filing reports for NPR, ABC's *Wide World of Sports*, Fox Sports, and *The New York Times*. At the age of 60, she decided to take up the Cuba-to-Florida challenge that had defeated her in her twenties. It took four years and five attempts, but she finally triumphed as the first person to make the 111-mile swim without the benefit of a shark cage.

As former chair of CBS Entertainment, [Nina Tassler](#) is one of the most respected executives in network television. Under her leadership, CBS was the number-one network in 12 of the 13 years of her tenure, with such acclaimed shows as *The Big Bang Theory*, *How I Met Your Mother*, *The Good Wife*, and *Madam Secretary*. She is credited with bringing many female executives along with her to the top. Tassler recently published her first book, *What I Told My Daughter: Lessons from Leaders on Raising the Next Generation of Empowered Women*.

[Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe](#) has been director of the Saint Monica Girls' Tailoring Center in Gulu, Uganda, since 2001, providing rehabilitation to more than 2,000 young women who had been abducted, raped, and tortured during Joseph Kony's 20-year reign of terror in that country. She has given the girls a way to support themselves through training in tailoring, catering, and other skills, restoring their independence and self-worth. Sister Rosemary was named a CNN Hero in 2007 and was included in *TIME Magazine's* "100 Most Influential People" list in 2014.

[Reshma Saujani](#) is the founder and CEO of Girls Who Code, a nonprofit working to prepare young women for technology jobs. A former attorney, Saujani became the first Indian-American woman to run for U.S. Congress. During that race, she visited local schools and observed the gender gap in computing classes in local schools, inspiring her to create Girls Who Code. Although unsuccessful in her congressional bid, Saujani became deputy public advocate of New York City. Saujani has been named to *Forbes'* Most Powerful Women Changing the World.

Other Speakers and Moderators

[Susan Cain](#) is co-founder of Quiet Revolution, a for-profit company focused on the work, education, and lifestyle of introverts, and of the Quiet Leadership Institute, which teaches leaders how they can best draw on the strengths of introverted employees.

[Barbara Fedida](#), Senior Vice President for Talent and Business at ABC News, is responsible for developing and executing strategic planning for the next generation of both on-air and off-air news talent.

[Melanie Foley](#) is Executive Vice President, Chief Talent & Enterprise Services Officer for Liberty Mutual Insurance. She leads the company's talent, procurement, communications, real estate, and workplace services and strategies.

[Megan Schneider Gift](#) is Executive Vice President of Corporate Affairs at 2U, an educational technology company that partners with nonprofit colleges and universities to offer online degree programs.

[Karen Hough](#) is the founder and CEO of ImprovEdge, a corporate training and consulting company that brings the skills of improvisation – the ability to think on your feet and communicate in ways that bring people together – to the challenges of business.

As Vice President of Talent, Inclusion & Engagement at United Technologies Corporation, [Gail Jackson](#) is responsible for driving initiatives that inspire a culture of high performance, inclusion, innovation, and engagement.

[Joshua Levs](#) is an award-winning broadcaster, investigative journalist, and expert on issues facing modern families. Named to the *Financial Times'* top 10 list of male feminists, Levs successfully fought his employer, Time Warner, after he was denied parental leave when his child was born prematurely.

[Leslie Maher](#) is Vice President and General Manager for Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) Servers and Converged Systems for North America. She directs product management and product marketing, plans route-to-market roadmaps, grows business development, and oversees supply chain management.

Presence engineer [Roshini Rajkumar](#) is the host of *News & Views with Roshini Rajkumar* on CBS Radio Minneapolis. She is a popular analyst for print, radio, and TV outlets on such topics as politicians' media mishaps, pro sports scandals, and communicating across generations.

Renowned pianist [Jade Simmons](#) is among the most versatile concert artists performing today. She uses the piano to provide inspiration as well as entertainment. Simmons is also a leadership coach, specializing in teaching “maverick behavior” and out-of-the-box branding techniques.

Emmy award-winning journalist [Joyce Kulhawik](#) '74, '02HD, will serve as the conference host. Session moderators include Simmons School of Management professor [Stacy Blake-Beard](#); [Raquel Eatmon](#), CEO of Rising Media; and journalist and filmmaker [Nora Poggi](#).

About Simmons College

Simmons College (www.simmons.edu) is a nationally recognized private university located in the heart of Boston, and is the preeminent authority on women's leadership. Founded in 1899, Simmons is the only undergraduate women's college in Boston, and maintains a history of visionary thinking and a focus on social responsibility. The college offers world-class coeducational graduate programs in nursing and health sciences, including physical therapy and nutrition; liberal arts; life sciences; library and information science; business management; and social work. Follow Simmons on Twitter at [@SimmonsCollege](#) and [@SimmonsNews](#).

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