

*Did you know that in the past soapbox crates were used as temporary platforms for making impromptu public speeches?*

THE

# Soapbox

A NEWSLETTER of THE CENTER for POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



BEYOND THE VOTE: POLITICAL ACTION WEEK • CPP SPONSORS POLITICAL ADVOCACY CLASS IN WASHINGTON D.C. • WOMEN IN POLITICS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION • ELECTION NIGHT EXTRAVAGANZA 2006 • WHY BOTHER? THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTING IN AMERICA GOES NATIONAL • MCUSA • SCHMITT ENDOWMENT • CPP VOTER TURNOUT ARCHIVE • WALTER JACOBSON MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY WINNER: THE BIRTH OF A TWO PARTY SOUTH

# FROM *the* DIRECTOR



Census data suggest turnout for those under 30 rose by 11 percent in 2004 (compared to the 2000 election) and by three percentage points between 2002 and 2006. It's a bit early to say with certainty, but there also seems to be a great deal of interest in the 2008 presidential contest. Youth turnout continues to lag behind other age groups and it is surely no time to let up, but we may have turned the corner on a grim trend.

Elections are only one way to exert influence in the political process, however, and most young Americans are even less engaged in alternative modes of participation. In response, the CPP created several innovative programs during the last year to highlight the importance of activism during non-election periods. "Beyond the Vote: Political Action Week," held last April, offered films, workshops, lectures and discussions on numerous ways to influence the policy process. Under the guidance of CPP Research Fellow Melissa Comber and Economics Professor Stephanie

Martin, a two-week program in Washington, D.C. was launched in May. The focus of this trip was on effective ways to lobby decision-makers. In conjunction with Pearson Education, I was pleased to conduct seven "Active Learning Seminars" in cities across the country to help college-level instructors find ways to better excite students about their role in our democracy. Over 150 professors attended these seminars.

As you will see in the pages to follow, several other innovative programs were launched with the aim of helping young Americans better appreciate the various pathways of change.

As always, the student fellows and staff at the CPP deserve the credit for these important projects. We begin the new academic year excited about the 2008 election and ever more committed to finding innovative ways to help Americans understand the power and necessity of political participation.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Daniel M. Shea".

Daniel M. Shea, Ph.D.

## CONTENTS

COVER STORY .....	1
CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS.....	3
EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH.....	7
NEWS & EVENTS.....	9

STAFF NEWS/FOLLOW THE FELLOWS.....	11
WALTER JACOBSON MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY WINNER ..	12
SCHOLARLY RESEARCH.....	14
STAFF NEWS/FOLLOW THE FELLOWS.....	15
ENGAGEMENT IN AMERICAN HISTORY.....	16

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# COVER STORY

## CPP Sponsors Beyond the Vote: Political Action Week at Allegheny College

To encourage citizens to take part in the political process in a variety of ways, the Center for Political Participation at Allegheny College sponsored a week-long series of political events, titled “Beyond the Vote: Political Action Week,” on April 15 through April 20.

“Many young Americans see elections as their only avenue for political involvement,” said Professor of Political Science and CPP director Daniel Shea. “Our week of programs was designed to help students and members of the community better understand other ways to make their voices heard. We wanted to encourage students and community members to think outside the ballot box.”

Events focused on different issues and aspects of political activism, including lobbying, state judicial reform and letter-writing campaigns.

### SUNDAY

The week began in Shafer Auditorium with a showing of the documentary *Jesus Camp*, which details the influence of evangelical Christians in politics. Following the film 50 Allegheny students discussed the political implications of the activism practiced by this select group of citizens.



*Students participate in a lively discussion after watching the film *Jesus Camp*.*

### MONDAY

In the College's Grounds for Change coffeehouse, Tim Potts from Democracy Rising PA spoke about the crisis facing Pennsylvania's judicial system and described opportunities for citizens to become involved in addressing these issues.



*Tim Potts of Democracy Rising stresses the importance of state government reform and how citizens can get involved.*

### TUESDAY

Students and community members were encouraged to come to the Campus Center lobby to write letters and sign petitions on a variety of issues. Many student organizations, such as the College Democrats and College Republicans, set up tables advocating various political and social issues. Hundreds of letters were mailed to state and national decision-makers.



*Allegheny student groups encourage their peers to get active by writing letters and signing petitions.*

# COVER STORY

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**“I was really excited about the week,” said CPP Fellow Lisa Alexander ’08. “The other Fellows and I enjoyed putting it together. There was something for everyone, and I think all of us learned something new.”**

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## WEDNESDAY

With the help of the Crawford County League of Women Voters, the CPP hosted a forum for the candidates for Crawford County commissioner on Wednesday. All 11 candidates attended the event, where they discussed local issues, such as economic development and regional planning. The candidates also spoke of what their priorities would be if elected to office and their qualifications for the position. Students and community members attended the forum, which was held in the Tippie Alumni Center.



*Crawford County Commissioner candidates take part in a political forum in the Tipton Room of the Tippie Alumni Center.*

## THURSDAY

Allegheny alumni Mike Veon '79, former minority whip of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and current president of Veon, Kopp and Associates, and Dale Florio '77, president of the Princeton Public Affairs Group, shared their experiences and ideas about lobbying and influencing public policy with a large group of interested Allegheny students. Veon and Florio each gave brief introductions and then allowed for questions from students and Allegheny professors.



*CPP staff, Fellows, and Allegheny President Richard Cook meet with guest speakers Dale Florio and Mike Veon.*

## FRIDAY

The week concluded with lunchtime discussions on Friday in the Campus Center lobby. Seven Allegheny professors talked with groups of students about a variety of topics including health care reform, environmental concerns, campaign finance and ethics in government. ■



*An Allegheny student discusses the media and its influence on politics with CPP Director Dan Shea and Professor Courtney Bailey.*



## Christopher Murray Luncheon and Lecture Sponsored by CPP

by Becky Eby

The Center for Political Participation started the 2006-2007 school year with a luncheon and lecture on September 28, 2006. The Center was fortunate to have Christopher Murray, the co-president of Lambda Independent Democrats, speak with a select group of students and faculty. As the audience enjoyed a light lunch, Murray discussed his



*Christopher Murray discusses the impact of the Lambda Independent Democrats on our nation's government.*

work with the Lambda Independent Democrats, a LGBT political club located in Brooklyn, N.Y. Murray detailed his work with other political parties, New York members of Congress and the LGBT community. The students and faculty thoroughly enjoyed his presentation, and the lecture ended with a vibrant question and answer session. ■

## Breaking Down the Gender Barrier: CPP Sponsors Roundtable Discussion on Women in Politics

by Kat Bregant '07 and Lisa Alexander '08

The CPP hosted a roundtable discussion on Women in Politics in the Tillotson Room of the Tippie Alumni Center on October 19, 2006. Two prominent women spoke at the event. Michelle Brooks, a Mercer County commissioner running for state representative, and Catherine Zelazny, the first-ever female chair of the Democratic Party in Erie, stressed the importance of political participation by women. They discussed the challenges of their positions as well as the difficulties of being women in power.



*Student Fellow Afua Osei '08 with roundtable speakers Michelle Brooks and Catherine Zelazny.*

Audience questions prompted a discussion on gender stereotyping and sexism in the political world. Both women shared their personal experiences in office, including sexist comments from both men and women. Brooks and Zelazny explained that women need to participate in government in order to promote agendas

and viewpoints unique to them. The speakers' overarching message was that women should be strong and become involved, despite financial and social challenges.

CPP Fellow Afua Osei '08 remarked, "I hope that Allegheny students will realize the importance of women participating in the political process. In particular, those young women who feel that their needs are not being addressed by the people in power are urged to do something about it and get involved."

Another student who attended, Silica Weary '08, agreed with Osei and the panel's message. "There is a need for women's voices because they bring different experiences and views to the table. We are going to need that variety in politics if we are ever going to get things done." ■

# CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

## CPP HOLDS ELECTION NIGHT EXTRAVAGANZA FOR THE 2006 MIDTERM ELECTIONS

by Silas Russell '07

Grounds for Change coffee shop was filled to capacity on November 7, 2006 during the CPP-sponsored Election Night Extravaganza. About 100 students filtered in and out of the GFC to enjoy coffee, pizza, and ice cream sundaes while tracking the progress of their preferred candidates in the 2006 midterm election. Students debated party politics and the future of the 110th Congress.

"I was surprised and impressed by not only the turnout, but the enthusiasm of the students," said CPP Fellow Ben Swanekamp '07. "At midnight, we had to ask a large group of students to go home so that the coffee shop could close. It is not often that you see young people that engaged in current events, not to mention electoral politics."



*CPP Student Fellows enjoy ice cream while watching the midterm results in GFC.*



*Students enjoy refreshments and discuss the incoming election results.*

The CPP also provided a shuttle on Election Day to transport registered Allegheny students to and from local polling places. Students were strongly encouraged to register in Meadville this year in order to ensure ease of voting and strong turnout.

"Veteran poll workers were telling me how impressed they were with the number of Allegheny students voting," said Dan Conant '07, volunteer student poll worker. "With so many important elections this year, it is inspiring to know that young people are exercising their voice." ■

# CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

## POLITICAL FILM SERIES OPENS WITH A LOOK AT HEALTH CARE

by Lisa Alexander '08 and Niki Machin '08

On December 5, 2006, the CPP hosted the first film in its annual film series. *Dead Meat*, directed by Robert Browning, discussed the Canadian health care system. The documentary outlined major flaws with the system, such as long wait times for medical procedures.

Following the film Paul F. Oyler, MD, from the Meadville Medical Center, spoke on his personal experiences with the American health care system. Topics included the growing number of uninsured citizens, patients in the Medicare and Medicaid systems and possible improvements to the system. After his presentation, Oyler opened the floor to questions from students and faculty.

The resounding theme was the loss of Canadian doctors due to higher pay in the United States. Other questions dealt with prescription



*CPP Director Dan Shea and Student Fellow Lisa Alexander '08 discuss the American health care crisis.*

drug coverage and care for patients who cannot pay for treatment.

Following Oyler's presentation, Donald Marsh '07 spoke on the merits of the recently defeated California health care bill. Marsh suggested combining the Canadian and American systems by eliminating private insurers and creating a government-run agency that would provide coverage to all citizens. His

presentation sparked another lively debate.

More than 50 students and faculty attended the event and enjoyed popcorn, soft drinks, and stimulating discussion. The second film in this series, *Jesus Camp*, was shown during April's "Beyond the Vote: Political Action Week." ■

## CPP ANNOUNCES SCHMITT ENDOWMENT RECEPTION

On February 2, 2008, the CPP will host a reception in honor of the Michael B. Schmitt Endowment.

Allegheny alumnus Michael B. Schmitt '71, known to his friends as "Otto," died Feb. 1, 2005 in Bethesda, Maryland. He was 56

and had leukemia. In his memory, friends and family members established the Michael B. Schmitt Endowment for the Center for Political Participation at Allegheny College.

The reception in February will be the official announcement of the endowment.

CPP Student Fellows will make a small presentation to the contributing which will focus on how the CPP will use the endowment to support its many community and educational outreach programs. ■



# CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

## CPP Sponsors Ten-Day Political Advocacy Class in Washington, D.C.

by Lisa Alexander '08

On May 15, 2007, thirteen Allegheny students traveled to Washington, D.C. for a ten-day Experiential Learning class, partially funded by the Betsy Dotson Esquire Experiential Learning Fund. The trip, led by Assistant Professor of Political Science Melissa Comber and Assistant Professor of Economics Stephanie Martin, was designed to expose students to the two sides of D.C. and demonstrate connections between economics, policy and politics. Students visited various sections of the city to attend meetings, participate in service learning, and lobby representatives and senators on issues of their choice.



*Allegheny students, led by Professors Melissa Comber and Stephanie Martin, meet with Ann-Marie Luciano of Dickstein Shapiro and former U.S. senator Joseph Tydings.*

The first segment of the trip was service-oriented and focused on nonprofit, social welfare organizations. Students met with representatives from Bread for the World, an international, religiously based organization that focuses on hunger issues. They then traveled to M Street to meet with Nathan Kamesar and Tiffany Hicks, Americorps VISTA site coordinators for National Student Partnerships. Students discussed the impacts of poverty as they passed out flyers promoting NSP in the local community. They also volunteered at D.C. Central Kitchen, an organization that provides over 4,000 meals to D.C. residents per day. Students shared stories with staff members and helped prepare food.

In addition to service work, students also learned about lobbying. They met with Allegheny alumni Russ Harrison '94 of IEEE and Ann-Marie Luciano '98 of Dickstein Shapiro, as well as former U.S. senator Joseph

Tydings. Students were grateful for the opportunity to ask questions, receive tips and hear feedback on their own lobbying presentations. Students had contacted numerous congressional offices to schedule appointments prior to departing for D.C. Each group selected a unique issue—including microstamping gun ammunition, education reform, the Healthy Farms, Fuels and Foods Act of 2007 and death penalty reform—and created a brief presentation. For the last three days of the trip, students lobbied legislative assistants, representatives and senators. Offices visited included Congressman Phil English, Congressman



*Andrew Spinelli '09 and Heather Schubert '09 prepare food in D.C. Central Kitchen.*

Tim Murphy, Senator Robert Casey and Representative Mike Doyle. Two student groups also had the opportunity to speak directly with Representative Jason Altmire.

In addition to the academic portion of the trip, students visited monuments, museums and law and medical schools in their free time. The trip is designed to alternate with the biannual Political Science Department trip to Washington, D.C. in order to give more students an opportunity to experience the educational and cultural aspects of the city.

"I still don't know how to cut potatoes, but I gained valuable knowledge about our government and how to influence politics," said Tegan Millspaw '08. "As future leaders and American citizens, it is very important to understand and practice our rights and duties, which this trip allowed me to do." ■

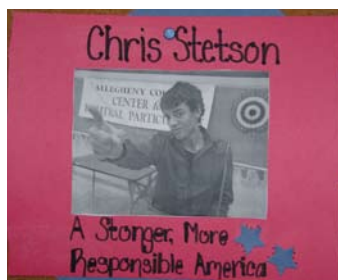


## MCUSA '08: Chris Stetson and the Race for PA's 20th District

by Ben Swanekamp '08

Republican newcomer Chris Stetson's campaign staff faced an uphill battle as they tried to unseat veteran Democratic incumbent Richard Palmer. The hotly contested race for Pennsylvania's 20th district was as hot as it's ever been, with Stetson's staff dealing with scandal, sinking polling numbers and an unpopular war. But by utilizing creative advertising, courting top-notch endorsements and using media outlets to downplay scandal, Stetson's team turned the race around. The most amazing thing about this race? There is no 20th PA Congressional District.

This race was fictional—part of the CPP's Fourth Annual Model Campaign USA program. For four months students from six area high schools worked under the guidance of Al-



*Direct mail pieces were created by all teams for the fictional Republican challenger Chris Stetson.*

legheny College students to learn the fundamental principles of campaigning, giving them a deeper insight into the American political process. By stressing sound, ethical campaign practices, the MCUSA program works to train and embolden the next generation of political professionals and enthusiasts. Throughout the program students learned about media, fundraising, advertising, polling and most importantly ethics.

The culmination of the MCUSA program was Competition Day, which asked each of the six schools to act as the campaign

staff of candidate Chris Stetson in the race for the fictional PA 20th. Armed with polling numbers, candidate bios, district demographics and economic data, teams went to work trying to unseat incumbent Richard Palmer. All teams updated and responded to blogs, set up websites, made mass mailings, and even took on tough interviewers.



*Former Pennsylvania Press Secretary and Allegheny alumnus Tim Reeves '83 speaks to MCUSA participants at this year's luncheon.*

During lunch MCUSA participants were treated to a talk from former PA press secretary Tim Reeves '83. Reeves told the students that politics can be rewarding and that individual efforts can make a real difference. At the end of the day awards were given out to teams that showed exemplary skills in various aspects of campaign work.

While not all of the students who participated in MCUSA will go into politics, everyone involved walked away with a deeper awareness of the American political system and the importance of participation. ■



*Students from the 2008 Best Campaign team pose with their Allegheny student coordinators, Molly Lennon '07 and Matt Smith '08.*

## Teaching Matters!

### TWO CPP INITIATIVES TAKE AIM AT ENGAGING STUDENTS THROUGH BETTER INSTRUCTION

Introductory courses in American Government are offered at most colleges and universities. They are mandated at many institutions and in several states. Overall, nearly one million students take this important class each year.

"It's a critical course," notes Daniel M. Shea, CPP director, "and it affords a wonderful opportunity to help a lot of young Americans understand how our system works and how they can make a difference. This class has the potential to reinvigorate our democracy. If we really want to better engage young Americans, we need to focus on this introduction to American government."

With this in mind, the CPP undertook two important initiatives during this past year.

#### **A Survey of American Government Instructors**

Given the prominence and importance of introductory courses in American Government, most would be surprised to hear that few studies have been conducted on how it is taught, course goals and objectives, areas of coverage, effective teaching techniques, and student competencies.

In April, Shea and CPP Research Fellow and Assistant Professor of Political Science Melissa Comber took an important step in better

understanding this course. They conducted a nation-wide study, with nearly 400 American Government instructors taking part. The questionnaire, which listed 75 questions, covered areas such as teaching goals, techniques, course content, and teacher training. To supplement the survey, Shea and Comber also analyzed over 200 course syllabi.

"The response to our survey was overwhelming," said Comber. "There's growing interest in this class and we expect important findings from the study."

Preliminary results have been revealing. For example, over 93 percent of the respondents believe that their introductory course in American Government can draw students into the political process, but just 34 percent have had any formal training on effective teaching.

A full report will be released by November 2007. Shea and Comber will also use findings from the study in their forthcoming book on effective teaching strategies and tactics.

#### **"Active Learning" Seminars Conducted Across the Country**

Teaming up with Pearson Education, and as part of the release of his new book, *Living Democracy*, CPP director Daniel M. Shea conducted seven "active learning" seminars at

cities across the country last spring. Over 150 college instructors attended these all-day seminars. The goal of the program was to explore effective teaching strategies and tactics.

In brief, active learning aims to invest students in their own "voyage of discovery." It is the application of proven learning techniques to enhance student talents and competencies, create a transaction of knowledge between the student and instructor, and deepen the understanding of complex material.

"There is growing recognition that expertise in the subject matter is critical, but so too is teacher training," said Shea. "A vast majority of college professors have had little or no teacher training. We know that American Government courses are important for the health of our democracy and that every generation of students poses new challenges."

Seminars were conducted in Chicago, Houston, San Antonio, Dallas/Ft. Worth, Berkeley, New York, and Springfield, Mo.

"I have my fingers crossed that we can continue the seminars during the next years," noted Shea. "Keeping abreast of new ways to reach students should be an important part of our job." ■

# CPP Why Bother? Program Impacts Students Nationally

by Lisa Alexander '08

In the fall of 2006, CPP Student Fellows and Allegheny student volunteers presented *Why Bother? The Importance of Voting in America 2006* to ten high schools in northwestern Pennsylvania. The program also launched its first national campaign. CPP Fellows Kristin Marsteller '06 and Silas Russell '07 had traveled to Harvard University's Institute of Politics in July of 2006 to participate in the National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement. Along with individuals from Rutgers University, Saint Anselm College and the University of Tennessee, they developed the 2006 program and formatted it to connect with high school students across the country.

The nonpartisan, narrated PowerPoint program was designed to encourage young people to vote in various types of elections. The *Why Bother?* program has shifted its focus since its creation in 2004. In the past, it encouraged young people to vote in presidential and local elections.

**This year, the program focused on congressional elections in addition to the general importance of voting.**

The 2006 program begins by demonstrating how young people can initiate change with their

voices and their votes. It highlights Oakland, CA high school students who joined community organizations, attended town hall meetings and held press conferences in a successful campaign to secure over \$4 million to reduce public bus fares. The presentation also uses popular music, graphics and current examples to explain the differences between political parties, reasons to vote and how to register and use different types of voting machines. Approximately 300 students in Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango counties viewed the 2006 *Why Bother?* program along with hundreds of other high school students from across the country. ■

# CPP Voter Turnout Archive Makes Great Strides During Summer 2007

by Melissa K. Comber

The Voter Turnout Archive Project ("VTA") at the CPP finished its second and final summer of data collection. Voter turnout statistics have currently been collected from Beaver, Butler, Erie, Lawrence, Mercer, Somerset, Venango, and Washington Counties in Pennsylvania, with as many as four more counties to be added this fall.

A project website—<http://webpub.allegheny.edu/group/vta/home.html>—has also been created. This website allows users to easily view and download voter turnout data. It also features a "related links" tab to other voter turnout and political participation internet sites. An alternate tab on the site leads users to the Pennsylvania Counties Archive data file. This archive provides county-level voter turnout statistics for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for all presidential and gubernatorial elections since 1972.

Voter turnout statistics provide valuable information that can be used to examine voter conduct, indicate the quality of elections and campaigns, and gauge the general health of the electorate. In particular, the VTA Project provides voter turnout statistics at the community level. ■



# NEWS & EVENTS

## CPP CO-SPONSORED EVENTS

### EGYPTIAN FEMINISM SCHOLAR SPEAKS AT ALLEGHENY COLLEGE

by Diana Warth '08

Last November the CPP co-sponsored a lecture by Dr. Ghada Hashem Talhami on "Egyptian Feminism as a Framework of Modern Arab Feminism." Nearly 100 students packed Henderson Auditorium to hear Dr. Talhami speak.

Born to Palestinian parents in Amman, Jordan, Dr. Talhami received her Ph.D. from the University of Illinois. Active in women's rights in the Middle East and Africa, Dr. Talhami has authored several books, including *The Islamic Mobilization of Women in Egypt*. Presently, she is the D.K. Pearsons Professor of Politics at Lake Forest College.

In Dr. Talhami's talk, she discussed the way in which Egyptian feminism can be used as a standard for other Arab nations. She explained that feminism is not just a Western concept; women's rights movements have existed in many other parts of the world for many generations. In Egypt, specifically, there have been several active women's liberation movements throughout the past century.

During her talk, Dr. Talhami also discussed the history of women's rights in Egypt. She stated that as a result of the efforts by Egyptian women's rights advocates, Egyptian women now enjoy many of the rights that are often thought of as being enjoyed only by women in the West. In conjunction with this, she also discussed the issue of women's rights within

Islam. She explained that Islam and women's rights are not contradictory, contrary to popular belief. Dr. Talhami supported her argument by citing verses from the Koran, the Muslim holy book, and the Sharia, Islamic law. She concluded that the fight for women's rights in Egypt, just as in every other country in the world, is a continuing struggle.

After her lecture Allegheny, students and faculty, as well as community members, were invited to the CPP for a reception with Dr. Talhami. ■



*CPP Fellow Diana Warth '07 talks with guest speaker Dr. Ghada Hashem Talhami at a reception in the CPP.*

### THINGS HEAT UP AT GLOBAL WARMING DISCUSSION FORUM

by Ben Swanekamp '08

Last September, the CPP hosted a forum in Allegheny College's Grounds for Change coffee shop to discuss Al Gore's controversial Academy Award-winning documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*. Commonwealth Community Energy Project sponsored a public showing of the film in Shafer Auditorium. The CPP co-sponsored the screening and sponsored a discussion following the show.

Students chatted about the film, the debate surrounding global warming, and the political repercussions of both the movie and the overall topic. A large crowd attended the forum, led by Student Fellows Silas Russell '07 and Benjamin Swanekamp '08. Many discussed the political ramifications of climate change and how they could become actively involved with the issue. Students also brought

up subjects such as the Kyoto Protocol, Europe's aggressive environmental policies, the science behind global warming and the claims against it. All sides of the issues were actively debated while participants enjoyed light refreshments. ■

# STAFF NEWS/FOLLOW *the* FELLOWS

## Staff News



### Research Fellow Granted Opportunity to Lecture Abroad

Research Fellow and Assistant Professor of Political Science **Melissa K. Comber** received a Junior Lecturing Fulbright award. She will be teaching at the Universitat Duisburg-Essen in Germany for the 2007-2008 academic year. Professor Comber will teach courses on American social policies and American politics in the Department of North American Studies.

## Saying Goodbye to 2007 Fellows



### Silas Russell '07

*Alden Scholar, Lambda Sigma*

Silas graduated with a degree in political science. He is currently stationed in Iowa, working as a field organizer for the John Edwards for President Campaign. After the 2008 presidential election Silas plans on attending law school.



### Diana Warth '07

*Cum Laude, Alden Scholar, Pi Sigma Alpha*

Diana graduated with a degree in political science and women's studies. She plans on working for the U.S. government in D.C. for a few years, and in the future plans to attend a university to fulfill a joint degree in Middle Eastern Studies and a Jurist Doctorate in International Law.

## 2006-2007 Fellows



*L-R:*

Ted Zimmer '08  
Niki Machin '08  
Ben Swanekamp '08  
Lisa Alexander '08  
Afua Osei '08  
Silas Russell '07

*Pictured above:*  
Diana Warth '07

# WALTER JACOBSON MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY WINNER

## The Birth of a Two-Party South: The Changing Southern Electorate

by Niki Machin '08

Arguably one of the most important political changes in modern America was the creation of a competitive two-party South. This modern condition is a far cry from the near autocratic rule of the Democratic Party following the Reconstruction Era. The South consists of eleven states of the old confederacy: South Carolina, North Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, and Tennessee. With the South as its bastion, the Democratic Party had nearly uninterrupted control of the U.S. House and Senate from 1933 to 1995. In 1950, only two seats were held by Republicans from a southern house delegation of 105, and there were no Republican senators (Black, 1998). Following 1960s civil rights legislation, federal intervention destabilized the Democratic Party in the South, leading to the gradual erosion of Democratic power.

Many issues have combined to create the current political environment in the South, but the three major factors were shifts in partisan identification, demographic changes, and a dramatic change in Republican Party strategy. These factors broke the Democratic stranglehold on the South and created a truly national Republican Party (Knuckey, 2006).

From its birth, the Republican Party relied on a two-thirds strategy, which required achieving large majorities in the West and North in order to compensate for the total loss of the South. Following the Civil War, the Union Army occupied the South, created Republican governments, and enfranchised former slaves. Reconstruction proved to be a death sentence for the Republican Party in the South. Southerners were furious with the occupation, the disenfranchisement of many ex-confederates,

ultimately the disenfranchisement of all southern blacks (Black and Black, 1992).

Scholars have been reluctant to apply the term realignment to the South, despite the increasing popularity of Republican presidential candidates among southern voters, because up until the 1990's most southerners continued to identify with the Democratic Party (Knuckey, 2006). In fact, 2000 was the first year that Republican identification was the majority position, while

**Many issues have combined to create the current political environment in the South, but the three major factors were shifts in partisan identification, demographic changes, and a dramatic change in Republican Party strategy.**

and the harsh treatment dealt out by the Radical Republicans. This level of animosity toward the Republicans was seen in 1874 when a dramatic shift to Democratic control resulted in four-fifths of the southern delegation becoming white Democrat. Once reconstruction ended in 1877, the white Democrat's priority became to restore white supremacy in the South. This was accomplished through any means necessary including violence, intimidation, fraud and

Democratic identification slid to one in every three southern whites. Several factors are believed to have caused this dramatic shift, including racial attitudes, social-class changes, and party polarization coupled with ideological realignment (Knuckey, 2006).

The South has experienced dramatic demographic and population shifts, which have impacted the electorate. Scholars have attributed the fall of the one-party system



# WALTER JACOBSON MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY WINNER

to the ever increasing social and economic diversity of the South (Petrocik and Desposato, 1998). As seen in the North with the Republican Party, the growing complexity of the economy made one-party politics harder to maintain (Black and Black, 2002). Along with changing demographics, the redistricting following the 1990 census was the needed catalyst to tip the Southern electorate to a Republican advantage (McKee, 2005).

Regardless of ideological shifts or demographic changes, the Republicans could not make headway in the South until the party was willing to fight for seats. The Republican Party was nonexistent in the South prior to the 1940's, but an opportunity emerged in 1948 with Truman's desegregation of the military and the Dixiecrat revolt (Aistrup, 1996). Even with this opportunity, the southern Republican Party was in dire straits; from 1952 through 1960 Republicans won only 34 out of 530 house elections, and most of these victories came from historically Republican districts in northern Tennessee and Virginia (Black and Black, 2002). Democratic incumbents were nearly invincible, with a reelection rate of 99 percent. Even in open-seat elections, frail local Republican parties often failed to run any candidate. To improve Republican

candidates' prospects in the South, it would take the commitment of the national party to crack the Democratic control (Bullock and Shafer, 1997).

## Today, the South is comparable to any other region of the country.

Changes in partisan identification, demographics, and party structure have all combined to destroy the political anomaly that was the Solid South. Today, the South is comparable to any other region of the country; the sectional distinctions, which once defined southern politics, are rapidly disappearing. Currently, Republicans enjoy an advantage within the southern electorate, and many scholars believe that this advantage will exist for decades to come (Knuckey, 2006). But unlike the southern Democratic Party of the past, the new Republican advantage is not based on racial hatred and a complete lack of political competition. Also southern Republicans are not immune from national political trends, as seen in the 2006 election. Southern voters today enjoy something their ancestors could not imagine, two powerful parties with distinct ideologies battling at every level of government. ■

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# THE Soapbox

A NEWSLETTER *of* THE CENTER *for* POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

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