

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

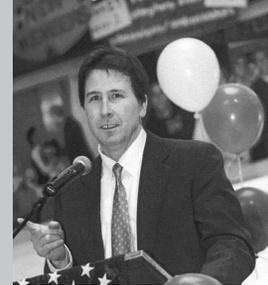
THE Soapbox

A NEWSLETTER of THE CENTER for POLITICAL PARTICIPATION



NOMINATION REFORM INITIATIVE • NEW YORK TIMES KNOWLEDGE NETWORK • CPP HOSTS FIRST NATIONAL NOMINATION REFORM DISCUSSION • ALLEGHENY LAUNCHES SOAPBOX ALLIANCE • PRESIDENT BILL CLINTON ENDORSES SOAPBOX ALLIANCE • CURT SMITH THE PATRIOT-NEWS • 2008 D.C. TRIP STAFF NEWS • FOLLOW THE FELLOWS • AMERICAN BLACKOUT • SUPER TUESDAY • SCHMITT ENDOWMENT • CPP RECEIVES GIFT OF MCKINLEY MEMORABILIA

FROM *the* DIRECTOR



A legendary party boss once remarked, “I don’t care who does the electin’ so long as I do the nominatin’.”

Indeed, how parties choose general election candidates has always been a critically important part of our political system. Crawford County, Pennsylvania, the home of Allegheny College, holds the distinction of being “the birthplace of the primary.” In 1842 it was the first municipality to mandate primary elections for all local offices. The first presidential primary was held in Oregon, in 1910. After a series of reforms, both parties moved to binding primaries and caucuses in 1972.

As the 2008 nomination race neared, we at the CPP began to focus on the limits of the current process. We watched the leapfrog contest, with each state struggling to move its date up in order to be relevant. We began to wonder about the possibility of new approaches, models that might better draw young Americans into the process. By early fall we had announced a four-year initiative to explore the current system and to offer recommendations for change if

needed. And of course, our scheme placed young voters at the center of it all. Our kickoff event, which you can read more about on page 1, was held one week after Super Tuesday. Surely, we thought, the 2008 process would be over by then. Boy, were we wrong! But the event was a great success, with college teams coming from as far away as New Hampshire.

We were also pleased to kick off in October a national initiative to emphasize the importance of open candidate events on college and university campuses. Articles in *USA Today*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and many other outlets, as well as several wonderfully supportive editorials, including one in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, helped spread the word.

Yes, we were busy this last year—as you will soon read. As always, I wish to express my most sincere gratitude to the CPP Student Fellows, staff, and faculty for their energy and their steadfast commitment to developing innovative programs that will make a difference on campus, in the community, and across the nation.

Finally, as you likely know, Richard Cook has stepped down as president of Allegheny College. A passionate believer in participatory democracy, he also knows that the future of our system lies in the hands of America’s youth. Colleges have a special responsibility to help train young men and women in the arts of citizenship. Richard’s enthusiastic support of our endeavor is a testament to his respect for young Americans and to his willingness to dedicate time and resources to our mission.

Thankfully, our new president, Jim Mullen (a political scientist, I might add!), has expressed his enthusiastic support of our work. He, too, shares our vision that the CPP can be a model for liberal arts institutions striving to find innovative ways to make a difference.

Best regards,

Daniel M. Shea, Ph.D.

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Allegheny College Kicks Off Nomination Reform Initiative

By Jimmy Beyer '09



On February 13, just one week after Super Tuesday, Allegheny hosted the inaugural event of a two-year initiative to help shape the nation's presidential nomination system.

To kick off the effort, a one-day conference—held in conjunction with a four-week online course taught by Professor of Political Science and CPP Director Daniel Shea and offered via The New York Times Knowledge Network—explored past, present, and future changes within the presidential nomination process, focusing particular attention on likely reforms that could be in place for the 2012 election.

For the student component of the conference, seventeen teams—including one from Manchester, New Hampshire—participated, publicly showcasing their ideas for nomination reform.

Student teams were asked to present their reform ideas through posters—in an exhibit viewed by conference participants, Allegheny students, community members, and journalists—in the Campus Center lobby. Later, in Quigley Auditorium, five teams with especially compelling ideas were selected to give PowerPoint presentations to make a more complete argument for their plans. Arguably the idea that generated the most interest came from a team from Slippery Rock University. SRU's "Voter Empowerment Solution" used voter turnout in the preceding election to determine the state-by-state voting order for the next election's calendar of primaries and caucuses.

After the presentations, author and political strategist Bay Buchanan visited with students and signed copies of her latest book, *The Extreme Makeover of Hillary (Rodham) Clinton*.

Following the book signing, conference participants enjoyed dinner in the Tillotson Room and remarks by Jane Eisner, vice president of national programs and initiatives at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.



Panel of Experts Continues Discussion on Nomination Reform

By Niki Machin '08

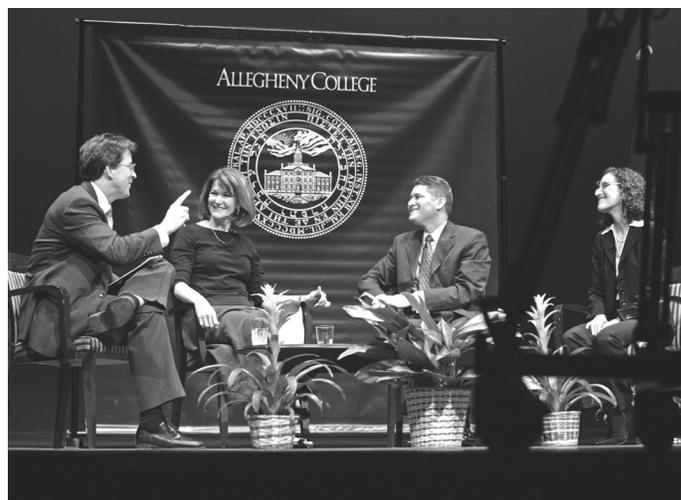
One-on-one and small group conversations begun in the Campus Center lobby during the day were continued across the nation via a first for Allegheny, a live webcast panel discussion, which was hosted collaboratively by the CPP and the New York Times Knowledge Network. Experts on the nomination process, the panelists included political strategist and author Bay Buchanan, Pennsylvania Secretary of State Pedro Cortés, and Jane Eisner, vice president for national programs at the National Constitution Center. Moderating the exchange was CPP Director Daniel Shea.

Dr. Shea opened the proceedings. “The process of selecting presidential party nominees has changed in numerous, important ways over the past two centuries,” Shea said. “By many accounts, the nomination process will not endure another election. Reform is inevitable.”

In a passionate but courteous exchange, the panelists discussed the flaws in the current system and their ideas for how an ideal nomination process would look. Each panelist drew from different areas of expertise. Secretary Cortés spoke about the role of state governments in the primary and caucus system, while Buchanan related tales from the campaign trail. Eisner spoke specially to issues related to youth participation and involvement in primary politics.

All of the panelists agreed that there are critical flaws in the current nomination framework and that reforms are necessary to make the process timelier and open to all voters. Audience members—both those seated in Shafer Auditorium and those viewing the broadcast online—were given the opportunity to submit questions and hear panelists’ responses.

On February 13, Shafer Auditorium bustled with teams involved in the nomination reform competition and Allegheny students interested in reforming America’s presidential nomination system. Interpreting the general buzz for many, when the evening panel discussion was finished, Allegheny senior Megan Perry said, “I really learned a lot from the panelists and I certainly hope some reforms are made to the nomination process so all voters can participate regardless of what state they live in.”



CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

President Mullen Takes Office

When James H. Mullen, Jr. became the twenty-first president of Allegheny College on August 1, 2008, he brought with him not only twenty years of experience in leadership roles in higher education but a keen interest in American politics.

Before coming to Allegheny, Dr. Mullen was president of Elms College. He has also served as chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Asheville and as senior vice president of Trinity College. A sought-after lecturer in Trinity College's public policy department, he focused his work on the American presidency. He also held appointments as professor of history

at Elms College and as professor of political science at UNC Asheville.

At the University of North Carolina at Asheville, the designated liberal arts campus of the UNC system, Dr. Mullen's work helped earn national attention for the university's academic program and statewide praise for its commitment to community. At Trinity College, he was responsible for Trinity's comprehensive master plan and oversaw a nearly \$300 million public/private partnership that revitalized the neighborhood surrounding Trinity's campus.

Dr. Mullen is a graduate of the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. He holds a master of public policy degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and a doctorate in higher education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.



CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

Dan Shea Speaks on 2008 Election at Annual Library Lecture

Dan Shea, professor of political science and director of the Center for Political Participation at Allegheny College, presented the 12th Annual Lawrence Lee Pelletier Library Lecture on October 10.

Before a standing-room-only audience in the newly renovated library, Shea's talk, "New Horizons: How the 2008 Election Will Reshape American Politics," argued that path-breaking candidates, cross-cutting issues, shattered fundraising records, and a polarized electorate will result in an election that will reshape America's politics.

Documentary American Blackout Spurs Discussion

By Ted Zimmer '08

On October 24 the Center for Political Participation and the Allegheny College Office of Diversity Affairs co-sponsored an event that shed light on the disenfranchisement of African American voters in the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. The program featured the film *American Blackout*, which made the case that many African Americans and others had been either inappropriately denied access to their polling places or deemed ineligible to vote on Election Day. Much of the documentary focused on African American communities in

Florida in the 2000 election and Ohio in the 2004 election. The film also followed the story of outspoken Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney from the state of Georgia and her fight for reelection.

After the movie, Celeste Taylor, Pennsylvania state coordinator of African American outreach for People for the American Way, facilitated a discussion of the feelings stirred by the film, asking the audience to describe their feelings about the film in one word. Responses included "angry," "shocked," and "disappointed." Surprise was a common thread in most of the reactions. The discussion developed into a lively conversation about specific actions students could take to help prevent similar disenfranchisement from occurring in the future.



CAMPUS NEWS & EVENTS

BET's Jeff Johnson Anchors Martin Luther King, Jr. Events

On January 22, political and social activist Jeffrey Johnson, known for his role on Black Entertainment Television's "Rap City," presented the keynote address at Allegheny's week-long celebration of the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Forty years following King's assassination, Johnson's talk, 'Unclaimed Legacy: From Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Barack Obama,' offered a call for greater youth involvement in our nation's civic responsibilities," said Cherjanét D. Lenzy, director of diversity affairs at Allegheny College.

An AME minister, public speaker, and leadership trainer, Johnson is perhaps best known for his appearances on BET's "Rap City" as Bigg Tigger's cousin, Cousin Jeff.

Former Speechwriter for George H.W. Bush Speaks at Allegheny

Best-selling author, radio host, and columnist Curt Smith—former speechwriter for President George H. W. Bush—visited Allegheny College in April to give a CPP-sponsored talk about the legacy of President George W. Bush and the windfall that he believes it represents for Democrats in the 2008 presidential campaign. Smith's talk was titled "George W. Bush, the Democrats' Ascent and the 2008 Presidential Campaign."

"Bush will be recalled for a reverse Midas touch: whatever he touches, he destroys," said Smith. "Even the Democratic Party may not be able this year to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory."

During his talk, Smith explained what he called "the forty-year-old Republican Silent Majority coalition," how he believes President George W. Bush destroyed it, and how Bush became the decisive issue of this campaign.

Students Gather for Super Tuesday Celebration

By Zachary Best

The Center for Political Participation joined with other political groups on campus to host a Super Tuesday celebration in the Grounds for Change coffeehouse. The CPP, with the College Republicans and Democrats, welcomed students, who filled the space at GFC and spilled out into the hallways. Students enjoyed ice cream and other snacks as they watched the results come in on a big-screen television.

Students were interested to see the results, for along with wanting to see how their candidate of choice was faring, many were interested to see if the results on the Democratic side would enhance the role that the Pennsylvania primary would play nationally. Some students used the event as a campaign opportunity, with ample supporters for various local politicians present as well.

Community Discussion Explores Political Dissent During Wartime

by Autumn Humes

After taking a course at Allegheny College titled "Americans, Christianity, and Social Justice," senior Jessica Sarkis began to question whether dissent is a threat to national security during wartime. To learn more, she organized a community discussion of the issue in Ford Chapel, which was sponsored by Allegheny's Department of Religious Studies, Office of Service Learning, and the Center for Political Participation.

Sarkis began the discussion, which was moderated by Philosophy and Religious Studies instructor Sarah Roncolato, by showing a documentary she filmed in her junior year. *Blowing in the Wind* chronicles local protests in Diamond Park that had gained notoriety in the region over the past couple of years. The discussion, heated at times, but mostly respectful, was covered by the *Meadville Tribune*.

“Super Pool” Alumni and Friends Fund Michael B. Schmitt Endowment

By Elizabeth Andrews

On February 2, the CPP held a reception for members of the Allegheny alumni group “The Super Pool” to recognize the formation of the Michael B. Schmitt Endowment, a three-year campaign that raised a total of \$43,220.

Allegheny alumnus and Super Pool member Michael B. Schmitt '71, known to his friends as “Otto,” died February 1, 2005 from leukemia. In his memory, friends and family members established the Michael B. Schmitt Endowment to benefit the Center for Political Participation.

The Super Pool, founded in 1968, is a group of Allegheny alumni who have stayed in touch for forty years through an annual competition selecting the winners of NFL football games. Members of the group gather each year on Super Bowl weekend for a reunion, which is sometimes held in Meadville.

Over the years, more than fifty people have been members of the Super Pool, thirty-two of whom are still active participants. Current Super Pool members contributed the majority of the endowment along with contributions from Schmitt’s family and others.

Schmitt majored in political science at Allegheny and was an active member of the Super Pool, missing only one annual reunion during his thirty-one-year membership.

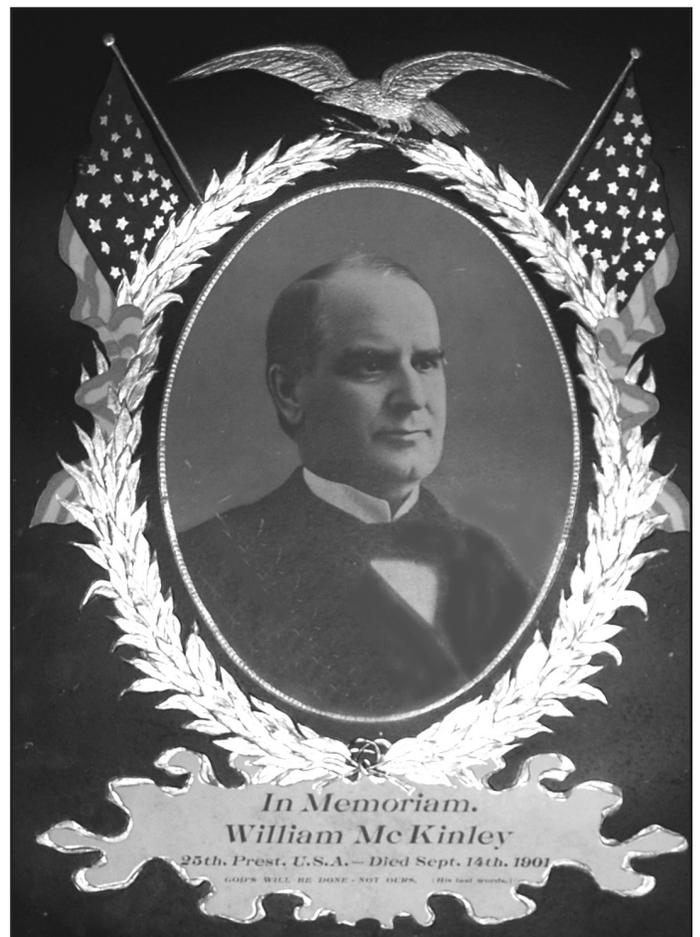
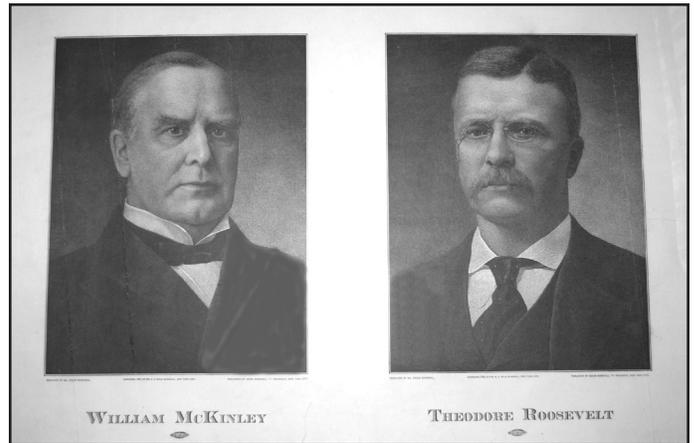
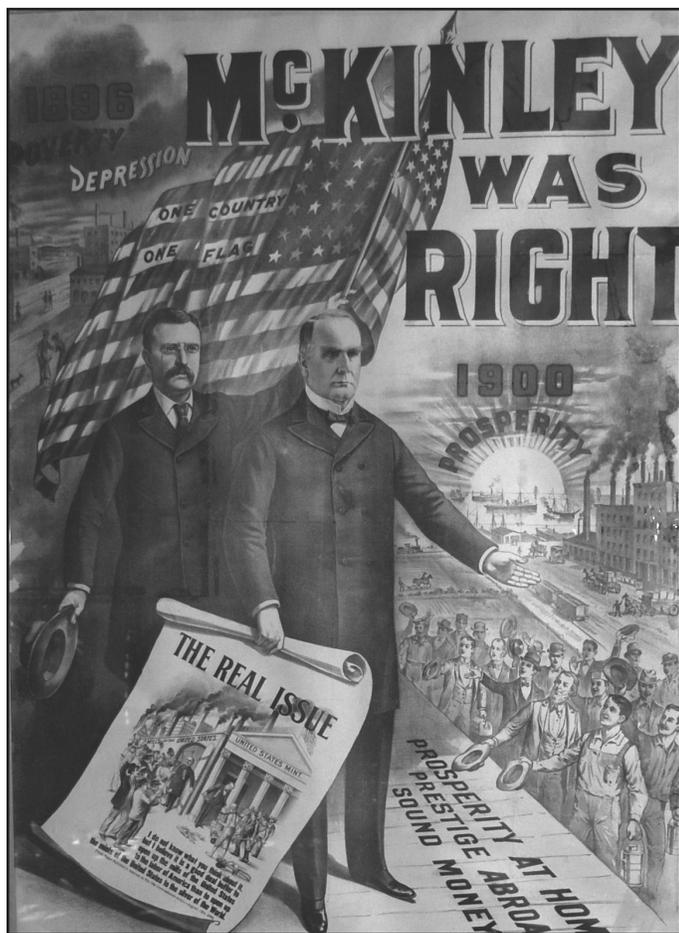
“It was a singular ‘feel good’ moment for all of us,” says Super Bowl founder Thom Myers '71. “I personally hope that the Otto Fund will serve as an example to future Allegheny students of the lifelong bond that is formed through friendships made at a small liberal arts college, the uniqueness of being an Allegheny College graduate and a sense of obligation to give back for the experience that made us who we are.”



GIFTS

Mandel Family Gift Adds Distinction to CPP Board Room

The Honorable Jack Mandel '58 and family members Judy, Josh '90, and Dave '91 presented five framed pieces of William McKinley memorabilia to the CPP, providing a vivid display both of Allegheny's rich political history and of the spirit of patriotism that continues to drive the center's work.



Allegheny College Creates Soapbox Alliance To End Closed Candidate Gatherings on Nation's Campuses

On the 150th anniversary of the birth of its pioneering investigative journalist, alumna Ida Tarbell, Allegheny College invited institutions of higher education nationwide to join us in a democracy-strengthening initiative with the goal of ending the practice by political candidates of holding closed meetings on college campuses.

In a morning news conference at the college, President Richard Cook announced an initiative that invites leaders in higher education to join the "Soapbox Alliance," a coalition of institutions that either have an open campaign-event policy or have pledged to work toward the goal of establishing an open-event policy by September 1, 2008.

"We encourage candidates and campaigns from all political parties to visit college and university campuses to engage students and the public in authentic discussion of the issues," said Cook. "But we reject the notion of 'town meetings' being limited to hand-picked supporters. Campuses should not be used as convenient backdrops for staged events designed to represent something they are not."

The idea behind the initiative sprang from the dilemma Allegheny College faced during the 2004 election season when it received a

request from the Bush-Cheney campaign to rent its gymnasium for a ticketed event, with the campaign organization determining how the tickets would be distributed. At the time, Allegheny's practice had been to welcome private groups to use its facilities with or without charge, depending on availability and circumstance. As a result, despite the college community's distaste for the idea of a closed "town meeting," it found itself without a sound basis to deny the request.

The experience caused members of the college community to look for a way to encourage candidates to visit campus while embracing the ideals of authentic political engagement and debate. Led by Professor Daniel Shea, nationally respected scholar and founder of Allegheny's Center for Political Participation, and in collaboration with his faculty colleagues and the administration, the college adopted a policy that allows campaign organizations to reward supporters with tickets to an event but requires that at least half of the available seats must be made available to the general college community through a non-biased distribution.

The idea of encouraging other colleges to band together in order to strengthen the impact of such policies and potentially end the practice of hosting closed campaign events on campuses



NEWS & EVENTS

altogether was first described in a perspective piece by Shea that was published in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in August 2006.

“The reaction to the article has been great,” said Shea. “But everyone realizes that colleges have to come together on this. I’m convinced that students care deeply about genuine debate and are turned off by anything else,” Shea said.

Reactions Across the Nation...

The very idea of a closed event is insulting politics are supposed to be open and filled with discourse. If a candidate can’t handle a US citizen with different opinions how in the world are they going to handle foreign leaders? Or tough situations? It’s about time someone took a stand against these I hope my school joins.

The New York Times, The Caucus, Posted by Jessica, 11/10/07

Every college and university in America would do well to follow this policy.

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 11/9/07

Why didn’t someone start this sooner — no one American should be disallowed to see his President or public official whether he agrees or disagrees — these are not dictators, but elected officials of the people?? or any two-bit scam I guess — these closed speaking engagements and stacked audiences that Bush, Cheney and even now Clinton like to use should be abolished. Presidents should not be allowed to spew propaganda with the backdrop of Soldiers either.

ABCNews.com, Posted by paulettc0, 11/20/07

It’s undemocratic for an educational facility to rent space to political parties and candidates without allowing all of their students to participate. Invitation-only rallies don’t foster learning, debate or democracy — they just create group-think and give candidates platforms to put forth ideas no one will question. “What’s worse is that when schools sell their spaces to political interests, the administrators have also sold the school’s name and image (that will be documented in news reports, photographs and video tapes) without getting anything in return that benefits their students. They’ve corrupted their students’ ability to protest and question leaders for cash.

The Columbia Chronicle, a student publication at Columbia College Chicago, 11/26/07

While students aren’t the only demographic whose interests are being selectively addressed by campaigns, these scripted events have repercussions for the youth vote as a whole. In a moment when young voter participation is on the up-swing, it is frustrating to see young voters used as props and pushed into conveniently labeled boxes.

Cora Currier, *The Nation*, 11/26/07

The notion that some people might “misbehave,” and that this justifies seven years of shielding the president from being in the same room as Americans who disagree with him, is demonstrably ridiculous.

Steve Benen, *The Carpetbagger Report*, 11/20/07

The idea is that on college campuses, politicking must remain an equal-opportunity endeavor. Democrats, Republicans and any other party can’t have a private audience on the Allegheny College campus. Campaign staff won’t like the new policy, but that isn’t the point. Allegheny College will now remain true to its free expression of ideas mission. Sounds like a winner to us.

Erie Times-News, 11/18/07

Allegheny College, a respected liberal arts school in Meadville, Pa., is striking a blow for what might be called democratic authenticity. It is rebelling against the notion that politicians should be able to stage a town hall meeting at a college that is all show and no campus-community participation.

Toledo Blade, 11/15/07

This type of dirty campaigning should not be tolerated. The Soapbox Alliance will allow open, honest debate from candidates and will eliminate “staged” events. Especially in an academic environment, an intelligent, authentic political discussion is crucial. More colleges should support this movement, and I hope it expands to other organizations and communities as well. Well done, Allegheny College for stepping up and taking charge.

The New York Times, The Caucus, Posted by Ashlee, 11/13/07

Presidential Visit Tests Soapbox Alliance

When former president Bill Clinton visited Allegheny College on April 19 for a campaign stop in support of his wife, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton, it was more than an important rally before this year's historic Pennsylvania primary election.

It was also our first real test of the Soapbox Alliance.

Not only did the Soapbox's core premise that college campuses should be places open to civic discourse, especially during intense political campaigns, prove sound, but President Clinton directly endorsed the alliance in his opening remarks.

Two Allegheny students, former CPP student fellow Afua Serwaah Osei and sophomore Sam Rigotti, were first to address the crowd, which was made up of Clinton, Obama, and McCain supporters.

In November 2007, Allegheny founded the Soapbox Alliance, a coalition of institutions working together to end the practice of holding closed campaign events in campus facilities. Each member either already has an open-event policy or pledged to work toward the goal of establishing an open-event policy by September 1, 2008. More information about the College's open-event policy and the Soapbox Alliance can be found at www.soapboxalliance.org.

Allegheny College has invited all of the candidates in the 2008 presidential election to visit campus.



Allegheny College Hosts National Summit on Political Engagement

Allegheny College hosted the Bonner Foundation's Summer Leadership Institute 2008, June 4-7. More than 300 students, faculty, and college administrators from across the country participated in the program, which was titled "Summit on Political Engagement: Connecting Service to Politics and Politics to Service."

The Bonner Foundation's initiatives engage students at seventy-five colleges and universities in improving the lives of individuals and communities. The foundation's work strengthens student development and community impact while promoting civic engagement, community building, diversity, international perspective, spiritual exploration, and social justice.

Exploring five pathways for action, advanced in Dan Shea's recent co-authored book, *Living Democracy*, summit participants were challenged to make connections between the work of community service and the work of civic participation, specifically focusing on grassroots mobilization, lobbying, cultural change, elections, and litigation.

Several national organizations were involved in the leadership institute, including representatives from CIRCLE (Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), Project Pericles, Mobilize.org, the Roosevelt Institution, and Teach for America.

The conference agenda also included numerous forums and workshops featuring Allegheny programs: the Allegheny College Center for Experiential Learning, the Civic Engagement Council, and the Center for Political Participation.



Former CPP Student Fellow Receives Fulbright Award

As American families took time off from work to celebrate Independence Day with traditional picnics and fireworks, Afua Osei, of Bowie, Maryland,

was preparing to study a much younger country's efforts to balance the needs of its growing economy against the desire to preserve its cultural traditions.

Afua Osei, a 2008 graduate of Allegheny College and former CPP student fellow, was awarded a Fulbright Award to study and teach in Malaysia, which celebrated fifty years of independence on August 31.

As a double major—she majored in political science and was the first student at Allegheny to design her own major in black studies—Osei took full advantage of the College's interdisciplinary approach to education by also taking courses in economics, history, women's studies, philosophy, religious studies, communication arts, and English.

Now, with her long-range sights set on winning a seat in the U.S. Senate, the young scholar sees her upcoming

experience in Terengganu, Malaysia, as an opportunity to serve others, to immerse herself in the country's culture, and to explore the complex intersection of commerce and heritage.

At Allegheny, Osei also served as the president of the Association for the Advancement of Black Culture and as chairperson of the Community HIV/AIDS Awareness Committee. She was honored with a 2007–2008 Cornerstone Award at Allegheny and was a public policy and international affairs fellow at the H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University.



Next Steps for 2008's Graduating CPP Student Fellows

Lisa Alexander is attending Albany Law School of Union College to study criminal and/or family law.

Niki Machin is working for Teach For America, teaching middle-school science in rural eastern North Carolina.

Ben Swanekamp is working on the State Senate campaigns of David Nachbar and Rick Dollinger with an eye toward landing a staff position in Albany.

Ted Zimmer is working in Pittsburgh as a community organizer at Consumer Health Coalition, a nonprofit organization that concentrates on improving health care access and quality for all individuals.

Walter Jacobson Memorial Prize Essay Winner

The Walter Jacobson Memorial Prize was awarded to Emily Rich for her essay “Microtargeting: The Future of Democracy.” While the full text is available on the CPP web site, cpp.allegheeny.edu, a synopsis of her work is provided here.

Microtargeting: The Future of Democracy

By Emily Rich

Microtargeting has changed the dynamics of campaigning by reaching into the voter universe and unlocking the potential of atypical voters. As in the past, most campaigns devote their time, energy and dollars towards the mobilization of voters already affiliated with their respective parties. However, as a result of microtargeting, campaigns have been able to focus on the recruitment of otherwise non-partisan voters. Even as the use of microtargeting has come to the forefront of the campaign world, several questions concerning its effectiveness need to be considered. Does this method of voter targeting always benefit every campaign? How has microtargeting changed the dynamics of campaign strategy? Is microtargeting all that different or more effective than voter targeting models constructed on the results of traditional public opinion polling? And finally, has microtargeting affected the democratic character of our electoral process?

Background

The 2004 United States Presidential election elevated the innovative “microtargeting” voter turnout method to the pedestal of the latest and greatest way to win a campaign. Political pundits and blogs buzzed about the technology that was credited for the razor thin reelection of Bush/Cheney. Karl Rove, George Bush’s electoral “architect,” reinforced his reputation as the boy genius, and the American conservative movement appeared to be unstoppable.

Microtargeting and its ability to pinpoint miniscule population segmentations dates back long before the reelection campaign of our 43rd President. There is little doubt, however, that microtargeting contributed to that victory and will play a significant role in future campaigns where the circumstances are suitable.

Development of Microtargeting for Politics

Political microtargeting was developed to combine the information from voter history files and consumer data purchased from large companies that warehouse such information, including Acxiom and Donnelly Marketing.

The GOP invested a great deal of time and financial resources into building voter files and matching that data with purchased consumer information. As a result, it has been widely reported that the Republican Party enjoyed an advantage over the Democrats in their development of microtargeting voter turnout tactics.

While the combined use of voter file and consumer data to “microtarget” was widely recognized as being in the forefront of contemporary campaign strategy in the post election analysis of the 2004 presidential election, the idea of using consumer data in politics was tested prior to this monumental election. In the 1996 Presidential campaign, President Bill Clinton and the Democrats were recognized for the creation of “LifeTargeting.” Both parties had already utilized voter information such as location and previous voting history to target voters. The LifeTargeting design, however, was the first system to use specific voter information including magazines they were subscribed to and the type of car they drive, as a mechanism to send more specific messages (Wasserman and Melillo 3).

The ability to microtarget allows a campaign to slice and dice the electorate down to smaller fractions and create narrow messages with appeal for specific voters. It is particularly effective in a close race and in identifying new voters and the “swing” electorate.

Winning with Microtargeting

In the aftermath of the 2004 election, Republicans were confident in the capabilities of their microtargeting and voter turnout machine that had come to be referred to in the press as the 72 hour program, GOTV (Get Out the Vote) or Victory. However, the year subsequent to the President’s reelection proved to be significantly less favorable for the GOP.

While the Republicans were plagued by scandals and an overall disappointment with the White House, their party remained hopeful in the summer of 2006 and there were a number of articles in the press talking up the GOP’s unstoppable machine.

Fool-Proof Strategy?

Microtargeting by itself is no more effective in winning a campaign than any other innovative campaign strategy being put into practice today. While it is undeniable that microtargeting has the capacity to tip an election, it is not the save-the-day resolution for all or even many political campaigns. Regardless, Republicans and Democrats alike are racing to keep up with the latest microtargeting trends and one of the biggest proponents of the strategy is Mark Penn, CEO of Burson-Marsteller and Hillary Clinton’s chief strategist.

“Mark Penn proposes that demographic segments as small as 1 percent of the population can ‘tip an election’ or ‘spark a movement.’”

At this point in the ever evolving methodology of campaign strategy, the microtargeting voter turnout method has only been tried and tested a handful of times. The 2004 cycle highlighted the latest

WALTER JACOBSON MEMORIAL PRIZE ESSAY

approach, with promising executions of the strategy seen in the Chafee-Laffey primary in Rhode Island; but in the fall of 2006, the Republican party was sorely reminded that no amount of voter targeting and turnout machinery can by itself produce winning results in an environment too unfavorable for a party as a whole to overcome.

Should Every Campaign Microtarget?

While microtargeting is considered by many to be genius in nature and effective in results, it is not the ideal method of voter targeting and modeling turnout universe for every single campaign. However, if campaigners should find themselves in the position where they anticipate a close race and need to rely on turning out new voters, the fringe of their party and the “swing” vote in order to win, a microtargeting project may be just the answer. However, the sheer cost of a microtargeting project may cause a campaign to reject or at least minimize its use.

The Future of Microtargeting

Some may question whether or not the innovative use of microtargeting has adversely affected the democratic character of the traditional American electoral process. This question can be considered by means of a Karl Rove response to an interview question about his approach to American politics. Rove’s response was a word for word quotation from a letter written by Abraham Lincoln to his Whig campaign committee (Gerson). In his letter Lincoln writes, “Keep a constant watch on the doubtful voters, and from time to time have them talked to by those in whom they have the most confidence, and also to place in their hands such documents as will enlighten and influence them . . . and on election day see that every Whig is brought to the polls” (Lincoln).

It appears as though microtargeting has not, as speculated, changed the character of our electoral process. Rather, it is simply another step in the constant evolution of voter targeting, which determines who the campaign needs to attract to the polls on Election Day and how they ought to execute their plan to win the election.

Like any new methodology, it takes years for an individual or business to perfect and fully develop innovative strategic practices. No campaign is won on a single message. Success depends on the collection and analysis of voter research. Data research, then, becomes imperative to a successful campaign, because it allows the candidate to create a message that appeals to the electorate, thus mobilizing voter turnout on Election Day.

Efforts to mobilize voters during presidential campaigns have been widely utilized since the 1950s. However, only recently with innovative technology such as the use of voter files and microtargeting have these efforts become demonstrably more successful.

The impact of microtargeting on present day political campaigns and society in general is positive. Innovative microtargeting techniques not only help candidates win, but also tend to bring more people to the polls. Voter turnout reached historical lows over the past few decades. Thus, the success experienced by campaigns in reaching voters is encouraging news for our democratic system of government. Whether the measurable increase in voter participation attributed to the personalized microtargeting techniques will be long lasting remains to be seen.

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THE Soapbox

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