Political Involvement Fair

The BYU Political Affairs Society had the opportunity to host an awesome Political Involvement Fair this fall. The non-partisan event featured representatives from many local and national political campaigns, including those from both Obama/Biden and Romney/Ryan. The event was very well received, as over 300 BYU students attended. The students visited with campaign representatives and discussed current political issues; they were informed of the many opportunities students have to get involved on the BYU campus. In addition to the campaign booths, students had the chance to chat with officers from a variety of clubs on campus, such as BYUPAS, College Democrats & College Republicans, and BYU Political Review. Furthermore, students learned about networking and internship opportunities through organizations like BYU Washington Seminar, and Utah Colleges & Exit Polls.

As the fair was aimed to promote political involvement, students had the option to register to vote on site, eliminating the stress and confusion that often prevents young people from getting involved in political activities.
The Great Debate

This fall semester, being an election season, the BYU College Democrats and Republicans engaged in multiple debates. In late September two members of the College Democrats, Ian Hansen and Andrew Moore, defended their idea of an ideal economic system against two members of the College Republicans, Lauren Barden and Brandon Riches, who critiqued the biggest problems with our current economy. Both sides answered questions posed by their opponents and by the audience. The discussion ranged from taxes and revenue creation to government stimulus and market liberties. The stark differences of the Hayekian versus Keynesian philosophies of economics became quite apparent very quickly adding a little flare to the already feisty debate. Through a secret ballot vote by the audience of over 200 students, the College Democrats were declared the winners. But the discussion on the economy and other important issues did not end there. The College Democrats and Republicans co-hosted a panel discussion in early October with BYU Faculty to discuss the details of tax policy. Dr. Kearl and Dr. Sims of the Economics Department sat with Dr. Wilson and Dr. Gilchrist of the Political Science Department to pick apart the details of our current tax structure and to propose their ideal solutions, even though they would never get proposed by any of our current politicians. They discussed changes in capital gains taxes and corporate taxes that might rid us of the perceived “double taxation.” Most argued that elimination of certain deductions would drastically simplify our tax code and bring in a great amount of revenue. The discussion was moderated by the Chair of the Political Science Department, Darren Hawkins, who allowed for the students to pose questions near the end. But this was not the end of the student involvement for the semester. Later in November the College Democrats and Republicans joined once again in a student debate hosted by the BYU Political Review. The Political Review along with the two clubs decided on four topics that they found to be most interesting for this election. They then had a Democrat and a Republican write an article to present the opposing viewpoints on general ideology, immigration, healthcare, and foreign policy to publish in an issue of the Political Review (www.byupoliticalreview.com). They then defended their arguments publicly in a live debate at the Varsity Theater.
Exit Polls

Considering the historic implications of the 2012 election, this year’s Utah Colleges Exit Poll was a unique and fascinating experience. Under the direction of Professors David Magleby and Kelly Patterson, BYU students had the opportunity to contribute to all preparations leading up to Election Day. Those enrolled in the designated class were placed in various committees, such as the Recruitment and Training, Questionnaire, and Public Relations committee, to lead and organize critical aspects of the project. Students from all committees played an integral role in all parts of the process, beginning with our survey design and culminating in Election Day crisis management and data analysis. Furthermore, this endeavor was a result of a successful collaboration between seven different universities and colleges throughout the state. Our Election Day operations were a testament to this as over 600 student volunteers worked lengthy shifts at 130 polling locations throughout Utah. It was inspiring to not only see the dedication of these undergraduate students, but the willingness of voters to participate in this learning experience.

In the month before Election Day, my entire life became consumed in the Exit Poll: traveling from Southern Utah University to Weber State University, training over 600 volunteers on how to be effective pollsters, organizing groups for 130 different polling locations, sending and replying to hundreds of e-mails, and maintaining communication between professors, students, and classmates. Though the project was more time-consuming and difficult than I could have possibly imagined, I wouldn’t trade the experience I gained for anything.

―Katherine Westmoreland

It was an extraordinary opportunity to participate in doing something that most colleges students don’t have the opportunity to do. I worked in managing the exit poll headquarters on Election Day and it was non-stop action as we tried to make sure that everything went well. This was one of the best experiences of my undergraduate years.

―David Sturgess

Participating in the Utah Colleges Exit poll was one of the most challenging experiences of my college career. As a member of the questionnaire committee, I helped write and design the questionnaires for Election Day. I also volunteered my computer skills to write all of the Stata code for the election night broadcast data system. Like I said, all this was very challenging. However, I also think this experience was definitely worth the challenge. I gained a lot of valuable experience in public opinion research and data analysis in a real-world setting. Definitely worth it.

―Robbie Richards
BYUPAS had the opportunity to host the most successful event in its history, an Election Night Party. The event drew a crowd of easily over 500 people, as students and faculty, both from BYU and elsewhere, came together to enjoy pizza, popcorn, and the Presidential Election results. The Varsity Theatre was packed beyond capacity, and the line to get into the event wound through the hallways of the Wilkinson Student Center. As CNN continued to predict either Obama or Romney as the winners for various states, Obama and Romney fans within the crowd burst into loud applause and cheering, until the final prediction, that Obama would be reelected, was announced. This announcement was met with mixed responses, but nonetheless excited a loud cheering section of Obama supporters. Writers and photographers from local news stations as well as national media sources, such as ABC and the Washington Post, attended. Cameras and microphones could be seen scattered throughout the theatre, interviewing both Romney and Obama-supporting students and professors. The BYUPAS goal of getting more BYU students involved in such a critical matter of importance was most certainly achieved, and interest in the club itself is growing rapidly at this time.

For more information, or to stay up to date on events hosted by the BYU Political Affairs Society, be sure to visit our Facebook page, which can be found by searching for BYU Political Affairs Society on Facebook.