

Teaching American Politics during an Election Year

Dennis L. Plane

Based on a Bookend Seminar presented on February 11, 2009.

I would like to thank everyone for coming today. As you might guess, one of the biggest thrills for a professor of American politics is to teach during a presidential election year. I'm here today to talk with you about my approach for using the election as a teaching tool. I was fortunate that the 2008 presidential election turned out to be far more captivating, dramatic, and historic than most, and that young people showed more interest in this election than they had in any other election in recent history. I was also fortunate to be able to send students to the Democratic National Convention in Denver, the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis/St. Paul, and the presidential inauguration in Washington, D.C. But my use of the election as a teaching tool was not limited to these three excellent experiential learning opportunities, as I will explain in more detail shortly.

First, I would like to discuss what I hoped to accomplish in using the election as a teaching tool during the 2008 presidential election season. I would also like to point out that several of my goals were more ambitious than simply reaching out to those students who were formally enrolled in my courses; I hoped to engage a broad spectrum of Juniata students who might otherwise be happy to sit on the sidelines. Thus, my first primary goal was to boost student interest in the election across the campus. Second, because I believe our political system would be better—more democratic—if young people participated at the same rate as older Americans, I hoped to move students beyond mere interest and into action. That is, getting students to think, talk, and debate about the election wasn't enough; I wanted them to participate and vote. My third goal was to provide some meaningful experiential education opportunities for students. This meant getting students out of the classroom and into the field. Reading about the excitement of a national nominating convention is one thing, but experiencing it in person is another. My final goal was to give students a taste of what careers in politics might be like. Keep in mind that most people working in politics are not politicians, and I wanted my students to appreciate the wide range of potential careers.

While teaching during the 2009 presidential election year, I was also motivated by a secondary goal: I wanted to get Juniata College some quality free media coverage. Quite simply, if my programs benefit both the students and the college, then I am more likely to get support for similar experiences during the 2012 presidential election.

THE PRIMARY ELECTION

The formal start of the presidential election is the series of primaries and caucuses that are integral to the nomination process and are traditionally kicked off with the Iowa caucuses and the New Hampshire primary. (Of course, the informal start to the presidential election is typically the first day after the last presidential election, but that's for another presentation entirely.) At this point of the election season, the public is mostly tuned out and only the media, political junkies, and residents of New Hampshire and Iowa are paying attention. To boost student interest in the nomination process, I created a game I called the "Super Tuesday Spectacular" that was modeled after the ubiquitous March Madness office pools. Students were recruited to play through their politics classes and through the *Announcements*. Faculty were also recruited to play and encouraged to distribute the game sheets to their students. The idea was simple: each player predicted which candidate would win each of the nominating contests held in the twenty-one states on so-called "Super Tuesday," which was February 5, 2008. The person with the most correct picks would win a \$75 gift card to Sheetz [a local convenience store], something that students seem to find strangely valuable. A total of sixty-three students and eight faculty members participated and the winner was our very own Dr. Emil Nagengast. (I should note, however, that I was in Guatemala on Super Tuesday for the adoption of our daughter, Rosemary, and I left Emil in charge of collecting the ballots from under my door on the morning of the election. Emil assures me that his ballot was indeed completed on time and before the voting had already taken place, but I have no way of verifying his claim.)

To move beyond stimulating interest to stimulating voter turnout, I engaged in several strategies designed to make it easier for students to register to vote. Forty-nine states require voter registration and forty-two of these states require that the process be completed considerably in advance of the election. In Pennsylvania, voters must register thirty days beforehand. As you know, getting students to do anything thirty days in advance is a tremendous hurdle. (I can't get my students to turn in their assignments on time, let alone thirty days early.) Voter registration is especially burdensome for students because they must either register at their campus address (which they generally view as temporary) and vote in an unfamiliar precinct, or register at their hometown address and vote by absentee ballot using rules that are arcane, complicated, and must be exercised with considerable forethought. Thus, most students most of the time, simply do not vote. Because it is easier for students to vote in person on Election Day using their campus address (a right the U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed) and because Pennsylvania is a battleground state where the results of the election are more likely to make a difference in the nationwide outcome (due to winner-take-all features of the nominating process and the Electoral College), I typically encourage students to register and vote at their campus address.

To increase voter registration (and therefore voter turnout), I taught my students about the voter registration process and handed out voter registration applications to interested students in class. I then offered to collect any completed applications for those who wanted to register in Huntingdon County and hand deliver them to the Courthouse, saving students the hassle of finding the correct address and the cost of the postage. (For a generation of students hooked on texting and email, sending anything through the United States Postal Service feels especially burdensome.) I also worked with the College Registrar, Athena Frederick, to distribute voter registration applications to interested students through a display in her office. (This helps the College comply with a 1998 amendment to the Higher Education Act that requires colleges like Juniata to distribute voter registration materials at least 120 days prior to all federal elections.) And finally, I had a student assistant create a billboard in the Politics wing of Good Hall that contained voter registration applications and instructions for how students should fill them out.

There are some indications that these efforts yielded modest success. According to public records, from the start of the school year to the thirty-day voter registration cut-off (known as the “closing date”), one hundred twenty-three citizens registered to vote using the College address, 1700 Moore St., as their residence. In addition, an unknown number of Juniata students were likely motivated to register at their off-campus or hometown address. Of course, it is impossible to know how many of these students would have registered to vote regardless of my efforts, but I like to think that I encouraged at least some additional students to register who otherwise would not have bothered. The ultimate measure of success, I suppose, is not voter registration, but voter turnout. Public records indicate that on the day of Pennsylvania’s primary election, April 22, 2008, eighty-six citizens who were registered to vote at 1700 Moore St. cast a ballot in either the Democratic or Republican primary. This result is fairly encouraging considering that John McCain had sewn up the Republican nomination weeks earlier, that state law prohibits students who register as independents from participating in primary elections, that such elections have notoriously low turnout, and that young voters are less likely to vote than older voters. Nonetheless, I would have liked to see even greater participation by our students in the 2008 Pennsylvania primary.

THE NATIONAL POLITICAL CONVENTIONS

The next major opportunities for student learning came with the national nominating conventions sponsored by the two major political parties. The Democrats held their convention at the end of August in Denver and the Republicans held their convention in early September in Minneapolis/St. Paul. I had had some great experiences back in 2004 when I took a group of Gallaudet students to the Democratic National Convention in Boston for John Kerry’s nomination. The program was organized by The Washington Center, a nonprofit educational organization that facilitates student internships in

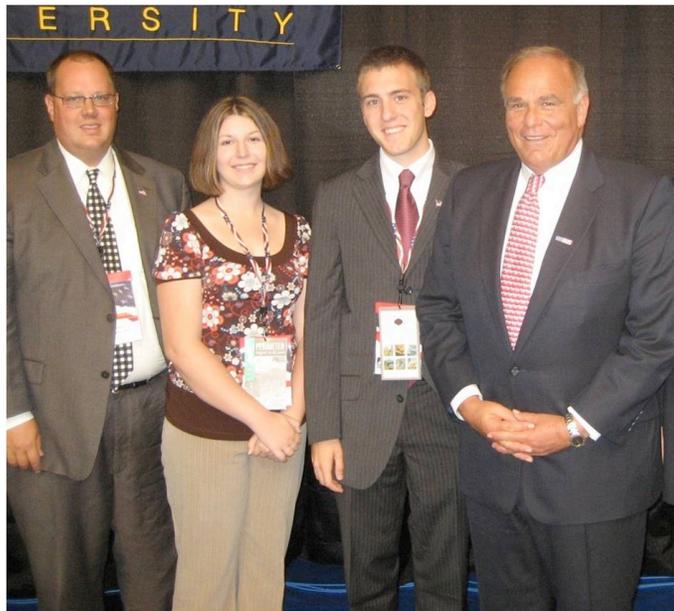
Washington, D.C. (including internships for Juniata students) and runs various academic seminars. When I came to Juniata, I knew I wanted to organize similar experiences for my students here. Thus, I made arrangements for eight students to attend one of The Washington Center's two-week convention programs. To ensure that the program was affordable, I was able to secure some funding from Career Services and from the Provost's Office. Students would earn two credits for successfully completing the program.

About twenty students applied for the program. I was surprised that all applicants expressed a preference to attend the Democratic convention over the Republican convention. I think several factors contributed to this outcome: Obama energized young voters in a way that John McCain did not; at the time the applications were due, it appeared that the Democratic Party might hold its first brokered convention in years, since neither Hillary Clinton nor Barack Obama had yet collected enough delegates to be declared the presumptive nominee; the Democratic convention was going to be historic, with either the first woman presidential candidate or the first African-American candidate; and attending the Republican program would require that students miss the first two weeks of the semester, while attending the Democratic convention would require missing only the first week. In fact, even students whom I knew were die-hard Republicans had applied to attend the Democratic convention rather than the Republican convention! After a little persuasion that the Republican convention would also be spectacular (fewer interns, same fanfare, and a better opportunity to schmooze with political big-wigs), two exceptional Republican students, Lindsey Lanzendorfer and Emily Hauser had a change of heart and made plans to head to Minneapolis for the Republican convention program. I made plans to head off with the other six students to Denver for the Democratic counterpart.

Each convention was a week-long extravaganza, while each academic seminar organized by The Washington Center was a two-week program with hundreds of student participants representing colleges from around the country. The schedule of events for both academic seminars was chock-a-block. Each day's program began at 8:30 a.m. with speakers including elected officials, interest group representatives, behind-the-scenes convention organizers, journalists, and political scientists. Afternoons and evenings were filled with small group discussions, writing assignments, fieldwork placements, various receptions and events, and (of course) the party nominating conventions themselves.

THE DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION

A noteworthy speaker at the Democratic convention program in Denver was Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell. He spoke about the need for Barack Obama to reach out to Hillary Clinton's supporters. (Rendell had been an outspoken advocate for Hillary Clinton during the primary and was somewhat awkwardly straddling his allegiances to the Clintons and to the Democratic Party.)



Dennis Plane, Sarah Dotter, and Jordan Yeagley with Gov. Ed Rendell after his presentation to Washington Center students.

One afternoon event during the first week was a motivational address for college Democrats given by Howard Dean, Democratic National Committee Chair. Another early event was a reception sponsored by The Washington Center that gave students a sample of what to expect at the various events they might be attending in the days to come. The students attended the reception dressed in professional attire, as they were throughout the two-week program. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, learning how to dress professionally is important as students transition from the college environment (where sleepwear is often acceptable) to a professional one (where sleepwear will get you fired). On the first day, I had one student show up with the vents in his right-off-the-rack suit still sewn together; I'd much rather him learn that lesson from me during the program than during his first job interview. In addition, professional attire is helpful for gaining access to events and credibility while at the events. Part of the program is learning how to schmooze, network, and gain access—vital skills for those interested in a career in politics.



The Juniata contingency at a reception at Mile High Stadium hosted by The Washington Center. Left to right: Jess Kline, Sarah Dotter, Bennett Rea, Zach Gordon, Joe Lockwood (St. Francis University), Seth Fox, Jordan Yeagley, and Dennis Plane.

During the second week, the students' afternoons were occupied by various "fieldwork assignments" (best described as mini-internships). In addition, those who had obtained tickets (called "credentials") to the convention attended the official ceremonies if they did not have a conflict with their fieldwork. Students were also largely on their own to make plans (and receive invitations) to the various official and unofficial parties and receptions that comprise the pre- and après-convention scene, which—of course—is where much of the real politicking takes place.

The students were evaluated in part through two written assignments: a daily blog and an op-ed. The blog was intended to be like a journal, where students could reflect on their experiences and make connections between their textbook understanding of American politics and their real-world experiences. This is, of course, the essence of experiential learning. Students posted their blog entries on the Juniata webpage, which enabled friends, family, and the Juniata community to follow their experiences as they unfolded. The op-eds served as a short (but challenging) writing assignment that could realistically be completed during the program and that got students to think analytically about contemporary political issues.

In an effort to gain publicity for the College, I had made arrangements with John Wall, Juniata's director of media relations, to review the op-eds and send out for possible publication those that seemed promising. This turned out to be a huge success and resulted in the publication of nine different op-eds. Each of the eight student participants had his or her piece published in at least one newspaper, often in the

student's hometown, and an op-ed I wrote as an example for the students was published in Huntingdon's *Daily News*. John Wall was also tremendously successful at getting publicity for the program in the *Altoona Mirror* before we even left campus. The *Mirror* published an extensive front-page story featuring local students Jess Kline and Lindsey Lanzendorfer, and their upcoming journey to the Democratic and Republican conventions, respectively.

For many students, the heart of their experience was their fieldwork assignment. These were essentially week-long volunteer gigs that often entailed hands-on learning, late nights, and access to the convention hall. Because these experiences were arranged by the well-connected Washington Center, students often received prime placements that they would not have been able to receive on their own. At the Democratic National Convention, Bennett Rea worked grueling hours for Fox News; Jess Kline wrote several articles for *Roll Call*, a prestigious Capitol Hill newspaper; Jordan Yeagley and Sarah Dotter volunteered for Tavis Smiley's show on PBS; and Seth Fox and Zach Gordon were placed with security at the Colorado Convention Center, the venue for some of the official meetings connected to the convention. (The convention itself was held at the nearby Pepsi Center).

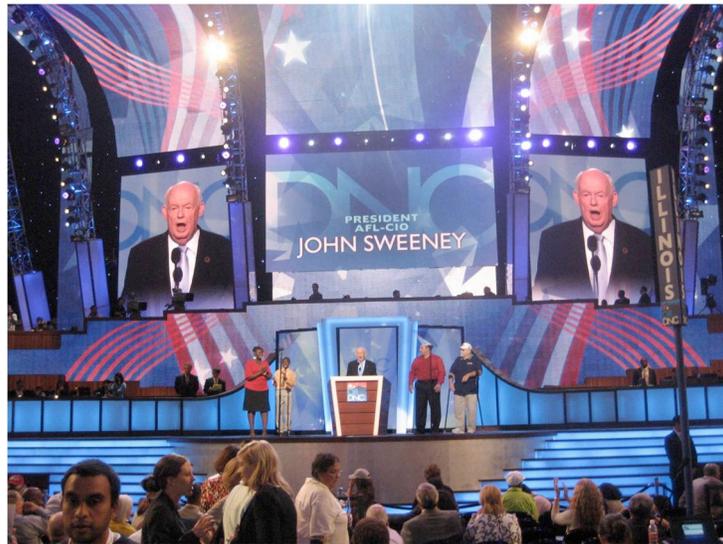


Seth Fox gives a tour of the Pepsi Center to a group of political tourists on the day before the hall was closed for its pre-convention security sweep.

Each fieldwork placement had some advantages and disadvantages, but all students were able to gain access to the convention hall on at least one occasion, and several had access on multiple occasions. The fieldwork assignments also allowed students to see various careers in politics. As with an internship, sometimes the best experiences are those that make you realize that you are not interested in pursuing a

career in a particular field after all. Indeed, this was the experience of at least one Juniata student, who later told me that politics was intriguing to study, but simply too fast-paced and stressful to pursue as a career. I view this as a success; it's much better to find that out now than after you've landed your first job.

The convention itself was spread out over four evenings. Each afternoon began with a series of boring speeches given by various important-but-below-the-radar players in Democratic politics, such as the AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, whose image I captured with my digital camera while on the floor of the convention hall. In order to get this picture, I had to have a coveted "floor" credential, which I borrowed from a colleague at another university who has a former student in Democratic politics. My colleague used the floor pass during the prime time addresses given by Hillary Clinton, but allowed me to use it during a few of the less noteworthy addresses.



AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney, addresses an inattentive audience during his not-quite-prime-time speaking slot.

For the prime-time speakers, I was, of course, relegated to the nosebleed, behind-the-stage seats. Yet the energy in the room meant that all seats were good seats that night (even if some seats were more equal than others).

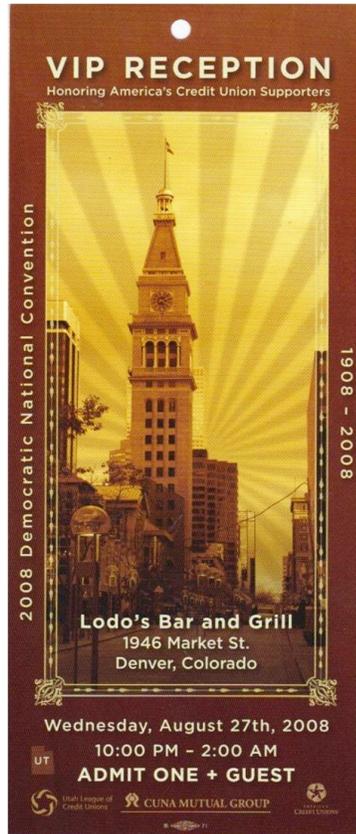


After failing to win the nomination, Hillary Clinton nearly steals the show while backing Barack Obama, the presumptive nominee, during her prime-time speaking slot.

Of course, the convention is as much about the social events, where delegates and political insiders mingle, as it is about the speeches. These events usually involve copious food, drink, music, and opportunities to hob-knob with important Democrats. One such event was the official convention kick-off party, the “New Orleans All-Star Jam-Balaya.” It featured an all-star cast of New Orleans musicians, including the legendary Irma Thompson, and an Obama Ale brewed by the Half Moon Bay Brewing Company. I arrived at this event without a ticket, but soon found someone I knew who had extras. (He was a Washington Center student from another college who was in my small group and had a fieldwork placement with the Pennsylvania delegation.)

Another such event was a reception called “A Blue Night in Denver” that was sponsored by the Blue Dog Coalition, a group of moderate House Democrats. Once again, I arrived at this party without an invitation, but (after my group of politics professors was turned away twice) we found a third entrance where one of our former students was working the door. She let us in, but we were then asked to pay \$30 each. We thought this was odd since such events are typically free, but we paid for the ticket nonetheless. As it turns out, we had stumbled upon the VIP entrance for members of Congress. Why would such VIPs need to pay to enter? It turns out that Members of Congress are not allowed to accept free tickets to such events due to ethics rules that prevent gifts to legislators. To get around this, they had created a special entrance for lawmakers where they could pay a nominal fee to avoid any violation of ethics rules. As a student of American politics, I found this fascinating.

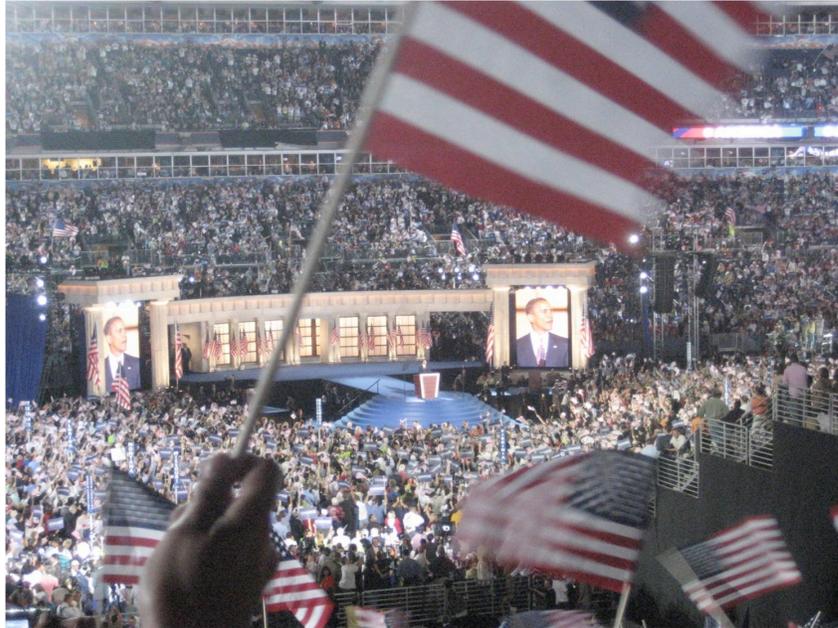
One final social event that I want to discuss was a reception “honoring America’s credit union supporters.” In other words, it was a party sponsored by an interest group that lobbies on behalf of credit unions. I had received tickets for several students and myself when I attended the Utah delegation breakfast that morning. Delegates typically receive invitations to more events than they can attend and, for some reason, a party to celebrate credit unions didn’t make it to the top of most delegates’ to-do list. Their tickets, then, were ours for the asking.



An invitation to a reception sponsored by a credit union interest group.

Of course, the capstone event of the week was the acceptance speech given by Barack Obama on the forty-fifth anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. The event had been moved to Mile High Stadium to help accommodate the throngs of supporters who had made the pilgrimage to witness the historic nomination of the first African-American presidential nominee of a major political party. (As a Denver native and lifetime fan of the Denver Broncos, I find it hard to call the stadium by its “new” official name, INVESCO Field at Mile High.) The six Juniata students and I were fortunate to have an opportunity to attend this event, as The Washington Center had arranged for those who did not have “community credentials” to volunteer during the morning in order to gain credentials to

attend the headliner's address in the evening. Immediately after the convention ended and before I left Mile High Stadium, I called George Germann from the *Daily News* to give my impressions of the evening, ensuring some additional media coverage for Juniata.

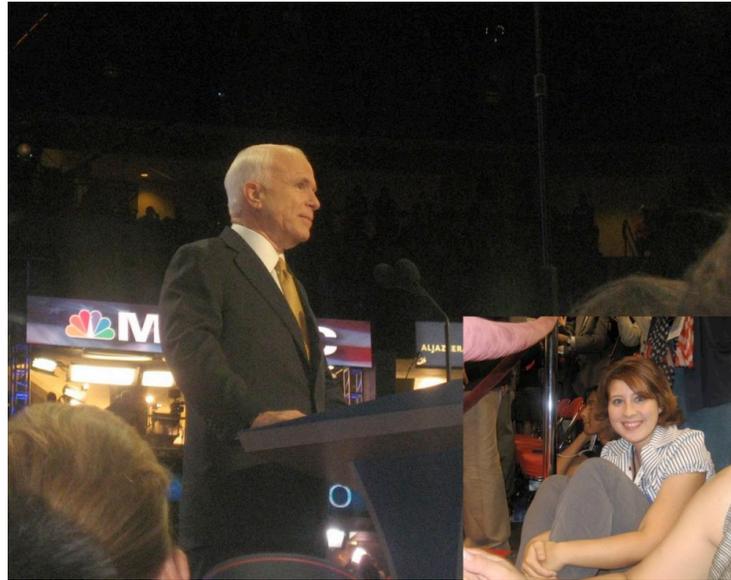


Barack Obama accepts the Democratic nomination in front of thousands of supporters at Mile High Stadium in Denver, Colorado.

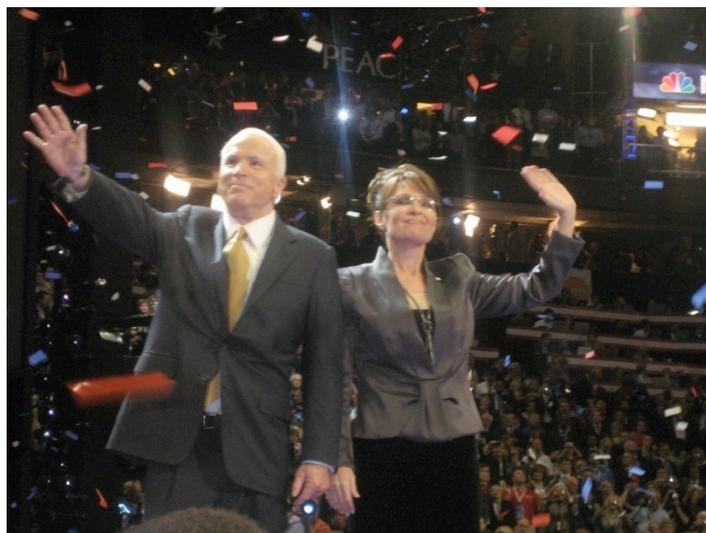
THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

The two students who attended the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis/St. Paul also had amazing experiences, and both were quite happy with their decision to head to Minnesota instead of Denver. Lindsey Lanzendorfer completed her fieldwork with the McClatchy Company, owner of several newspapers including the *Centre Daily Times*. Lindsey was given tremendous responsibility and really grew from the experience. On her first day, she thought she was showing up for a simple orientation. Instead, she was told something like, “go interview some delegates from Alaska about Sarah Palin and report back to us by 5:00 p.m.” There she was in an unfamiliar city with no experience, no car, and no information about who the elusive delegates were or where to find them. Yet she took initiative, rose to the challenge, and made such a positive impression on her supervisors that by the end of her fieldwork experience, she and the other McClatchy interns were asked to write a piece of their own choosing. They implemented the project from start to finish—selecting a topic, conducting research, interviewing subjects, and writing the piece. The result was an article titled “McCain has young supporters, too” co-bylined by Lindsey that ran in several newspapers across the country and on numerous websites. Emily

Hauser also had a good experience working with the European Photopress Agency. Both Lindsey and Emily had amazing access to the convention hall via their fieldwork assignments. In fact, Lindsey's press credential granted her access to the big acceptance speech by John McCain. She was literally just feet away from McCain as he became the official Republican nominee for president.



Composite image showing Lindsey Lanzendorfer's position when she captured this picture of John McCain accepting the Republican Party nomination.



Above: Lindsey Lanzendorfer's prime perch also enabled her to capture this picture of John McCain and Sarah Palin during the traditional balloon and confetti drop marking the close of the convention.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

While the conventions were great experiences for those who attended, I also wanted students who could not attend to have some first-hand experiences in the political process. At the same time, I wanted the learning process that began with the conventions to continue through the fall election season, and I wanted students of different political persuasions to dialogue with each other. Thus, I designed a special topics course that focused on the general election and included the students who attended either of the conventions and about ten other interested students. The course closely followed the election as it unfolded, from the conventions, through the debates, up to Election Day, and concluding with the post-election analysis and commentary. I allowed the course to unfold organically as the campaign did, selecting readings by journalists and academics according to what topics were at the center of the election during any given week. A core component of this course was also a requirement that students complete at least twenty hours of election-related activities, or what I called fieldwork. Students could volunteer for a party or candidate, attend campaign rallies or events, participate in debate watch parties, help with voter registration drives, or engage in any number of other election-related activities. The fieldwork component could be partisan or non-partisan and could involve organizing, participating, or simply attending. The bottom line was that students had to get out of the classroom and into the field. I kept track of the students' activities by reading their journals, which were submitted weekly.

I also wanted to encourage students who were not in my class to become engaged in the election. One way I accomplished this was through another March-Madness-style election contest. This time, participants were asked to pick the Electoral College winner in each state, as well as the winner in seven of the most hotly contested Senate races. One lesson I learned from the 2000 presidential election was to always include a date and time at which the results will be tabulated, with any as-yet-undecided races excluded. It was good that I had included such a clause, for if I had waited until all the election returns were in, we still wouldn't know who had won the contest, as the outcome of the closely contested Minnesota Senate race between Norm Coleman and Al Franken is still in extra innings. This contest included sixty-three student participants and twelve faculty participants. I collected the ballots myself this time and Emil didn't win. Do I sense a pattern here?

To encourage voter registration during the general election, I advised several students who were organizing voter registration drives. These drives were typically bipartisan or nonpartisan, even if they were coordinated by Obama or McCain supporters. I also worked to establish good rapport with Sandy McNeal, the voter registrar for Huntingdon County. One thing I did was recruit a student intern to help in the County Commissioner's Office with various election administration duties. In general, the voter registrar was very helpful to students who were registering to vote, as I believe she was helpful with all

citizens who wanted to register. Once again, I also distributed voter registration applications in my courses and encouraged my colleagues to do the same.

The evidence suggests that these voter registration efforts were successful. There were a total of 399 new voter registrations at 1700 Moore St. between January 1, 2008 and November 4, 2008. There are currently 567 voters registered at Juniata College who are between the ages of 18 and 21. (There are also a considerable number of voters 22 years or older who are officially registered at the college but are unlikely to be current Juniata students, as official voter registration rolls are seldom purged to remove students when they graduate.) These numbers do not include students who may be registered at their off-campus or hometown addresses. The evidence also suggests that the bump in voter registration translated to an increase in voter turnout on Election Day. A total of 952 voters cast ballots in Huntingdon's Fifth Ward (the precinct that includes Juniata College), which is 469 additional voters over the 2004 presidential election—a 93 percent increase! While I can't take credit for that entire surge—Barack Obama deserves considerable credit, I think—I would like to believe that my efforts contributed to the increase.

THE PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION

In the waning days of the presidential election, I began making arrangements for the final experiential learning activity of the 2008 presidential election: the inauguration of the new president and vice-president—whether it would be Barack Obama and Joe Biden or John McCain and Sarah Palin. The Washington Center also runs an excellent academic seminar that coincides with the presidential inauguration and I reserved eleven spaces for Juniata students, with the College picking up about three-fourths of the cost and the students chipping in the rest. Due to the historic nature of the Obama victory and his appeal to young citizens, I was overwhelmed with students interested in attending. With the help of the Internship Committee, I selected those eleven students who would be able to attend. Participants included Democrats and Republicans, freshmen and seniors, and politics and biology students.

Like the convention programs, the inauguration program was about two weeks long and overlapped with the first few days of the semester. During the first week, the schedule included speakers in the morning, small group meetings in the early afternoon, site visits in the late afternoon, and various activities in the evenings. The site visits for the Juniata students represented a wide range of careers found in the nation's capital: the Chinese Embassy, the World Resources Institute (an environmental think tank and interest group), the Washington bureau office of McClatchy newspapers, the Capitol, and the Federal Election Commission. The Capitol visit was on Thursday, January 15, 2009, and crammed full of historic moments. In the Senate gallery, students saw the farewell addresses of Senators Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden (each of whom was warmly congratulated by John McCain), passage of the first bill of the Obama

administration (the Lily Ledbetter Fair Pay Act), and the swearing in ceremony for Senator Roland Burris conducted by Dick Cheney in his ceremonial role as President of the Senate. Burris was appointed under controversial circumstances to take the seat vacated by President-Elect Obama. (In my numerous visits to the Senate gallery over the years, I had never before witnessed the Vice President of the United States execute his ceremonial duties as President of the Senate.) Following these events, the students met with House Representative Bill Shuster for a question-and-answer session.

Left to right: Dennis Plane, Amin Khoshnevisan, Nicole Staricek, David Sill, Tiereney Miller, John Gillette, Rep. Bill Shuster, Danielle Rohar, Andrew Medlyn, Felecia Strauch, Riley Downs, Cheryl Mariani, and Martin Poveda Amarfil





The crowd for the “We Are One” concert stretched from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument, a harbinger of the number of people who would later pack the Mall for the swearing-in ceremony.

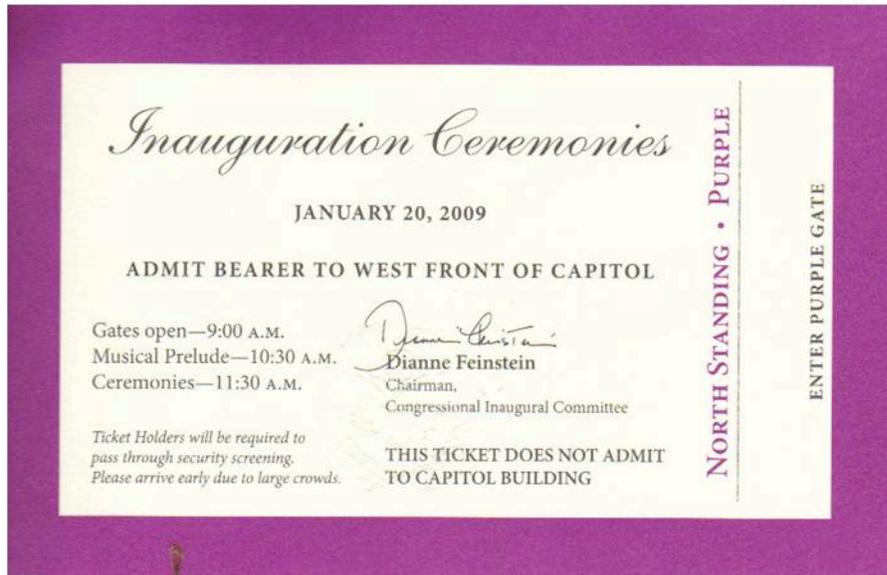
The first official event of the inauguration was the star-studded “We Are One” concert that was held at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday, January 18, 2009. As I walked to this event with thousands of other Americans, I began truly to appreciate the extent to which we were witnessing history in the making. The sleepy government town that had greeted us the week before was gone. In its place was an undersized town bursting at its seams, the epicenter of massive political migration. The feeling in the air—the sense of history and kinship we shared with those around us—was, I imagine, akin to the feeling experienced by those who had witnessed Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech at the same place some forty-five years prior. D.C. was a magnet for citizens of every age and color; it was part political Mecca and part Woodstock. Quite simply, it was a place that many felt they must go. The Juniata contingent was no exception.



Above: Cheryl Mariani with Gov. Ed Rendell at the Pennsylvania Democratic Party's "Yes We Did" celebration.

The Juniata students were also invited to volunteer at the Pennsylvania delegation's "Yes We Did" victory party, which was held the evening before the inauguration. In exchange for help setting up and collecting tickets, our students were allowed to join the festivities.

Of course, the hottest ticket in Washington was for any of the reserved areas for Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony. Interest in this particular inauguration had been so high that the organizers decided to open the entire length of the National Mall, from the Lincoln Memorial to the swearing-in platform on the back side of the Capitol. Through the assistance of Representative Shuster's office, Huntingdon County Commissioner Connie Kough Pittenger, and Darlee Sill (father of David Sill, one of the student participants), I was able to secure tickets to the reserved section of the swearing-in ceremony for all interested students. After battling with the crowds and bottlenecks caused by an inept security plan, we somehow made our way to the reserved section and quickly forgot the trauma of the journey. (Others, however, were not so fortunate and scrambled for alternative venues to watch the historic transition. Connie Kough Pittenger, for example, sought refuge in a nearby Irish pub, unable to make it through security in time.)



My official “purple ticket” granting standing access to the northwest Capitol lawn.

Standing on the Capitol lawn listening to the chief justice swear in the first African-American president in our nation’s history was awe inspiring. Words cannot do justice in expressing the depth of emotion I, or my students, felt on that day, so I won’t try.



Left to right: Martin Poveda Amarfil, Tiereney Miller, David Sill, and Riley Downs as they wait in the cold for the start of the historic swearing-in ceremony.

As with the convention programs, the students worked with John Wall to draft and revise an op-ed related to the inauguration or the new presidential administration. Four students had their piece published by their hometown newspaper and I argued in an op-ed published by the *Daily News* that the costs of the inauguration were actually quite small and served as an appropriate economic stimulus. In addition, some of the Juniata students were interviewed for news stories that were later broadcast on local television stations in Pittsburgh and Johnstown.

FOUR MORE YEARS

In sum, I believe that I have done a reasonable job at attaining those goals I set out at the beginning of the election season. Student interest and participation were comparatively quite high, and I like to believe that I helped contribute to the uptick. In addition, students had meaningful opportunities to use the election as a learning tool and to sample various careers that are appropriate for those with an interest in politics. And we had fun and got good publicity in the process. I think it was a smashing success. But it would not have been such a success had it not been for the support of several people I would now like to thank. Special thanks go to the Provost Jim Lakso, President Tom Kepple, Darwin Kysor in Career Services, and Emil Nagengast, chair of the Politics Department, for making funds available to help ensure that students had an affordable experience. I would like to thank John Wall for his assistance with the op-eds and other efforts to cash in on some publicity. I would like to thank Rep.

Bill Shuster, Commissioner Connie Kough Pittenger, and Darlee Sill for their help in securing tickets to the swearing-in ceremony. I would also like to thank The Washington Center, and especially Kathleen Regan for her help in getting our students involved with the Pennsylvania delegations at both the Democratic National Convention and the inauguration. And finally, I would like to thank my colleagues for participating in the March-Madness-style contests and for encouraging your students to do the same, for assisting with various voter registration efforts, for being tolerant when students missed your classes to attend one of the programs, and for doing your part to get students engaged in the election. I couldn't have done it without your help.

Thanks for coming. I'll see you again in four more years!