

Good luck at regionals cross country!

BC poll shows tight race for president

National polls show a tantalizingly close presidential race between Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, and a Brevard College survey conducted this week reveals a similarly tight race—at least, among students.

Among students registered to vote who responded to the Clarion’s survey, Mitt Romney has a one-point advantage of 43 percent, compared to the president’s 42 percent—a difference of just two votes out of the 206 responses to the question “Who did or would you vote for” in this year’s presidential election.

Romney held a similar slight advantage among students who had voted early, either by mail-in absentee ballots or by early one-stop voting—again, a difference of just two votes.

The closeness of the vote among students is reflective of North Carolina’s status this year, as in 2008, as a so-called “battleground” state—one of the handful of states in which polls are close enough that they could swing the election one way or the other in the all-important electoral college tally which determines the actual winner of presidential elections. Out of the 132 students registered to vote in North Carolina who took the survey, Obama holds just a two-vote advantage.

“It somewhat mirrors the general public,” said Ralph Hamlett, associate professor of political communication at the college. National tracking polls since the first presidential debate on Oct. 3 show that the race between Obama and Romney has narrowed to a virtual tie, with Romney even holding a slight edge in several polls.

The biggest reason for the tie among students at Brevard, however, can be seen when the polling is broken down by the students’ year at the college. First-year students went overwhelmingly for Romney, 45 votes compared to just 33 for Obama, whereas for seniors, the opposite was true—seniors in the survey preferred Obama over Romney 28-17, a difference of 11 votes.

For sophomores and juniors answering the survey, the difference in each case was a single vote in favor of Romney.

According to Hamlett, the disparity between freshmen and seniors suggests that younger students are not as politically

aware or engaged in the issues that other polls and studies have shown matter greatly to them—especially social issues such as gay marriage, abortion rights, and women’s issues in general. Several students mentioned these issues specifically as key factors in their presidential choices—and in every instance, students who raised them said they preferred Obama.

“I think basic human rights trump taxes,” one student, a senior, wrote on the survey form.

Also important to respondents were education, health care, and the economy and taxes, each of which ranked on average higher than 4 on a scale of 1-5 on matters significant to voters in this year’s election. Foreign policy—including terrorism and the war in Afghanistan—was ranked at 3.96, followed by environmental concerns at 3.86 and immigration ranking lowest at 3.29.

Among Romney supporters, the key write-in issue had to do with the size and appropriate role of government. “Growing the government does not produce the right kind of jobs,” one person wrote on the survey.

Faculty and staff were also invited to

take the survey, and their responses were a stark contrast to those by students—among Brevard College employees, Obama took a commanding lead of 82 percent to Romney’s 18 percent.

When all results, from students, staff and faculty at the college, are averaged together, Barack Obama had a double-digit lead of 51 percent to 38 percent for Mitt Romney. “Other” took 3 percent of the vote, and 8 percent of respondents remain undecided.

The survey was conducted Monday through Thursday of this week to students in BCE classes and to faculty and staff via an electronic form. All told, The Clarion received 329 responses to the survey, of which 267 respondents—81 percent—identified themselves as a registered voter. Among the 266 students who took the survey, 55 percent are registered to vote in North Carolina and another 24 percent are registered in another state. Roughly one in five students (21 percent) said they were not registered to vote.

The poll’s margin of error is plus or minus 3 percent, with a 95 percent standard deviation.

