

STATE AND LOCAL



President Barack Obama (left) and former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney will debate three times during the 2012 election. Image via polltco.com

What to Watch for in the Presidential Debates

Emily Hawkins, staff writer

Though media coverage of the presidential election has been going on for more than a year, the party conventions are now over and general election season can formally begin. The Republicans chose the former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney as their nominee, while the Democrats selected incumbent President Barack Obama. The two have the opportunity to debate three times: Oct. 3 with a domestic policy focus, Oct. 16 with a town hall format and both domestic and foreign policy questions and Oct. 22 with a foreign policy focus.

The vice presidential debate is set for Oct. 11 between Democratic current Vice President Joe Biden and Republican Rep. Paul Ryan. This debate will have questions about both foreign and domestic policy. Biden is known for his gaffe-prone personality and long tenure in the U.S. Senate, while Ryan is known for his controversial GOP budgets, including his Medicare plan, in the U.S. House. All vice presidential and presidential debates will be held at 9 p.m. eastern time.

Comparing the presidential candidates' strengths and weaknesses, Romney's strength is his private sector success as partner at Bain Capital which many believe will translate to high rates of job creation for the economy. Obama will have to counter this claim directly in the debates, as under Obama, the unemployment rate has decreased but stayed steadily around or above eight percent. Obama's strength

is his foreign policy and national security successes such as the killing of Osama Bin Laden and the ending of the wars. Neither Romney nor his running mate Ryan have much experience with foreign policy, so expect Romney to face some foreign policy questions. Both presidential candidates are expected to answer tough questions about the realistic value of many proposed policies. Romney has not given much detail about his tax plan to the public, namely never mentioning the loopholes he plans on closing in order to neutralize his planned tax cuts. And Obama has not given a clear answer on how his next four years will be more successful at reducing the country's high deficit.

The two should be prepared to face questions about their inconsistent, flip-flopping views on many policy areas. Obama changed his mind about the raising of the debt ceiling and how strict he believes immigration law should be, while Romney changed his views on healthcare and many social issues including abortion. Both have had inconsistent ideas about the legality of same-sex marriage.

A neutral commission plans the debates so the American people can expect a thorough and fair process, but most political scientists agree that neither side should get their hopes up. Historically, debates have not changed polls or election results drastically. The election will be held on Nov. 6 and the deadline to register to vote in North Carolina is Oct. 12.

Retention (continued from front page)

academic policies and procedures that impact student success. This year we are placing a particular emphasis on advising, and I hope that students will seek out their advisors and discover the advantages of working closely with a faculty member to plan their academic program." She asserts that "academics affect retention in several ways," explaining that "a student who is struggling with her course work may be unprepared or too discouraged to continue pursuing a degree. In addressing academic opportunities and success at Meredith, Dr. Gary Walton, Dean of Arts and Humanities, adds that professors have high "hopes and expectations that students will take advantage of resources provided by the faculty members." He notes that professors provide many resources for students, including syllabi, assignment sheets, Blackboard modules and office hours in order to provide academic mentoring for students and insure the academic success of enrolled students.

In addition to academic fit and success, Director of Financial Aid Kevin Michaelsen asserts that there is a correlation between retention and financial aid, noting that the Office of Financial Aid "works closely with Dr. Green to create a fair distribution of funds by taking into account the individual student's needs and personal situation." Unfortunately, "the Office of Financial Aid is on a limited budget in terms of institutional, state and federal funding that it can offer to students." In a March 27 article published by Lou Carlozo on Reuters.com, Carlozo establishes that the price for "a four-year private college education tripled in price between 1980 and 2010...and that student loan debt for a bachelor's degree now averages more than \$23,000 per student borrower." He notes that "financial barriers play a key role in students' decisions to drop out of college. [...] Among adults age 18 to 34 who lack a bachelor's degree, two-thirds halted their education to support a family, 57 percent preferred to work and make money and 48 percent simply couldn't afford college."

Social and cultural fit also contribute to student retention and Vice President of Business and Finance Craig Barfield relates that everyone on campus has a role in how a student feels about the Meredith community. He notes that staff members in offices from Account-

ing to Security, Facility Services to the Dining Hall provide the best service possible and aim to create a friendly campus culture.

Regarding campus culture, Director of Student Leadership and Service Cheryl Jenkins marks the correlation between student involvement and a feeling of campus community that influences retention. She states that "Meredith College students who are involved in student organizations feel a stronger connection to our institution because it gives them a sense of belonging to a community and they feel 'ownership' of our college. By being a part of a student organization, a student has the opportunity to build lasting relationships, fulfill a passion, learn leadership skills, and make contributions to campus."

Student Government President Jade Rice personally supports Jenkins' statements, asserting that "being a part of the Student Government Association since my sophomore year has really helped me feel like I am a part of the Meredith Community. I have had the chance to meet so many students, faculty and staff that I would not have otherwise met. Not only does being involved help with connections and feeling like you are a part of something it is also a lot of fun!"

While Meredith is working to improve retention rates, Dr. Green notes that of traditional-aged students at Meredith 49 percent graduate in four years and 60 percent graduate in six years. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data illustrates that this is a higher four-year rate than at other local schools, where North Carolina State University had a 41 percent graduation rate for four years and a 73 percent graduation rate for six years, and William Peace University had a 23 percent graduation rate for four years and a 35 percent graduation rate for six years.

Looking beyond the numbers, Dr. Green adds that "the hopes of the strategic plan that is currently under consideration is that all students who enroll in Meredith will obtain a wonderful Meredith College experience in a reasonable amount of time and that these students upon graduation will be able to get their dream job or enter graduate school to achieve their professional and personal goals."

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