

Election 2004

Debates may be critical to youth and first-time voters' decision-making; National Campaign tallying responses from students at Debate Watches

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Editor in Chief

"This is a different group of kids than we had eight years ago," said George Taylor, professor of political science and public administration.

This election year, students are more in tune and more informed than the previous generation of first-time voters, according to Taylor.

Taylor brought the National Campaign for Political & Civic Engagement to Elon and directs students in adapting the national program to the local campus.

According to a Harvard University Institute of Politics survey, 62 percent of college students said they definitely plan to vote in this election. This engaged group of the registered college population is up 50 percent from college voter turnout in 2000.

The Institute of Politics also reports that 4 out of 10 young voters do not identify themselves

What to do Friday before you go out: Debate Watch

What:

A town hall style debate

When:

Friday, Oct. 8
9 - 10:30 p.m.

Where to catch it:

PBS (Channel 4)
CBS (Channel 9)
NBC (Channel 12)
FOX (Channel 8)
ABC (Channels 10,11)
FOX NEWS (Channel 40)
CNN (Channel 34)
MSNBC (Channel 59)
CSPAN (Channel 39)

The National Campaign will not host a formal Debate Watch Friday but will resume hosting group Debate Watches Oct. 13 for the final Presidential debate on domestic issues.

with a political party, and generally do not commit to voting for a particular candidate until late in the election year.

The presidential debates were helpful for first-time voters, according to responses from students attending the first Debate Watch.

"For the first time, I think they could see the candidates discussing the issues," Taylor said. "[Student moderators] had to cut two of the discussion groups off at 11:15 - almost no one left after the debate."

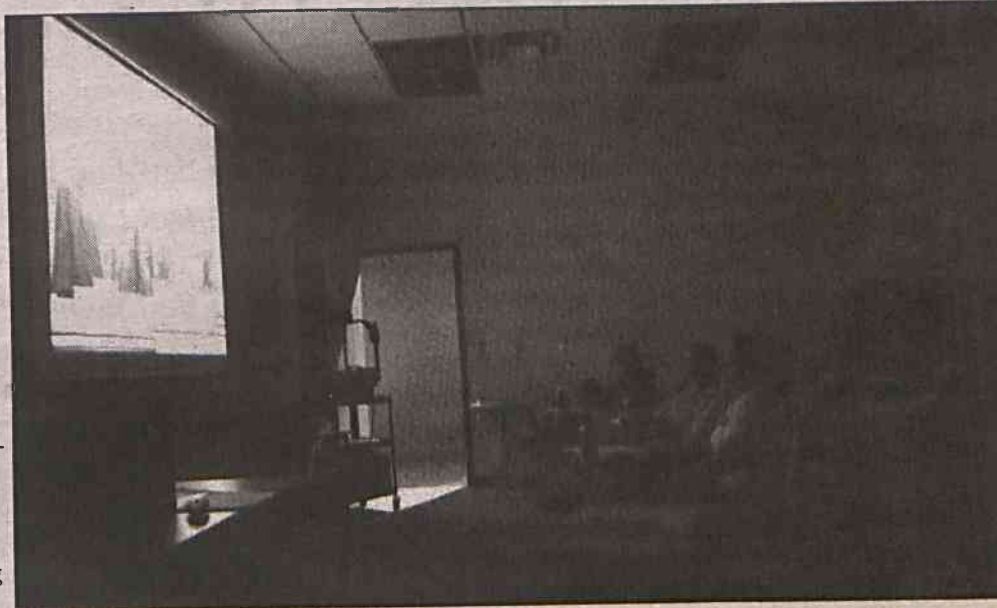
Students stayed in McEwen long after the debates had finished to discuss topics such as what issues they found helpful, which were irrelevant and whether or not the debates would affect the way they would vote.

Polls conducted following the first presidential debate cited some undecided voters deciding to vote for John Kerry, but none moving their vote to George W. Bush.

Does Taylor think this information is accurate? "I think the debates will change some people's minds," he said. Regardless of which candidate young voters mark on their ballots this fall, Taylor's goal and the driving purpose of the National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement is to get students voting.

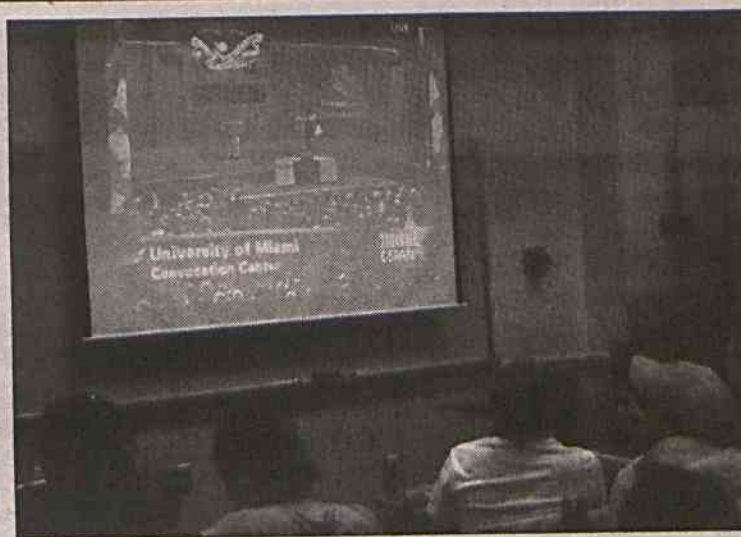
"If we can get them to vote for the first time, then they will probably be more engaged and buy into the voting thing," Taylor said.

The National Campaign has documented the registration of about 40 percent of the student body, the magic number they set last spring. But according to Taylor, the project isn't successful until that 40 percent returns a checked ballot.



Laura Hals / Photographer

More than 160 participants attended the first Debate Watch held by the National Campaign last Thursday. Students such as Jonathan Chapman, right, facilitated discussion among about 145 of those 160 students following the debate.



Students, faculty chosen to participate in campus debate

The Student Government Association and a supporting committee have chosen 12 individuals to prepare arguments for the campus-wide Presidential Election Issues Debate to be held at 7 p.m. on Oct. 21 in McKinnon Hall. Each individual will represent their respective parties in the debate of one of the three issues chosen by the student body, faculty and staff by vote in September. Issues chosen include the war in Iraq and terrorism, same-sex marriage and the economy. The debate will be open to the campus and will include a "Party with the Parties" following discussion, hosted by the SGA.

War / terrorism
Same-sex marriage
Economy
Captain

Republican
Jonathon Chuk
Jamie Falkenbury
Luke Wake
Katelyn Ealer

Democrat
Zack Lauritzen
Adam Smith
Kathleen Niple
Natasha Christensen

Independent
Matt Gendle
Martin Fowler
Stevan Miller
Ian Hull