



HISTORIC CHANGE

**RUN FOR THE WHITE HOUSE
ENERGIZES STUDENTS AND KEEPS
GRAND VALLEY EXPERTS IN THE NEWS**

— by Dottie Barnes

Hundreds of students, faculty and staff members cheered and hugged as they witnessed the historic presidential inauguration of Barack Obama at a campus-wide event on January 20 (see page 5 for more on this story). “America United: A Grand Valley Celebration” was held in the Fieldhouse Arena on the Allendale Campus. Remarks were made by President Thomas J. Haas; Jeanne Arnold, vice president for Inclusion and Equity; Gleaves Whitney, director of the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies; and faculty members Mark Richards and Louis Moore before the start of the inauguration.

Haas told the crowd he had just returned from Washington, D.C., and saw the preparation for the inauguration. “The preparation for this historic event really started many, many years ago, many decades ago, many centuries ago,” Haas said.

Whitney called the day “glorious for our nation” and told the crowd, “We are participants, not just witnesses of one of the most interesting and consequential developments in our nation’s history.”

A live Webcast of the speakers and a link to the inauguration was made available on Grand Valley’s homepage. In addition to the Allendale Campus, viewing locations were set up at the Eberhard Center, Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences, Holland Meijer Campus,

photo by Bernadine Carey-Tucker

Students gathered in Area 51 of the Kirkhof Center on election night to track the election results.



photo by Bernadine Carey-Tucker

Danielle Wiese (far left), assistant professor of communications, appears on the local ABC affiliate to give updates on the presidential race.

Muskegon Regional Center and Traverse City University Center.

Several Grand Valley students traveled to the nation's capital to watch the inaugural events, including four political science students who were selected to attend an academic seminar through The Washington Center. One of those students, Selma Tucker, a senior from Buchanan, was interviewed by the Washington ABC television affiliate. "We're enjoying the splendor this country is going through," said Tucker. "It's a moment that I'll share with my children, my grandchildren, and my parents. I'm just excited to take some of this home with me."

HISTORIC AND UNIQUE

The presidential election was unique in that both candidates were after the youth vote, and with nearly 24,000 students, Grand Valley had the right audience. The candidacy of Obama, along with the introduction of Republican vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin, sparked excitement around the country and on campus. Students were kept informed about the historic presidential race through a variety of speakers and campus events.

The power of young people in this election made it

distinctive. Whitney said young people were more tuned-in to the election than ever before. "Secretaries of state reported more young people registered to vote than ever in history," said Whitney. "Pollsters predicted 75 percent of young people would vote for one candidate, Barack Obama."

The Secretary of State's mobile van came to the Allendale Campus for two days and dozens of students registered to vote.

GV GOT OUT THE VOTE

Voting was made a little easier for Grand Valley students who registered to vote locally. The Student Senate provided a shuttle bus to transport students from the Allendale Campus to the Allendale precinct, the Second Christian Reformed Church on Lake Michigan Drive. About 500 students used the free shuttle service, comprising one-fourth of all votes cast at that precinct.

On election night, about 200 people filled Area 51 in the Kirkhof Center. Student Senate, College Republicans and College Democrats sponsored the event, offering students free food and a big screen to watch the election results.

Brad Yanalunas, a sophomore from Commerce

Township, said he voted for John McCain because he believed McCain had a better economic plan. Yanalunas said McCain ran a good campaign, but following Bush hurt him.

Jessica Carter, a senior from Grand Rapids, said she waited in line for two-and-a-half hours to vote. "I'm a woman and I'm black," said Carter. "This historic election made me believe I can be president if I want. New doors have suddenly opened up for me."

Janomia Smith, a senior from Detroit, said Obama represents change. "Obama understands the needs in middle class communities and represents the change that actually affects me," said Smith. "You have to understand your public and that's why he won."

IN THE NEWS

Grand Valley's News and Information Services office created an online election center, a Web site featuring faculty experts who offered insight on the election itself and on a wide range of topics related to the election including the economy, education and health care. These experts were routinely tapped by local and statewide media for expert analysis.

Faculty members from the political science department, including Erika King, Roger Moiles, Whitt Kilburn, Kevin den Dulk and Don Zinman, provided weekly audio soundbites on the Web site that were also used by area radio stations through the election season. They offered reaction to the conventions, weighed in on the debates and discussed what went right and wrong for each of the candidates.

"It was a tough year for Republicans," said King. "They were certainly at a disadvantage because of the struggling economy." As for John McCain's surprise pick of Sarah Palin as a runningmate, den Dulk, who

has done extensive research in the area of religion and politics, said McCain instantly picked up three to six million evangelical votes. "Evangelicals make up about 25 percent of the American population," said den Dulk. "In 2004, Bush got nearly 80 percent of evangelical voters and McCain needed those votes to win the election."

King and Moiles were regular guests on the local NBC affiliate's political talk show, "To The Point," and Danielle Wiese, assistant professor of communications, was tapped by the local ABC affiliate to provide weekly comments on the presidential race.

Wiese also created an innovative course, Presidential Campaign Communication, to teach students about civic participation during election time. Student projects included creating and facilitating Debate Watch programs for the Grand Valley campus and for East Kentwood High School; designing a Voter Information Project with the Spring Lake Public Library; and working with the local ABC television affiliate, WZZM, to prepare a weekly news segment, two-hour Web chats and daily Internet blogs on student perspectives about the campaign. On Election Day, students served as guest journalists stationed throughout the community providing election coverage that ran on the WZZM Web site.

POLITICAL ISSUES AND DEBATES

About 25 students in Copeland Living Center gathered in the lobby to watch the third presidential debate with Moiles, a political science instructor. After the debate, students questioned Moiles about negative advertising, the candidates' policy proposals and the mortgage crisis.

Students also inquired about William Ayers, an anti-war activist with ties to Obama, and the importance of “Joe the plumber,” who is actually Samuel Wurzelbacher, a plumber cited as an example of middle-class America.

“Most thought Obama won the debate,” Moiles said. “Many thought McCain came off as angry while Obama was calm. The students felt character issues distracted from more important issues.”

A series of three noon events in October, co-sponsored by the Women’s Center and Health and Wellness, made for lively lunch discussions. Grand Valley political science faculty facilitated the talks.

On Constitution Day, September 17, the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies and Seidman College of Business hosted two Michigan politicians. Sen. Buzz Thomas, D-Detroit, supported Obama’s candidacy, while Republican politician G.J. Rusty Hills supported McCain. The economic crisis and education reform were hot topics for debate.

The Hauenstein Center co-hosted additional events, including a panel discussion on how the election would impact Michigan. One forum featured scholars from around the country offering an assessment of George W. Bush’s presidency. Another featured a visit by L. William Seidman, one of the founders of Grand Valley and CNBC’s chief commentator. During the event, co-sponsored by the Seidman College of Business Alumni Association, Seidman said he compared the economic plans of both candidates and told the crowd of more than 350 that neither candidate had defined a “memorable” program.

“I wish they had more experience in the real world

with the private sector,” said Seidman. “We have two candidates who are highly qualified but neither of them have ever been in business, nor do they have any experience that can help guide them in problems with the private sector. Neither is prepared to deal with the financial panic we’re facing.”

But, as Moiles contends, while the American public looks for change that will affect their lives in a positive way, Obama’s victory has inspired people and opened up a system to those who thought they couldn’t compete. “Only five years ago, I think few Americans would have believed we had yet progressed enough for an African American candidate to win the presidency, even within a generation or two,” Moiles said.



photos by Bernadine Carey-Tucker

Above: President Thomas J. Haas greets students as they board a free shuttle bus that transported student voters to the Allendale precinct on Election Day. Students, attending a gathering in Area 51 in the Kirkhof Center on election night, react as results are announced.