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Honors FYE Class Hosts Third Party Forum

November 1, 2016

In an election whose unofficial slogan might be “vote your conscience,” third parties have experienced a sudden surge in popularity. Voters troubled by Trump’s behavior and Clinton’s political history have looked to the Libertarian and Green parties in particular for recourse, but several issues stand between these parties’ presidential nominees and the White House. Is it pragmatic, or even ethical, to vote for a third party candidate this year? Why have third parties at all if the Electoral College system virtually blocks them from a legitimate chance at the presidency? Are this year’s candidates even worth voting for?

These are just a few of the many questions students in Dr. Christopher Caplinger’s Honors FYE course, Modern Political Debate, have considered in the past several weeks, leading them to host a Third Party Forum that took place on October 18th in the Nessmith-Lane ballroom.

“The way the course is set up, the students’ engagement project as part of the honors program is for them to be involved in voters’ registration and education,” Dr. Caplinger said. “Some of the things they’re doing include working tables to register people to vote, staffing early voting locations on campus, and educating other students about local candidates.”

Students were also required to create a forum surrounding voting or the election, an idea that began with Jarvis Steele (philosophy and political science ’19), the course’s Peer Leader. As a student in last year’s Modern Political Debate class, Steele had attempted to stage a similar forum, but could not get it off the ground. This year, however, with the support of students Patrick Maddi (international studies ’20) and Bryce Colvin (political science ’20), Steele saw his vision become reality.

“Last semester when I was in [the students’] shoes, I thought a forum would be the best, most responsible way to start a conversation about voter registration, and then the booths, the tabling, the flyers, the advertisements, those would be the next step. I feel like we skipped a step last year, so the forum really helped us go back and cover that base,” Steele said.

Rather than discuss voter registration, Maddi decided it would be more productive in this year’s political climate to talk about third parties. Colvin agreed: “In such a controversial election, there are so many people who feel like they’re having to hold their nose and vote, so we wanted to raise awareness that there are other options out there. Obviously, third parties don’t run to win elections, because that’s just not feasible; instead, they run to raise awareness on issues that the media doesn’t cover.”

With media outlets focusing more on Trump’s gaffes than actual issues, the Third Party Forum provided a much-needed comprehensive overview of third party platforms and issues surrounding them. With Dr. Caplinger’s guidance, Colvin and Maddi carefully chose five professors to speak at the event, a list that included political science professors Dr. Joshua Kennedy, Dr. Patrick Novotny, and Dr. William Biebuyck, history professor Dr. James Woods, and writing and linguistics professor Jared Sexton, who had perhaps the most unusual perspective on this year’s election. With op-ed pieces in *The New York Times* and *The New Republic*, Sexton’s coverage of the election, particularly Trump rallies, has recently become a phenomenon. In addition to attending the forum, he also served as a guest lecturer in Dr. Caplinger’s class.

Colvin said, “Sexton was a guest speaker in our class, and that’s one of the reasons why we wanted him involved. He talked about what he’s seen attending the different rallies and where he thinks the political atmosphere is headed in the next election, the next generation. He’d also been to the Green Party National Convention, so we thought it’d be interesting to hear about third parties from someone who’d encountered them up close.”



Third Party Forum (photo by Mick Miller)

Although Steele wasn't involved in selecting the professors, he was pleased with the outcome.

"The professors that they got to come out were excellent," he said. "Their expertise really helped develop the forum, and the shape and context they provided for these issues honestly couldn't be topped."

The audience undoubtedly agreed, for they responded to the forum with enthusiasm, according to Colvin.

"People were very attentive. I handled the vetting of the questions while Jarvis was moderating. And the majority of the questions we got were educated and people seemed to be really interested in it. It was exciting to see people take political activism, to take time out of their day to go attend something."

With several service hours left to fill, Steele and Colvin hope they can host more events like this in the future.

"The next step would be to go back to the drawing board, see what we can fix, workshop it, bring it back. Make a series of panels," Steele said.

For now, Colvin is content with the success of the Third Party Forum. "To me, voter education is one of the most important issues we're facing right now. If we inspired even just one person to do their own research, to look into third parties and educate themselves, I feel like we won."

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Honors Takes the Stage at TEDx Georgia Southern

November 1, 2016



Reid Loveless and Jennifer Shaffer at TEDx Georgia Southern

Finding creative solutions to the world's problems is a goal shared among students in the Honors Program, and all of our students at some point present their ideas in a public forum. Two students recently engaged that public forum on a global scale as they discussed their research and experiences on the TEDx stage. Jenny Shaffer (German/mechanical engineering '17) and Reid Loveless (biology '18) gave talks at the event, and they were joined by a number of other speakers from across campus and the community, including Dr. Steven Engel, the director of the Honors Program.

TEDx is a program devoted to sparking discussion and deep thinking in local communities and on college campuses. (TED is an acronym for Technology Entertainment Design.) The theme at Georgia Southern was "Connecting Creatively," and the three speakers shared their own unique perspectives on

using creativity as a problem-solving tool and means to approach the various issues facing our world. Shaffer incorporated her three summers researching and working in Germany into her talk.

"I talked about how living abroad can change your perspectives on common issues and problem-solving in the context of culture," Shaffer said. "I'm incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to share what were hopefully some thought-provoking ideas."

Loveless' speech challenged the notion that art and science are mutually exclusive disciplines.

He said, "I discussed some of the similarities between artists and scientists, how both benefit from working together, and how connecting the two connects the community with art and science as a whole."

As a political philosophy scholar, Dr. Engel brought Socrates into his discussion of the creative power of conflict, arguing for the necessity of "gadflies" in society, or people who provoke dissension and force others to consider new ideas. His favorite part of the afternoon was not giving his talk, but having the opportunity to watch honors students share knowledge gained from their own experiences.

"I think it's great to share the stage and have equal billing with two of our students," Dr. Engel said.

While the Honors Program was present onstage, it was also at work behind the scenes. Dr. Todd Deal, a 1986 Bell Honors graduate, was instrumental in organizing TEDx at Georgia Southern and served as the event's master of ceremonies.

"The TED theme of 'ideas worth spreading' is an exciting and engaging one for us," Dr. Deal said. "As leadership educators, we realize that leadership arises from many, many places and people, and ideas are the catalyst for great leadership to emerge. By hosting TEDxGeorgiaSouthernU, we are hoping for that sort of leadership to emerge among our students and in our community."

About the student speakers, he said, "The reason that we are hosting this TEDx event is, simply, students—their growth as leaders, their opportunity to interact with speakers, and their opportunity to speak at a TEDx event. We actively sought out and encouraged students to apply to speak at the event, and we are thrilled that we have two undergraduates and a graduate student as speakers."

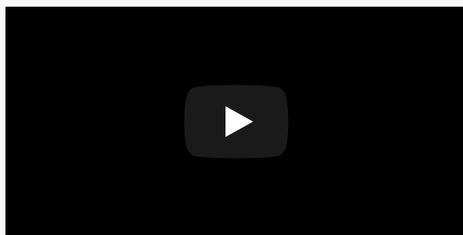
The students were thrilled as well. Loveless said, "The speech didn't go as planned, but I certainly am thankful for the opportunity, all the connections made along the way, and everything that I learned."

Shaffer agreed. "I want to say thank you to those who listened, even though I spoke a million miles an hour. Really, though, I just hope these talks prompted discussions about creative connections in our world, and I

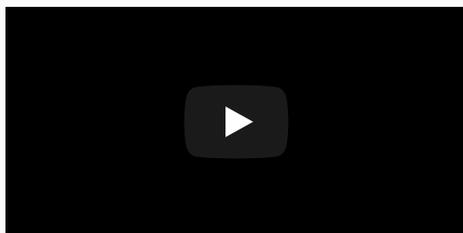
hope to see the TedXGeorgiaSouthernU conference grow over the years.”

See all three talks in the videos below.

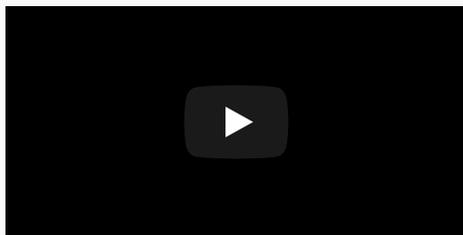
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