

# Experiential Learning at the National Political Conventions and the Presidential Inauguration

**Dennis L. Plane and Derrick Magnotta**

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**I**t is true that Karl Rove and I were classmates at The University of Texas. After he successfully managed George W. Bush's gubernatorial campaign, he decided that he wanted to go back to do something that he had never done: earn his undergraduate degree. So he enrolled at The University of Texas. Since undergraduate courses were too easy, he took graduate courses as an undergraduate student, which is how I met him. I guess you could say that listening to him illustrate our Political Behavior course with lessons from his own experiences in politics helped me to appreciate how much real-world experiences can help students understand politics. After that, he went in one direction; I went in another.

Before going any further, I should note that I wrote this presentation with Derrick Magnotta. He is one of the Juniata students who went to the 2012 Democratic National Convention with me. He helped me put this presentation together at the end of last semester and—in the true spirit of experiential education—he's not here with me today because he's in Washington, D.C., doing a semester-long internship with a lobbying firm on Capitol Hill; nonetheless, he is an equal contributor to this presentation.

We want to talk a bit about experiential education in the context of these seminar courses that I run to the national political conventions and to the presidential inauguration. I've been doing these programs since 2004 when I was still at Gallaudet University and took students to the Democratic National Convention in Boston. Remember John Kerry? In 2008, I took students to the Democratic National Convention in Denver, where we nominated Barack Obama. That year I also sent students to the Republican National Convention in St. Paul. This year, we sent students to the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte and to the Republican National Convention in Tampa.

These convention programs are usually between 100 and 200 students from all over the country, and I typically send a contingent of about ten Juniata students. Last summer we had six students go to Tampa for the Republican convention and four students went to Charlotte for the Democratic convention. Each program is two weeks long. I'll be telling you a bit about these programs as we go along.

In addition, I've been sending students to the presidential inaugurations. That is a ten-day seminar, and it is usually somewhat bigger; we had around 400 people in Washington just a couple weeks

ago from all over the country. Eleven of those were Juniata students. When Barack Obama won the presidency in 2008, we had almost 700 students. Yes, those crowds were larger, as the news has told us time and time again. I've also been sending students to the inauguration program since I arrived at Juniata in 2004 when, shortly after I got here, I sent Juniata students to the second inauguration of George W. Bush. Since then, we've had students at both of the Obama inaugurations, so I've been doing this for a while.

These seminars are run through The Washington Center (TWC). I've been affiliated with The Washington Center since 2004. I'm also on their Liaison Advisory Board, which, among other things, helps insure that the academic components of their programs are up to snuff and takes me to D.C. once or twice a year. The Washington Center is a non-profit experiential education organization. Ninety-five percent of what they focus on is internships. In fact, they are the largest internship facilitator in D.C., but about five percent of what they do is these academic seminars—which is my topic today.

## TYPES OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Of course, internships and academic seminars both fall under the experiential education umbrella. Definitions for experiential education vary considerably, but I think it's easiest to think of it as learning by doing. When students do something—when they experience something—they learn more about it. The role of the faculty member is to help facilitate that learning process. Ideally, the experiential education will parallel and build upon what they've been learning in the classroom.

There are a lot of different types of experiential education. A field trip is a classic example of experiential education: you take students out of the classroom and into the field and students learn from observing or participating in some activity. You can also embed experiential education in your on-campus courses. In my Campaigns and Elections course, students have to put in twenty hours of work with activities related to the election. For example, they can volunteer for one of the candidates, or they can run a non-partisan voter registration drive. Morgan Dux, one of the students from that class, volunteered at the Huntingdon County Courthouse helping with election administration. It's a way for people to take what they've learned in their textbooks and apply it in a hands-on setting. Internships and student teaching are capstone education experiences designed to tie what students have learned in the classroom with what they may do in an occupation. Study abroad is yet another type of experiential education.

I believe that these seminars are most closely related to this last category and fall into something slightly broader called study away. The convention and inauguration seminars are short-term, domestic study-away experiences. My colleague in international politics, Emil Nagengast, takes students on short-term experiences abroad to the Gambia; I take students on short-term experiences away in Washington, D.C., or to wherever the conventions happen to be.

Let me briefly address long-term versus short-term study-away experiences. The bottom line is that if you can go longer, that's great! But you get a lot of value by just going a short period of time, too. That is, short-term experiences get more bang for your buck and open study-away opportunities to more students. You might get eighty percent of the value of a long-term experience with a two-week study-away course. Of course, a lot of that depends on what you're trying to learn. Obviously, if you're trying to learn a language, two weeks isn't going to do it, or if you're trying to have an intercultural exchange, longer may be better—and domestic study away might not cut it.

For a lot of the high-impact value of study away, two weeks may be enough. It also has the benefit of opening up the potential universe of students who can participate, since many don't have the finances or the flexibility in their schedule to spend a semester abroad. Short-term experiences can also be scheduled when classes are not. For example, the inauguration students were back on campus before the spring semester began in earnest. Short-term, domestic study-away experiences are therefore relatively accessible.

#### WHY EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION?

Let me highlight three points. First, experiential education helps bridge the gap between the ivory tower and the real world. It helps students see connections that otherwise might get lost. Second, students can apply what they learn in the classroom to what they see in the field. It allows students to apply their knowledge. Third, once they graduate, students are going to be doing very little classroom learning; most of their learning for the rest of their lives will be experiential. If you can have some experiences with a professor who can guide you through the process, you can learn how to learn through experience. In other words, experiential education now can be a good foothold into a lifetime of experiential learning.

A core component of experiential education is—drumroll please!—having an experience. It really is that simple. You have to experience some sort of event or new environment. You observe. You see what's going on. While you're there, you're analyzing and interpreting. What do I see? How is this related to what I've learned in my classroom? How might it be different from what I've learned? How might this help me more fully understand what Dr. Plane was trying to tell me in class that I just didn't quite get?

One of the big keys to successful experiential learning is reflection. That is, experiential learning works best when students are encouraged to reflect on what that experience means. That's where you can see personal growth and problem-solving skills start to emerge. I think that reflection is key, even though it may not be as fully embedded in experiential education as I would like.

## BENEFITS OF EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education helps to challenge pre-existing conceptions. You may think politics works one way. But when you experience it, you realize that, “Hey! Maybe I was wrong?” It gives you a new perspective, something you may not have thought of before. It can change your opinion. I was talking to Juniata physics professor Jim Borgardt, who was in D.C. on sabbatical at the State Department while I was there for the inauguration. He said that he used to think that politicians were slow and incompetent and just didn’t do what they needed to do, but after spending time at the State Department, he understands why it takes so long to get things done.

Experiential learning enhances problem-solving skills. That is, we do a lot in the classroom that teaches facts and, to some extent, analysis, but we don’t do a whole lot of teaching about what to do when things go wrong. As Morgan Dux can attest, along with the other students who were in Tampa when Hurricane Isaac wreaked havoc during the RNC, things do go wrong. What do you do? How do you adapt? It’s good to have some experience with that before you get into the workplace.

Other benefits of experiential education are that you gain specialized knowledge and vocabulary. When you’re with people who are enmeshed in politics all the time, you quickly find out that they use different words—different lingo. They describe things differently than do I or the textbooks, so it gives students experience acquiring this new language.

Experiential learning helps students communicate better. At college, sloppy communication is easily forgivable. In the workforce, communication is key—especially in a field like politics. You have to be able to communicate with your colleagues, with your superiors, with government agencies, etc. How do you do that? Students actually don’t get that much experience communicating to those outside the ivory tower in most classes. Thus, experiential education is a way to develop this important skill.

When they’re out and about, students learn things, picking up things they didn’t learn in the classroom. Thus, another benefit of experiential education is new knowledge. When they come back into the classroom after engaging in experiential learning, they have experiences that they can share with other students. When I’m in a class with students who have participated in one of these seminars, they often raise their hands and say something like, “I remember when I was in Denver, this is what happened, and this illustrates the point that you’re making in the following ways...” In this way, experiential education can also benefit those who did not have the experience by making our classroom environment richer.

I’d like to make one final point here. Experiential education is often messy, and it’s good for students to have messy experiences. What do I mean by that? I don’t want everything to be easy for the students. I don’t want to hold their hand the whole time. Sometimes I want to throw them to the lions and watch them figure out what to do. While it might sound mean, it’s actually good for our students. Dealing with messiness is a good life skill. It’s also a good professional skill; when students are confronted with

things they're not expecting or things that are stressful, it forces them to problem solve. "How do I get out of this situation? I'm lost in the middle of D.C. How do I get home?" If I've done my job right, students will have the tools they need to find their way. I've given them maps, shown them how to use the Metro, taught them about urban common sense, etc. Now it's time for the students to apply what they've learned. Students need to develop the confidence that they can get out of messy situations. Things always go wrong in politics, so students need to know how to adapt. Afterwards, they need to reflect. Why did things get messy? What did I learn about how to problem solve in a situation like this?

This lesson can also be brought into the classroom. Shake things up a bit. Make things messy from time to time. Life throws you curve balls; learn how to adapt. Give an assignment with no right answer. In the real world, there are seldom right answers; it's all shades of gray, so give them something messy, see how they react, and then reflect with the students afterwards. Students want to know exactly when a test will be, exactly what the test will cover, and exactly how they will be assessed, but life is not always this predictable. Maybe we do them a disservice by making things so predictable. As Provost Jim Lakso noted, case studies are sometimes used in business departments for just this reason, yet they don't seem to be used as much now as they used to be. Maybe it's time to reverse course.

## EVALUATING THE SEMINAR COMPONENTS

Now I would like to look at the various components of The Washington Center's seminars in the context of the information about experiential learning that I just presented.

The first component of The Washington Center's seminar is exposure to new environments. For example, many of our students have never been in a professional environment before. The seminars are professional programs; students are expected to dress and act professionally, but dressing professionally is a skill that is learned through experience, not taught in the classroom. For example, on the first day of the inauguration program I was sitting behind a student from another school. He had obviously just taken his dress shirt out of its package for the very first time. I know this because it had a large sticker with the shirt's size on the back of the collar. This is the type of lesson I want students to experience now and not during their first job interview.

The urban environment is often new for our students. It may be a student's first time using public transportation or reading a map. I want students to learn how to navigate a major U.S. city.

The political environment is often new to our students. Only a few of those who attend these seminars from Juniata are political junkies. These seminars are open to the entire campus; there are no prerequisites, so I get a diverse group of students who are interested in attending for a variety of reasons. Many of these students have had little exposure to politics.

The social environment is also frequently new. What do I mean by that? Every Washington Center seminar has some sort of reception, social hour or cocktail hour. They often will invite people in from the community or perhaps from the Chamber of Commerce, so The Washington Center students will have the experience of socializing in a cocktail-hour setting. That's a really valuable skill for students, especially for those going into politics. You simply must know how to do that, but it's not something I typically teach in the classroom, so this sort of experience is a safe way for students to develop these skills.

Let me illustrate how the social environment can suddenly become a learning environment. One of my students was at a reception hosted by a powerful law firm at one of the political conventions. He witnessed one of the lawyers pull out his checkbook, write out a check, and hand it to an elected official—presumably for his reelection campaign. Sure, the student had heard that elected officials collect campaign donations from various sources, but to actually see the lawyer hand over a check and stick it in his pocket brought the lesson to life in a way that a classroom lecture cannot.

All of these new environments can be messy. They were messy with the conventions and with the inauguration. As the students will attest, Hurricane Isaac came near Tampa and the students at the Republican convention had to scramble. Barack Obama cancelled his stadium acceptance speech in Charlotte, so students who had tickets to see him suddenly no longer had tickets. The Secret Service can and does suddenly block off a gate, so you might have tickets to the inauguration, but the Secret Service isn't letting anyone in because there's a protester in a tree and they're trying to get him out. (That actually happened, by the way.) Students need to have these sorts of messy environments to hone their problem-solving skills.

For all of these environments, it's hard to properly prepare the students in advance because it is such a different experience for them—especially for those who are not politics students. Before we leave, I get the students together and try to tell them what it is going to be like, but I don't think it really gets through to them. Because of the timing of these experiences at the very beginning of the semester, these meetings have to take place at the end of the previous semester, but students' heads are just not into the game at that point. They are thinking about final exams or what they are going to do over break. The conventions or the inauguration seem so far in the distance at that point. I'd say that most of the foundational work happens on site in our small group meetings, which I'll talk more about later.

The academic components of these experiences are substantial. It is certainly not just a trip; it's an academic experience. Experiential education works best when the academic and experiential components parallel each other. The students have readings and do assignments. My students write op-eds, which are good for many reasons. One is that they're short but challenging to write. They're not forced to write a ten-page paper during a one-week seminar, but they do have to write 750 words well,

and that's a challenge. We've had considerable successes with getting these op-eds published, thanks to John Wall, Juniata's director of media relations. He reviews students' drafts, provides feedback, and then sets about selling the most promising pieces to various newspapers. Ethan Wilt's inauguration op-ed was published by the *Altoona Mirror*, as was Alexis Waksmunski's.<sup>1,2</sup> For every seminar, we've had success getting op-eds published. In 2008, we had five or six; this time we had two. Not only is it good for the student and good publicity for the college, it is a professional style of writing that I think is consistent with the notion of experiential education. In short, it's a win-win-win situation.

The other academic component is a blog. Each student is required to post a certain number of entries. This is one of those opportunities that encourage the reflection that we discussed earlier. Don't just tell me what you saw, evaluate what we saw. Identify what you learned from the experience and tie it to what we learned in lecture or small group or the readings.

Each morning begins with speakers—about five or six of them. The speakers usually run from 8:30 a.m. until about 12:30 p.m. The typical speaker will talk for about twenty-five minutes and spend another twenty-five minutes answering questions. Some of the speakers are academics, but most are professionals. This illustrates how the academic component can enhance the experiential component.

Here are some quotes from the students' blogs about the speakers. They may sound like they're from course evaluations, but they are from online blog posts. I went through and pulled out quotations that I thought highlighted the benefits from the students' perspectives.

- I think Grover Norquist made an excellent argument. He said that polarization is a good thing; it's good to have two different ideologies. It's good to have two political parties that stand for something different. Bipartisanship and agreement aren't always a good thing.
- I enjoyed learning from journalists, successful individuals like Brian Lamb, advocates like Grover Norquist, and the array of other panelists who took time out of their schedule for us.
- I loved...learning from those who have hands-on experience in their fields within the realm of politics.

One of the speakers we had at the Republican National Convention was Mickey Edwards, former Republican Congressman from Oklahoma. By the way, he had also spoken at Juniata after a student from the 2008 Republican convention invited him to campus. That's a great connection; that's bringing it back home. Academics included Michael Genovese from Loyola Marymount University and Meena Bowes from Hofstra; both are tops in their field.

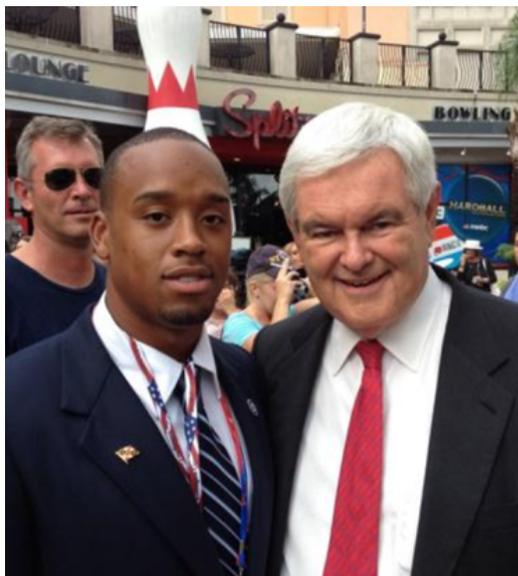
At the Democratic National Convention, one of our speakers was the director of the Charlotte 2012 Host Committee. We also heard from the executive producer of the Democratic National Convention—he's essentially a show biz guy, since the convention is one giant production. We had Representative Melvin Watt from North Carolina's 12<sup>th</sup> District, and Aaron Brown, former CNN anchor. At the inauguration, we had David Welna from NPR. We had a confidential assistant to President Obama. He's a twenty-something politico who worked on Obama's campaign and now is a personal assistant to the President—talk about a success story! We had the chief of staff for Harry Reid, the co-chairs of the

Commission on Presidential Debates, Cornel West, Tavis Smiley, Grover Norquist, the historian of the Senate; the list goes on and on. In D.C., more so than at the conventions, we're really able to get some fabulous speakers.

One thing I like about the speakers is that they get the students to think. One of the students talked in her blog about how Grover Norquist's presentation has caused her to contemplate for the first time that maybe polarization isn't such a bad thing. Prior to Norquist, several of the speakers had touched on the theme of polarization and how it was bad for democracy, but Norquist disagreed. This got the students to really think about polarization in a deeper and more meaningful way.

Students meet with their faculty leaders in small group discussions and talk about the speakers, debrief their experiences, and discuss the readings. This is an opportunity to draw parallels with the readings or provide additional context. Just who is Grover Norquist and what is his shtick? Small group meetings are also a chance to encourage analysis and reflection.

Fieldwork is a big component of the convention experiences. This is where the convention and the inauguration programs veer a bit. At the convention programs, the students spend the second week basically embedded with a host organization in what we call fieldwork. It's like an internship, but it's shorter and it's designed to get students into the action. With fieldwork, there is also no guarantee that you're going to be doing something substantive, but that's okay. For example, we typically would not give academic credit for an "internship" that involved being a security guard or a greeter, but at the conventions we often find that these types of positions can be a good way to find yourself in the center of it all. It can also be a good way to meet people like Newt Gingrich.



Carrington Jones '13 and Newt Gingrich at the 2012 Republican National Convention in Tampa.  
Photograph by D. Patrick Brown

Fieldwork gets students in the right place at the right time, which enables them to network. Many of these fieldwork placements are actually quite substantive. For example, Alexis Waksmunski wrote something that was published on the Voice of America website. Students do substantive fieldwork frequently, but it doesn't have to be substantive to be meaningful. Being a fly on the wall in a place where you can't normally gain access is an amazing form of experiential education. Morgan Dux was at the Republican convention in Tampa and ended up in the green room on the night of Mitt Romney's acceptance speech. Who else do you think was there? Clint Eastwood. He had just asked for the now-infamous chair. Morgan could hear the panicked reaction of the people in the room saying things like, "Why does he want the chair? We didn't plan this! This is going to be bad!" One thing that Morgan learned is that in politics, you can often be someplace where you're not supposed to be as long as you act like you're supposed to be there.

One student used his blog to describe his fieldwork experience as "basically non-stop recording, interviewing, taking photos, microphone-running, etc." You do whatever you need to do, and this is a good way to learn how to accomplish things that you've never even contemplated before.

In Minneapolis at the Republican National Convention in 2008, we had someone working for *Roll Call*, if my memory is correct. Sarah Palin had just been announced as the vice-presidential nominee, and they told her, "Go to this hotel where the Alaska delegation is staying and interview Alaska delegates about what they think of Sarah Palin being nominated." That was it! There were no instructions about how to get there, the location of the hotel, how to find delegates to interview, etc. The student was just told that the story was due by 9:00 p.m. That's a pretty high bar, yet that student did the job and her article was published the next day. No doubt she learned a lot from this experience. One thing she learned is that she does not want to do political reporting anymore. I think this is actually a great outcome. She tried something she thought she wanted to do, she did a great job, but then she realized it wasn't her cup of tea.

Some of the fieldwork placements at the RNC included the State Department Foreign Press Center, Talk Radio News Service, the Pennsylvania Republican Party, FOX News, and Black Entertainment Television. At the Democratic National Convention, we had someone with security (not the most glamorous job, but it gets you in the arena every night), Voice of America, and the Pennsylvania Democratic Party.

At the inauguration, the counterparts to fieldwork assignments are site visits. Instead of embedding our students in an experience where they're doing things, the site visit is more about observation and discussion. One of our site visits was with Eagle Publishing, a conservative publication house in D.C. We met with Adam Tragone, managing editor of *Human Events*, which was one of Ronald Reagan's favorite reads. Adam is a fairly recent graduate who is in the process of becoming part of the

White House Press Corps for *Human Events*. He's a twenty-five-year-old Juniata alumnus with a great success story. His first exposure to D.C. was through a Juniata internship supervised by The Washington Center. He was thrilled to talk to our students about what he does and how he got there. In fact, Ethan Wilt, one of our conservative students, stayed after the site visit was over and Adam introduced him to other people at Eagle Publishing who explained how to get internships and how to get your foot in the door. This is an example of networking in action, a key component of these experiential education opportunities.



Adam Tragone '09 and Ethan Wilt '15 at Eagle Publishing in Washington, D.C.  
Photograph by Kymberly Mattern

Another of our site visits was with Representative Glenn Thompson, who spent about an hour with our students. One of the things that the students learned by meeting with Representative Thompson is what a representative's schedule is like. We were scheduled to meet at 2:00 p.m., but when we arrived punctually, he was in another meeting. We were then told, "Well, he should be back at 3:00." So we walked around and came back at 3:00. "Now he's on the floor," we were told. That's how politics works. I can tell students what it's like in the classroom, but until they see it firsthand, it's not as meaningful. When we finally hooked up, Representative Thompson was great and we remain grateful for the swearing-in tickets he gave us. At the same time, I told my students to go and ask their members of Congress for swearing-in tickets. Part of the experience is tracking down tickets, so I wanted them to participate in this pursuit as well. Asking for tickets puts students outside their comfort zones, which is exactly where I want them to be. This will make it easier the next time they want something from an elected official. Some of our students had success, which meant that I had tickets left over to share with Jim Borgardt and Mike Wetzel—Juniata folks who were in D.C. and had helped make the experience richer for our students.



Representative Glenn Thompson speaks with the Juniata students in the Cannon House Office Building in Washington, D.C. Photograph by Dennis Plane

Let me tell you a quick story stemming from this ticket search involving Carlton Logue and Ethan Wilt. They ran into Congressman Jimmy Duncan outside his office, and he invited them in for a quick photo. Duncan is the representative from Carlton’s district in Tennessee. Later, when they happened to be waiting at the same elevator bank, Representative Duncan asked where they were going. They replied that they were going to the public House gallery. When Representative Duncan’s elevator opened, he said, “Hop on here with me.” So they did. Well, the representative took them with him on the subterranean pathways and subway to just outside the House floor. At one point, security told Carlton and Ethan, “It’s congressmen only right now; they’re going to hold a vote.” Representative Duncan said, “It’s all right, they’re with me.” They ended up sitting in the family gallery and chatting with Jimmy Duncan for twenty minutes or so. It was one of those things that happened in part because they were in the right place at the right time, but it would not have happened had I not sent them to roam the halls of Congress in professional attire. Over the years, I’ve heard lots of similar stories.

Other site visits this year included the Middle East Policy Counsel, the National Defense University, and the State Department with Jim Borgardt and Mike Wetzels, who is a 2007 Juniata graduate. As one of the students wrote in his blog, “The site visits also made the trip worthwhile. If anything, I learned from these visits that it’s possible to make your way from a nobody to a somebody. All you need is a good work ethic and network of people.”



Carlton Logue '13 and Representative Jimmy Duncan.

The Washington Center also has all sorts of activities planned, and very little of it is touristy stuff. Some of our students volunteered for the National Day of Service. At the Democratic National Convention, students attended a policy forum hosted by Madeline Albright and moderated by Joe Scarborough and Mika Brzezinski of *Morning Joe* fame. We attended a media reception, and there were all sorts of events going on that were sponsored by the Host Committee. There is much more to do than you can actually accomplish; one of The Washington Center's informal mottos is "sleep when you get home." Unfortunately for me, I got home and had to work the next day, so sleep remained elusive for quite some time.

Of course, the main event is always exciting and most—if not all—of our students got to experience at least part of the Republican National Convention, the Democratic National Convention, or the inaugural swearing in. Just like everyone else, right after the inauguration we went to an inaugural ball. Ours was held by the Allegheny County Democratic Party, so again they experienced social interaction and networking, which is not only helpful, but also really fun.

The inauguration program builds to this apex, which is the swearing-in ceremony. Of course, the students really love being there and witnessing it live. As Carlton Logue can attest, it's not exactly comfortable being crammed in with thousands of other people for something you can't really see all that well. It's like going to the Olympic Opening Ceremonies: the best seat is actually on your couch, but there's something about being at the event—about being there—that even fires up the Republican students at a Democrat's inauguration.

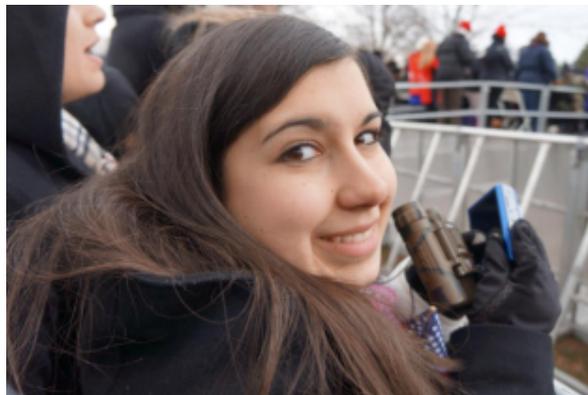


Barack Obama accepts the Democratic nomination in Charlotte, N. C., on September 6, 2012. Photograph by Dennis Plane

Just how meaningful was the swearing-in experience for the students? Well, here's what they wrote about it for their blogs:

- While the entire week was amazing, the highlight of the experience was the Presidential Inauguration Ceremony.
- It was a privilege being able to witness up close history in the making.
- It was the perfect grand finale to a spectacular experience that no one will ever forget.
- It's one of those moments that make you believe in the future. Without the Washington Center and Juniata College, I would never have been able to experience this rare opportunity.

Andrea Waksmunski—a natural science student and by no means a political junkie—got up at something like 3:30 a.m. to be one of the first people in line. It worked. Her group was at the very front of their section—right at the security barrier. Personally, I had great luck on Inauguration Day. After spending a week trying to get tickets—and then trying to get better tickets—a colleague gave me a blue ticket, which gets you in to the closest non-reserved section. Ironically, though, no one ever checked my ticket, so I just walked up and took a seat front and center, without getting up at 3:30 a.m. In fact, I left our housing at 9:00 a.m. If I hadn't gotten in, that would have been all right with me; I was there four years ago—nothing was going to top that.



Andrea Waksmunski in her front-of-her-section viewing position for Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony on January 21, 2013. Photograph by Kymberly Mattern

To wrap things up, I want to share with you another quote from a student blog. I think it really sums up what I'm trying to accomplish with these programs. She writes, "During my time in the city, I've met people with many different perspectives on issues concerning the world of politics; some I agreed with, others I didn't agree with or made me feel uncomfortable. But all of them made me rethink the opinions I had earlier. This whole course has opened up a world that would have been closed off to me."

This, to me, is one of the best things I could read. It shows why experiential education is such a high-impact practice. Experiential education can be a remarkable, life-changing, event. It provides a much fuller understanding of politics. It makes politics real; it gives it life. I'm thrilled to be able to do these programs. I'm thrilled that Juniata has supported these programs so that we can continue to provide this sort of experiential education to our students.

#### NOTES

1. Ethan Wilt, "Inaugural Blues: More of Same," *The Altoona Mirror*, January 22, 2013.
2. Alexis Waksmunski, "Shift Focus to Bolster Rural Police," *The Altoona Mirror*, January 22, 2013.