

ABSTRACT

“2008 Presidential Debate,” J.D. Williams Library, The University of Mississippi

Entry for the Mississippi Library Association Public Relations Award in the Category of “Best Effort by an Individual Library to Publicize Library Services around a Single Theme or Event”

In November 2007, the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates announced that the University of Mississippi would host the first 2008 Presidential Debate on September 26th. Soon afterwards, the university administration urged the campus community to develop academic programming related to the debate. The J.D. Williams Library responded to this call with a variety of resources and events: an archives exhibit entitled “Hail to the Chief!” on presidents and Mississippi in presidential elections; an online Presidential Debate Subject Guide which outlined useful publications, databases, websites, and archival collections for researchers of debates and presidential elections; and a small Brown Bag series designed to highlight politically-related material in Special Collections.

The library used a variety of traditional and online methods to promote these activities. In addition to University of Mississippi press releases issued to local and state media, the library posted an exhibit poster and library debate flyer across campus and the Oxford community. Announcements concerning the exhibition and Brown Bag programs also appeared on the library home page, on several online community calendars, in campus listserv emails, and on the Presidential Debate Subject Guide events page. The university added a resource link to the Subject Guide on the official university debate website, and the Political Papers Archivist promoted all library activities in an email to faculty teaching debate-related courses in the fall. Films of the Brown Bags were posted on YouTube, on the university podcasting platform, catalogued as DVDs for the library, and aired on the university television station.

The library also utilized this historic occasion as an opportunity to strengthen ties with donors, legislators, and university resource allocators. In particular, Special Collections hosted an invitation-only opening for the exhibit. Speaker John Hailman discussed the topic of his book *Thomas Jefferson on Wine* while audience members sipped wine varieties favored by the third president. The library also published a *Keepsake of Presidential Portraits* based on presidential images in the holdings of Special Collections. Created largely for development purposes, the library has distributed the *Keepsake* to past and prospective donors, high ranking university officials, Institute of Higher Learning board members, federal and state legislators, the presidential nominees, and the debate moderator.

Anticipating that a number of journalists might consult Special Collections for historical research and use of campus images, the department created an Archives Press Packet to streamline the process.

The 2008 Presidential Debate resources and activities organized by the J.D. Williams Library fulfilled a number of objectives: executing the request of the university administration for academic programming related to the debate; increasing public awareness of library and archival resources; meeting the needs of media during debate coverage; strengthening the library’s relationship with library and Special Collections donors; and enhancing the library’s standing with funding authorities within the university administration.