Students Attend Presidential Inauguration--Kedra Hildebrand

In January, eleven UM students led by PSC Assistant Professor Robert Saldin attended the 2009 presidential inauguration as part of a Washington Center Seminar that ran from January 10-20. Thousands of students from across the US participated in the seminar to witness and understand the inaugural process. Through a combination of lectures, site visits, tours, and special events, participants learned about the newly-elected president, the formation of his administration, and the role of the media. Among the special events were a reception at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce with Bob Schieffer of CBS News, a performance by political humorist Mark Russell, and the chance to see the final Senate votes of Senators Hillary Clinton and Joe Biden.

The most significant part of the seminar was, of course, the opportunity to watch the inauguration of the 44th President of the United States, Barack Obama. The UM students waited more than eight hours to be part of the event. On their return, they agreed that the emotion and enormity of the crowds were humbling. Weeks later, the importance of the event had yet to fully sink in. Even Prof. Saldin, a veteran of inauguration ceremonies, found the inaugural impressive. According to him, “there was a uniform feeling of excitement in Washington that was not there in past years.”

Due to the large number of schools seeking entrance to the program this year, UM was lucky to be included. The students who attended the inaugural seminar were: Kiki Cain, Joseph Caldwell, Andrew Dusek, Erin Giefer, Allie Harrison, Casey Lalonde, Dylan Laslovich, Rachel Jennings, Umed Partov; Shohina Touraeva, and Daniel Viehland. Seven of the students received scholarships from the President’s Office and ASUM. In addition to the chance to participate in this historic event, the students received course credit for PSc 493: Presidential Inauguration Seminar.

View From the Chair --Professor James Lopach

Our graduates frequently inquire about developments in the Department. This past year has seen several sabbaticals, a new hire, a nod toward retirement, increased faculty interest in student engagement activities, and preparation for our participation in the University’s upcoming accreditation visit. Accreditation gives the Department an opportunity to conduct a self-study and meet with outside academicians during a campus visit, which will occur spring 2010.

A major accreditation theme – for all universities, including UM – is “assessment.” We are being asked whether we are effectively gauging our success as a Department. This assessment effort must go beyond the routine testing and grading of student performance. It has to address whether or not we are actually achieving our program-wide goals. The Department is gathering the needed information by conducting exit surveys and testing our majors on political science issues at the beginning and at the end of their curriculum. The exit survey, which focuses on the Department’s six learning goals, asks students if the Department has improved their skills related to expository writing, oral expression, research, critical analysis, and citizenship, and whether we have improved our knowledge of political science. We are happy to report that we appear to be doing well. A perfect score is 5.00, and the grades we received from our exiting seniors in 2006 and in 2008 are as follows: writing – 3.75, 3.75; oral expression – 3.50, 3.73; research – 3.66, 3.73; analysis – 4.08, 4.23; citizenship – 3.75, 3.83; and knowledge – 4.00, 3.92.

The assessment test has been administered once – to this year’s freshmen and seniors. They were quizzed about basic knowledge in American government, comparative government, international relations, and political theory, and asked to write an essay on a provided topic. Each part was graded on a percentage basis. The average scores of the freshmen on the knowledge section and the writing section were, respectively, 48.4 percent and 80.8 percent. The seniors’ comparable scores were 75.3 percent and 93.3 percent.

The final query of the assessment process asks the Department, “How are you using your findings?” To this question, the Department must demonstrate that it is improving and keeping up to date. So this year Professors Paul Haber and Ramona Grey have been on sabbatical researching new books; Lou Hayes announced his intention to reduce his position to half time; Rob Saldin, a recent American government Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, joined our faculty; and, most importantly, Saldin, Karen Adams, and Chris Muste are planning to increase opportunities for their students in practical politics: Saldin regarding legislative internships, Adams regarding participation in Model United Nations, and Muste regarding campaign and polling activities. These are important initiatives for political science faculty and students interested in improving our society. They reflect Mother Teresa’s instruction: “The fruit of service is peace.”
Department Welcomes Robert Saldin --Kedra Hildebrand

In Fall 2008, Assistant Professor Robert Saldin joined the PSC Department as a specialist in American political institutions. Prof. Saldin received his Ph.D. from the University of Virginia, and has held research fellowships at the University of California, Berkeley and Johns Hopkins University. Originally from Boise, Prof. Saldin always wanted to return to the West. Thus he was “ecstatic” to take a position at the University of Montana, especially since his grandmother graduated from UM in the 1930s.

Prof. Saldin became interested in American politics during the 1984 presidential election. Although he briefly considered a career in Washington D.C., Prof. Saldin chose a life as an academic because being a professor allows him to combine his love of teaching and the freedom to write about important issues. Prof. Saldin enjoys introducing students firsthand to the political process. In August 2008, he took several UM students to the Democratic National Convention in Denver. In January 2009, he accompanied another group of UM students to the presidential inauguration. Profs. Saldin enjoys introducing students firsthand to the political process. In August 2008, he took several UM students to the Democratic National Convention in Denver. In January 2009, he accompanied another group of UM students to the presidential inauguration. Prof. Saldin explains, “MUN is an unforgettable experience because of the hands-on learning and the fun of personal diplomacy.” In addition, MUN provides UM students with an opportunity to develop leadership skills. This year special recognition was given Ashley Zuelke (best chair) and Owen Javins (best vice chair). After taking PSC 337, students are eligible to join the MUN travelling team, which in recent years has sent 12 students per year to the prestigious, week-long National Model UN (NMUN) conference in New York.

In Spring 2008, the team represented Thailand and received an “Honorable Mention” for Best Delegation. The students met with staff at the Thai mission to the UN and spent a full day at UN headquarters.

In Spring 2009, the team will represent Iceland. MUN Club President Aimee Ryan and returning veterans, David Shelton, Kelsi Steele, and Robert Cahill are already strategizing about how to bring home another award. They will be joined by new members Theda Backhouse-Prentiss, Craig Harrington, David Knobel, Katie Peers, Marissa Perry, Will Selph, Emily Tutvedt, and Ashley Zuelke. Team members will see some friendly faces in New York as they re-unite with Louise and Donald Krumm, who started the MMUN high school conference in 1966 and have had exciting careers in international relations.

In addition, the group will meet with recent PSC graduates who now organize and run the National Model UN conference, including Jenny Hathaway Spalding, a 2006 UM graduate of the PSC Master of Arts Program, who is serving as the 2009 NMUN Secretary General. Jenny is joined at NMUN headquarters by fellow PSC alumni, Rob Killian, Paul Moe, and Lindsay Erickson.

For more information about MMUN and to help support the travelling team, please visit the website at http://www.cas.umt.edu/mun/default.html

Calendar of Events

February 23: Michael Scheuer, “Marching Toward Hell: America and Islam after Iraq,” UC Ballroom 8pm

March 16: Albert Borgmann, “Politics and the Pursuit of Excellence,” University Theatre 8pm

April 6: James Davidson Hunter, “Public Service and the Idea of Changing the World,” University Theatre 8pm

April 20: Woody Holton, “Unruly Americans and the Origins of the U.S. Constitution,” University Theatre 8pm

May 16: PSC Department Graduation, Music Recital Hall

October 9: PSC Homecoming Gathering

Your Contributions At Work

Contributions from PSC alumni and friends fund a variety of department initiatives. If you would like to support the Political Science Department, please send check or money order to The University of Montana Foundation, P.O. Box 7159, Missoula, MT 59807-7159, with a note in the memo line indicating it is for the Political Science Department. For more information about making a gift (with no obligation to do so), please contact Ric Thomas of the UM Foundation at ric.thomas@msuumont.edu or (800) 443.2593, (406) 243.5615

Department Welcomes Robert Saldin --Kedra Hildebrand

Although his research interests in American politics are broad, in the past year, Prof. Saldin has written a lot about the role of the West in national politics. Due to dramatic population and electoral vote increases, the West is beginning to be established as a swing region in national elections. “It used to be that people would say ‘if you want to be president you need to carry the south.’ I think that is changing,” he says. “Now it is important for politicians to carry the West.” According to Prof. Saldin, this is good news for the people of the region. National politicians will start to pay more attention to issues such as natural resources, public lands, water, and energy that matter to Western voters.

Currently Prof. Saldin is putting the final touches on his book, War, the American State, and Politics since 1898, which will be published in January 2010 by Cambridge University Press. The book is based on his Ph.D. dissertation and represents more than two years of labor. He also published an article, “Foreign Affairs and the 2008 Election” in the December issue of The Forum.
The U.S. and the Americas -- Professor Paul Haber

My current research project addresses the broad question of how the United States can realistically pursue its enlightened self-interest in its relations with Latin America via its foreign aid budget. My argument is that the United States government contributes positively to the long term legitimate interests of the United States while simultaneously contributing to improving the quality of democracy and social justice in the Americas when it supports grassroots development projects that are administered by effective indigenous non-governmental organizations. Fortunately, there is a government agency that is already doing this called the Inter-American Foundation. I say fortunately because it is generally much easier to expand upon something the government is already doing than to start a new institution and funding channel.

I have been working on this project for the past two and a half years. My research has included extensive fieldwork with 15 NGOs located in Peru and Ecuador that were receiving IAF funding. The profiles of these NGOs and the projects they oversee vary widely. The largest of them has been around for over 20 years, has 150 employees, was at the time of my visit receiving funding from at least seven sources, and is a player in regional and national public policy making. The smallest of them has three employees and at the time of my visit was less than a year old. Projects vary from watershed protection to agricultural development to protections against domestic violence. The photo shows me with two couples who are part of a cooperative effort in their small community to increase incomes through rural tourism, which is creating opportunities for tourists who are willing to shed a few comforts to get out into the countryside where they have an opportunity to interact with local people and learn about their lives in ways that just don’t happen when staying in urban hotels. Rural tourism, when it works well, provides a mutually beneficial outcome for both the tourists and their hosts.

The IAF grants, which generally range from about a total of between $100,000 and $300,000 dollars dispersed over several years, are designed to contribute to several primary goals. First, they contribute directly to helping local people to help themselves to meet their unmet basic needs of food, shelter, education, health care, and freedom from violence. Second, the grants assist the NGOs who receive them to build their institutional capacity. Third, by strengthening the NGO sector, the United States government makes a positive contribution to strengthening civil society. As argued cogently by Alexis Tocqueville many years ago, strong civil society organizations are the primary foundation upon which strong political organizations and participation is built. Many people have become disillusioned regarding the United States stated commitment to strengthening democracy in the global south for what I would agree are good reasons. However, my research findings support the claim that the IAF demonstrates that positive contributions are happening even if they are not well known.

PSC Faculty Research

Prof. James Lopach is researching a topic tentatively titled, “The Catholic Politician: Profiles in Conscience.” He is studying American Catholic politicians from the perspectives of our nation’s pluralistic society, the first amendment, election politics, and moral integrity.

Associate Prof. Karen Ruth Adams is writing a book and compiling a companion reader on international security. She has also been asked to write an essay on “The Causes of War” for the International Studies Association’s Compendium Project.

Associate Prof. Ramona Grey is on sabbatical during Spring 2009. She is writing six entries for C.Q. Press’ International Encyclopedia of Political Science and working on a political theory book, Approaches to the Study and Practice of Political Theory: The Search for Standards.

Prof. Jeffrey Greene will present a paper on the Montana State Budget at the Annual Meeting of the Western Political Science Association’s meeting in Vancouver, BC. The paper is part of an annual roundtable on Budgeting and Policy in the 13 Western States. He also published an article with James Lopach titled “Montana” in Congressional Quarterly’s Political Encyclopedia of U.S. States and Regions. He is currently working on a public policy textbook, Public Policy: A Concise Introduction, for Wadsworth Publishing.

Prof. Peter Koehn submitted the manuscript for his new book, Transnational Competence: Empowering Professional Curricula for Horizon-Rising Challenges, co-authored with James N. Rosenau, to the publisher (Paradigm Publishers). In September, he delivered an invited plenary address on “Transmigration, Transnational Competence, and Global Health” at the 2nd Tampere Symposium on Global Health Research, University of Tampere Medical School (Finland). He also lead-authored “Enhancing Higher Education’s Engagement in International Development: Africa-U.S. Partnerships,” which appeared in the Journal of the World Universities Forum 1, 6 (2008):127-140.

Assistant Prof. Christopher Muste is currently working on a project investigating the effects of news media coverage on people’s opinions about immigration, and another project exploring how the order of questions in public opinion surveys affects people’s opinions about social groups. He presented his research at the 2008 conferences of the American Political Science Association and the International Society for Political Psychology, and is currently preparing these papers for journal publication.
Scott Jenkins writes, “since graduation in December 2003 I have been busy. I first started out as the Debate Coach at Hellgate High School from 2003-2005. In 2005 I moved to Baltimore to live with some friends with the hopes of getting to DC and entering the political world. Instead I worked in a hotel as a night manager for a year until I found my dream job. In May of 2006 I interviewed and was hired by the Baltimore Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America as a District Executive serving Carroll County, Maryland. My job is to help promote scouting in the Baltimore Area especially Carroll County. I am responsible for fundraising efforts of around $100,000 every year, Product Sales of $110,000 each year, and recruiting and retaining some 2,300-2,400 youth participants and 1,000 adult leaders in Carroll County.”

Bob McCready writes, “after graduating from the UM department of Political Science in 1985 and the University of Washington with an MMA in 2004, I spent three years living in Mexico working for the School for Field Studies. Beginning in 1997, I started working for The Nature Conservancy where I still work and hold the position of Director of Conservation for the Migratory Bird Program. In this capacity, I work with TNC staff and partner organizations all over the Americas. Recently I have been supporting the development of various conservation efforts in Mongolia. I live on Bainbridge Island in Washington, and miss Missoula though I am fortunate to travel Montana for work once or twice a year.”

James A. Messina (B.A. 1993) served as national chief of staff for Barack Obama's presidential campaign and as director of personnel for the Obama-Biden presidential transition. Currently, he is Deputy Chief of Staff to President Obama. Previously, Messina served as chief of staff for U.S. Senator Max Baucus (D-MT), U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), and U.S. Rep. Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY). He has overseen and consulted on political campaigns from Alaska to New York.

Kevin Parsneau writes, “after various delays and career sidetracks, I have finished my Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Minnesota (August 2007), studying under Dr Larry Jacobs. I ended up writing my dissertation on presidents and their executive officers rather than IR or state politics. I now have an assistant professor position at Minnesota State University. I would like to thank Forest Grieves for the encouragement he always gave, even if I did not expeditiously follow it.”

Did you know? Nine PSc Alums have received UM's distinguished Alumni Award. In this newsletter we profile one of them, Garry South: A 1976 graduate of the Department, Garry was named “one of the top political strategists in the Democratic Party.” He is a frequent guest commentator on NPR and a regular contributor of opinion pieces to the The Politico, Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Daily News, San Francisco Chronicle, Sacramento Bee, Asian Week, Capitol Weekly and the California Majority Report blog. For the past 36 years Garry has managed or played leading roles in campaigns for President, U.S. Senate, Congress, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, State Legislature, County Executive, County Supervisor, Mayor and City Council.

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“Can you imagine what I would do if I could do all I can?”
--Sun Tzu

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