



COLLEGE of
CHARLESTON
Department of Communication

March 2008
For Immediate Release

Contact: Patrick Harwood
Department of Communication
(843) 953-2212/harwoodp@cofc.edu

DESIRE FOR CHANGE AND DIVERSE CANDIDATES SPARK YOUNG VOTERS
Survey of College of Charleston Students Shows Obama Way Ahead

On the heels of recent campus visits by several presidential candidates, students at the College of Charleston say they are politically aware and are eager to cast their ballots in November.

In past elections young voter turnout has been poor but indications across the country are that this trend is being reversed.

In February, after preparing four separate surveys related to this year's election, students in a C of C public relations class queried more than 350 students on issues ranging from key issues and concerns to candidate preferences and celebrity endorsements.

When asked why young voters are showing greater interest in the upcoming election, a survey of 70 College of Charleston students found 41 percent are attracted by the diversity of candidates and another 36 percent cite their desire for a change from the current administration's direction.

U.S. Sen. Barack Obama is the clear favorite among the remaining presidential candidates. In a survey of 70 students he took 54 percent of the vote. His Democratic rival U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton received 10 percent of the students' vote. GOP frontrunner U.S. Sen. John McCain took 19 percent, followed by U.S. Rep. Ron Paul's 12 percent and former Gov. Mike Huckabee's 3 percent.

In this survey, 46 percent of the student respondents called themselves Democrats, 29 percent Republicans, and 16 percent Independent.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are the top issues on the minds of 86 percent of responding students in that same poll. This was followed by concerns about the economy and job market, then health care, global warming and illegal immigration.

When asked to rate the effectiveness of the Bush Administration only three percent of students say it has been "effective." Forty-three percent say it has been "highly ineffective" and 14 percent cite a "neutral" position on the issue.

In a separate poll that included responses from some non-C of C students in the Charleston area, 95 percent of the 80 respondents want to withdraw U.S. troops from Iraq. Of those favoring such a withdrawal, only 28 percent say the troops should be brought home immediately. The remaining 72 percent favor a slow withdrawal.

The same survey found only 5 percent saying the current war plan is working. Two written comments included suggestions that the United States should "generate a plan to hand back responsibilities to Iraq" while another respondent said that "everything should be under control before pulling out."

A separate survey of 120 students found skepticism about how effective a woman president could be. Only 28 percent said they believed a female president could run a "highly effective" administration. This compared to 45 percent of the respondents who said a minority president would have a highly effective administration.

--more--

C of C Political Survey (p. 2)

Another survey, seeking views of students about celebrities endorsing presidential candidates, found nearly half of the 120 students queried believe it is fine for celebrities to endorse candidates, but that candidates should not go out of their way to seek such endorsements.

But celebrities seem to have little sway in influencing the votes of their fans. Responding students were unanimous in saying that if their favorite celebrities spoke out against their candidates of choice that it would not change their minds.

The majority of surveys were completed on Feb. 14. Twenty C of C students in a Public Relations Practices class taught by communication professor Patrick Harwood had fellow students fill out their paper surveys around campus.

Prior to South Carolina's Republic and Democratic presidential primaries earlier this year the Communication Department at the college brought in four candidates as part of its Bully Pulpit Series. Participating candidates were Barack Obama, John Edwards, John McCain and Ron Paul.

With the largest undergraduate major at the College of Charleston, the Department of Communication enrolls more than 800 students in its undergraduate and graduate programs. Students in the department study such topics as political communication, interpersonal communication, journalism, and public relations. The department is housed in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences.

###