

Archived Presidential Debate Collection Opens to Public, Finding Aid Posted Online

Contributed by Erin Parsons
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OXFORD, Miss. - The first 2008 presidential debate, hosted Sept. 26 at the University of Mississippi, will be remembered as a historic benchmark that showcased Ole Miss to the world in a new light.

Among the many avenues taken to ensure documentation of that international event is creation of the Presidential Debate Collection in the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the John D. Williams Library.

Following more than a year of preparation, the collection recently opened to the public. A finding aid, which includes a description of the collection and other information, is available online at <http://purl.oclc.org/umarchives/MUM01697/>.

"This collection was only possible because a great number of people in the university and the community contributed material," said Leigh McWhite, political papers archivist and assistant professor, who coordinated the collection's creation.

The collection includes correspondence, news releases, reports, clippings, publications, posters, photographs, recordings and memorabilia. Planned in connection with the debate and the election, the university sponsored more than 70 academic courses, programs and activities, which are represented in the collection.

Items range from Debate Steering Committee files to DVD recordings of debate-related events and academic programs to newspapers, magazines and life-size posters of the presidential candidates.

"We received a lot of what we call ephemera, things that sometimes just get lost to history because they weren't intended to be saved," McWhite said. "So we have such items as signs telling the Republicans and Democrats where to stand in Spin Alley (a campus area designated for public political discourse on debate day). We also have printed programs and invitations, because the university hosted all sorts of classes, events and activities that we tried to represent in the collection."

Researchers for years to come should find the collection to be a thorough representation of the debate, which led to election of the nation's first black president.

"The debate was a very significant event not only in the university's history but also in the nation's history," McWhite said.

To view the Finding Aid, visit <http://purl.oclc.org/umarchives/MUM01697/> . To schedule a physical viewing of the collection or to donate an item, contact McWhite at 662-915-1850 or at slmcwhit@olemiss.edu. To learn more about the J.D. Williams Library, visit http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/ .