

Debate Recap Broadcast

November, 11, 2011

Colleagues,

Wednesday night, Oakland University played host to a debate featuring eight Republican candidates for president. But what you saw on television was much more than two hours of spirited political discourse in the O'Rena; it was the culmination of months of painstaking preparation by a dedicated team of Oakland faculty, students and staff. I have rarely felt more institutional pride than I did that night during our two hours in the national spotlight.

Immediately after I announced via e-mail on August 1 that we would be hosting this debate on November 9, we mobilized a team of two dozen OU faculty, staff and students to work with staff from CNBC and the Michigan GOP – the event co-sponsors – to plan and execute this event. The endeavor involved complex logistical challenges and acute attention to even the smallest details.

Slowly, as summer faded and we segued into a new academic year, plans began to take shape. Interest in the debate started to build here on campus and in the surrounding communities. Inquiries from students, friends, donors, alumni, members of the press and political junkies started to increase as the date drew nearer. We built a special debate website, draped event banners all around campus and engaged students in our classrooms in robust discussions about the democratic process of choosing a president. We even had some of our students act as stand-ins for the candidates during production run-throughs before the debate.

All along, we viewed the debate as a significant teaching experience for our students. Countless student organizations planned special events around the debate; many professors held special class sessions to discuss the debate and the electoral process; nearly 200 student volunteers worked in the O'rena and media filing room during the debate; dozens of our students were interviewed by media outlets from across the country; and, one of our students sang the national anthem before the debate.

Our students employed all forms of integrated media before, during and after the debate. We provided an opportunity for students and the campus community to become involved in discussions about the debate through Twitter, Facebook, and blogs with feeds through our tech towers located in the Oakland Center and built especially for this historic occasion.

An important part of our mission is to provide our students with the most significant, meaningful educational experience we can. These and countless other volunteer, educational, advocacy and involvement opportunities touched thousands of students. I'm confident memories of these experiences will last a lifetime.

At the same time, the university community made a tremendous impression on visitors. When they started arriving on campus a week ago today, interest in the event shot up exponentially. In

just a three-day period, our media relations team received more than 90 calls from reporters across the country, all asking for interviews with OU faculty and students.

As I talked with many visitors at several special events before the debate, a common theme began to emerge. People who previously were not familiar with Oakland University remarked to me what a beautiful campus we have, and how accommodating and hospitable our faculty, students and staff were during their time on campus. Many commented on how well organized the event was.

Millions of viewers watched the debate, and thousands of newspapers, radio stations, Internet news outlets and bloggers ran stories about it. It is impossible to quantify what that means for us in terms of raising our public profile, but buying that kind of publicity would easily cost millions of dollars.

Time and space will not permit me to thank by name all of the individuals who made this event a tremendous success. For now, I trust that you know who you are. My profound gratitude goes to you all for the outstanding and tireless work you put in to make this one of the great nights in Oakland University's history.

It was a night that our students will never forget. As one student put it, "Thank you for the best day ever."

Sincerely,

Gary