



Tuesday, November 30, 2004

Community book author lectures on media role

By *Rebecca Wyatt*, OU Web Writer

Students packed the Oakland Center Banquet Rooms to hear a lecture by Kathleen Hall Jamieson, co-author of this year's community book, "The Press Effect: Politicians, Journalists, and the Stories that Shape the Political World."

Jamieson, professor of communication and dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, has been involved in analyzing political campaigns and campaign ads for the national media and is a co-founder of the site FactCheck.org.

"The Press Effect" is recommended reading in many of Oakland's rhetoric classes. The book examines how the media affects politics and shapes thinking about political issues and candidates. It explores the role of the media in the 2000 presidential campaign, coverage of the Persian Gulf War and other controversial events in recent U.S. history.

Jamieson started her career by studying the press from inside the House Committee on Aging. She studied the press' reaction to information and the way it was covered in the news. She said she was amazed how the press relied on the "he said/she said approach" to providing information to the public and she really wanted to find a way for the press to scrutinize information provided by politicians.

"The press ought to challenge everything," Jamieson said. "The press should be a custodian of fact. Journalists as custodians of fact has a very important role in campaigns."

FactCheck.org was established to question every claim in political ads in the hope that journalists would use it to relay the information to the public.

"We were trying to get rid of the he said/she said," Jamieson said.

The Web site was never meant to be used as a source of information, as Vice President Dick Cheney referenced in the debates, but as a way for journalists to expose and dispel misleading information in ads, Jamieson said.

According to her, it isn't enough to rely on the press to scrutinize the ads. She is now working to educate the public on how to look critically at political ads on television. She has started a list of four guidelines for examining ads and said the list will continue to grow.

Using video clips of the ads from the 2004 presidential campaigns, Jamieson illustrated her four guidelines.

1. When an ad contains visuals and ominous music, listen carefully because they are being used as a distraction from the message.

"If it's scary be wary," Jamieson said.

2. Don't accept all labels provided in ads.

"Question what's underneath the labels," Jamieson said, adding that viewers should challenge the inferences made by ads.

3. Politicians use things that people care about the most to deceive them, such as social security and Medicare coverage. Viewers should use their knowledge about that topic to disregard false claims. The political parties always exaggerate numbers to deceive the public, Jamieson said.

4. The rules can be applied together. Jamieson said to use them all to examine the ads.

The campaign ads don't lie, they persuade and mislead people into believing something that may not be true, or may

be an exaggeration of the truth, Jamieson said, adding that lying is what Lyndon Johnson did or what Richard Nixon did when it came to Watergate. There was proof the men had lied. She said presidents who lie should be impeached, but she is not certain President George W. Bush lied about going to war in Iraq.

“What he (Bush) told us is not what we found there,” Jamieson said. “He may have been misled. He may have believed what he said.”

According to Jamieson, it's the media's job to get under the claims and expose the misconceptions.

Mike Lewis, director of OU's journalism program, said Jamieson's book was helpful to him in writing his dissertation and he was excited it was this year's community book.

Jamieson is “not an ivory tower academic;” she analyzes the news media and presents it to the public in a way everyone can understand, Lewis said.

Jamieson and her family are no strangers to the area. In fact, Jamieson's sister is an OU nursing alumna and her husband's family resides in the Detroit area.

The lecture was part of the Celebration Liberal Arts Presidential Leadership theme. For more information, visit the [Celebration Liberal Arts](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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