Democracy at Denver

by Leah Katz-Hernandez

As you begin your fall semester at Gallaudet University, you might have noticed that a little chunk was missing from the campus. Two professors -- Frances Marquez and Mairin Siobhan Veith -- were not here for the first week of classes. Additionally, some of your classmates that could have been sitting next to you were absent. The reason?

D.N.C.

DNC stands for the Democratic National Convention. National Conventions happen only once every four years for both the Democratic and Republican parties. The best way to describe the purpose of the conventions is to summarize it as a national political convention with state delegations, big-name politicians, grassroots activists, leaders from state and federal levels, and students as field workers. These conventions occur only during the election years, and take place in the summer just before the heated events of the fall's election politics. They are staged very much like rallies, with many speeches by prominent politicians to both parties and meetings in which state delegations cast their votes on motions that will impact the Democratic or Republican Parties.

Finally, one of the most exciting and important moments of the National Conventions is when the presumptive presidential candidate receives the official nomination for either the Republican Presidential Candidate or the Democratic Presidential Candidate. The highly charged and patriotic atmosphere and tempo of these conventions usually gives a "jump-start" to both parties in their contest for the White House come November. It's sufficient to say that both conventions are some of the most important political events in America, aside from Election Day.
This year, eight Gallaudet University students were at Denver for the Democratic National Convention -- with the two professors I mentioned above, both from the Government Department. We were here to participate with the Presidential Academic Seminar and the Democratic National Convention.

What exactly is the Presidential Academic Seminar? It is the nation's only academic program for college students overseen by The Washington Center, a specific organization based in Washington, DC that "provides internship programs of exceptional quality and services that students in any major field would be able to earn a full semester's worth of credit from their home institution." It is especially unique because The Washington Center is non-partisan about conventions and has been organizing seminars for both conventions. Since the program's establishment in 1984, the number of students attending both conventions for fieldwork has steadily climbed from just 20 students to over 450 students and 50 faculty members in 2008!
"It is the first time I've had students email me asking how to register to vote," Professor Mairin Veith said. It's true that this year's election is the epic battle of generations. John McCain is the oldest ever presidential candidate at 72 years old, while 48-year-old Barack Obama galvanizes the younger generation. The buzz and energy of young people to be active in politics prior to a National Convention has been unprecedented, except for 1968. In 1968, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago soured when the youth demographic clashed with the city's police force in a series of explosive riots. This year, however, things will be different. The youth demographic of America are empowered in ways that they never have been before. To many of the students attending DNC this year, Barack Obama represents more than change from old politics -- he is one of us. He understands us. He listens to us. He is here for us. We can connect to Obama. And that has instilled such passion and eagerness in the youth to really get involved with the campaign process in any way possible. Our energy will not be destructive like in 1968 -- rather it will be the powerful pushing force behind Barack Obama's historical Presidential Campaign 2008. Here's to a phenomenal November!
Key Dates to Remember

- Last day to register to vote in DC: **Monday, Oct. 6**
- Election Day: **Tuesday, Nov. 4**
- Presidential Inauguration: **Tuesday, Jan. 20** (No School!)