

Election connection Students click on the issues

By Mary Medland, Contributing Writer

Anyone who believes that college students are politically apathetic should reconsider that point of view. "Our students care about this election," says Sanford Ungar, president of Goucher College. "This is a campus that is very political, very activist and very much involved. People here get up in the morning and express an opinion, which is something we like and encourage."

But, he adds, that not all Goucher students are going to climb onto the Barack Obama bandwagon. "We have some Hillary supporters, and I know we have some Ron Paul supporters," says Ungar. "And there are probably some John McCain supports here."

Similarly says Kevin Kallaugher, the award-winning political cartoonist who is perhaps better known as KAL, "This generation is more connected with this election than any I've ever seen over the course of 30 years."

Kallaugher adds that the two formative historical events for today's college students are the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks and Hurricane Katrina. "With Sept. 11, students began to look at their country in a different light, and with Katrina, they were exposed to politicians and leaders disappointing them in ways they never thought possible," he says.

"Then there was the prospect of history being made with a woman running for president and an African-American man, as well as the length of the primary process, in which every single state became important. Students are clearly engaged in a way they have not been before."

Ungar notes that today's students, unlike those of the Vietnam War era, do not personally feel threatened by the war in Iraq, but they are aware that it is affecting their lives. For instance, Goucher students are required to study abroad. "What they find out is that in other countries this war is very unpopular," says Ungar. "They have to explain to those outside the United States whether or not they support this war. And many students feel the Iraq war is getting in the way of other important issues, such as energy dependence."

Goucher student Chris George, an 18-year-old history major from Lutherville, Md., who will be voting in a national election for the first time, has been paying plenty of attention. "For the most part I want to be

certain that a candidate doesn't stand for something that I find abhorrent, such as basing policies on religion, warmongering or having a poor environmental policy," he says. "I see John McCain using religion as a political tool, while Barack Obama seems religious personally, rather than on a political level. I also prefer candidates who have a good stand when it comes to gay rights and who are pro-choice."

While health care may be an issue of importance to many Americans, Ungar reports that is not what he hears students worrying about. "They talk of the college loans they will have to pay off, the cost of college in general and the terrible economy," he says. "Many of our students have helped in the recovery efforts of Hurricane Katrina ... they are very much aware of their obligation to help those in need or those in distress in this country."

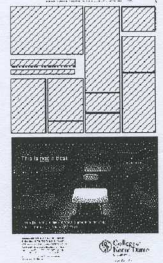
For students arriving at colleges in different locations from their home states, there is the matter of getting registered to vote and obtaining absentee ballots. "Voting for the first time can be both exciting and daunting," says Ungar. "We mount a pretty heavy effort to help our students get this taken care of."

After 30 years as a political cartoonist for *The Sun* and England's prestigious *The Economist*, Kallaugher has spent the past few years at the University of Maryland Baltimore County's Imaging Research Center. "Political cartoons are a great way to introduce people to our democracy," says Kallaugher. "I learned everything I needed to know about Watergate from political cartoonists and their work."

Kallaugher's first project as a UMBC artist in residence was to take cartooning into the realm of three-dimensional animation. "I worked with students to create the 'Digital Dubya,'" he says. "The idea was to bring cartoons into the 21st century."

"The second year I worked with an elite group of students to create a three dimensional film - *The Choice* - about college kids and voting. In some ways, students haven't changed from when I was in college ... they are trying to learn and to grow up, and they have a great deal of curiosity about what is going on in the world."

During the 2007-2008 academic year, Kallaugher worked with both students and faculty to build a special website - www.usdemocracy.net, which has as its motto "I Came, I Laughed, I Learned." The idea is that

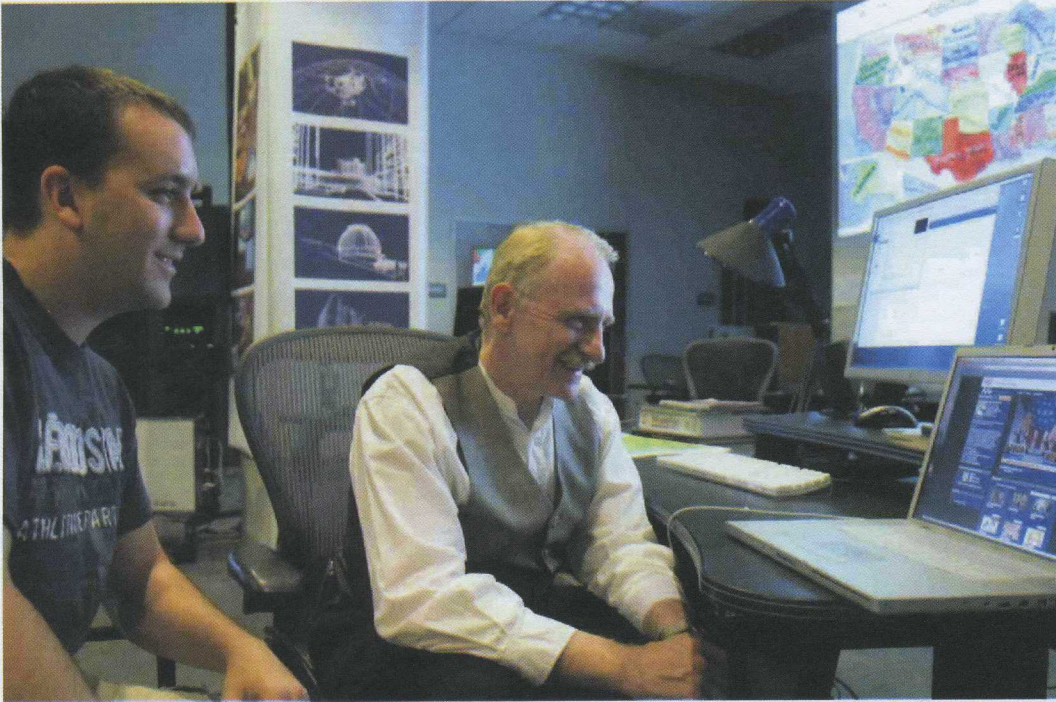


the site will help high school students and others to understand how what Kallaugher calls "this nutsy system we have" works. "We hope to have usdemocracy.net up and running in the fall," he says. "Our plans for the future include creating a blog to discuss issues that are important to people living in this kind of society."

Kallaugher notes that the big difference between today's generation of students and their parents is, not surprisingly, technology. "This is a generation that

doesn't know how to use a rotary phone, but they are still the most media savvy generation ever, and they are barraged by more information than any generation before," he notes.

But there are challenges. "Because the amount of Internet information is so vast, it is important to teach students ways of filtering information and finding out the truth through all the noise," he says. "Everyone needs to know which are – and are not – trustworthy, reliable sources of information. •



John Dean, Contributing photographer



