

The Road to the White House Runs Through Our Campus: Staging a Mock Political Convention to Build Student Interest and Awareness

*Joseph A. Melusky, Mark C. Gentry
Saint Francis University*

Special Report, April 5, 2008, Democratic National Convention, Pennsylvania:

The ballots have been cast and tabulated. The delegates have made their selection. By a vote of 2,469 to 1,580, the Democrats have selected their 2008 presidential nominee. It will be Barack Obama! Senator Obama has narrowly defeated Senator Hillary Clinton for the Party's presidential nomination. This just in -- the delegates have selected Obama's running mate. Hillary Clinton! The Obama-Clinton ticket should be a formidable one as the Democrats seek to recapture the presidency following eight years of Republican control. And now we return you to your regularly scheduled programming.

Wait a minute. This is not what happened in Denver in 2008. The Democrats who met in Colorado did formally nominate Barack Obama, but they paired him with Joe Biden, not Senator Clinton. However, the above "special report" accurately describes how things turned out months earlier in Loretto, Pennsylvania at Saint Francis University's Mock Democratic Convention.

Introduction

Students originated the idea of staging mock national conventions at Saint Francis University back in 1960. The events have become campus and community traditions, with mock conventions having been held every four years since. In every presidential election year, Saint Francis University hosts a mock national convention for the party that does not occupy the White House. In 2008, with President Bush in office, it was time for a Democratic Convention. The purpose of this paper is to describe briefly the process of hosting a mock presidential convention and to share some experiences from our 2008 Convention.

It would be difficult to describe in detail everything that goes into planning for a mock national convention. Nonetheless, we will relate some of our experiences in preparing for Saint Francis University's 2008 Mock Democratic Convention in the expectation that some of these comments might be helpful to you if you decide to stage a mock convention of your own.

Staging a mock convention takes a lot of work. Is it worth it? We have found that our students enjoy and benefit from the experience. Mock conventions provide useful experiential learning supplements to more traditional classroom instruction. Perhaps some of our experiences will encourage others to consider sponsoring conventions on their campuses or to accept our invitation to join us at Saint Francis University for our next mock convention in 2012.

Organization

Our thirteen mock conventions have been designed to resemble national party conventions to the extent feasible.¹ Students and other members of the University community serve as campaign managers, state delegates, and state delegation chairpersons. The state chairs recruit delegates with whom they plot strategy and prepare posters, banners, and costumes. Campaign managers court delegates, post signs, distribute literature, and even attempt to arrange appearances at the convention by their candidates or

surrogates. Students serve on platform and other committees. They transform the student center into an authentic-looking convention hall. Considerable direction is provided by faculty but widespread student involvement and execution are critical to any successful convention.

Mock conventions are sponsored by the Saint Francis University Current Affairs Club, the political science program, and the Center for the Study of Government and Law. Students from various majors belong to the Club, but most of its members are studying political science. Political science faculty members head the Mock Convention Planning Committee. Student officers of the Current Affairs Club also serve on this Committee. The Club President serves as convention chair or co-chair. Faculty members sometimes designate additional co-chairs. Other club officers choose which committees they would like to chair. In 2008, Club officers and members chaired the Correspondence Committee, the Credentials and Rules Committee, the Halls and Decorations Committee, the Platform Committee, and the Media and Community Relations Committee. Additional responsibilities were assumed by these individuals as circumstances required. For example, two students served as campaign managers for Senator Clinton and three students served as campaign managers for Senator Obama. Others served as Convention Floor Managers. The Planning Committee oversaw the entire Convention -- its procedures, preparations, committees, and so on. All of these specialized standing committees reported to the Planning Committee.

Importance of Early Planning

About one year before the Mock Convention, we began publicizing the events on campus through signs, videos, meetings, and newspaper articles. Later, we conducted some straw polls and wrote about the results in the student newspaper. Budget estimates were prepared well in advance too. Funding was supplied through the Student Government Association (parent organization of the Current Affairs Club), the History and Political Science Department, and the Center for the Study of Government and Law. While it would be possible to stage a no-frills mock convention on a budget of a few hundred dollars, a larger budget makes it possible to offer potential keynote speakers a reasonable honorarium. A special course entitled, "The Road to the White House" was offered during the Spring 2008 semester. Using texts, periodicals, the similarly titled C-SPAN series, and other resources, the course focused on presidential selection processes, in general, and the 2008 campaign in particular. Students in this seminar played key roles in the 2008 Mock Convention. This course was a vehicle for ensuring that a nucleus of knowledgeable activists would be available for convention leadership responsibilities. Journal entries from these students also provided some indication of the academic benefits that mock convention participants derive.

We try to schedule our mock conventions for a weekend shortly before the Pennsylvania primaries. In this way, we hope to persuade campaigning candidates to visit our convention. All declared candidates for the Party's nomination are invited. In 2008, Barack Obama had not yet secured enough delegates to assure him of the nomination prior to the Pennsylvania primary so this strategy did help us attract campaigning politicians to the campus. Regardless of the date you choose, it is most important to set the date for a mock convention as early as possible so that reservations and other facilities arrangements can be made.

Committees

Approximately eight months prior to the Convention, several committees were established to work on specific projects. The Committees are described below. Committee chairs were also selected at this time.

The Planning Committee held several open meetings to discuss possible keynote speakers. Discussions with assorted campus officials regarding budgetary and other considerations then took place. Additional open meetings were held. The field was winnowed and short list of affordable and appropriate speakers was produced. As these conversations were underway, a former faculty member indicated that she was spending the semester at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and that former Congressman Lee H. Hamilton (IN-9th) was in residence. Along with former Secretary of State James Baker, Hamilton served as Vice-Chair of President Bush's 9/11 Commission. We asked our colleague to speak with Hamilton about keynoting our convention and he agreed to do so. It helps to be flexible in such matters so unanticipated opportunities like this one can be seized. Shortly before the Convention, Mr. Hamilton announced that he was supporting Barack Obama's presidential bid, adding further immediacy, interest, and excitement to his visit.

As a general rule, we do not invite current elected officials to keynote. Their schedules are so unsettled that they can seldom provide the kind of advance commitment we need to plan the event. The Director of Student Activities contacts prospective speakers on our behalf, ascertains their availability, and ultimately extends our invitation. Try to secure your keynote speaker as far in advance of the convention as possible so s/he can be featured in publicity releases and can be mentioned when inviting other individuals.

Keynote speakers over the years have included Senator Richard Schweiker, Senator Eugene McCarthy, Georgia State Senator Julian Bond, President Reagan's former campaign manager, John Sears, Congressperson Bella Abzug, and Senator Paul Sarbanes. The 1992 keynoter was Senator George McGovern. Not only was he commemorating the twentieth anniversary of his nomination for the presidency by the Democratic Party; he was visiting Saint Francis twenty years after his presidential nomination by a previous generation of our mock convention delegates. The 1996 keynote speaker was former Governor of Pennsylvania and Attorney General of the United States, Richard Thornburgh. In 2000, our keynote speaker was Marlin Fitzwater, former U.S. Press Secretary for Presidents Reagan and Bush. In 2004, Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, Lieutenant Governor of Maryland and daughter of the late Robert Kennedy, keynoted.

A Correspondence Committee was also established. This Committee designed the 2008 Mock Convention logo, designed and ordered special stationery, and handled related matters. The Committee also corresponded with the state and national Democratic Committees, declared candidates, and other invited guests.

The Platform Committee, naturally, was charged with developing a mock party platform. The Committee was formed, a chair was selected, and background research ensued. Then, as the Convention approached, several open meetings were held by the Committee to provide interested parties with a chance to express their views. Campaign managers for leading candidates also had a chance to shape the platform. Following these sometimes lively sessions, the Committee drafted a platform. At the Convention, the platform was adopted by a voice vote.

The Credentials and Rules Committee was also established and a chair was selected. This Committee was responsible for assisting and welcoming non-Saint Francis University delegates who participated in the Convention. Students from several area colleges, high schools, and even a group of sixth-grade students attended. The Committee also worked with the Planning Committee in setting the Convention agenda. Further, while the simulation is reasonably realistic, we take some liberties with the rules of actual national party conventions. For example, since we try to complete our business in two or three hours rather than four days, we use voice votes wherever possible. Further, the Rules Committee determined that both Obama and Clinton would be eligible for the nomination, even if one had "locked up" enough votes to secure the actual nomination prior to the Pennsylvania primaries. As it turned out, the race was still undecided at the time of our Mock Convention. This is not always the case. When one of the candidates has already been declared the likely nominee prior to our Mock Convention, we still conduct our mock conventions as contested or nominating ones and not as a ratifying ceremony for some primary- and caucus-selected victor.² That is, *all* our delegates are unpledged. Our delegates do not try to predict who the national party will, in fact, nominate in the summer. Instead, Saint Francis University delegates nominate the candidate they *prefer*.

One point of real controversy for the Credentials and Rules Committee involved how the votes of the Michigan and Florida delegations would be handled. Recall that in 2008, both states held contests before the date that had been prescribed by the Democratic National Committee. The DNC stripped Florida and Michigan of their delegate votes when these states held early primaries without party approval. The SFU Credentials and Rules Committee voted on February 12, 2008 to support this DNC decision by refusing to recognize Florida and Michigan delegates at the 2008 Mock Convention. Vote totals were adjusted accordingly and, as a result, 2,025 votes (rather than 2,208) were needed to win the nomination.

Tickets emerging from these mock conventions have included Adlai Stevenson-John Kennedy, Nelson Rockefeller-Charles Percy, George McGovern-Shirley Chisolm, Jerry Brown-Morris Udall, Gerald Ford-John Anderson, Gary Hart-Jesse Jackson, Michael Dukakis-Jesse Jackson, Jerry Brown (again!)-Tom Harkin, Bob Dole-Colin Powell, John McCain-Elizabeth Dole, John Kerry-Al Sharpton, and, as noted, Barack Obama-Hillary Clinton.

The Media and Community Relations Committee was in charge of publicity. The chair of this committee developed a comprehensive press plan and worked with campus public information officers in coordinating Convention publicity. The Committee sent releases to newspapers, radio, and television stations. Articles were written for the campus newspaper. Informational pamphlets were developed and mailed to community groups, schools, local political figures, and civic leaders. A 2008 Mock Convention web site was developed and used to post relevant information. Invitations were printed and mailed. Arrangements were made to have this Mock Convention videotaped as previous ones had been. Footage from previous conventions was shown on monitors around campus as students distributed brochures and fact sheets to interested parties. News releases and press kits were prepared. A luncheon for Lee Hamilton and invited guests was held a few hours before the Convention. A press conference with Mr. Hamilton was held immediately prior to the opening gavel. In addition to local media, reporters from the Dutch national radio system came from Washington for the press conference and to cover the Convention. The Mock Convention was streamed live on the SFU web site. "Hits" were registered from near and far. Response from alumni who had participated in previous conventions was especially favorable. Disks were made available to PCN, the Pennsylvania public access channel, for later viewing. Clips were posted and linked to the Department's and the Center's web sites.

The Hall and Decorations Committee secured all art and construction supplies and transformed the student center into a convention hall. The Committee instructed state delegation chairpersons to bring some of their delegates with them to a large staging area at an assigned time before the Convention. At this time, all materials were available and students constructed their state and candidate signs, posters, and placards. The afternoon before the Convention, a construction crew installed flags, draped crepe paper, prepared the stage and seating areas, tested podium and floor microphones, set up musical equipment, and made sure that the "convention hall" would be ready for the following day's festivities. A few hours before the Convention, students went to the hall to fill and place helium balloons. We learned the hard way that helium-filled balloons sag noticeably if they are set up too early. It also helps to bring a wrench to remove the top from the helium tank. Details and practicalities cannot be over emphasized.

Campaign Managers

Students volunteered to act as campaign managers for their favorite candidates. They contacted candidates' campaign headquarters to obtain literature, posters, and other materials. They posted signs and banners around the campus, negotiated with Platform Committee members, tried to make deals with state delegation chairs, discussed the vice-presidency among themselves, and generally tried to win support for their candidates. They wrote to their respective candidates to remind them of our invitation to appear at the Convention and/or to try to arrange for a visit by a surrogate associated with the campaign. They also delivered brief nominating speeches for their candidates at the Convention. Shortly before the Mock Convention, the campaign managers squared off in a public debate. Questions were posed by a student moderator and by members of the audience. A new feature was that students from different residence halls, athletic teams, and student organizations posed some videotaped questions too. In this way, our campus debate incorporated some of the more interactive elements that are beginning to be featured in actual candidate debates.

State Delegates and State Chairpersons

State delegation chairs were extremely important. For several months leading up to the Convention, they signed up for the states of their choice on a master list posted outside the Department offices. They were briefed about their responsibilities and given some handouts. The chairs recruited delegates for their states and submitted their delegate lists a few weeks before the Convention. It is helpful to recruit residence hall assistants, fraternity and sorority officers, student government officers, and other campus leaders for these positions whenever possible. A workshop for state chairs was held as the Convention drew near to explain procedures in detail and to answer questions. As noted, they brought delegates to a staging area to prepare banners and signs. They were in charge of their states' voting at the Convention. They polled delegates during roll calls, tallied votes, and announced them. Some state chairs placed names in nomination at the Convention. Some brought their delegates garbed thematically in state-related costumes. State chairs were encouraged to offer some state-related remarks before announcing votes (for example,

“Madame Chairperson, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, home of the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, and Yuengling’s, the Nation’s Oldest Brewery, wishes to cast its votes as follows. . . .” Or another memorable example: “Madame Chairperson, New Mexico, home of New Mexicans. . . .”). Theme music played as state chairs approached the floor microphone. In short, the chairs recruited delegates, coordinated them before and during the Convention, and encouraged creativity (within somewhat loose boundaries of good taste and decorum).

General Observations and Advice

Formal organization, division of labor, clearly delineated chains of command, and the like are all important. But it is not possible to anticipate everything that will require attention. Let us offer some more general observations that might help if you decide to stage your own mock convention.

Start early. You will have to delegate many duties to students on the Planning Committee and in other leadership positions. Try to recruit responsible and conscientious students for these positions. The ability to take initiative and to work productively without direct supervision are key attributes. Flexibility, a sense of humor, and a thick skin are also desirable traits. Approximately one year before the convention, have these students review files and video clips of past mock conventions to orient themselves to their tasks. They should then contact national party headquarters and research relevant web sites for candidate addresses, calendars, rules, and proceedings pertaining to the current campaign. These documents are invaluable and doing this kind of “legwork” early is advisable.

As any club advisor can attest, the degree of student enthusiasm, self-motivation, and competence of student members can vary considerably from year to year. The 2008 Mock Convention was especially challenging. The Current Affairs Club suffered as several key members dropped out for reasons having little to do with the Club or the Mock Convention. Student leadership of the Club suffered as a result. The “Road to the White House” course became more of a vehicle for organizing the Convention than it had been in past years. We are now considering adding a one-credit course supplement for students in this course who are participating in the Mock Convention. This one-credit course, entitled “Mock Convention 2012,” could then be used as an organizational vehicle for the Convention. Enrolled students will be assigned tasks such as writing the party platform, developing campaign management strategies for the candidates, preparing press kits and promotional materials, and so on. The course and the Mock Convention would provide a lesson in applied politics.

You will need the cooperation of assorted campus officials, staff members, and colleagues. You will need financial, logistical, organizational, and informational assistance. Discuss your plans and anticipated needs with strategically situated individuals well before the convention and stay in touch with them as the event draws near.

It is important to decide early on whether or not candidates for a party’s nomination who drop out before your mock convention will be included on the convention’s ballots anyway. If so, it is necessary to make sure that the campaign managers understand that their candidates will still be eligible for nomination (that is, they should still be doing their jobs!). They might also consider trying to land the running mate’s spot for their candidate.

When choosing a keynote speaker, it is tempting to want a current politician with national stature, both for the attention s/he will bring to a mock convention and for the relatively inexpensive cost. Most cannot accept speaking fees beyond expenses. However, it can be very difficult to get a commitment from a current politician, and any commitment you do receive is, at best, tentative. It is possible that a week before the convention they will have to cancel, and then you will have to scramble to find a replacement. For example, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell was invited to speak at our 2008 Mock Convention. Two days before the event, his office confirmed that he would attend and preparations were made in the schedule for him. However, on the morning of the event, his office called to cancel. Such are the hazards of inviting elected officials to speak. For this reason, it is wise to make sure that your keynote speaker is someone whose schedule is more predictable. It is recommended that you choose someone through a speakers bureau where there is a contract and, therefore, a much firmer commitment. Many former politicians and government officials are available, and although the cost is higher than for a current politician, the firm commitment is well worth it.

It is also important to decide how many speakers you want to invite and how long each will have to speak. In 2008, our speakers included Blair County Commissioner Donna Gority, Blair County Democratic Committee Chairman Frank Rosenhoover, State Senator John Wozniak. In addition, the State Auditor General, Jack Wagner, appeared and offered remarks. Lieutenant Governor Catherine Baker Knoll was unable to attend in person but she provided written remarks. Governor Ed Rendell was scheduled to speak, but schedule conflicts forced him to cancel just before the Convention began. Several surrogates campaigning for Senator Clinton spoke as well, including U.S. Representative Allysson Schwartz, Jehmu Greene, Judy Lichtman, Heather Tom, and Betsy Ebeling. And, as noted, the keynote speech was delivered by Lee Hamilton. The fact that the Obama-Clinton race was still up for grabs at the time of our Convention contributed to our ability to attract so many distinguished speakers. At some point, however, it is possible to have “too much of a good thing.” While students reported that they appreciated the content and enthusiasm of the speakers’ remarks, it was evident that some in attendance were growing a bit restless by the time we were able to proceed with committee reports and balloting for the presidential nomination.³

Think carefully about technology and plan how you will use it. Electronic scoreboards, e-mail, web sites, and videotaping will be features of any mock convention. Teleconferencing can be used to permit off-site delegations to participate in your campus mock convention. Live streaming of the event permits alumni and other interested off-campus viewers to be part of the festivities. Another possibility is to have keynote and other featured speakers deliver their remarks through video conferencing or to supply taped remarks that are prepared in advance. Advantages include reduced travel costs and speaking fees. Disadvantages include the loss of personal contact. How much is it worth to your institution, your department, and your students to have a nationally prominent speaker visit your campus in person? Will a “virtual visit” suffice?

Videotaping the mock convention is highly recommended. Television news footage is also valuable. Current participants can see how well they have done. Students enjoy watching some convention footage in classes and seeing themselves and their friends in action. The videos elicit some laughs and good-natured teasing, along with a sense of pride, satisfaction, and accomplishment. The clips can be posted on relevant campus home pages and later archived. Such materials are also useful for advertising future conventions and for showing future participants how the convention works. We recommend one stationary camera focused on the podium, and a mobile camera. Footage can be edited to be used as a “highlight” disc for advertising your next convention.

After the convention, hold de-briefing meetings with Planning Committee members. Survey student participants for their reactions. Find out what worked and what didn’t work and adjust accordingly. From our surveys, we have found that students enjoy and remember the costumes worn by state delegations and the interesting facts about a state that the delegation chair mentions when giving the state’s vote. Students also have reported overwhelmingly that they are more likely to watch the actual presidential conventions after having participated in a mock convention. These responses support the conclusion that we have achieved one of our goals for the convention: getting students more interested in and informed about the presidential race.

Recruiting students to participate may be your most challenging task. Some campaigns generate more enthusiasm than others. Approximately 350 students -- more than one-fourth of Saint Francis University student population -- participated in the 2008 Mock Convention. We were successful in attracting students from other colleges and from area high schools. While the challenge of generating student interest is greater in some years than in others, it is precisely then that activities like mock conventions are most important because they help to generate student interest and focus attention on presidential campaigns.

To encourage more widespread student participation on state delegations during the Convention, we are now considering offering cash prizes to delegations that were the most vocal or expressive in their enthusiasm. We might recognize delegations that came in the most creative costumes traditionally associated with their states or delegations that created the most “artistic” posters to represent their states. If cash prizes were substantial, such as \$500 to the winning delegation, we might find it easier to attract student participation in the future. Intrinsic motivations and appeals to public spirit and civic responsibility

are fine, but appealing to a bit of self-interest could go a long way towards mobilizing even more student participation in the future.

Why Stage A Mock Convention?

Experiential education is an important supplement to classroom instruction. Students observe theories being put into practice. They role play and attempt to apply concepts for themselves. The abstract becomes concrete. When opportunities for meaningful reflection are provided, mock conventions, moot court, model United Nations, and other simulations can increase students' interest in and knowledge of the topic at hand. Mock conventions provide students with valuable insights concerning convention procedures, coalition building, and other aspects of presidential campaigns. The excitement and publicity surrounding mock convention preparations stimulate student awareness of and interest in the current presidential campaigns. Students involved on the Media and Community Relations Committee learn a great deal by contacting local media, compiling press packets, and advertising the event. Campaign managers learn about the candidates and the art of negotiating in trying to convince delegates to vote for their candidate. Delegates, including state delegation chairs, experience the pressure applied by campaign managers and what is required to become informed about the candidates. Comments from students returning in the Fall have consistently indicated that they paid more attention to the actual party conventions during the Summer -- and understood them more fully -- than they would have had they not themselves been involved in our mock convention.⁴

For the above reasons, a conscious effort is made to involve students from various disciplines and majors. As explained above, a varying but always large proportion of our undergraduate student population participates in these mock conventions. Area high school students and students from other colleges and universities are invited to participate or observe. The events are advertised in the surrounding community and invitations are sent to civic groups, public officials, and other members of the community. Press coverage is relatively extensive, especially so if the speakers are well-known figures. In addition to their academic significance, then, mock conventions can be vehicles for attracting favorable publicity for the host institution.

Bringing distinguished visitors to the campus and generating favorable publicity for the host institution are certainly valuable outcomes. But the primary beneficiaries should be the students. A successful mock convention should be enjoyable for students while it simultaneously increases their political interest and elevates their campaign awareness. It is often said that "we simulate to stimulate." A mock convention brings the campaign, the issues, and even some of the actors to the campus. Publicize the event through web sites, electronic bulletin boards, campus newspapers, classroom announcements, and so on. Spread the word. Some might opt to persuade, coax, and cajole students to participate. Some might offer "extra credit" or other inducements. Some might require student participation. Some might develop special classes focusing directly on the campaign and the convention. Convention-related activities can be incorporated into existing classes. Whatever strategies best fit your personal style, once student interest is stimulated, they are ready to learn and we can use mock conventions to teach them and to reach them.

APPENDIX

Some sample materials that were used at Saint Francis University's 2008 Mock Democratic Convention are attached. Perhaps you can adapt them to fit your own needs. If you would prefer to participate in an existing mock convention program, we invite you to visit us with your students and participate in Saint Francis University's 2012 Mock Convention - - a Mock Republican Convention next time.

APPENDIX 1

The 2008 Mock Democratic Convention is coming to Saint Francis University on April 5th, 2008! **WHAT IS A MOCK CONVENTION?**



The Mock Convention is designed to resemble the national Democratic Nominating Convention in every way, with students acting as campaign managers, state delegation chairmen, and state delegates. Participation is also needed in the areas of convention hall decorations, stage and sound crew, and security. Positions are available for approximately 800 or more students in all these areas. Student political opinion will be reflected by the candidate nominated. The results may or may not be an indication of what to expect at the actual convention this summer.

WHAT IS A CAMPAIGN MANAGER?

The job of the campaign manager is to persuade the state delegates to vote for his/her candidate. The means with which to accomplish this are at the complete discretion of the campaign manager and his staff, in the best tradition of American "backroom politicking." Bribes are permissible but do try to keep it legal.

WHAT IS A STATE CHAIRMAN?

The state chairman will recruit a delegation to represent a state of his/her choice. The more delegates you can bring to the convention, the more effective and exciting it will be. Come prepared for the occasion with such things as signs, banners, noisemakers, etc. Interested students should sign up as soon possible. The popular states will go fast! (The sign-up sheet will be posted on the bulletin board next to Scotus 314.)

WHAT IS A STATE DELEGATE?

A state delegate represents the state of his/her choice and will vote on each ballot until a majority of 50% plus one is reached. Your vote is important. YOUR vote will determine the outcome of the convention.

WHAT HAPPENS AT A CONVENTION?

Almost anything! Actual conventions tend to be rather chaotic; the Mock Conventions at Saint Francis are no exception. Placards, posters, and political propaganda will be available with which to stage wild floor demonstrations. Improvisation is desired and encouraged. Between ballots, campaign managers will be busily caucusing the state delegations for votes. There is always the possibility of a deadlock--a few uncommitted voters could make all the difference.

WHAT IF I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT POLITICS OR CONVENTIONS?

Prior knowledge or experience is not needed. During the convention itself you will learn a great deal about the American political processes and you'll have some fun doing it! You will experience not only the external aspects of a convention, but also the backroom politicking which makes the system exciting. As a bonus, you will be more aware of the issues and the positions of the candidates, making you better prepared to vote in November.

HOW MUCH TIME IS INVOLVED?

Actually, very little. If you want to be more creative, however, the amount of preparation time is up to you. There will be periodic meetings before the convention in which details will be discussed.

WHEN IS THE CONVENTION?

The convention will be held on Saturday, April 5, 2008. Mock conventions can be a lot of fun; post-convention celebrating is a tradition.

APPENDIX 2

2008 MOCK DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION



Saint Francis University
Loretto, Pennsylvania 15940

POLITICAL SCIENCE
(814) 472-3059

CURRENT AFFAIRS CLUB

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SAINT FRANCIS UNIVERSITY MOCK CONVENTION

Students originated the idea of staging a Mock National Convention at Saint Francis University in 1960. The event has become a campus and community tradition, as a convention has been held every four years. It has been the tradition among the Saint Francis community to hold the convention of the party not holding the Office of the President.

The 1960 Democratic convention began amid parades and fanfare. The Honorable Philip Lepresti, a member of the State House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, delivered the keynote address. The event set standards for future years. The first mock convention ended with the nomination of Adlai Stevenson for president and John Kennedy for vice president. The event was deemed a tremendous success by all participants.

The convention continued to grow in 1964, when it was staged in Doyle Hall amid shouts and cheers. The purpose of the event began to become clear as a 1964 passage from the University newspaper *The Loretto* indicated: "This convention affords our students an opportunity to learn more about our political system and enjoy themselves at the same time."

By 1968, the campus event had begun to attract outside notice. Students weren't the only ones who watched Senator Richard Schweiker, who then represented the 13th Congressional District near Philadelphia, deliver the keynote address. Various states nominated their favorite candidates, later yielding these decisions to other delegations. In the fashion of a true political convention, floor demonstrations were conducted for each candidate following the nominating speeches. After six hours of balloting, caucusing, and vice-presidential nomination, the convention was adjourned with Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Senator Charles Percy as the students' choices for the Republican presidential and vice presidential nominees.

The renowned Senator Eugene McCarthy was the featured speaker at the 1972 convention. Included in the nine-point plan he outlined was a suggestion that the Democratic National Platform include a firm commitment to end the war in Vietnam. Political maneuvering became an integral part of this event. Following the third ballot, Senator George McGovern was selected for president, and Shirley Chisolm was given the vice-presidential slot by the student body.

By 1976, the convention, held in the Maurice Stokes Field House for the first time, had developed a high degree of organization. Georgia State Senator Julian Bond, the keynote speaker for the bicentennial year, stated that "the convention at Saint Francis University mirrored national conventions I have seen." In that year, the tension ran high as Governor Jerry Brown edged Congressman Morris Udall for the presidential nomination. Udall supporters had to remain content with the vice-presidential spot awarded him. The atmosphere of the 1976 convention was often a lighthearted one, as reflected by these observations offered by one of the student participants: "As expected, the crazies were out in force. One delegate appeared costumed as the Wild Man from Borneo. Another fashioned bicentennial shorts with bright green sunglasses to match."

In 1980, a mock Republican convention was held. George Bush, then a Republican presidential candidate, was forced to cancel his engagement as keynote speaker. John Sears was a late replacement, and he filled in quite ably. Once again, enthusiasm was high and the convention nominated Gerald Ford to be the presidential nominee, and John Anderson as the vice-presidential nominee.

The 1984 Democratic meeting was one of the most controversial in the history of the convention. Bella Abzug delivered the keynote address amidst the picket lines and protests outside the Stokes Fieldhouse of Ms. Abzug's pro-choice stance. Despite the controversy, the convention was a large success and generated much enthusiasm. Gary Hart was chosen as the presidential nominee of the Democratic Party, and Jesse Jackson was the vice-presidential nominee.

The 1988 Democratic Convention was another rousing one. Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland was the keynoter and the delegates nominated Michael Dukakis for the presidency and Jesse Jackson (once again!) for the vice-presidency.

In 1992, the Democratic Convention was graced with the presence of Senator George McGovern as keynote speaker. Not only was Senator McGovern commemorating the twentieth anniversary of his nomination for the presidency by the Democratic Party; he was visiting Saint Francis University twenty years after his presidential nomination by a previous graduation of our mock convention delegates. Nominated for president was Governor (soon-to-be president) Bill Clinton, and for vice-president was Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, who was present at the convention representing the Clinton Campaign.

In 1996, another Mock Republican Convention was held. Former Pennsylvania Governor, U. S. Attorney General, and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations, Richard Thornburgh, was the keynote speaker. The delegates nominated Bob Dole for the presidency and Colin Powell for the vice-presidency.

In 2000, yet another Mock Republican Convention was held. Marlin Fitzwater, former press secretary for Presidents Reagan and Bush, delivered the keynote address. The delegates nominated John McCain for the presidency and Elizabeth Dole for the vice presidency.

The successful 2004 Mock Democratic Convention keynote speaker was Kathleen Kennedy Townsend. The 2004 participating delegates nominated John Kerry for president and Al Sharpton for vice president. Excitement mounts every four years here at Saint Francis University as preparations for the mock convention are made. State delegation chairpersons promote state unity and enthusiasm. State costumes, signs, and flags are constructed. Campaign managers craftily secure the votes of as many state delegates as can be persuaded. They flood the campus with slogans, posters, and other paraphernalia in support of their favorite candidates. Construction crews work hard to create an authentic looking convention hall.

The 2008 convention scheduled for Saturday, April 5, promises to be no exception!

APPENDIX 3

2008 MOCK DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION

April 5, 2008, Saturday

1:00 p.m. JFK Student Center, Saint Francis University Loretto, Pennsylvania 15940

HOW WILL THINGS WORK AT THE MOCK CONVENTION

AND

WHAT AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

Agenda:

1. Call to Order: Chairperson
2. The Pledge of Allegiance
3. The National Anthem
4. Invocation: Reverend Gabriel Zeis, T.O.R.
5. Introductory Remarks: Chairperson
6. Welcoming Speeches
7. Keynote Address: Lee H. Hamilton
8. Credentials Committee Report
9. Rules Committee Report
10. Platform Committee Report (followed by voice vote)

11. Nominations of Presidential Candidates;
Campaign Manager Acceptance Speeches
12. Balloting by Roll Call of States for Presidential Nominee
13. Announcement of Convention Presidential Nominee: Chairperson
14. Nomination of Vice-Presidential Candidates
15. Balloting by Roll Call of States for Vice-Presidential Nominee
16. Announcement of Convention Vice-Presidential Nominee: Chairperson
17. Benediction: Rev. Daniel Sinisi, T.O.R.
18. Adjournment

Rules of the Convention:

1. The Convention shall proceed in the order of business stated above.
2. To place a candidate's name in nomination, the state delegation chairperson should rise and wave the state's identification placard. Once recognized by the Convention Chairperson, proceed to the nearest floor microphone to make your nomination.
3. No campaign manager's nominating speech shall exceed five minutes in length.
4. In balloting, the vote of each state shall be announced by the chairperson of the state delegation.
5. The number of votes needed to nominate shall be defined as one half of the total votes plus one (2,025 votes needed to nominate). Note: If the Convention decides to seat and count the votes of the Florida and Michigan delegates, 2,208 votes will be needed to secure the presidential and vice-presidential nominations. The Credentials and Rules Committee has determined that if these states and the Democratic National Committee reach an agreement to count delegate votes from FL and MI, the Mock Convention will abide by this decision and will count the votes of mock convention delegates from FL and MI. However, if the states and the DNC are unable to resolve the matter prior to April 5, 2008, SFU Mock Convention delegates will decide by a voice vote whether or not the FL and MI votes will be counted.

General Instructions:

Before the Convention--

1. All state delegation chairpersons have received a memo which explains some of your responsibilities. The memo also tells you how many votes your state will have and how you will cast them. If you have misplaced these materials, get new copies from Dr. Gentry or Dr. Melusky.
2. All state delegations should have:
 - a. state identification placard (this will be provided at the convention);
 - b. additional state signs;
 - c. candidate signs and banners;
 - d. other distinguishing items (e.g., state costumes).

Sign making will take place on Tuesday, March 25, 2008; Thursday, March 27, 2008; Monday, March 31, 2008 and Tuesday, April 1, 2008 from 8 to 11 p.m. each evening in the basement of Saint Elizabeth Hall.

State delegation chairpersons should bring some delegates with them to participate in sign and banner making.
3. The state delegation chairperson should submit complete lists of state delegates to Dr. Gentry or Dr. Melusky. This should be done **immediately** (if you have not already done so). Be sure that none of your delegates have signed up to be members of some other state delegation.
4. Report to JFK on Thursday, April 3rd between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. and/or Friday, April 4 at 4:00 p.m. with as many volunteers as you can round up to hang signs and banners and help with convention set up.

5. Assemble your delegation and have them seated in your state section on the Convention floor before 12:45 p.m. on April 5. When you arrive, check in at the registration desk.

6. All participants are encouraged to get into the "spirit" of the Convention and to have a good time but please remember that we are trying to project a positive image of Saint Francis University to the surrounding community. Remind your delegates that this is a simulation and they should at least **pretend** to have enthusiasm for the Democratic Party, even if their actual personal preferences lie elsewhere.

7. Your STATE: _____ delegation is entitled to cast _____ votes. The apportionment of votes within the delegation is up to the delegation and its chairperson. For example, if your state is entitled to cast 50 votes and your delegation has ten members, several things might happen. If all ten delegates agree to vote for candidate X, the chairperson will cast all 50 votes for candidate X. But if eight delegates vote for candidate X and two delegates vote for candidate Y, the chairperson will cast 40 votes for candidate X and 10 votes for candidate Y.

8. Each state delegation should caucus before the Convention to decide if it wishes to participate in candidate nominations. If you decide to nominate a candidate, the state delegation chairperson will announce the nominee and will introduce that candidate's campaign manager, who will then make a brief acceptance speech.

9. During March, campaign managers can begin placing signs for the respective candidates around campus. In designing signs, all persons are asked to observe standards of "good taste." Following the Convention, you will be responsible for removing your own signs. Please do so immediately.

10. Campaign managers should caucus before the Convention to discuss the vice-presidency. Candidates who have withdrawn from the race might be considered for the second spot on the ticket. If candidate X wins the presidential nomination, his or her campaign manager will accept the nomination and will announce candidate X's preference(s) for a running mate. The campaign manager will be encouraged to identify at least two acceptable running mates. The Convention Chairperson will ask a state delegation chairperson to nominate this person (or these persons). Wave your state placard to be recognized. If more than one candidate is nominated for the vice-presidency, balloting by states will proceed in the same order as the presidential balloting. The number of votes to nominate will again be 50% plus one -- 2,025 (or 2,208). If only one candidate is nominated for the vice-presidency, balloting will be by acclamation (voice vote).

At the Convention --

1. Presidential Nominations:

According to the rules of this Convention, only the Democratic candidates still running as of March 1, 2008 (Clinton and Obama) are eligible for nomination on the **first** ballot. **If** we go to a **second** ballot, the field is wide open.

The Convention Chairperson will announce that the following candidates are eligible for the party's presidential nomination (Clinton and Obama). S/he will then ask if anyone wants to place a name in nomination. It is likely that Illinois would place Obama's name into nomination and that New York would place Clinton's name into nomination because IL and NY are the "home" states of Obama and Clinton respectively.

To place a candidate's name in nomination, the state delegation chairperson should rise and wave the state's identification placard or state sign. Once recognized by the Convention Chairperson, proceed to the nearest floor microphone to make your nomination.

If you are placing a name in nomination say this: "Mister/Madam Chairperson, the state of _____ would like to nominate _____ as our party's presidential candidate." The Chair will ask for a second from another state. (Delegates will applaud wildly after the nomination is seconded.) Then the Chair will ask if the candidate's campaign manager is present and would like to offer brief remarks on his or her behalf. If not, the Chair will give **you** the opportunity to offer some remarks in behalf of the candidate you nominated. You can "respectfully decline" to do so.

The campaign manager will have five minutes to make a speech placing his/her candidate's name in nomination. A "spontaneous" demonstration of enthusiasm may follow.

2. Roll Call for **Balloting** for **President**:

Each state delegation chairperson will announce the votes from his/her state. The states will be called in alphabetical order. **PLEASE BE NEAR A FLOOR MICROPHONE SO THE ROLL CALL CAN PROCEED QUICKLY AND SMOOTHLY. ANTICIPATE YOUR STATE.** For example, the Convention Chair will call "Alabama." The Alabama state delegation chairperson will go to the microphone and will announce "Mister/Madam Chairperson, the state of Alabama (you can insert a few colorful, historically significant, or otherwise interesting comments about your state at this time) casts its votes as follows: ..." (Alabama will cast 60 votes. The Alabama delegation chairperson will calculate the apportionment of these 60 votes among the candidates. If all 60 votes are not being given to a single candidate, the Alabama delegation chairperson should save the largest count for last.) Subsequent state delegation chairpersons will follow the same procedure.

After all states have cast their votes, the Convention Chair will bang the gavel and call the balloting to a close. At this point, the Recording Officer will approach the podium and will announce the results. Remember, it takes a majority of the total available votes to win. That is, the nominee will require at least 2,025 votes (or 2,208).

If there is no winner on the first ballot, the Convention Chair will reopen the nominations. At this point, new candidates can be nominated or the nominations of candidates can be withdrawn by campaign managers or by the state chairperson who originally nominated that candidate. (Of course, another state could re-nominate someone whose nomination was withdrawn). Rise and wave your state placard to gain the Convention Chair's attention.

Any state delegation chairperson can now nominate a new candidate. At this point, **any** Democrat who is constitutionally eligible for the presidency could be nominated. Next, a second round of balloting will take place following the same procedures used during the first round. Rounds of balloting will continue until a candidate is able to secure the nomination. (Note: bargains concerning the vice-presidency might be especially useful to break such deadlocks.)

After the Recording Officer announces the winner of the presidential nomination, yet another "spontaneous" burst of enthusiasm may be called for.

3. Selection of the **Vice-Presidential Nominee**:

The Convention Chair will announce the start of vice-presidential nominations. The campaign manager for the winning presidential candidate will inform the Convention of his/her candidate's preference(s) for a running mate. As noted previously, the campaign manager will be encouraged to identify at least two acceptable running mates. The Convention Chair will then ask state delegate chairs for nominations. Only running mates identified as "acceptable" by the presidential nominee's campaign manager and who are constitutionally eligible for the vice presidential spot on our Party's ticket can be nominated. Wave your state placard to be recognized. The Convention Chair will call for seconds. Anyone from the floor can shout out, "I second the nomination." After nominations have been closed, balloting by states will proceed as above. The number of votes needed to nominate will again be 50% plus one -- 2,025 votes (or 2,208). If we encounter severe time constraints a voice vote may be substituted for roll-call balloting at the discretion of the Rules Committee.

4. **Final Note:**

Try to hold your delegates on the floor for the entire convention. One helpful way of doing this is to caucus and poll them before each vote.

THIS IS NOT EXACTLY HOW REAL CONVENTIONS WORK, BUT IT IS A PRETTY CLOSE APPROXIMATION. WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO HAVE FUN, PAY ATTENTION TO THE 2008 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AND TUNE IN TO THE NATIONAL PARTY CONVENTIONS THIS SUMMER TO SEE HOW CLOSELY THESE SPECTACLES MATCH OUR OWN!

ENDNOTES

1. Securing a party's nomination is the first step to becoming president. Candidates start early to organize campaigns, recruit volunteers, raise money, and build name recognition. Primaries have become increasingly important since 1968 and candidates try to build momentum and win enough delegates to secure a party's nomination. As a result, campaigns have become more expensive, media coverage has intensified, and political conventions have become less important as candidate-selection devices. See Stephen J. Wayne, *The Road to the White House 2008: The Politics of Presidential Elections* (Thompson Wadsworth, 2008).

2. National political conventions in the United States have changed. In past years, conventions deals were sometimes made by delegates and party bosses to give the nomination to a favored candidate. Multiple ballots were sometimes necessary to reach a decision. Suspense and anticipation were high. Media coverage was extensive. In more recent times, however, the primary-determined nominee has been known in advance. Instead of candidate-selection conventions, parties have held "coronations" or ratifying conventions where delegates make things official. In spite of these changes, conventions are still important.

Conventions enable delegates to get acquainted and plan for the upcoming campaign. Conventions provide a forum for examining and modifying rules and procedures. Convention delegates debate and approve a platform, signaling the party's positions to voters. Conventions give party luminaries and rising stars a chance to address the delegates and the viewing public. Conventions are vehicles used by the party to rally the troops and as four-day infomercial to impress voters with the party's candidates, messages, and unity.

Conventions are heavily scripted and staged with television in mind. What will the viewers see? What will they think of the party and its candidates? Parties try to minimize dissension and discord and to demonstrate unity and resolve. On the other hand, journalists look for news. Conflict makes for more interesting stories than harmony. Interests of party leaders and journalists are at odds. The irony is that if party leaders succeed in staging a "good show," networks are less interested in covering it. Network coverage has declined and will continue to do so under existing circumstances. Of course, political junkies can always turn to C-SPAN for gavel-to-gavel coverage of the proceedings.

Staging a mock convention provides instructors with opportunities to teach about and demonstrate similarities and differences between conventions of the past and present. See Joseph Melusky, *The American Political System: An Owner's Manual* (McGraw-Hill, 2000) for a discussion of the evolution of party conventions.

3. One solution would be to imitate recent practice of the national parties by eliminating the position of "keynote speaker." This way, a number of "featured speakers" could be invited and, depending on how many accept, reasonable time limits could be set. A budgetary side benefit would be saving the speaker's fee that goes to a prominent keynoter. On the other hand, identifying a prominent keynoter up front helps to generate publicity and to attract other speakers who want to share the dais with this individual.

4. Surveys are distributed to participants. Journal assignments featuring Mock-Convention experiences are required in some classes. Discussion area questions about the Mock Convention are posted in course web sites. From such sources, we glean suggestions for improvement and are able to discern that students overwhelmingly find the experience worthwhile. Most indicate that the Convention was fun, they learned more about the campaign, and they plan to watch at least portions of the upcoming national party conventions to compare them to their own experiences. A few students attended the Democratic and Republican conventions in connection with academic internship programs. These students reported that the Mock Convention gave them unique insights and prepared them to better appreciate activities in Denver and Minneapolis-St.Paul.