

Republican National Convention Seminar- Kelly Oeltjenbruns

My name is Kelly Oeltjenbruns, and I studied for two weeks in Tampa, Florida, at the Republican National Convention. I'm a politics major here at Cornell. Pause; I know what you're thinking. Every time I tell someone I'm a politics major, I get an eye-roll, a slight gasp- at the least, a raise of the eyebrow. We have labeled politicians in largely negative ways, and you're probably also thinking that we've done so for good reason. I'm not trying to convince anyone any differently; but being in the political atmosphere was probably the single best thing I have done for my political career. I'm so thankful for the Class of '55 for their generosity in helping provide the opportunity for me to spend two weeks in Tampa for the Republican National Convention.



The day after I arrived in Tampa, The Washington Center (TWC), who facilitated the seminar, held lectures from various intellectuals and professionals. These continued throughout the first week, and featured former Congressman Mickey Edwards, Hofstra Professor Meena Bose, former journalist Aaron Brown, and Loyola Professor Michael Genovese. The subjects of these lectures were political strategy, financing, and media, and how they affected the RNC.



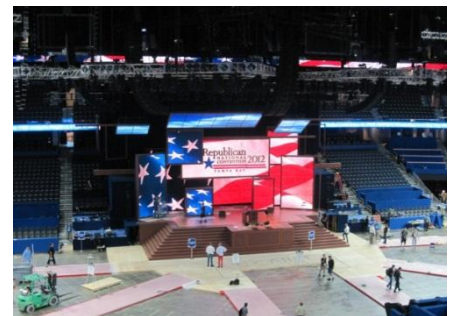
Professors Brown and Bose, with Congressman Edwards, discussing political strategy

The lectures were fantastic. Very informative, I learned things about media angles that I had never thought about before. Mr. Aaron Brown, a longtime reporter, discussed the role of images on screen paired with the role of words on screen, and how they interacted with the audio of TV ads. For example, he

showed us an ad aired against McCain in 2008, and it was very impactful because it relied solely on powerful images and soft background music, not wordy arguments. Among other topics, Mickey Edwards drilled home that we need to be Americans before Democrats and Republicans, and discussed how to protect our nation against the threat of partisanship. Overall, the lectures spurred a new thought process about all things political.

I've taken some politics classes at Cornell, and participated in some primitive election activities. It was good to have solid background knowledge of party workings and member roles, which I can partly accredit to my first year at Cornell. Recently, an opportunity to help with the Linn County Republican campaign has opened up, and I am excited to be able to help with that and gain some more ground experience.

In addition to our lectures, we were split into small groups for discussion. These groups were led by faculty advisors, my



Convention Floor- 4 days until Convention

leader being a professor at Hofstra University. It was good to engage in deep discussion with the students around me, and this was also a great way to meet on a more personal level some other



students in the TWC program. We were given tours of the Convention facilities, and were able to see all the construction being done in the forum. I was amazed at the small amount of time it took them to get set up! We also attended special events hosted by Hillsborough Community College (the campus we used during our program) and TWC. These events presented a great opportunity to talk not only to the speakers who gave the morning lectures, but also to other guest who had been invited. For example, the President of TWC was at one reception, which was

exciting. One event was held at the Florida Aquarium, which we were able to look at throughout the course of the night. These were great opportunities to network, as that was something I wished to learn about and was also something TWC was emphasizing. I cannot say I've mastered the skill yet, but I've definitely picked up techniques and am excited to be in more positions to network.

While the first week of the seminar was lectures, the second week was the actual Convention. Friday and Saturday, I interned as a stand-in for CNN. My job was to sit where an anchor would sit during the broadcast while the crew checked



microphones, lighting, and camera angles. While the job in and of itself was not action-packed, it was so interesting to see the CNN crew work to make the set look perfect. There was so much equipment packed into their skybox. The crew members were extremely nice, and I got to know a few of them, who were able to tell me about the media process- what they're looking for in a shot, what they'll focus on,



CNN Skybox

and where they'll strategically place reporters, for example. It was a blast working for them, and it was very cool to get to see the skybox that the millions of viewers get to watch at home. The week of the actual Convention, I worked as a volunteer for the Tampa Host Committee. While I was disappointed at my placement and expected something more substantive, being a volunteer was fun. My job was to greet delegates and other guests as they came to the

Convention Area, and I was stationed right outside the Tampa Convention Center, where all the media outlets had work stations (the actual convention was in the forum). Because the first day of the Convention was cancelled due to Tropical Storm Isaac, I only worked Tuesday-Thursday. Tuesday was a long day- from 10:00 AM to 8:30 PM- but the other two days I worked 4:00-8:30 PM shifts. I was able to see some pretty famous



Former Secretary Condoleezza Rice

people (Rick Perry, Piers Morgan, Stephen Baldwin, to name a few) and was able to talk to some delegates and other guests of the Convention. More importantly, I was able to get into the Convention



Rick Perry, TX Governor

Forum to see most of the big speeches, where I was able to analyze the speeches and discuss them with my peers. We all agreed, for example, that Ann Romney nailed her speech, but the video made to ‘humanize’ Romney that played before his acceptance speech should have timed the points of emphasis differently. Analysis to this level is something I’m excited to take on as a political scientist.

Going to the Convention was a blast. I learned many things about political strategy and process, and was able to meet some exciting people as well.

This Seminar challenged my perceptions of my future career, but also

confirmed that I am in the right field. Politics is exactly where I should be – exactly what God has laid on my heart- and my future plans include (more solidly than in the past) the idea of going to Law School and entering public service. Going to this Convention made me want to start my career immediately, for want to be in the thick of all the issues and policy making in this crucial time in America’s history. I’m excited to be involved in political science, and I’m so thankful that Cornell and the Off-Campus Study office, through the Class of ‘55 Award, are helping me to achieve my goals.

Thank you so much!

-Kelly Oeltjenbruns, Class of ‘15

