

Defining Political Views

At Iowa State, being a student requires a lot of hard work and responsibility. The topic of politics is just one more thing for students to think about. For some, the extent of their political activism is reading a newspaper or a news magazine, others go as far as being involved in a political organization.

The following pages reveal the different forms of student political activism in a series of three stories. The first, "Defining Political Involvement" is a story that touches on the often-talked-about issue of student political involvement.

"Political Internship Proves Resourceful" tells the story of Brad Hansen, an Iowa State student who spent a semester in Washington D.C. Hansen found that his active political involvement while in Washington changed his life.

The last story "Building a political force through the many powerful voices" shares the experiences of the two main political groups on campus, the ISU Democrats and the College Republicans.

Your activism in politics is a personal choice but is also one that will never grow without knowledge of the options of how to be involved.

-design by Chad Owen

AN EXPLORATION OF STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVITY FINDS INVOLVEMENT AT IOWA STATE

How politically informed are you? For many Iowa State students, the answer lies in the fact that between classes, work and a social life, they lack the time needed to keep up with the daily happenings of local and national politics.

Many students agree that “there’s a lot of apathy towards the whole political process and what’s going on,” Brad Hansen, an Iowa State political science major, said. “Most of the students seem to care more about who the leading football rusher is in the Saturday football game than they do about what’s going on in the nation’s capital.”

Mathew Goodman, Government of the Student Body off-campus senator, acknowledged that while students are pretty apathetic when it comes to national politics they are even more apathetic when it comes to GSB and local politics.

Although more than half of Ames’ 35,000 residents are college students, few of them participate in local politics.

Dave Zeisler, a senior in management information systems, said that the reason students do not pay attention to local politics is because many of them don’t plan to stay in Ames after they receive their degree.

“I didn’t even know Larry Curtis was the mayor of Ames until he was my professor last semester,” he said.

Goodman added that students complain about city policies but fail to do anything to try and change them.

POLITICAL INTERNSHIP

Brad Hansen, a senior in political science, is a self-motivated person who has a sincere interest in politics.

“I came up with the idea on my own,” Hansen said of his Capital Hill internship in Washington D.C. as an aide to Senator Charles Grassley, R—Iowa during the fall of 1994. Hansen said he saw a poster advertising Washington D.C. internships and thought that it sounded like a neat idea.

Hansen, who plans on getting a legal education after graduating from Iowa State, was placed where he could put his legal instincts to good use.

“They placed me upstairs in the judiciary subcommittee,” he said. He assisted Grassley, who has a seat on the Republican Senate judiciary subcommittee, in clarifying and finalizing new legislature.

“The reason we don’t have 19-and-over bars here is because of the city council, and no one [students] ever runs for the city council,” he said.

Student apathy towards local politics carries over to campus politics—especially where student government is concerned. Most students have no idea what goes on in GSB Goodman said, adding that only three percent of Iowa State’s 23,000 students voted in last spring’s GSB elections.

At the same time, however, many students don’t pay attention to state or national politics either.

According to Goodman, there is some student interest in state politics, however, that interest is typically focused on governor and senate races.

Jennifer Davis, a senior in political science, said that a lot of students probably don’t know who their state representative is. She added that a lot of politicians try to make themselves noticed at first, but if the students don’t respond by voting for them, they lose interest in the students pretty quick. Presidential elections it seems attract the most student interest and involvement, she said.

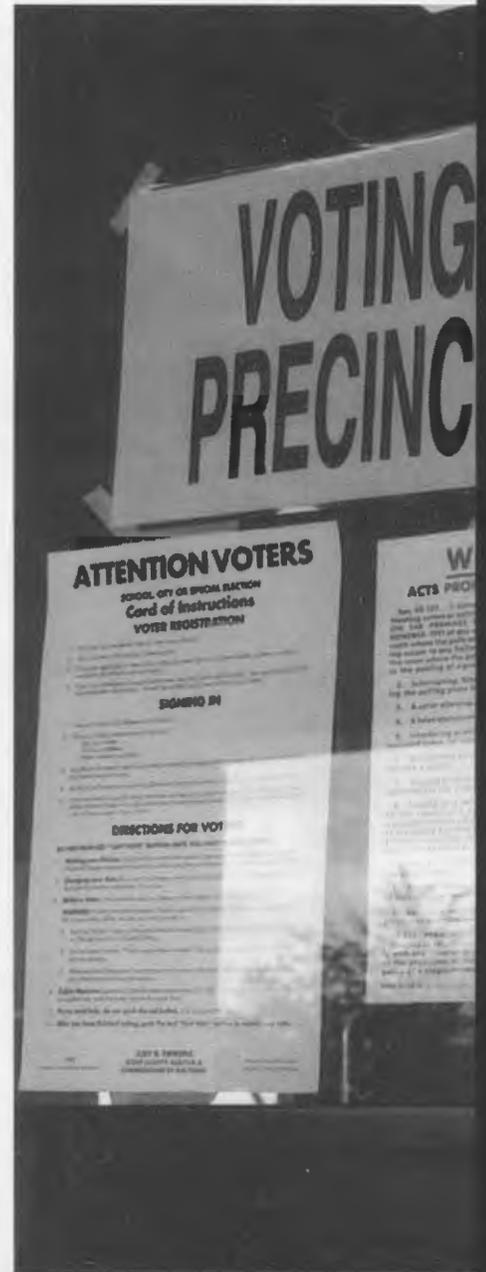
If voter registration numbers are any indication of political activism, than things might not be all that bad at Iowa State. A survey of 146 ISU students by *ethos* staff members shows that more than half are registered to vote.

Iowa State political science professor Steffen Schmidt said that the largest thing students do politically is vote at election time. “Between elections they may not do much else,” he said.

Hansen also agreed that elections had a big effect on students. “When it’s an off year we don’t even know what’s going on,” he said, adding that students do not focus a lot of attention on the political system as a whole. “A lot of students don’t get the whole effect of how politics affect them,” he said.

Schmidt had a more positive view of students’ interests in politics, saying that many are interested in and aware of the issues, but they have a hard time finding unbiased information.

“There’s a lot of misinterpretation and ideological interpretation floating around, and it’s hard to sort out how to position yourself,” he said. “I think that’s a real serious problem.”



PROVES RESOURCEFUL

“I helped them on whatever issue they were working on. When I was there, it was the crime bill—a bill from the U.S. House of Representatives. I would have to read through the bill and find out what was going on and help them do research,” Hansen said.

After experiencing politics at the national level, Hansen has become an advocate for political involvement. “These staffs literally cannot work without interns. It was an amazing experience to go out and work on that level of government. You don’t think you have a lot of pull out there, but what you’re doing is actually important.”

“It wasn’t even so much the actual job duties and what I learned, I think the most important thing I took away from Washington was the people that I got to meet and the people I worked with. I made amazing contacts out there that I think will be important to my future,” he said.

A successful future is in store for Hansen who has aspirations of

becoming a lawyer. “I don’t want to practice law my whole life though, I’d also like to get into the political arena. I’d like to get involved in city politics and then possibly go to the state level.”

Wherever Hansen ends up, his love of politics will go with him.

“Politics is weird, if you get into it, you can’t get into it on just one level. If you get into politics, it becomes your whole life, from my perspective,” he said.

“It is kind of hard to keep another job. You’ve got to watch your back at every turn.”

—by Jen Schroeder

Because students generally lack time, the *Iowa State Daily* is usually their primary source of local and national news. In fact, 84 percent of the students surveyed by *ethos* said they read a newspaper(s) at least three times a week.

The *Daily* provides information to a lot of students because it's so available," Schmidt said.

Hansen agreed that the *Daily* is a simple and convenient source of political information, but "that's an extremely narrow source of news on this campus," he said, adding that when he listens to other students discussing politics, he often hears them quoting verbatim from the *Daily's* opinion page.

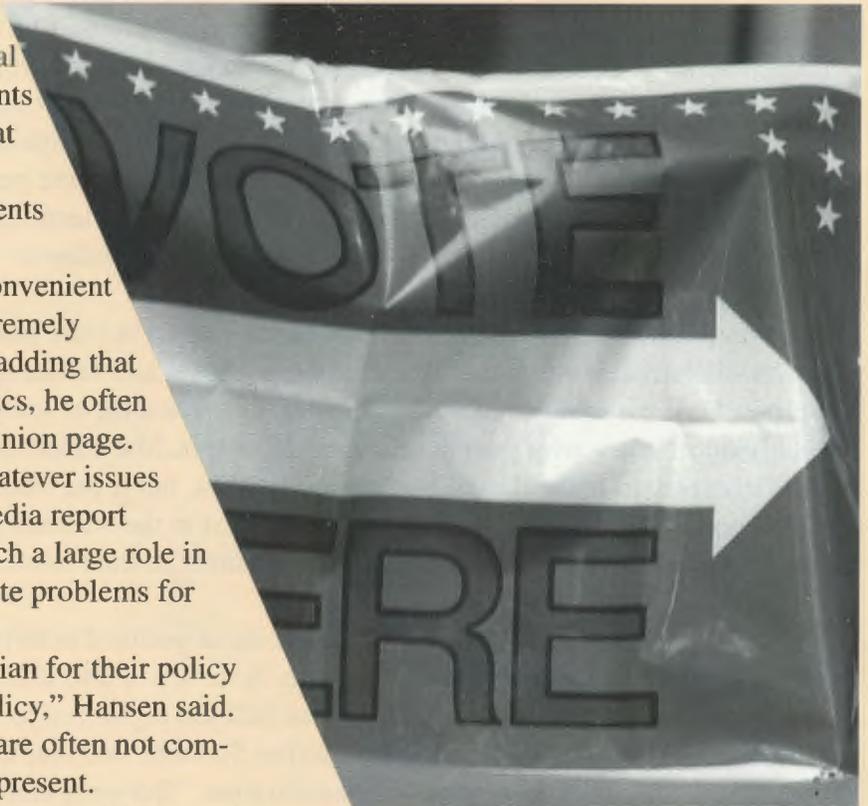
"The political stage is set by the media, and whatever issues are out there only become important when the media report them," he said. The fact that the media do play such a large role in the dissemination of political information can create problems for candidates and voters alike.

"A lot of people out there will trash on a politician for their policy when they really have no idea of what's in the policy," Hansen said. Thus when students go to the polls to vote, they are often not completely sure what issues the various candidates represent.

According to Schmidt, another problem is the volume of information. "There is so much information that a lot of people just put up their hands and say I can't read all of this," he said.

In the past people were not expected to know about political issues so long as they understood what their party represented, Schmidt said. "American politics in the nineties is complicated. You can't really be informed about all of the issues."

— by Trisha Wollrab



Building a political Force

ISU DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS

WORK TO GET STUDENTS INVOLVED

When it comes to discussing political activity, campus political groups are a good source of information. The two main student political groups at Iowa State are the ISU Democrats and the College Republicans.

Despite the existence of these and other political groups on campus, political activity among students at Iowa State seems to be at a bare minimum. ISU Democrats co-chair Dustin Shaver, a junior in political science said that ISU is a "fairly apathetic campus," when it comes to politics.

"They don't get involved," Shaver said. "Even though they may care about the issues and the candidates, they'd rather spend their time in other groups and other activities."

Active members for both groups vary from semester to semester. The College Republicans usually have between 30 to 50 active members. College Republicans chairman John Tannehill, a sophomore in business, said. Shaver said that the ISU Democrats average about 30 active members per semester. Shaver said, that's about 60 students representing two different groups on a campus of 25,000 students.

"Sixty people is not a good percentage," Shaver said. "I would think on this size of a campus you could pull more people in."

Politics is "a bad word" for students, Tannehill said. "People have one big misconception—they think of it as a big rally or something." In reality, this couldn't be farther from the truth.

The ISU Democrats and the College Republicans are awareness clubs that want to see students get involved. Both groups hold meetings every other week and bring in popular political speakers. For instance, in September, the democrats brought in Mike Peterson, chairman of the Iowa Democratic Party, while the republicans brought Steve Churchill, a state representative.

Another area of focus for both groups is registering students to vote and then trying to convince them to do so.

"I don't think as many of them are [voting] that should," Tannehill said, adding that on average, voting numbers for people below the age of 25 are low, but starting to increase. One method both groups use to register voters is by setting up booths at campus events like Clubfest and VEISHEA and booths at various campus locations.

In September the democrats had 103 students sign up in one day. "The trick is—once you get their name on a sheet—keeping them involved and interested," Shaver said. "That is our challenge this year—keeping them involved."

Both groups stressed the importance of getting their fellow students involved in the political process. For the upcoming presidential campaign, both groups would like to see students become more involved in the political process.

"This is a fun way to become involved; once you are involved in college, you stay involved down the road," Churchill said.

Peterson agreed, with Churchill, adding that "what students say has an impact on the upcoming election, I want this party [democratic] to be more youthful and vigorous."

—by Kim McNamer

STUDENT SURVEY

ethos surveys students about where they get their information on politics and the extent of their political involvement.

Do you read a newspaper or newspapers at least three times a week?

Yes 84% **No** 16%

Do you read a news magazine or news magazines at least once a week?

Yes 21% **No** 79%

Do you watch T.V. news at least three times a week?

Yes 67% **No** 33%

Have you ever volunteered, or worked for, a political campaign?

Yes 17% **No** 83%

Have you ever signed a petition?

Yes 73% **No** 27%

Are you a registered voter?

Yes 77% **No** 23%

The political survey was conducted via telephone using a random sampling of 146 Iowa State students on Sept. 15-20, 1995. Results were figured by Test and Evaluation Services located in 114 Durham Center.—ed