



---

"So, Your Institution Is Hosting a Presidential Debate...": A Case Study of 2008 Programming by the University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections

Author(s): Leigh McWhite

Source: *The American Archivist*, Spring/Summer 2010, Vol. 73, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010), pp. 219-234

Published by: Society of American Archivists

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27802722>

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



*Society of American Archivists* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The American Archivist*

JSTOR

# “So, Your Institution Is Hosting a Presidential Debate . . .”: A Case Study of 2008 Programming by the University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections

Leigh McWhite

## Abstract

On 26 September 2008, the University of Mississippi hosted the first presidential debate between Barack Obama and John McCain. This case study describes the wide variety of programming and resources developed by the Archives and Special Collections to coincide with this historic occasion. It identifies objectives, outlines assessment, and discusses lessons learned that have implications for any large-scale programming efforts.

In November 2007, a year prior to the federal election, the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates announced that the first debate of 2008 would take place on 26 September on the University of Mississippi (UM) campus. The last time the state’s flagship institution had experienced the national spotlight with such intensity was 1962. That fall, a white segregationist crowd rioted against U.S. marshals protecting James Meredith, scheduled to register as the first African American student at the university. This small insurrection failed to prevent integration and resulted instead in a year-long occupation by federal troops. Over the following decades, the university, known familiarly as “Ole Miss,” would periodically enter the national consciousness as the media covered other episodes of troubled race relations on campus, including protests against the institution’s use of Confederate symbols.<sup>1</sup>

© Leigh McWhite.

<sup>1</sup> Much has been written about the University of Mississippi’s tumultuous racial history; the following is a selective bibliography: Russell H. Barrett, *Integration at Ole Miss* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965); Nadine Cohodas, *The Band Played Dixie: Race and Liberal Conscience at Ole Miss* (New York: Free Press, 1997); William Doyle, *An American Insurrection: James Meredith and the Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962* (New York: Doubleday, 2001); Charles W. Eagles, *The Price of Defiance: James Meredith and the Integration of Ole Miss* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); David G. Sansing, *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1999); and James Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1964).

Yet, the university has made tremendous strides in race relations that have gone unheralded in the national press: African American student enrollment is about 16 percent and growing; the university regularly commemorates the events of 1962, recently erecting a statue honoring Meredith and the civil rights movement; and the institution's William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation promotes an open dialogue on past and current racial issues on campus and across the state. Chancellor Robert Khayat recognized that hosting a presidential debate was an opportunity to demonstrate this transformation for thousands of international and national journalists, thereby improving the public's perception of UM. Little did anyone realize that the McCain-Obama contest would heighten the relevance of race as a storyline in this particular debate.<sup>2</sup>

The university also viewed the debate as an enhanced learning experience for students and the campus community. Soon after the university's selection as host, the administration issued a request for academic programming related to the debate and the election. In response, departments, institutes, and organizations planned ninety-two events, and professors from a variety of disciplines created nineteen courses. For its part, the Archives and Special Collections developed a broad range of resources and events to support both public awareness and campus learning objectives. In the course of several months of planning, we identified five broad goals to guide our efforts:

- 1) to execute the request of the administration for academic programming,
- 2) to increase public awareness of library and archival holdings of related materials,
- 3) to meet the needs of media during debate coverage,
- 4) to strengthen ties with library and archives donors, and
- 5) to enhance the archives' relationship with university funding authorities.

The Archives and Special Collections at UM is a relatively small department in the J. D. Williams Library consisting of five faculty and two staff. Collecting focuses on the University of Mississippi, the state of Mississippi, and blues music. In 2004, Special Collections created a new Modern Political Archives unit to

<sup>2</sup> Michael Nelson wrote a four-part series on the University of Mississippi debate for the *Chronicle of Education* blog: "Hosting a Presidential Debate: The Ole Miss Experience, Part 1," at <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/nelson/hosting-a-presidential-debate-the-ole-miss-experience-part-i>, accessed 18 December 2008; "Prez Debate at Ole Miss, Part 2," at <http://chronicle.com/blogs/election/2408/prez-debate-at-ole-miss-part-ii>, accessed 5 September 2008; "McCain-Obama at Ole Miss, Part 3," at <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/nelson/mccain-obama-at-ole-miss-part-iii>, accessed 18 December 2008; "Hosting a Presidential Debate: The Ole Miss Experience, Part 4," at <http://chronicle.com/review/brainstorm/nelson/hosting-a-presidential-debate-the-ole-miss-experience-part-iv>, accessed 18 December 2008. See also, Sara Hebel, "Debate Host: Leading Ole Miss through Chaos, Celebration, and History," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 55, no. 7 (10 October 2008): A1.

handle the transfer of approximately 7,000 linear feet of unprocessed congressional and legal collections from the law school along with several thousand more feet of political collections already held by the repository. The debate provided a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to highlight the political collections, and as political papers archivist, I assumed the lead for planning and coordinating all but one of the library's activities.

Nothing appeared in a review of library or archival literature on the specific subject of presidential debates. However, broadening the subject search to general archival programming and public relations was helpful. Elsie Freeman Finch's anthology *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists* offers several useful essays such as Megan Siffin-Marino's "In Print, On Air: Working with the Media" and Timothy L. Ericson's "Anniversaries: A Framework for Planning Programs."<sup>3</sup> I also consulted Kathleen D. Roe's article, "Public Programs," in *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*; Elsie Freeman's "Education Programs: Outreach as an Administrative Function" in *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*; and Anne E. Pederson and Gail Farr Casterline's book *Archives and Manuscripts: Public Programs*.<sup>4</sup> Although I had created a number of exhibits over the years, I also took time to examine Casterline's *Archives and Manuscripts: Exhibits* and an essay by Joan Rabin entitled "Archival Exhibits: Considerations and Caveats," which appeared in *A Modern Archives Reader*.<sup>5</sup>

## Exhibit

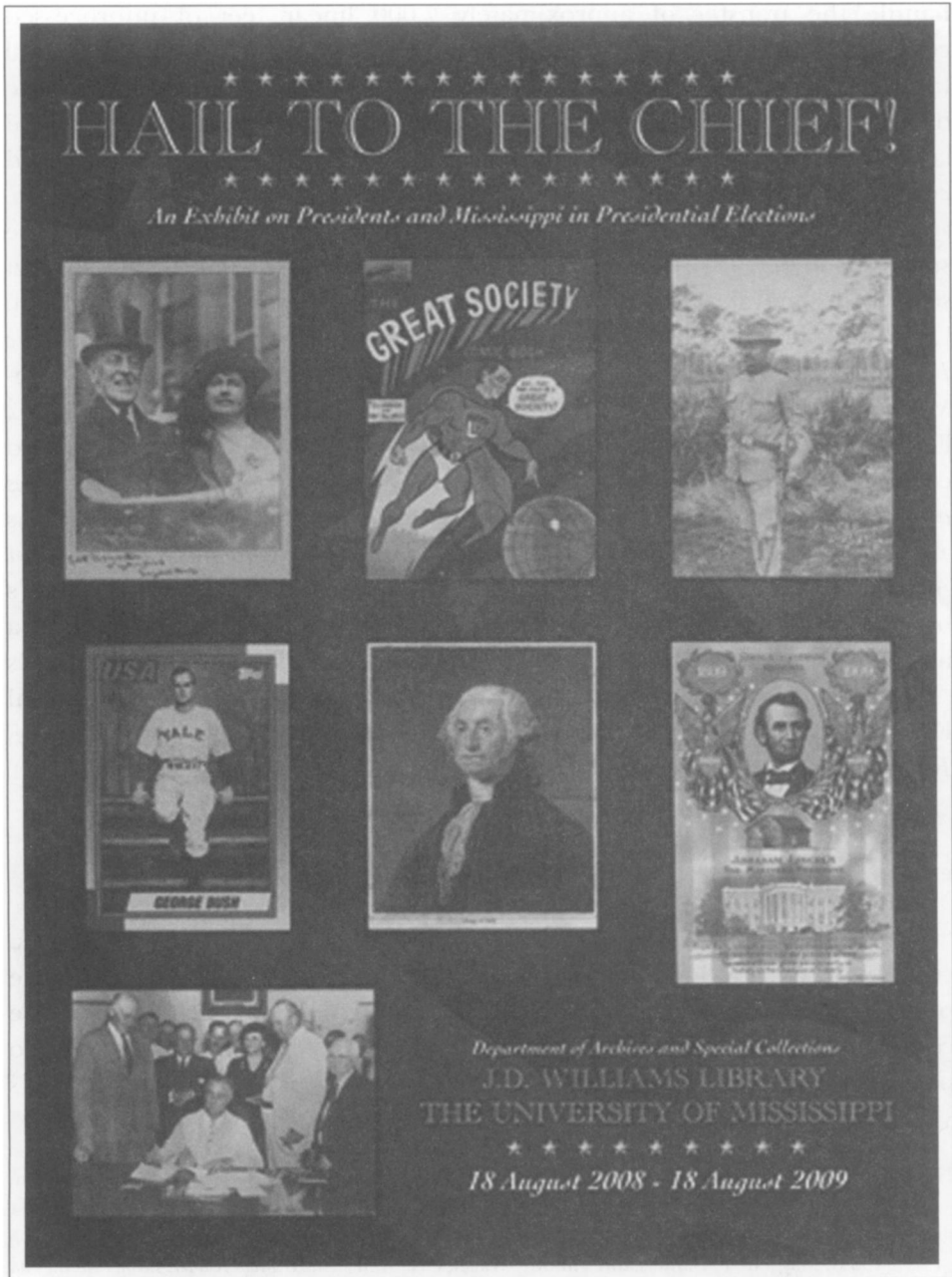
A large-scale exhibit was an obvious programming choice. Fortunately, a year-long project to identify items in the repository's collections for an online politics and government subject guide had recently concluded.<sup>6</sup> These resources indicated a surplus of material to fill eighteen display cases and also pinpointed themes that would play to the strengths of the department's

<sup>3</sup> Elsie Freeman Finch, ed., *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists* (Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> James Gregory Bradsher, ed., *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walsh, eds., *A Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice* (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984); Anne E. Pederson and Gail Farr Casterline, *Archives and Manuscripts: Public Programs* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Gail Farr Casterline, *Archives and Manuscripts: Exhibits* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1980); Joan Rabin, "Archival Exhibits: Considerations and Caveats," in *A Modern Archives Reader*.

<sup>6</sup> University of Mississippi Archives and Special Collections, Politics and Government Subject Guide, at [http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/center/archives\\_subject\\_guide/polgove/intro](http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/center/archives_subject_guide/polgove/intro), accessed 25 November 2009.



**FIGURE 1.** Images on the “Hail to the Chief!” exhibit poster are the same as those featured in the *Keepsake of Presidential Portraits* distributed to library and archives donors.

holdings. Over the course of nine months, curators of the exhibit narrowed display options to 130 pieces in a variety of formats illustrating key historical points or offering wide public appeal. Anticipating an increase in visitors and media contact leading up to and during the debate, the dean of the libraries and the head of Special Collections paid for a long-overdue facelift for the Faulkner Room, the space that holds the department's main exhibits and hosts all functions and instructional presentations. After a paint job and the addition of new window shades and a picture rail, "Hail to the Chief!: An Exhibit on Presidents and Mississippi in Presidential Elections" opened to the public on 18 August 2008 at the start of the fall term. By 19 December 2008, over 1,100 had visited the exhibit. When the exhibit came down in mid-August 2009, over 2,700 people had viewed "Hail to the Chief!"

Ten cases explored the state's role in presidential campaigns between 1844 and 1968. Items displayed included a letter from a UM student discussing the probable fallout from Abraham Lincoln's election, original handwritten correspondence from James K. Polk and John F. Kennedy, drafts of U.S. senator Pat Harrison's keynote address at the 1924 Democratic convention, and a teletype of Hubert Humphrey's 1968 speech on campus. Eight additional cases showcased material related to the presidency in general, ranging from George Washington to Bill Clinton. Sixteen inscribed presidential photographs appeared on the walls. Current donor U.S. senator Thad Cochran graciously loaned photographs of the five most recent presidents from the walls of his office.<sup>7</sup>

The exhibit did not shy away from the significant and highly charged topic of race in Mississippi politics. Researchers travel from across the country to access the department's civil rights holdings, archivists regularly conduct presentations for classes and tour groups on the topic, and every major exhibition in the last ten years, regardless of its main theme, has had at least one or more cases dealing with civil rights in some fashion. "Hail to the Chief!" was no different. It included a letter from a Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party leader about the 1964 Democratic National Convention, briefs on court battles regarding the racial composition and control of both the Mississippi Republican and Democratic parties, white supremacist appeals in campaign literature, and a two-page letter from John F. Kennedy reacting to the 1962 UM riot.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For further descriptions of the exhibit, see early publicity that appeared in our library's newsletter: "Hail to the Chief!: Presidential Debate Inspires Exhibit," *Keywords* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 4–5, at [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general\\_library/files/admin/gifts/keywords/keywordssmall\\_2\\_2.pdf](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/files/admin/gifts/keywords/keywordssmall_2_2.pdf), accessed 19 December 2008.

<sup>8</sup> The archives did not fear censorship from an administration anxious only to promote a positive image of the past. Indeed, Chancellor Khayat and other officials made it clear from the beginning of debate planning that the university would not ignore its troubled past, since it was the baseline for pointing out the gains of the present.

### Stewardship

The library capitalized on “Hail to the Chief!” by hosting a reception on 29 August for high-level library and archives donors to celebrate the exhibit’s opening. This Friday date coincided with the advent of a home football weekend and the grand opening of a new alumni hotel, a confluence of activities coordinators hoped might encourage out-of-towners to attend. Chancellor Khayat also issued a personal invitation to all the members of our state’s congressional delegation, but unfortunately, planners had not taken into account that the Republican National Convention was scheduled for that same week! Of 202 invitations, 35 guests attended. After the chancellor and University Libraries dean greeted the guests, I provided a brief presentation of the library’s debate programs (emphasizing that the exhibit would not have been possible without the generosity of collection donors) and introduced the guest speaker, John Hailman, author of *Thomas Jefferson on Wine*.<sup>9</sup> Caterers served wine vintages favored by the third president and tables featured seasonal floral bouquets of blooms and berries grown at Monticello. No direct appeals for funds were made. Such stewardship events permit the university to express appreciation to supporters and lay the foundation for future fund-raising success.

During the reception, the library also distributed copies of *A Keepsake of Presidential Portraits*, a commemorative set of postcards featuring seven presidential images used in “Hail to the Chief!”<sup>10</sup> The captions on the reverse of each postcard provide descriptive context and relevant anecdotes. The archives recognized early in planning that time constraints would not permit the publication of an extensive catalog, but that a keepsake was a viable option. The original concept included a “gilt” frame made of cardstock with a prop that could stand on a flat surface. The frame would hold cards of presidential images that recipients could sort through and choose the head of state they wished to place in the forefront. Unfortunately, the costs of the standing frame proved prohibitive. The department floated the idea along with a mock-up to various administration officials in hopes they might fund the project in return for sufficient copies to distribute in media bags or pass out to donors contributing to the debate fund. Recipients were enthusiastic about the design, but deterred by the expense. Although UM raised more than \$5 million to cover debate expenses, most went toward necessary infrastructure and technology improvements with little left for academic programming. In the end, the University Libraries dean funded the postcards as a less-expensive format. Those donors invited to the reception but unable to attend received a *Keepsake* in the mail, and surplus copies are available for library and archives development efforts.

<sup>9</sup> John Hailman, *Thomas Jefferson on Wine* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> The same portraits appear on the exhibit poster.

## Research Tool

In the early months of 2008, the library rolled out a new content management system called Drupal for use with bibliographer's subject guides. The dean suggested that I work with Web Services librarian Debra Riley-Huff to create a "Presidential Debate Subject Guide." Over the course of two weeks, I provided Riley-Huff with content for pages on publications, databases, websites, and archival resources. The subject guide also contains sidebars with contact information, an RSS feed to UM debate news, and a schedule of library debate events with links to further information.<sup>11</sup> The utility of Drupal is its ease in updating the site as new resources became available. For example, after the initial version of the subject guide appeared online, blues archivist Greg Johnson compiled a list of blues tunes with presidential references that I then added to the section on archival resources and linked to their individual catalog records. Incorporating newly finalized information on dates and guest speakers to the events page was a breeze. After each of the programs, we also linked the events page to excerpted recordings on YouTube.

The "Presidential Debate Subject Guide" went live in July 2008.<sup>12</sup> A few weeks later, the university added the guide as a drop-down resource link on the homepage of the official UM debate website.<sup>13</sup> The subject guide received more than 1,000 unique visits in the month before the 26 September debate. As interest in the upcoming confrontation between McCain and Obama increased between 23 September and the day of the debate, the site received 4,000 more unique hits. The Web Services librarian suspected that the university library server would have crashed on the day of the debate if numbers had spiked just a bit more. By the end of the fall term, the subject guide had accumulated 6,200 unique hits.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The following online resource lists proved useful in locating websites for the subject guide: U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates, "Citizen Resources," at <http://debates.org/pages/electlinks.html>, accessed 28 April 2008, on 1 February 2010 at <http://www.debates.org/index.php?page=citizen-resources>; University of Michigan Documents Center, Elections 2008, at <http://www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/elec2008.html>, accessed 29 April 2008; Hofstra University, Joan and Donald E. Axinn Library, "Elections and Voting Subject Resource Guide," at [http://www.hofstra.edu/Libraries/Axinn/axinn\\_srg\\_elections\\_voting.cfm](http://www.hofstra.edu/Libraries/Axinn/axinn_srg_elections_voting.cfm), accessed 30 May 2008; Federal Election Commission, "Visit Other Election-Related Sites," [http://www.fec.gov/links\\_files/Links.shtml](http://www.fec.gov/links_files/Links.shtml), at accessed 28 April 2008.

<sup>12</sup> University of Mississippi Libraries, "Presidential Debate Subject Guide," at [http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/center/subject\\_guide/debate/intro](http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/center/subject_guide/debate/intro), accessed 19 December 2008.

<sup>13</sup> University of Mississippi, "Presidential Debate," at <http://www.olemiss.edu/debate/>, accessed 19 December 2008.

<sup>14</sup> Riley-Huff estimates that .edu domains from across the United States represented the most frequent visitors at approximately 70%; less than 10% were international in origin.



**Brown-Bag Series and Presidential Debate Collection**

The archives also hosted a series of three brown-bag lunchtime programs for the general public that examined politically related collections. The first program, “Women in Politics: The Archival Record in Special Collections” (4 September) highlighted three collections with newly posted online finding aids: the Lily Thompson Collection (with a primary focus on the Mississippi Woman Suffrage Association), the League of Women Voters of Mississippi Collection, and the Southern Women Legislators Collection. I asked the donors of two of these collections to participate with me: Provost Emerita Dr. Carolyn Staton, whose NEH grant created the files on women in southern state legislatures; Fran Leber, current president of the League of Women Voters (LWV) of Mississippi; and Dr. Cora Norman, founding member of the Oxford LWV chapter. On the day of the brown-bag program, a temporary exhibit of original items from all three collections was available for the audience. At the beginning of the program, I demonstrated the finding aids and showcased selected items from the collections, while Leber and Norman educated the audience of twenty-seven on the LWV’s mission and entertained with stories of their pasts in politics. Unfortunately, Staton had to cancel her appearance a few days before the event.

The second lunch, “Tell Every President to Listen to the Blues,” took place before a standing-room-only crowd of 104 on 11 September. Blues archivist Greg Johnson and Highway 61 radio host Scott Barretta played audio clips and discussed references to presidents in blues lyrics. Many in the audience stayed after the program to view the display of items from the Blues Archives prepared by Johnson.

One reason for the high turnout was that the chancellor had pledged all the university’s debate tickets to students. A student committee designated a portion of the seats to winners of debate-related contests (such as student debates or essay contests) and then distributed the remainder in a passport/lottery system. Students attending authorized debate events received a stamp in a passport that increased their chances for winning a coveted ticket. Both the first and second brown-bag programs were officially designated “passport” programs.<sup>15</sup>

The third lunchtime event, “History Lives in Mississippi: Creating the Presidential Debate Collection,” occurred on 23 October, several weeks after the main event. Since the University of Mississippi does not have a records management system for its official records, Special Collections made a concerted effort to seek donations of debate material not only from the general public and

<sup>15</sup> The passport initiative was so successful in encouraging student attendance at noncurricular academic events, that the university administration is seeking to duplicate its success with other campuswide programming efforts.

campus community, but also from the university administration. Months prior to 26 September, the university's Debate Steering Committee distributed a one-page memorandum to campus organizers describing our determination to preserve a historical record of this occasion, outlining the types of material that the archives wanted to include in the collection and assuring donors that they need not spend time organizing their records before contributing them to the collection. Two weeks before the 23 October brown-bag lunch program, all members of the Steering Committee, event organizers, and faculty teaching debate-related courses received an identical appeal for donations as well as a personal invitation to attend the event. Finally, promotional material invited the general public to bring any debate-related material they wished to contribute.

Since the third brown-bag program also served as our department's programming for Archives Month, my brief introductory welcome linked the general mission of the archival profession to the specifics of the Presidential Debate Collection. The first guest speaker was Dr. Andy Mullins, executive assistant to the chancellor, who spearheaded the debate application and planning as chair of the Debate Steering Committee. After Mullins offered his insights and anecdotes on the debate process, Dr. Andy Harper of the Center for Documentary Projects described his team's work in capturing on film all the associated activities and sights. To the delight of the audience, Harper then played a brief clip from a documentary-in-progress on the 26 September debate.<sup>16</sup>

Although we received a number of donations the day of the lunch program, material began drifting in even before the debate and continued through the following year. Processed in February 2009, the Presidential Debate Collection occupies nine linear feet and includes correspondence, records, reports, clippings, press releases, publications, posters, maps, photographs, recordings, and memorabilia connected with hosting the debate and its associated activities.<sup>17</sup>

In August 2008, University Libraries dean Julia Rholes decided to submit the library's debate programming for a Mississippi Library Association Public Relations award. The award criteria suggested that the entry would benefit from a demonstration of formal assessment in addition to statistics on visitors and attendance. Although the proposed brown-bag program audience survey was quite simple, as a form of human research it still required approval from the Institutional Review

<sup>16</sup> Professor Emeritus Dr. David Sansing, author of *The University of Mississippi: A Sesquicentennial History*, was to place the debate in the context of the institution's history, but had to drop out due to a family emergency. An unanticipated benefit of scheduling multiple speakers for each brown-bag lunch was that gaps left by absent speakers were easily filled by others.

<sup>17</sup> UM Public Relations sent out a press release on the Presidential Debate Collection in June 2009, at <http://news.olemiss.edu/index.php?/200906254572/libdebate062509.html>, accessed 1 February 2010. The finding aid to the collection is available online at <http://purl.oclc.org/umarchives/MUM01697/>, accessed 16 November 2009.

Board (IRB). Fortunately for my duties as principal investigator, I had completed CITI (Collaborative IRB Training Initiative) certification the previous year. After completing an application that included a copy of the survey, IRB granted approval.

Of the 146 who attended the three brown-bag programs, 51 audience members completed a voluntary survey, a 35% response rate. The eight questions asked the status of audience members; whether respondents had attended previous Special Collections functions; how they had learned about the program; whether the program had advanced their knowledge of the topic; their rating of the program overall, whether they would attend future Special Collections events; whether they would recommend Special Collections to others; and what topics they would like future programs to explore. The survey also solicited further comments (see Appendix A).

As seen in Table 1, undergraduates were the largest number completing the questionnaire (41%), although all other categories were represented. About half of respondents (51%) had not attended previous Special Collections events. Most discovered the event via an online calendar (43%), although a significant number also learned about the event through campus email listserv announcements (35%). Forty-one (80%) stated that the program advanced their knowledge very much, while the remaining 20% marked “somewhat.” Thirty rated the program as “excellent,” 18 as “very good,” and 3 as “good.” Forty-nine of 51 respondents stated that they would attend future Special Collections activities, and 50 would recommend such functions to others. The archives also received 34 suggested topics for upcoming programming. Gratifyingly, all comments were positive.

### Debate Media

Yet another archives clientele was the media. The U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates warned the university to expect more than 3,000 foreign and domestic journalists to descend upon Oxford in the days leading up to the debate. One of the most useful archival essays in preparation for the debate was James M. O’Toole’s “The Pope and the Archives: A Study in Archival Public Image.”<sup>18</sup> O’Toole describes the media onslaught his small Boston archdiocese archives experienced when Pope John Paul II visited the city in 1979. His experience and insight encouraged me to think about what the media might want from our archives, instead of what kind of publicity we might receive on our exhibit and programs.

Anticipating that at least a few reporters might seek out the archives for a story or research assistance, we prepared a departmental press packet available

<sup>18</sup> James M O’Toole, “The Pope and the Archives: A Study in Archival Public Image,” in *Advocating Archives: An Introduction to Public Relations for Archivists*, ed. Elsie Freeman Finch (Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994), 115–19.

"SO, YOUR INSTITUTION IS HOSTING A PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE . . .": A CASE STUDY OF 2008 PROGRAMMING  
BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI ARCHIVES AND  
SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

**Table 1.** Survey Results for Archives Brown-Bag Series 4 September 2008, 11 September 2008, and 23 October 2008

<b>Audience status</b>	<b>Undergrad</b> 21	<b>Graduate</b> 6	<b>Faculty</b> 11	<b>Staff</b> 6	<b>Community Resident</b> 5	<b>Other</b> "Visiting Professor" "visitor to Oxford" "retired faculty" "I LWW member"
<b>Previous SC attendance</b>	<b>Yes</b> 25	<b>No</b> 26				
<b>How did you find out?</b>	<b>Newspaper</b> 9	<b>Email</b> 18	<b>Flyer</b> 7	<b>Online calendar</b> 22	<b>Other</b> "Leigh" "Presidential Debate Site" "Music Professor" "Scott Barretta" "husband" "friend" "debate website" "personal correspondence" "gender studies class" "news release" "meeting" "letter"	
<b>Advance your knowledge</b>	<b>Very much</b> 41	<b>Some what</b> 10	<b>Not much at all</b> 0			
<b>Overall rating</b>	<b>Excellent</b> 30	<b>Very good</b> 18	<b>Good</b> 3	<b>Acceptable</b> 0	<b>Poor</b> 0	
<b>Future SC attendance</b>	<b>Yes</b> 49	<b>No</b> 2				
<b>Recommend SC</b>	<b>Yes</b> 50	<b>No</b> 1				
<b>Future topics</b>	"Presbyterians in Mississippi, Religion in the South, Foodways, Race Relations in the South, Bluegrass Music" "B.B. King" "Ole Miss History" "Local history, Current events, Faulkner, Authors" "I'm not even sure where to begin" "maybe something related to slavery and educational history" "Movies, Faulkner, Larry Brown, Willie Morris" "Foreign languages – books, manuscripts, spoken language (tapes/records)" "Those with a racial or cultural theme embedded" "Clinton history, allegations, rumors" "Theology/connections between religions" "More about the current arts scene in the South/about <u>current</u> U.S. music" "MS history"					

**Table 1.** (Continued) Survey Results for Archives Brown-Bag Series 4 September 2008, 11 September 2008, and 23 October 2008

	"William Faulkner, Willie Morris" "Topics on history of politics in Mississippi" "Civil War" "Native American Mississippi Tribes" "Mississippi Territory History" "Southern Religion" "Immigration and Cultural Diversity" "Faulkner as a screenwriter"
<b>Additional comments</b>	"Lots of pretty girls working here" "Unique topic but expertly presented, better than excellent!" "Fun" "Terrific! Thanks to organizers and speakers." "Great! Inspiring!" "Very educated women!" "Thank you — _____, fan of Special Collections" "I will be donating items regarding this election" "Are there plans for the recap/highlight tape to be available for purchase?"
<b>Total attendance:</b> 146	
<b>Total survey responses:</b> 51	

both at the archives reference desk and for digital transmission. Compiled in a folder embossed with the university logo, each packet contained a one-page fact sheet on the Archives and Special Collections; a library flyer outlining debate activities and resources; and a "Quick Subject Guide for Media Covering the Presidential Debate," which described related collections on UM and race relations, as well as suggested readings on that topic and Mississippi political history. It also contained a photograph guide prepared by our new visual curator, Pamela Williamson, that featured thumbnail images and captions of photographs from the 1962 integration crisis, a use form, a fee statement, and a description of payment methods. In addition to providing links for online viewing, she also created a binder for the reference desk containing finding aids and image scans. Realizing that debate media would desire immediate turnaround on photograph requests, Williamson made arrangements for use of another department's credit card machine during this period. With these preparations in place, the department quickly and efficiently completed requests for seven different newspaper and broadcasting groups, including two from the national media.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Perhaps more of the media would have sought our assistance if not for the diligent preparations of the university's Public Relations staff, who provided images and film clips related to the university and arranged for interview opportunities with James Meredith and others. In addition, film crews found plenty of opportunities to record colorful crowds as locals gathered in the university Grove starting at noon for "Rock the Debate," which also featured "Issue Alley" and food vendors. In pleasant weather, few journalists were probably inclined to visit a quiet library archives.

## Promotion

Media were also crucial in promoting the archives debate programming. Elaine Pugh, library liaison in the university division of Media and Public Relations, organized the creation of four press releases on the exhibit and each brown-bag program. In addition to distributing these articles to state and local media outlets, Public Relations also made digital versions available on the university's official debate website. A number of Mississippi newspapers picked up one or more of these stories. Not content with relying on Public Relations, I personally reached out to other potential outlets that might promote the "Hail to the Chief!" exhibit. For instance, although my email to the editor of the glossy *Mississippi Magazine* garnered no response, the *Journal of Mississippi History* decided to promote the exhibit in its *Mississippi History Newsletter*.

As demonstrated by the brown-bag lunch program survey, other useful advertising tools involved the Internet. Descriptions of the exhibit and brown-bag programs were provided to the university debate website and the Web calendars of the university, the local Chamber of Commerce, and the Town of Oxford. Announcements for the exhibit and brown-bag lunches also appeared on the library's homepage, as well as the "Presidential Debate Subject Guide." A day prior to each lunch, an email reminder and description were distributed via the campus listserv.

More traditional publicity methods included an exhibit poster and a flyer on the library's debate resources and activities, which archives student workers posted across campus and the community. We also sent the flyer through campus mail to several hundred faculty, staff, and administrators whose job titles and department affiliations identified them as having potentially strong interest in the topics. Each faculty member teaching a debate-related course also received a letter that described the subject guide, outlined the archives exhibit and brown-bag lunch series, solicited donations for the Presidential Debate Collection, and offered archives presentations or tours for their classes.

## Conclusion

The 2008 presidential debate represented the first time the Archives and Special Collections had attempted to program a large series of resources and events around a single theme. The archives clearly fulfilled objectives with regard to executing the university administration's request for academic programming as well as increasing public awareness of related library and archival resources. The university officially sanctioned the "Presidential Debate Subject Guide," the exhibit, and the brown-bag lunch series. Attendance at the exhibit and brown-bag programs met or exceeded similar efforts in the past, and audience members who participated in

the survey gave the programs high marks. Although we did not anticipate the huge volume of online visitors to the subject guide, the possibility should have occurred to us in light of contemporary society's high use of the Web to search topics of immediate interest. Future hosts would be wise to increase their server capacity.

Having one motivated person to coordinate most of these activities was advantageous. Involved in every aspect of programming, I developed a knowledge base of details that allowed me to effectively cross-promote our various endeavors. A single point of contact also simplified communications with the university administration and journalists. However, one person could not have possibly accomplished this programming alone; many people in the archives, the library, and the university played essential roles in the ultimate success of our efforts. In addition, I also benefited by having a dean and department head who permitted me to reprioritize my job responsibilities to focus on the debate. Programming organization and details proved time consuming and a distraction from normal duties. Although I continued to respond to reference queries and other tasks requiring immediate attention, my collection processing rate diminished drastically.

In hindsight, I would have added lesson plans to the subject guide targeting elementary, high school, and undergraduate levels. Local school systems participated in the community's debate fever by adding the subject to their curriculum, and several classes visited the exhibit. We might have increased our reach by providing an online component more easily accessible to teachers. If resources were available, I also would have chosen to increase the number of brown-bag lunch programs offered and posted an online version of "Hail to the Chief!" to coincide with the peak of debate activities in the fall.<sup>20</sup> However, the department suffered from two faculty vacancies over the course of the year (including the position of digital initiatives librarian), so Jennifer Ford, the head of Special Collections, wisely decided to limit our commitment.

Since many university administrators were personally involved in the institution's debate plans, archives participation provided an excellent opportunity to connect with officials on a project in which they placed high value. The debate allowed Special Collections to demonstrate its willingness to invest time and energy in related programs and to showcase the depth and significance of the repository's research collections. I am confident that the department and the Modern Political Archives unit in particular have created a favorable impression upon a variety of UM administrators. Though immeasurable right now, such goodwill can only prove beneficial in the long term. In the year since the electoral

<sup>20</sup> In January 2009, I began working with James Kelleway, assistant to the Web Services librarian, on the development of an online version of "Hail to the Chief!" To view the online version, which posted live in early July 2009, see [http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/hail\\_to\\_the\\_chief/](http://apollo.lib.olemiss.edu/hail_to_the_chief/), accessed 28 January 2010. This digital exhibit features every piece from the physical installation except for the series of framed presidential portraits that had hung on the wall. The online exhibit also includes full-text access for many of the letters and publications.

contest, two highly placed university officials initiated communications with me over archival issues. One of these conversations led naturally into a well-received discussion of the department's need for a separate building designed to archival specifications with greater storage capacity.

Similarly, our archives used the debate to connect with library and Special Collections donors. Alumni and residents across Mississippi were proud and interested in the university's hosting activities. We capitalized upon this fascination by inviting donors to an elegant and entertaining exhibit reception, followed by distribution of the keepsake facsimile of presidential portraits from our archives' holdings. The library also promoted our full range of debate activities with stories in two different issues of the newsletter received by all library donors. Although we deliberately chose to use the reception and distribution of the *Keepsake* as stewardship efforts, repositories at future hosting sites should consider the possibility of making direct fund-raising appeals.

Most organizations will never face the prospect of a presidential debate since the commission only organizes a handful every four years. Nevertheless, this case study has broader applications. Any archives can adopt a similar array of programming to tackle a comparable set of goals. Selection of an appropriate theme or event is key to harnessing an already primed audience, utilizing the resources available in your repository, and justifying the amount of effort involved. Examples are anniversaries of state, city, or institutions; a major local event likely to attract public interest; the book selected for a One Book, One Community reading project; or the topic of a History Month research contest. All events and resources should cross-reference and cross-promote one another as well as the selected topic. A few intertwined relationships have a greater impact on target audiences than a larger number of isolated programs, and they also leverage investments of time, labor, and resources.

However, if the U.S. Commission on Presidential Debates should announce that your institution will host a presidential debate, be prepared to take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to introduce your historical resources to the campus, the community, the media, potential donors, and the world. In late October 2008, the Mississippi Library Association awarded the University of Mississippi Libraries special recognition for its range of debate programs, stating "This unique project showcased the library's services and special collections and the utilization of technology. It presented a once in a lifetime event with national/international implications."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> See Mississippi Library Association (MLA) "Public Relations Awards," at <http://www.misslib.org/index.php/awards-scholarships/mla-awards-scholarships/mississippi-library-association-public-relations-award/public-relations-award-winners/>, accessed 1 February 2010. To view the website created as UM's MLA award entry, see [http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general\\_library/debate2008/](http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/general_library/debate2008/), accessed 1 February 2010. We chose to submit the entry as a website to showcase the high number of online programming efforts.



## Appendix A

*Archives & Special Collections*  
*Presidential Debate Brown Bag Series, Fall 2008*

1. Audience Participant Information:  
 Undergraduate \_\_\_\_ Graduate \_\_\_\_ Faculty \_\_\_\_ Staff \_\_\_\_  
 Community Resident \_\_\_\_ Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_
2. Have you ever viewed an exhibit or attended an event at the Archives & Special Collections before?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
3. How did you hear about the program?  
 Newspaper \_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_ Flyer \_\_\_\_ Online calendar \_\_\_\_  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_
4. Did this program advance your knowledge and understanding of the topic?  
 Very much \_\_\_\_ Some what \_\_\_\_ Not much at all \_\_\_\_
5. Overall, how would you rate this program?  
 Excellent \_\_\_\_ Very good \_\_\_\_ Good \_\_\_\_  
 Acceptable \_\_\_\_ Poor \_\_\_\_
6. Would you attend more Archives & Special Collections events or exhibits in the future?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
7. Would you recommend Archives & Special Collections events or exhibits to others?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
8. What archival topics would you like to learn more about in future Archives & Special Collections events or exhibits?
9. Please include any additional comments below: