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Presidential debate watch party in Buley

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Contributer

As party divides widened, students at the university united to watch the presidential debate as a community.

On Sept. 10 at 9 p.m., students and faculty alike gathered on Buley Library's ground floor to view the presidential debate on the big screen.

The 2024 election is the first presidential election most students will be eligible to vote in, and as such, it holds significance for the university community.

"As educators, we are committed to supporting that process with educational tools to help students not only become informed, but to find out when they need information," Director of Library Services Amy Beth said. Beth hopes to foster curiosity among the student body and believes debate is a great way to do that.

Decked out in red, white and blue, library chairs were full of students of every major interested in politics or just looking for insight on which candidate to cast their vote for this November.

The intimacy of the setting allowed students



PHOTO | VAUGHN KEENEYX

Director of Library Services Amy Beth holding a tray of red, white and blue candy.

who did not have cable television the ability to enjoy the debate, accompanied by friends and snacks.

"This year is just more interesting than the others," nursing major Janelle Lawrence, a freshman, said.

Associate Professor of Political Science and Urban Affairs Jonathan Wharton echoed similar sentiments.

"Some character attacks were also expected between the

candidates, which led into countless off-topic charges, but this is why presidential candidate debates are not taken seriously," Wharton said.

Both the College Conservatives and the College Democrats, who jointly helped organize the event with the university, sent representatives to the watch party.

Despite the difference in viewpoints, all sat watching together, laughing at the same time

and generally enjoying themselves.

Both sides agree that this election is one of extreme importance and will set the stage for all future elections to come.

Many students, like communication disorders major Zach Thornton, a senior, had already decided on their vote before coming into the debate.

Thornton said he will be casting his vote for former President Donald Trump, who he believes

will follow through on his promises of tax cuts and stricter immigration laws.

Thornton voiced his displeasure with Vice President Kamala Harris's performance as the attorney general in California.

"If Trump wins, hopefully we see a resurgence of a bit of nationalism," Thornton said.

The president of the College Democrats, marketing major Tom Gilbertie, a senior, was

also in attendance.

Gilbertie asserts his vote will go to the Harris-Waltz administration, citing his appreciation for her policies, especially what she plans to do to address the affordable housing crisis.

Harris would be the first female president and the first Asian American president, something Gilbertie appreciates.

"If you haven't voted in a while, this is the election to vote in because if we don't vote in Kamala, then I feel like our democracy is going to get dismantled," Gilbertie said.

He worries Trump brings no policy and is a risk to democracy as we know it.

Regardless of political party, students should feel like their vote matters. Everyone deserves to be represented.

Psychology major Ce'ahnne Khan, a junior, said that she wanted to watch the debate with a community of students instead of alone.

"Watching it with a live audience is great just to see others' reactions and learn from people around me," Khan said.

The library will be hosting a vice-presidential debate watch party on Oct. 1, as well as an election night watch party on Nov. 5.

Wellbeing offers suicide prevention

By Vaughn Keeney
Contributer

According to a 2021 study from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is considered a societal epidemic, as someone in the U.S. dies by suicide every 11 minutes. Annually, this translates to approximately 50,000 Americans.

The university's Wellbeing Center, located on the first floor of Schwartz Hall, hopes to bring awareness and perspective to this preventable loss of life.

The Wellbeing Center offers QPR training—which stands for question, persuade, refer—and is a 2-hour session where students and faculty can gain what Erin Duff, the university's wellbeing specialist, refers to as "soft skills."

Duff gives students the tools to "have conversations around a tough subject that can be challenging and anxiety provoking."

Offering hope through positive action is the motto of QPR, though it is not a substitute for counseling or treatment. QPR sessions are interactive and participation-based, and the attendees seemed engaged and willing to share their own experiences and be vulnerable.

Psychology major Nora Losty, a sophomore, said the issue is close to her heart and "because it is such a taboo topic, not a lot of people want to talk about it, and knowing about these things prevents things in the future."

Losty pointed out that death makes people uncomfortable, which leads to contrived ignorance surrounding suicide, which is a shame when suicides are preventable if the signs are recognized early enough.

If someone is concerned about a friend or family member committing suicide, they should look out for direct verbal clues, indirect verbal cues and behavioral clues.

If they suspect that someone else is thinking of committing suicide, first the concerned party should question the person. Ask them how they are and make sure to use an even and kind tone.

"How you would want someone to ask you is how you should talk to someone else," Duff said.

The next step is to persuade them to seek help.

Remind them that, as psychology major Alex Cruz Velasquez, a junior, said, "the storm doesn't last forever."

The last step is to refer them to resources where they can seek help.

All session participants left with a pamphlet full of contact numbers to refer to if they or someone they know is struggling.

When asked what they learned from QPR training, Cruz Velasquez said, "I hadn't thought about the difference between a less direct versus more direct approach."

Cruz Velasquez also

said that they felt they gained a "small sense of community" after the session.

Completing the QPR training rewards participants with a certificate confirming their QPR-certified status, which remains valid for 2 years before it needs to be renewed.

This certificate can be put on a resume to help the applicant stand out, especially someone interested in a career in social work. QPR training is offered once a week, and the dates are posted on OwlConnect with an option to RSVP beforehand.

The Wellbeing Center also offers a mental health first aid training session for anyone looking to delve deeper into mental health training.

If you are struggling with suicidal ideation, please call the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or text "HOME" to 741741 to talk to a trained volunteer crisis counselor. Help is available; it is never too late.

Wellness has new amenities available

By Roselyn Ilo
Contributer

The university is stepping up its wellness game with the introduction of new amenities aimed at enhancing student wellbeing.

The campus now boasts two nap pods, massage chairs and multiple Zen Dens as part of a broader initiative spearheaded by Counseling Services and the Wellbeing Center.

Nick Pinkerton, the associate dean of counseling services and wellbeing, has championed this initiative.

"Our goal is to create environments where students can take a break, decompress and ultimately improve their overall wellbeing," Pinkerton said.

The nap pods are in the library on the first floor and near the gym in the student center. Massage chairs are in Schwartz Hall and Recreation and Fitness, while Zen Dens are in the Adanti Student Center, CASAS and Schwartz Hall.

The initiative, funded by grants, aims to integrate mindfulness and relaxation into students' daily routines.

"We want to make sure students have access to spaces that support their mental health," Pinkerton said. "These new features are designed to offer quick and effective ways for students to improve

their wellness."

The university's investment in wellness spaces aligns with a broader trend among universities to prioritize mental health resources as part of their support systems for students.

"Creating these spaces is part of our prevention strategy rather than just addressing issues after they arise," Pinkerton said. "We want to proactively support students' mental health and provide them with resources that help them manage stress before it becomes overwhelming."

Student responses to these new features have been mixed. History major Madison DeStefano, a freshman, acknowledged the existence of the nap pods and Zen Dens but admitted she had not used them yet.

"Even though I haven't used them, I think it's good to know they're available if I need them," DeStefano said. "It's helpful for those long days on campus, especially if you're a commuter."

In addition to these amenities, the university is hosting a QPR, Question, Persuade, Refer, certification workshop on Oct. 15.

This training will equip students with skills to recognize and respond to signs of suicide, further emphasizing the university's commitment to mental health support.



PHOTO | VAUGHN KEENEY

Wellbeing Specialist Erin Duff getting ready for the session.



Psychology majors Ian Maggi, a freshman, and Alex Cruz Velasquez, a junior.