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## Elections 101

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# University of Dayton, Ohio (url: <http://www.udayton.edu/index.php>)



## Elections 101

10.07.2008 | Students, International, Culture and Society

The world watches U.S. presidential elections, and this year's race is no exception.

But how do people outside the U.S. make sense of all the talk about red states, blue states, swing states, the electoral vote, the popular vote, political parties and more?

Former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft — a distinguished research associate in the University of Dayton's School of Education and Allied Professions — took 90 minutes this week to help about 40 international students and scholars studying at UD understand the basics of the U.S. electoral system.

"He answered our questions clearly and gave good details," said Lamia Benkirane of Morocco who said she has studied the U.S. government system but had questions about the Electoral College.

It was this often-confusing aspect of the American election process that received the most time during and after the presentation. Taft explained that the president is not chosen by a national popular vote, but as the result of 51 statewide elections. Each state, including the District of Columbia, has at least 3 and no more than 51 electoral votes. A candidate needs 270 to win.

"Now, when you look at the map on election night, you'll see red states and blue states, and you'll know what they're talking about," he told the students.

Taft also explained how the Electoral College increases the importance of swing states like Ohio and used electoral maps of 2000 and 2004 to show how one or two states can change the outcome of the election.

When he told the students that most states have a winner-take-all system, which allowed George W. Bush to win all of Florida's electoral votes — and the presidency — in 2000 by fewer than 600 votes, some, like Naser al-Ajmi of Saudi Arabia, said the system seemed unfair.

Taft also briefly explained the United States' two-party system, the major issues influencing the election and which groups lean Republican and which lean Democrat.

The students also seemed interested in Sen. John McCain's choice of running mate, Sarah Palin. They asked why he chose her, what the vice president's role is and if Americans care about who the vice president is.

UD's Center for International Programs sponsored the discussion.

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