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10 Things to Know About Ohio

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Presidential hopefuls John McCain and Barack Obama both made campaign stops in Ohio this week. Each has visited the state nearly 20 times since June, and McCain announced his running mate in Dayton, leaving little doubt the campaigns consider Ohio a critical swing state that could decide the election.

Faculty experts at the University of Dayton, Ohio's largest private university and one of the top-10 Catholic universities in the U.S., share what the candidates should know about the Buckeye State and what they must do to win here.

1. BE SPECIFIC

"Barack Obama struck the right note in the primaries by focusing on the manufacturing jobs leaving Ohio, but at some point he's going to have to offer a solution. He needs to be specific about where new jobs will be coming from.

"McCain has to focus on sincerity and real plain talk. He is not going to be able to make a case that he represents a radical departure from the policies of President Bush, but he can represent a departure from the tone." — Christopher Duncan, professor and department of political science

2. VISIT, VISIT, VISIT

"The key to an Obama or McCain win in November will be the ability of each campaign to recreate on the ground in Ohio what Gov. Ted Strickland and Sen. Sherrod Brown did in the 2006 election cycle. They criss-crossed the state 'getting to know' voters, and more importantly, allowing voters to 'get to know' them. Whichever candidate does this best will win the votes of Ohio voters." — Nancy Martorano, associate political science professor

3. KNOW ECONOMIC REALITY

"While recent job loss comes on the heels of three years of job growth for the rest of the country, Ohio never recovered the jobs lost in the 2000 to 2003 period. The recent downturn for the economy as a whole feels like getting hit with a two-by-four for a fighter still on their knees from the last punch." — Richard Stock, director of UD's Business Research Group

4. UNDERSTAND THE CHANGING ECONOMY

"Ohio has lost a lot of jobs, but many employers are struggling to find workers to fill skilled jobs. Both candidates should be more specific about how they will retrain workers for today's jobs and upgrade the skills of the current workforce. This is a safety net issue for Ohio workers and a competitiveness issue for Ohio in the global economy." — Former Ohio Gov. Bob Taft, distinguished education research associate

5. SPELL OUT SOLUTIONS TO THE MORTGAGE CRISIS

"Ohio was one of eight states with foreclosure start rates higher than the national average this quarter, and it's higher than last year. There is still a downward trend in house sale prices, but that activity is decent, which is a good sign that people are in the market. The foreclosure crisis may get worse, however, as there still are a huge number of adjustable rate mortgages that are going to reset in 2009 and 2010. Ohioans want to hear the candidates' answers on how they will deal with the overall mortgage markets and how they will deal with foreclosures, something neither of them is talking much about." — Jim Durham, law professor

6. BE AWARE OF VOTING CHANGES AND ISSUES

"Since the 2004 election, Ohio has transitioned away from punch-card machines to electronic equipment. If the recent past is any guide, in Ohio and elsewhere, we should still be on the look out for problems and breakdowns in the equipment. Given the expected large turnout in November, there is also the question of whether especially urban precincts have provided sufficient

equipment and training to handle perhaps larger-than-expected turnouts at the polls. To some extent, these issues may be ameliorated by the expected large number of absentee voters." — Richard Saphire, constitutional law professor

Other issues that warrant attention, according to Saphire:

- The operation of Ohio's voter ID requirement and how well the use of provisional balloting works for those whose IDs or qualifications are challenged at the polls.
- Ohio is in the process of determining how registration rolls will be "cleared" of people whose registration is questioned.
- There still is a possibility that Ohio Republicans may mount a legal challenge to Ohio Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner's directives that allow some people to register and vote on the same day.

7. AS OHIO GOES, SO GOES THE NATION

"Ohio is a bellwether state, and no Republican has ever won an election without winning Ohio. Pay special attention to Dayton, as Montgomery County has an uncanny ability to vote the way the entire state votes in presidential elections, and by the same percentage." — Father John Putka, S.M., political science lecturer

8. THIS IS NOT 2004

"Values voters received a lot of attention in 2004 for putting Ohio in Bush's column, but we're in a different economic time. If you're a strong partisan, you know who you're going to vote for. The challenge for the candidates is to reach those people who are still making a decision, and I think for most of them, it's going to be questions of the economy, especially in Ohio." — Grant Neeley, associate political science professor

9. WIN OVER THE MILLENNIALS WITH "CHANGE"

"Today's youth are tired of the stereotypical Washington back-door dealings and party politics and are calling for change in D.C. 'Change' is the one word that senators Obama and McCain keep repeating throughout this election. It seems the candidates are realizing the power of the youth vote and listening to the reports that say we may constitute up to 25 percent of the electorate this November." — Alex Orłowski, co-author of nationally published "Millennials Talk Politics" study and senior sociology/political science major

10. BE SUSPICIOUS OF POLLS

"State polls — not national polls — are what matter. Also, some polling groups and campaigns are interested in making their poll look closer than it really is. Pay attention to whether a poll is reporting the responses of likely voters or registered voters. By using registered voters, and a smaller margin of error, results can be portrayed as a real lead. As the margin of error increases, the comparison between candidates becomes more difficult to break out from the 'statistical dead heat.' " — Grant Neeley, associate political science professor

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