Dear Alumni and Friends:

In the School of Arts and Sciences we believe that learning takes place inside and outside of classes, and we endeavor to provide our students with learning opportunities that take them beyond their classrooms and computer screens. Whether they are attending special speaker events, doing field work for their environmental science classes, participating in Focus the Nation presentations on current issues, completing internships, traveling to another country in our immersion learning courses or studying abroad for a semester, students have multiple opportunities to apply and expand their learning in various settings.

During the recent election, our Arts and Sciences students had opportunities to delve into our democratic process. Our students gained valuable insight into the workings of the political system from a wide variety of perspectives, from attending the Republican National Convention in Tampa to working in campaign offices and participating in the University Campus Presidential Issues Debate.

Dr. Heather Parker, chair of the Department of Social Sciences, observes, “I was impressed by those students who participated in the Presidential Issues Debate because they worked hard to learn about the relevant issues, and this caused them to be much more invested in the electoral process. The students who worked directly with campaigns learned first-hand that working on a campaign is not just about supporting a particular candidate or issue; being involved is about participating in the democratic process and being an informed citizen regardless of the election results.”

The students grew and matured and gained political savvy as a result of their experiences during this election cycle. Student testimony says it best.

Katie David, a graduating senior, worked during an academic placement at the RNC through The Washington Center, and offers:
“I was very grateful to be given the opportunity to participate in the RNC. I learned so much that I brought back to share with my peers and professors that added to all of my classes. I met so many people from all over the country, many of whom I am still in contact with. I learned more about the American political process than I could have ever learned from any political science or history class. It also put me in contact with many people I would have never met otherwise. The experience cemented the fact that I want to be a legislator when I am out of school and showed me the necessary steps that I need to take to get to that position.”

December graduate Camara Silver, who organized the on-campus Presidential Issues Debate between Phi Alpha Theta (history honor society) and Pi Sigma Alpha (political science honor society), wrote:

“Planning the PSA/PAT Presidential Issues debate was challenging but rewarding. I had the opportunity to work with supportive colleagues and professors. I did not anticipate a lot of people showing up to watch us debate, but to my amazement, we had a booked room. Getting my fellow students tuned in to important issues was very satisfying.”

We will not always have a national political-party convention taking place nearby, and during a neck-and-neck presidential election, to stimulate our students. But our commitment is ongoing as we continue to expand opportunities for students across our majors and locations to participate in the learning process in new and exciting ways. We believe this makes their studies timely and further encourages their critical thinking capabilities, ensuring a full educational experience.

In future letters, I look forward to sharing more learning inside and outside of the classroom.

Sincerely,

Mary T. Spoto, Ph.D.
Dean, School of Arts and Sciences