

Students gain insight on presidential debate procedures

□ The speakers for A&M's Center for Presidential Studies will discuss the complexities of debates.

By James Bernsen
THE BATTALION

Two co-chairs of the non-profit, non-partisan organization that arranges presidential debates will speak at 8 p.m. in Rudder Theater to inform Texas A&M students of the intricacies of the debates.

Frank Fahrenkopf and Paul Kirk of the Commission on Presidential Debates, which was established to organize debates in an unbiased manner, will speak on the intricacies of debates as well as the plans for 1996.

Dr. Kurt Ritter, a speech communications professor, said debates are more crucial than ever before.

"Debates are going to be central to the '96 presidential election," Ritter said. "It's clear that it's going to be a close election. A substantial portion of the American public will turn to the debates to decide who to vote for."

Many factors, including the possible candi-

dacy of former Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Colin Powell, will make the election interesting, Ritter said.

"When you see polls that say if Colin Powell was in a three-way race with Clinton and Dole they'd be running about 30 percent each, then you know it could be interesting," he said.

Vanessa Beasley, a visiting professor in the speech department, said debates serve a vital function that television commercials and other events cannot fulfill.

"Debates are one of the few opportunities a citizen has not only to hear the candidate, but to watch them and see if they look leaderly," Beasley said. "They get to see the candidates in antagonistic situations and whether the candidate is capable of responding to challenges. "Up till now, they're one of the most comprehensive forms of getting information."

The lecture is sponsored by the Program in Presidential Rhetoric, part of A&M's Center for Presidential Studies, an academic component of the George Bush Presidential Library.

Dr. Martin Medhurst, coordinator of the

program, said organizing debates is more difficult than one might imagine, and students will gain new insight into the world of politics.

"They are going to learn a lot of the behind-the-scenes information on what goes on to organize a presidential debate," Medhurst said. "Things like conflict management, the ability to handle the likelihood of a third party candidate."

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Fahrenkopf and Kirk were former chairmen of the Republican and Democratic National Committees respectively, which Ritter said makes them highly qualified to organize the debates.

"They were chairmen of the national committees at the same time, which made them

sort of opponents," Ritter said. "But if we take '92 as an example, they can rise above that." Beasley said that in their field, there is one more important to come speak than Fahrenkopf and Kirk.

"It's important that they're coming because of the importance of debates," she said. "It's very rare to have someone who's that high on a national level working together."

The Commission on Presidential Debates strives to provide fair settings for the debates, Beasley said.

"I think that there's a reason to be hopeful that it would be [fair]," she said.

Ritter said the Commission has already tackled one important question of presidential debates in dealing with third party candidates.

"Clearly every candidate would like to be included in the debate," he said, "but you've got to draw a line as to who is a legitimate candidate."

Kirk and Fahrenkopf will also be able to answer questions about the elections and possible outcomes.

"We have an opportunity to talk to people who are going to be able to predict what will be factored in the '96 elections," he said.



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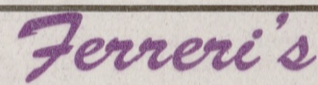
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