

## THE HONORS COLLEGE



St. Mary's College of Maryland  
at Historic St. Mary's City

### **Poli-Sci Profs and Students Leave Ivory Tower and Testify to MD House Asking For Election Day Innovations**

#### **MD House Bill Would Close Colleges on Election Day Encourage Professors and Students to be Poll Workers**

*Photo available via e-mail*

(St. Mary's City, MD) March 7, 2007 – Professors and students took a road trip from Maryland's first capital in St. Mary's City to Annapolis to ask for a 21<sup>st</sup> century remodeling of Election Day procedures. Zach Messitte and Michael Cain, two political science professors from St. Mary's College of Maryland (SMCM) and four students appeared before the House Ways and Means Committee on Feb. 28 to testify on House Bill 366, "Election Administration and the Recruitment and Retention of Election Judges."

Cain and Messitte developed House Bill 366 after implementing a "Professors at the Polls" research grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The bill, sponsored by Delegate John Bohanan (29B –D), requires that public institutions of higher education be closed for normal academic activities on general Election Day. If passed, the new law would allow faculty and students to work as non-partisan poll judges and poll workers, as well as making it more convenient for students to vote on their campus.

The bill addresses several problems the professors uncovered last year while implementing a "Professors at the Polls" research grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Their study found that Maryland has a shortage of poll workers, an aging population of poll workers (with an average age of 72 years), and an increasing need for computer knowledge by poll workers. Messitte and Cain worked as poll judges in November in St. Mary's County.

"College students might find it appealing to work at the polls and earn \$140," said Cain. When Cain and Messitte worked the day-long shift at the polls last year they said the day was onerous and long but worthwhile.

(more)

## News Release

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Founded in 1840 as Maryland's "monument school" commemorating the state's first capital, St. Mary's College of Maryland provides a high-caliber liberal arts education typically associated with prestigious private colleges while maintaining the affordability and accessibility of a public college.

- 1,934 men and women
- Designated the Maryland state honors college in 1992.
- Consistently ranked among the top liberal arts colleges by *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Princeton Review*, and the *Fiske Guide*.
- Selective admissions – SAT average of 1252
- Highest 6-year graduation rate for all Maryland public colleges and universities
- Opportunities for independent student research through the senior thesis, the St. Mary's Project
- Waterfront campus along the St. Mary's River in Southern Maryland
- National 2004 Inter-Collegiate Sailing Association Co-ed Champions

“Another important part of the bill is that it allows poll workers to work part of the day, instead of the full 14 hours,” said Jennifer Ridgley, one of the students who testified. Ridgley is a junior at SMCM and attended Severna Park High School. She represents the college in Annapolis as a William Donald Schaefer intern for the office of the College’s vice president for finance, Tom Botzman. Ridgley hopes to attend law school when she graduates and perhaps work in public office.

“This was a good experience and I learned that I had to be on my toes, and know the bill well, so I could answer the legislators’ questions” said Ridgley.

Two other students, Robin Ricks (Baltimore/Mergenthaler Vo-Tech High) and Michael Rohrs (Annapolis/St. Mary’s High), also attended the committee meeting and answered questions about the bill. Jeremy Pevner (Pasadena/Chesapeake Senior High) went along to report for the *Point News*, the college’s student newspaper. Pevner is the managing editor of the newspaper.

The professors’ testimony comes after their report in January to the American Association of University Professors and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. More information on the bill is available at <http://mlis.state.md.us/2007RS/billfile/hb0366.htm>.

St. Mary’s College of Maryland is ranked one of the best liberal arts colleges in the nation by *U.S. News & World Report*, *The Princeton Review* and *Kiplinger’s*. With roots going back to 1840, SMCM is the state’s only public honors college, offering the academic excellence of a top private college with the openness and affordability of public education.