Controversy N’ Coffee

Controversy N’ Coffee is a student-run, not for profit group, formed to bring more intellectual discussion to the campus of Washington University in St. Louis and to the greater St. Louis Community.

History:
Controversy N’ Coffee was formed by six students while on a University sponsored community retreat, in response to the challenge of “forming an action plan to bring positive change to Washington University.” While at the retreat the foundations for the program were laid, and the energy surrounding the idea was turned into a tangible plan to get the project off its feet. The group now has moved passed the point of simply laying the foundations down, and is in the process of planning the specifics of its first event.

Purpose:
As students of Washington University, we have found that despite the news, the media, and the classes in which we are enrolled, many of the voting population are under-informed and are making decisions based on their gut and not on the facts of the issues. Controversy N’ Coffee sees this as a major problem, and intends to do something about it. By staging a series of discussions between professors in different fields, each with a different perspective, we intend to inform the student body and allow them to generate their own opinions, and to make informed decisions thereafter. The issues on which we will focus are issues that affect America today. Our mission is to engage both students on campus and residents of the St. Louis community to think for themselves, to understand the issues around them, and to make a difference.

Format:
Discussions will feature four to six faculty members, coming from several different departments, and each equipped with knowledge of the issue at hand from a unique perspective. There will also be a moderator, likely an individual selected from the administration of Washington University. The moderator will pose a series of questions, gathered by the Controversy N’ Coffee from a survey of individuals across campus. The professors will then engage each other in friendly, civic debate, with each presenting an answer to the questions posed through the lens of their particular field or area of expertise. The audience will be looking in on the discussion as if viewing a conversation between professors over coffee in the faculty lounge. The last fifteen minutes will see questions fielded from the audience, followed by a coffee reception afterwards in which the audience can engage the professors regarding their comments and views.

Going Forward:
Controversy N’ Coffee plans to host three or four more events between now and the elections to be held this November. In addition, plans are in the works to put video of each debate online, where the information will be readily and conveniently accessible to all (per participant approval).

We are the generation of change. It could be said that this presidential election is the election of change. Never before have students and young adults flocked to the polls with such steadfast resolve. As students of Washington University, we feel an overwhelming responsibility for the future of our nation. We hope that this event is a step in the right direction.
Current State of the Economy Event:

Topic: Current State of the Economy.

Date / Time: April 14, 2008 – 7:00 – 8:30 pm. (Please arrive by 6:30)

Location: Busch Hall (Law School) – Moot Court Room

Panel:
Moderator – Professor Dorothy Petersen
Economics – Professor James Morley
Economics – Murray Weidenbaum
Social Work – Professor Mark Rank
Federal Reserve Economist – Mr. Kevin L. Kliesen
- We may have a professor from the Law School joining us as well.

** This event is designed to be decidedly non-partisan. The idea is to present information from a number of different points of view so that individuals can make their own educated choices by hearing a number of different voices and perspectives, not just one, as bringing in any single speaker would do.

Questions:

The following are questions being considered for discussion. Each participant will have the opportunity to respond to every question, and is encouraged to do so. However, it is not obligatory to answer all of them.

1. International trade has emerged as an important campaign issue. What impact do free-trade agreements have on the health of our economy? Has their impact been overstated on the campaign trail? To the best of you ability, could you summarize where the Democratic and Republican Party stand on this issue? –

2. $100 oil – will this do anything to spur a decrease in gasoline consumption? –

3. A weakening U.S. dollar – what does this mean? Where is the dollar at its weakest, and where is it relatively stronger? Will the dollar rebound, and what could spark that change? What does this mean both for students going abroad and for the overall 18-25 age demographic? –

4. Will continuing to lower interest rates increase inflation in the coming months? Why? In your response, please explain the current conventional wisdom about how monetary supply affects the price level? –

5. Is the rate of outsourcing growing? What will the job market look like for students when they hit the real world in a few years? –
6. Looking forward, what can you say about the health of our nation’s credit and housing markets? –

In your responses, please consider that we’ll have a number of individuals in the audience who have never taken an introduction to economics course. When responding, assume a decent degree of understanding, but if a term or concept comes up that you feel may be unfamiliar to those not studying the field, please give a brief explanation of the concept and how it functions.