CREATIVITY

How well do governors keep their promises?

Some research shows that, while the news media give U.S. Presidents little credit for keeping their campaign promises, Presidents actually keep their promises about 70 percent of the time. That’s a good average, says SWT Political Science Professor Bill Stouffer, when you consider the number of variables that can prevent them from keeping their promises.

"Promises are important to our system of government," Stouffer explains. "Expecting our political leaders, especially Presidents, to make and keep promises is part of what legitimates our democratic system.

If Presidents do a good job of keeping campaign promises, then do governors—especially Texas governors—have a comparable success rate? When Stouffer challenged students in his research, about one of them took him up on it. Sara Smith (B.S. Applied Sociology 2003), who took a directed research course with Stouffer, worked with him to conduct a comprehensive review of 20 years of work by political scientists and others interested in state politics. Neither Smith nor Stouffer could discover anything written on governors’ promise-keeping for any of the 50 states.

Finding such an open field for research, Stouffer plans to involve more of his students over the next 5-10 years in his studies of gubernatorial promise-keeping in several states, beginning with Texas’ four-year governors—Dolph Briscoe, Bill Clements, Mark White, Anne Richards, and George Bush.

Stouffer will research newspaper stories, gubernatorial archives, inaugural addresses, state-of-the-state addresses, and legislative records, and he will interview campaign consultants and the governors themselves as he looks into the promise-keeping records of these governors.

LEADERSHIP

Self-awareness as HIV prevention

Dr. Roque Mendez’ research into college student populations shows that, even when students say they favor safe-sex practices, they often continue to engage in unprotected sexual activity. Mendez is looking for ways to reduce high-risk behavior in young people by increasing their awareness of the discrepancy between what they say and what they do.

"There is some research that shows that people’s behavior becomes more consistent with their attitudes when they are self-aware," says Mendez, Professor of Psychology at SWT, explaining that self-awareness directs a person to be more aware of his or her values and to act in ways that are consistent with their values. Self-awareness theory, developed by Robert Wicklund when he was at The University of Texas, predicts that attitude and behavior become more consistent as self-focused attention increases. "In the everyday world, we are distracted by many things, and when we’re distracted, we may not act according to our values. But, when people do become self-aware, they become conscious of what they believe in and they act accordingly."

Mendez and his research team—including SWT Psychology faculty Timothy L. Hulsey and Robert A. Archer—hope to apply the principles of self-awareness theory to HIV prevention. They are looking at mechanisms that might trigger states of self-awareness and at different individuals’ tendencies to become self-aware during periods of sexual activity. In a current study, the researchers are collecting data that show that the greater the discrepancies between people’s attitudes and behavior toward safer sex, the more excuses they are likely to pro-
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to involve more of his students over the next 5-10 years in his studies of gubernatorial promise-keeping in several states, beginning with Texas’ four-year governors—Dolph Briscoe, Bill Clements, Mark White, Anne Richards, and George Bush.

Stouffer will research newspaper stories, gubernatorial archives, inaugural addresses, state-of-the-state addresses, and legislative records, and he will interview campaign consultants and the governors themselves as he looks into the promises that were made and the ones that were kept. In determining whether promises were kept, he will consider the kinds of support and opposition the governors received both inside and outside their political party and the party’s political strength within the state and the legislature. He will also consider governors’ good-faith efforts to keep promises, even when they fail.

“There is more to promise-keeping than getting laws passed,” Stouffer continues, so he will also look at each governor’s record of vetoes and appointments to state boards, commissions, and departments.

Stouffer, the co-author of textbooks on state and local government, says his books revolve around the idea that it matters who governs and that the individual can make a difference,” Stouffer says. “Governors’ records of promise-keeping are one way to measure the difference they made.”

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Mendez believes that the SWT team is the first to apply self-awareness theory to HIV prevention studies. The team has published studies on the relationships between gender and culture and high-risk behavior, also in the context of self-awareness theory.

IN MEMORIAM
Ione Dodson Young, retired Professor of English, died at home in Austin in April. A gifted teacher of 19th-Century English literature, Dr. Young taught from 1931 to 1975. In 1965, she published A Concordance to the Poetry of Byron in four volumes. A favorite teacher among students throughout the University, Dr. Young stayed in touch with many of her former students, whom she called the “Young Friends.” The “Young Friends” established the Ione Dodson Young Endowed Scholarship that benefits junior, senior, and graduate students in English. For information about the scholarship, please call Patsy Pohl, Department of English, (512) 245-7698.

Leipzig: How cultural identity influences funding for the arts

When the National Endowment for the Arts was in danger of losing its U.S. Government funding in the 1980s, Dr. Margaret Menninger became interested in how societies historically have funded cultural institutions — concert halls, orchestras, ballet companies, museums. “In the debate over government’s responsibility to culture, it was argued that the U.S. Government should be more like European governments, who were said to have always funded cultural institutions,” says Menninger, a historian at SWT. But when Menninger began looking into the history of European arts funding, she discovered that municipal funding of cultural institutions began only as recently as 1830. Menninger is writing a book on the history of the cultural institutions in Leipzig, a city in former East Germany known internationally for its music: Bach, Mendelssohn, and Schumann all worked and performed there, and Wagner was born there in 1813.

“Leipzig is an interesting study in arts funding because, unlike Dresden, Paris, or Vienna, it didn’t have a royal court or a king to lay down the cultural infrastructure — the concert halls or art museums. The people of Leipzig had to build their infrastructure all by themselves, and it was built initially by a very wealthy middle class. As the century went on, however, more of the citizenry got involved until the city government was talked into taking over the institutions that had become such an important part of the city’s cultural identity,” Menninger explains.

Germans have long understood the importance of culture, Menninger continues, expressed in the concept of Bildung, that to be a good person and a good citizen, one must not only become educated in high culture but consume it, as well. “This is a particularly prized German middle class value,” says Menninger, who argues in her book that Bildung also means that a good citizen ensures that others have the opportunity to consume high culture. It was the German middle class who created their own arts appreciation clubs, built the arts institutions, and then pushed to have them funded by city government so that they are available to everyone.
Two professors in the College of Liberal Arts have been designated as Senior Specialists in the Fulbright Program for the next five years. Vincent L. Luizzi, Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy, has been named a Senior Specialist in Law, and Steven M. Wilson, Professor of English, has been designated a Senior Specialist in American Studies. Fulbright will send the two professors on assignments to other countries for two to six weeks, to advise and lecture in their fields of expertise. Luizzi will advise on making the transition from an inquisitorial to an adversarial system of justice and the construction of criminal and professional codes of ethics. Wilson will focus on developing resources for teaching American literature, as well as lecturing on American culture.

Fourteen students from the University of Maribor in Slovenia visited SWT recently, attending classes in Chicano, African-American, and women’s literature. Most are former students of Professor of English Steven M. Wilson, who was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Maribor in 2002. Wilson, now a Fulbright Senior Specialist, received a letter from the U.S. Embassy Public Affairs Officer, thanking him for “your initiative to continue your great Fulbright cooperation and invite the students to Texas... In these times of stress that kind of understanding and experience of our country really helps.” Also, the U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia met in Maribor recently with the students who came to SWT.

Robert A. Fischer, Chair of the Department of Modern Languages, has been commended for his leadership by the executive board of the national Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium. Fischer, who has directed the consortium for the past six years, was cited for his success in building the program’s quality and enhancing its prestige.

Anthropology major Danielle Alvarado has been awarded a Rockefeller Brothers Foundation fellowship to pursue graduate studies. Alvarado is one of nine SWT students to receive the fellowship since 1997.

Civil War Historian Vikki Bynum, Professor of History, has won the Texas State Historical Association’s Lawrence T. Jones III Research Fellowship in Texas Civil War History, presented at the Association’s 2003 annual meeting.

A course taught by Carole Martin, Professor of French, has won the Innovative Course Design award from the Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies. The course, titled “From Court to Street: 18th-Century France,” included a spring break trip to Versailles, Paris, and Ermenonville where 17 students studied the art, architecture, and history of 18th-Century France.

The Center for Texas Music History gained new international attention recently when its programs to promote, preserve, and study Texas and Southwestern music history were featured in the French newspaper La Tribune/Le Progrès, with circulation in the Haute-Loire region of France. The Center’s work was recognized in a column by the president of the Country Rendez-Vous Festival, an annual music festival held at the village of Craponne.

Two Department of English faculty have won awards for articles that appeared in the journal Literary Criticism of Children’s Literature. Claudia Nelson’s article, “Drying the Orphan’s Tear: Changing Representations of the Dependent Child, 1870-1930,” was selected as Best Article. Teya Rosenberg’s article, “Magical Realism and Rusdie’s Midnight Children as a Test Case,” was selected as Honor Article. It is the first time that both awards have been received by faculty in the same department.
The Pursuit of Excellence

The accomplishments of our outstanding faculty and students are made possible by gifts from our friends. Please designate your Annual Fund gift this fall to a program in the College of Liberal Arts.

Blair wins Drue Heinz Literature Prize

SWT’s award-winning English faculty garnered another major recognition recently when Dr. John Blair received the 2002 Drue Heinz Literature Prize for his short-story collection, American Standard (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002). The prize, given by the University of Pittsburgh Press, is considered the nation’s foremost honor for short fiction. In announcing the award, judges praised the stories’ “realism and imagination,” their “taut lyricism,” and their ability to provoke “that tingle of self-recognition.” Blair, author of two novels—A Landscape of Darkness and Bright Angel—and a poetry collection titled Green Girls: Poems that won the 2001 Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Series Award, hopes the Drue Heinz Prize will increase publishers’ interest in his work. In fact, since he won the prize, literary agents are calling him more frequently for manuscripts, and the manuscript of a recently-completed novel is under review by publishers.

Blair, who directs SWT’s undergraduate creative writing program, finds that his own experience as a published writer lends authority to his teaching of creative writing. “I can tell my students more confidently what they need to do, if they’re interested in publishing,” he says. “My struggle to write something translates well into the classroom because the students are also struggling to write. We talk about what works for some writers and not for others. We also spend enormous amounts of time doing creativity exercises on how to get started and how to write material that’s surprising and new. We explore metaphor and the poet Robert Bly’s idea of ‘leaping poetry’—the spontaneous dimension of writing. We talk about where inspiration comes from and the Greek idea that ‘inspiration’ meant literally ‘to be breathed into’ by the muses. And we talk about Yeats’ automatic writing, because writers are so often convinced that their writing can’t be coming out of themselves. When you have that sensation, you know you’re a writer. I try to get students to that place.”

At work on a new novel, Blair says that spending time with students on metaphor and creativity reminds him about the sparks that make writing come alive. And, he says the Drue Heinz Literature Prize has been a welcome affirmation of his writing, helping him to rekindle his own muse as he starts his new novel.

Creativity (continued from inside)