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Roommates and Friends Lead Opposing College Political Groups

Jan. 20, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— Democratic and Republican elected officials should take a lesson from Illinois Wesleyan's Brexton Isaacs '15 (Byron, Ill.) and Doug Burrichter '15 (Batavia, Ill.) in how to get along with the other side.

The two friends share an apartment in the Gates at Wesleyan, but not political ideologies. Isaacs is president of the College Democrats at Illinois Wesleyan, while Burrichter is the immediate past president of the College Republicans. Both are political science majors who aspire to work in the electoral sphere.

Not surprisingly, the two don't see eye to eye politically; they can't even agree as to why President Barack Obama and Congress disagree (Burrichter thinks it's ideology; Isaacs believes it has more to do with political posturing).

They do concur, however, that it's possible for both politicians and regular citizens to disagree without things turning nasty.

The two share their apartment with two other students: one Democrat and one Republican, so the ideologies are evenly split. "Our political discussions do get heated, but it's passion, not anger," said Isaacs. "We don't hold grudges."

Burrichter paraphrased Thomas Jefferson's 1800 letter to William Hamilton, where Jefferson wrote that he never considered a difference of opinion in politics as cause for withdrawing from a friend.

"When people lose sight that they are not looking at the individual's character when disagreeing over politics, that's when friendships are lost, and that's unnecessary," said Burrichter, who has headed the College Republicans since his sophomore year. "That's one thing all of us realize."

Isaacs has led the College Democrats at IWU for three years, and also serves as president of the College Democrats of Illinois and as an officer for the College Democrats of America.



Politically opposed roommates Doug Burrichter '15 and Brexton Isaacs '15



College Republicans (from left) Doug Burrichter '15 and Anne Kelly '15 debate College Democrats Brexton Isaacs '15 and Annie Kehler '15 on Voter ID Laws.

"Working with campus chapters across the country, I get a reaction of surprise whenever I tell people I live with the College Republicans president on my campus," said Isaacs. "I find that living with two conservatives makes me better at defending my positions. I'm challenged regularly about why I believe the things I do, and I'm living with an in-house debate team."

Isaacs used that debate experience Jan. 19 as the College Democrats and College Republicans considered whether Illinois should adopt a voter ID law. The public forum was part of Illinois Wesleyan's annual Teach-In that commemorates the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the debate, the Burrichter-led Republican team opined that prominent leaders in both parties have acknowledged voter fraud as a problem. The logical, appropriate response to the problem, according to the College Republicans, is to implement voter ID laws in Illinois.

Voter ID laws, the College Democrats countered, would have prevented few actual cases of voter fraud in the U.S. They also argued that voter ID laws decrease voter turnout and disproportionately affect disadvantaged groups such as minorities,

students and the elderly.

Like so many of Burrichter and Isaacs' personal discussions, the forum ended with the sides agreeing to disagree. "When politics is your business, like it is for me, I know I am going to win and lose some debates," said Isaacs. "When you don't take it personally, it's actually easy to have conversations where things get heated."

Burrichter quipped: "And as long as we keep beating them in dodgeball, that's all that matters."