

Mont Alto Hosts First SGA Presidential Debates

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Questions of experience, student outreach, and the ideas of a commuter meal plan and a new drug/alcohol policy were the subject of much heated discussion in the Student Government Association (SGA) Presidential Debate between candidates John Shaffer, a current member of the student senate, and Jalon Alexander, who has since won the election.

The debates, the first ever event of its type at Mont Alto, was held in the Heritage Room of the Millstream Café on March 23, where a surprisingly high student turnout nearly filled the chairs in the audience.

Current SGA President Coty Covert – a personal friend to both candidates who firmly maintained a position of neutrality throughout the campaign – gave the opening and closing remarks and professor of philosophy Dr. John Bardi officiated.

“I have a prophecy as to who will win this election,” Bardi said. “Our campus! These are two excellent candidates.”

Both Shaffer and Alexander began the debates with statements focusing on the power of students and the need for greater student outreach from SGA; these ideas became recurring themes throughout the

course of the debate.

“It is we the students and the power we hold that will affect positive change on campus,” said Shaffer. He said the SGA had failed to reach out to students this past year and pledged to attend meetings for every club and organization on campus if elected president.

Alexander interjected, pointing out that in the course of his campaign he had already met with many of the student organizations on campus and had worked their concerns into his campaign platform, adding that he “doesn’t see a difference” between SGA completely failing and only failing to reach out to students.

Throughout the debate, Shaffer placed emphasis on his previous experience in Student Government as a senator and an active member in the Council of Commonwealth Student Governments (CCSG), where he, with the help of President Covert, helped draft legislation “that was sitting on the President of the entire University’s desk the very next day.”

President-elect Alexander criticized Shaffer for not making his actions in SGA and CCSG more open to the public, claiming that many students are unaware of the actions and legislation Shaffer was a part of.

“We can’t have big goals, big dreams, and big things we want to accomplish if students are not actively aware of what’s going on in their government,” said Alexander.

Alexander also commented that he and Shaffer had “different views of experience”, explaining that while he had not been in SGA before, he successfully completed endeavors

on behalf of students, including leading a successful petition for more multicultural classes, without the benefit of an elected position.

Another major issue was the concept of a commuter meal plan. Alexander proposed that commuters pay a base fee of \$400, and any deposits into a plan afterwards would be used in conjunction with the same 65% discount resident students receive.

Shaffer agreed, adding that “if need be, I would organize a boycott of the Mill.” In response to a question from a concerned student in the audience, Shaffer said that he would be willing to use SGA money to feed students in the event of such a boycott.

“For the first time,” Alexander said, “and it seems almost like a miracle, John and I almost 100% agree on something,” which prompted laughter from the crowd.

The candidates both felt that completely eliminating the Drug and Alcohol policy was not the correct



Alexander, left; Shaffer, right

Government, a concept President Covert has been an outspoken supporter of. Shaffer pledged to continue Covert’s open-door policy and publish a newsletter containing the actions the SGA would take, while Alexander said that “face-to-face contact” with students would be more effective than the proposed newsletter in educating students on their government’s actions.

When asked what he would do in an ideal world in his role as SGA president, Shaffer answered without hesitation. “I’d eliminate the Drug and Alcohol policy,” he said, explaining that he felt that students should not be punished so harshly for alcohol offenses.

A student in the audience expressed his concern that eliminating the policy seemed like a safety issue, adding “the administration seems like they’re more interested in liability than student well-being.”


Alexander said he generated favor with the crowd, but Alexander ultimately won, if only by a small margin.

response, though he clarified that he is “not all for a dry campus”. What the University needs is “a non-coercive Drug and Alcohol policy that isn’t overbearing,” he said.

Alexander also added he would support a University ‘Amnesty Policy’ in which students could receive help if in danger after consuming alcohol without fear of disciplinary repercussions. Shaffer had previously supported similar legislation for an amnesty policy in his role as an SGA senator.

“Both these gentlemen today,” said President Covert in his closing remarks, “and in my experiences with them, have echoed that their ability to advocate on behalf of students is almost unsurpassed on this campus, even by myself.”

The end results of the debates seemed similar to the end result of the election itself. Both candidates generated favor with the crowd, but Alexander ultimately won, if only by a small margin.



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