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Presidential Documents and Recordings Available on UCSB Web Site

Interested in reading George Washington's first State of the Union Message or Abraham Lincoln's second Inaugural Address? How about examining signing statements issued by Herbert Hoover or listening to one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's fireside chats?

These and every other public document -- as well as many audio and video recordings -- associated with the American presidency are posted on The American Presidency Project , a Web site developed by a pair of political scientists at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

With almost 70,000 written documents and more than 700 recordings, the site, developed by John Woolley, professor and chair of the UCSB Department of Political Science, and Gerhard Peters, a graduate student in the same department, has become the definitive online source for presidential documents. Among items posted are public papers; inaugural addresses; proclamations; signing statements; executive orders; convention speeches; radio addresses; televised speeches; news conferences; and debates. The site also provides information on the presidents' relations with Congress, their popularity, public appearances, growth of the executive branch, and presidential selection.

Since the beginning of January, nearly 280,000 people from around the world have logged onto The American Presidency Project. They have accessed it from every continent, and practically every country, according to a map function on the site that tracks the number and geographical location of visitors per year.

"One of the pieces of the Web site that's being heavily used is the compilation of party platforms," said Peters. "We have the platforms of every party that's ever received an electoral vote in the United States, going back to 1840," he said. "People are doing textual analysis on the content of these platforms and are sending their students to study how the parties' statements have evolved."

The project began in 1999 when Woolley commissioned Peters to help him create a teaching resource that would enable students in his American presidency course to access primary presidential documents.

"I wanted to give them raw material that would let them do real political science research in the context of an undergraduate class," said Woolley. "Subsequently, the site has become a major research resource that's used all around the world."

Recently, the project teamed with CQ Press, a division of Congressional Quarterly, Inc., to produce the reference volume "State of the Union: Presidential Rhetoric from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush" (2007). Woolley and Peters served as co-editors with Washington, D.C. writer Deborah Kalb, and also wrote the introduction. CQ Press will release a second publication, "The Presidency A-Z," in August.

Other collaborations have taken place between The American Presidency Project and various presidential libraries.

"We gave the Truman Presidential Museum and Library digitized copies of all of President Truman's papers, and in exchange the Web master at the University of Missouri designed the search engine," said Peters. "That was a good reciprocal arrangement." The search engine allows visitors to The American Presidency Project to retrieve information based on specific search criteria, such as words or phrases.

Many other libraries provide links directly to the project. "I was on the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum Web site looking for a photograph, and on the front page of the site is a link that reads 'Public Papers of the President,'" noted Peters. "I clicked on it and it took me straight to our Web site."

Related Links

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