

Democrats in elephant country

By MATTHEW JELALIAN

BYU is one of the few universities where identifying politically as a Democrat or a liberal places a student in the minority category.

In a 2010 Gallup poll, 59 percent of American Mormons said they identified as conservative, 31 percent identified as moderate, and only eight percent identified as liberal. These statistics make Mormonism the most conservative major religion in America.

A 2012 Gallup poll suggested 84 percent of Mormons preferred presidential candidate Mitt Romney to President Barack Obama. Only 13 percent preferred Obama to Romney.

Since American Mormons often lean right politically, it would follow that BYU students would reflect that trend. However, Nicole Pavez, secretary for the BYU Democrats, said that may not be true.

"I find more liberals each day, and it's not like I look for them; it's just like you find people similar to you," Pavez said.

The social media coordinator of the BYU Democrats, Zaida Hill, said she is intrigued by the Democratic Party because its platform aligns well with her social and economic beliefs as a whole.

"I think the inequality of wealth in the United States is a big deal, and I like how the Democratic Party deals with that," Hill said. "I think we should tax the rich more."

Hill said her minority political beliefs can make it difficult to attend a school where culture, politics and religion often overlap.

"People will make rude comments without even realizing that they're hurting someone's feelings because they think everyone is conservative and like them," Hill said. "I have an Obama sticker on my laptop and even had somebody come up to me and told me I'm going

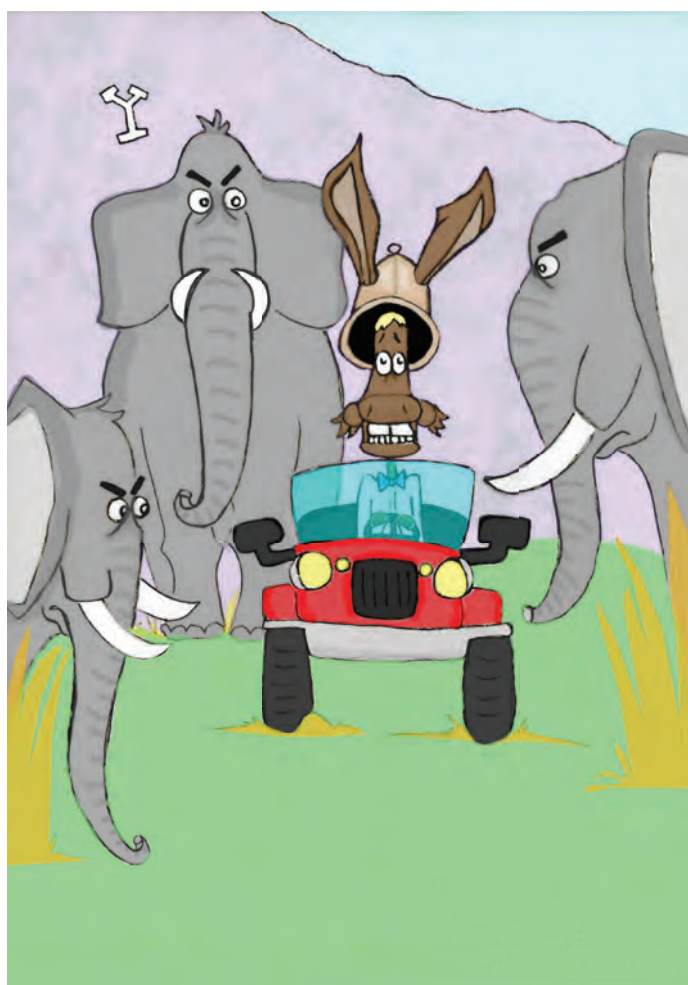


Illustration by Lizzie Jenkins

For some Democrats, Utah can feel like hostile territory where their opinions are not welcome.

to hell."

Despite this incident, Hill said most students are "understanding, welcoming and open to new ideas."

The BYU Democrats event coordinator, Hannah Wheelwright, said liberal politics are about new ideas in more than just common social issues.

"Liberal politics is about economics, and it's about international affairs," Wheelwright said. "Liberal politics is not just gay marriage and abortion. And I get very, very tired when someone finds out I am a liberal, and their first question is, 'Are you pro-choice, and do you support gay marriage?'"

Wheelwright said it is

frustrating when people focus on those specific issues when there is so much more to her liberal ideology.

Pavez said she recognizes the LDS Church has spoken on issues regarding the family but feels there are other issues to consider as well.

Hill said being a Democrat does not mean one is a less valiant member of the church.

"You can be a good member of the church and also be liberal," Zaida said. "I would want them to remember that we're all children of our Heavenly Father, and he does know our intentions. I don't think that when I'm at the judgment seat he is going to punish me for being liberal."

iPads in the classroom: The trend toward digital education

By ERICA PALMER

Apple has sold more than 7 million iPads to the U.S. education market since the product's launch in 2010, according to "Apple Insider."

The trend toward digital education is growing, as more and more school districts in the U.S. adopt 1-to-1 iPad initiatives. Though Rep. Becky Lockhart's iPad initiative for Utah didn't make the governor's budget this year, it might be a possibility for the future.

Dixon Middle School in Provo is one of a few schools in Utah that has a 1-to-1 iPad initiative in operation. In November 2012, they were one of only three Utah schools to win a state grant providing an iPad for every student.

Principal Jarod Sites said they have already seen improvements in their students' learning in the past year and a half.

"Writing has been the greatest improvement that we've seen," he said. "Last year we saw our eighth grade writing scores surpass the 90 percent proficiency level."

His teachers use iPads in all subjects, from Spanish to math. They have changed from paper textbooks to digital textbooks, giving the students access to videos, games, interactive reviews, online quizzes and more.

"For vocabulary this has been phenomenal," said John Anderson, who teaches Spanish at Dixon.

Janelle Frossard, a BYU education student graduating this year, is a huge proponent of technology in the classroom.

"That's the way we're going, and that's how it's going to be, so might as well embrace it," she said.

Frossard is currently teaching 10th grade English at Orem High School, and

uses digital technology in her classroom nearly every day.

"We did a lesson about Twitter, and it was easily one of the most engaging discussions," she said.

She has a classroom argumentative blog where students discuss their points of view on different pieces of literature.

Her school currently has a set of laptops the teachers can check out for their students, but she wishes each student had their own.

"It would be really helpful, mostly just with accessibility," Frossard said. "I have students coming to me every day asking, 'Are we blogging today?' because they really like it."

However, there is more to digital teaching than just a shiny new device.

"The difference isn't so much with the technology, but how they are using the technology," said Rick West, associate professor of the IP&T department of the McKay School of Education. "Teaching strategies are most important."

West's department is constantly researching ways to improve learning through technology. Now, nearly every student who goes through BYU's teaching program has to take a class in his department.

One big setback of the 1-to-1 initiative is the steep cost. Rep. Lockhart's iPad initiative would have added a hefty \$200 million to the governor's education budget.

"Sometimes when people think of the true cost of a 1-to-1 initiative, they only think of the cost of the device, which is not the case," Sites said.

He mentions other hidden costs, such as teacher training,

breakage, content filtering systems and improvements to infrastructure.

However, West said there are also some benefits that can help offset the cost of iPads in the classroom. He and fellow teachers have been researching a new possibility called "open textbooks," digital textbooks compiled of free information from the Internet.

Along with saving the cost of paper textbooks, open textbooks would allow teachers to be more involved in their curriculum.

"If we have them help us create the right book, it can be customized to the classroom," West said.

Sites said he believes the cost is worth it.

"If we are preparing our students for our past then it's not a wise use of money," he said. "But if we are preparing the students for the future we are going

to live in, we have to use technology."

Another issue iPads pose is potential distraction. However, Sites, Frossard and West all agreed that if teachers are having problems with distraction, the real problem is with classroom management.

"If you hold them accountable, most kids are smart enough that they will do their work first and the distractions will come later," Frossard said.

West believes a 1-to-1 initiative is something Utah could be ready for in the near future.

"A reasonable rational person understands the importance of technology in the classroom. But every big idea needs a plan," tweeted Gov. Herbert a few days before the budget for the 2015 fiscal year was finalized.

"We did a lesson about Twitter, and it was easily one of the most engaging discussions."

Janelle Frossard
BYU education graduate student

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