



*A Campus of the University of Wisconsin Colleges*

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## Press Release



Robert Johnson

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### ***Student research project impresses history faculty: Johnson gets unusual support for his research***

When history faculty from the 13-campus University of Wisconsin Colleges, the third largest UW institution after UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee, met for their spring department meeting April 3 – 4, they heard from one student, Robert Johnson, of **Viola**. It's the practice of the department to feature a student research project that is beyond expectation. Being chosen for that presentation is a significant honor. Yet Johnson got even more--unexpected and spontaneous additional support from the faculty.

Johnson, now a history major, spent a number of years doing factory work before he decided to change direction in his life and seek a college degree.

The inspiration for the research he presented to about 30 UW Colleges history faculty members on April 4—a paper entitled “The Senate Career of Lyndon Baines Johnson”—began on a cross-country bus trip he took to visit family in Baltimore in 2004. In Baltimore, he attended an event that offered free books. One of those books was *The Making of a President 1964* by Theodore White, about LBJ and Barry Goldwater. During the long bus trip back to Wisconsin, Johnson read the entire book.

“I learned about Johnson’s remarkable ability to find power, grab power and effectively use power,” Johnson said. “How did LBJ, a White southerner, see to fruition civil rights legislation while others could not? What did he learn as a Senator that he used as president?”

Dr. Aharon Zorea, UW-Richland assistant professor of history and the faculty member Johnson is working with on the LBJ independent study project, said, “When he was giving the presentation, the faculty were unusually attentive. Johnson’s research is especially in-depth. He told the history faculty about his plans to conduct further research April 16 – 17 at the LBJ Library in Austin, Texas, and they were impressed.”

How impressed?

Johnson said, “I was in my car, headed home from Green Lake (where the meeting was held), when my cell phone began to vibrate. It was Professor Zorea. He asked, ‘Could you come back?’ I was only about 10 minutes away, not far. So I returned.”

The history department faculty had spontaneously taken up a collection for Johnson. They presented him with \$168 to be used to purchase a digital camera, a tool that will ease and extend the research he’s conducting at the LBJ Library. He plans to photograph documents at the LBJ Library, bringing the images back to Wisconsin for later analysis. “This will effectively double the amount of research I can do,” Johnson said. “I was speechless and dumbfounded at that show of generosity and kindness.”

Johnson used the funds to purchase a 10.2 megapixel camera, 2G memory card, case and an extended warranty, a package that will serve him well for research purposes. He’s promised, in return, to share the results of his research with the faculty members who made it possible.

Johnson plans to continue his research, eventually to earn a Ph.D. in history, to write and teach history. His area of special interest is 20<sup>th</sup> century political history. “My love of history is matched by my love of politics. Running for political office is another of my goals,” Johnson said.

Zorea said that he enjoys working with students on independent research projects, something he encourages those with a passion for history to pursue. For more information, contact Zorea by e-mail at [aharon.zorea@uwc.edu](mailto:aharon.zorea@uwc.edu) or by calling the campus at (608) 647-6186, Extension 247.

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