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Arianna Huffington

Arianna Huffington Visits CSULB

Arianna Huffington, co-founder and editor-in-chief of The Huffington Post, spoke on campus Thursday.

Huffington, a nationally syndicated columnist and author of 13 books, was the fourth guest to come to the Beach for the annual Distinguished Speaker Series, held in the Carpenter Performing Arts Center at 7:30 p.m. The venue accommodated the largest audience in the history of the program.

This year’s topic was “Politics and the New Media.” Huffington discussed how the World Wide Web has shifted power away from the traditional media to citizens and is having a game-changing impact on the political world.

Huffington joked around, saying that the mainstream media suffer from attention deficit disorder, failing to cover major news stories. Instead of reporting on important, benefiting news, journalists have been focusing on entertainment news.

“Self-expression has become the new entertainment,” Huffington said. Some politicians, like Sarah Palin, are bypassing the media and are instead using social media to communicate their policies to the public.

Another example of how social media is used to spread the news is Tina Fey’s impersonation of Sarah Palin. When asking the audience who watched this, the majority rose their hand, but when asking them who watched it on Saturday Night Live, only a portion had. This illustrates that the number of devices a story is sent to makes it more widely available.

According to Huffington, although the new media is giving a voice to millions who would have been voiceless, the main problem of online content is that people are “hiding behind anonymity.”

Huffington stated that the highest responsibility of the media is to ferret out the truth. However, some topics don’t necessarily call for two sides to a story. “If you’re writing an article on the Holocaust, you do not need to call a Holocaust-denier!” she explains.

Huffington’s newest book, “Third World America: How our Politicians are Abandoning the Middle Class and Betraying the American Dream,” was published in September. It focuses on how America has increasingly become a country of extremes. She writes about how sleep deprivation has disconnected people from wisdom. People can focus on solutions if they stop acting as if “democracy is a spectator sport” and “tap into their own personal resilience.” Huffington stressed the importance of baring witness and knowing that solutions exist.

After the featured address, a panel discussion followed. CSULB panelists included Lucy Nguyen, Vice President of Associated Students Inc.; Craig Smith, Director of the Center for First Amendment Studies; and Lisa Vollendorf, Chair of the Academic Senate.

Huffington also answered several handwritten questions from the audience.

The evening concluded with a book signing in the lobby.

Launched in May 2005, The Huffington Post is a news and blog site that has quickly become one of the most widely read, linked to and frequently-cited media brands on the Internet. Its success stems from thousands of citizen journalists who send in stories.

The event’s proceeds went to the CSULB general scholarship fund for students.