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Jones puts passion into politics

By Doug Robinson

Deseret Morning News



Give Dan Jones a classroom full of students, and he's like Streep with a script, Montana with a gridiron, Pavarotti with an orchestra.

He teaches political science and American government at the University of Utah, which is dry stuff until Jones gets a hold of it. This guy is good. He's so good that students, after taking his class, routinely change their majors to political science or go directly from his classroom to the office of the poly sci department to sign up for volunteer political work.

"Happens all the time," says senior Bryson Morgan, a former student aide for Jones who works at the university's Hinckley Institute of Politics.

Just stand back and watch the man work a classroom. He delivers spellbinding lectures. No, that's the wrong word. He struts up and down the aisles of the classroom, delivering *orations* on the Constitution, the judiciary, the executive branch, the Bill of Rights, current political issues, whatever.

His voice rises to a shout to make a point, or falls to nearly a whisper. Or he goes silent for several long seconds, eyes closed while as he gathers his thoughts, while students hang on his next word. He pounds the lectern, points to students, throws his arms into the air. He is so passionate about what he teaches that sometimes tears flow — his and the students'.

"It's the complete show," says Morgan.

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Without looking at a note, he talks for nearly an hour, informing, commentating, questioning, quoting the Founding Fathers, recalling events, dates and statistics from memory.

After teaching for more than 40 years, he could

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mail it in, but he's still as passionate as a politician on the stump and as current as the day's newspaper. "There isn't one subject that I cover in American government that bores me," he says. "I learn something all the time."

Jones comes off as a little gruff, but don't let him fool you. He's a softy. His class sizes range from 40 to 100, but he doesn't miss much in there. He often calls students if they are absent. And after class he might say something like this to his T.A.: "The young man on the third row, second from the right, was having a bad day. Something's wrong. Get his number so I can call him."

"That was common," says Morgan. "Sometimes he would find out (from the student) that someone was ill, or there was a divorce or there was some personal problems."

The 72-year-old Jones recently became the first person to receive the Civic, Character and Service Learning Award, which is a long way of saying he's a great teacher. He was honored because he has "inspired so many students," said state Sen. Karen Hale, D-Salt Lake.

Jones is primarily known for his work through Dan Jones & Associates, a well-known market research and public opinion firm. He has conducted numerous polls for the Deseret Morning News, among other companies and political candidates.

In the business since 1959, he has been consulted by the likes of Ted Kennedy, Bob Dole, Orrin Hatch, Norm Bangerter and Mike Leavitt, and he has conducted polls for every presidential race since 1962.

He could have done this full-time, but he never could tear himself completely away from the classroom. He has taught at Granite and Bountiful high schools, Utah State and now at the U.

His father was a teacher in Pocatello, Idaho. His family regularly discussed political issues around the house. Seven of his eight siblings became professional teachers.

"I love to teach young minds about the Constitution and the political system and see if they can't find the interest to be involved," says Jones. "I want them to be knowledgeable voters about issues and candidates. I want them to feel a part of the system and what is great about America."

If you're wondering why he doesn't run for office himself, you're not the first to ask. One of the political parties in Utah — he won't say which — once asked him to run for Congress. He declined so he could continue his polling business, which he uses to feed his passion for politics the way a baseball junkie checks the box scores each morning. His wife, Pat, a newly elected state senator, is the politician in the family.

That also leaves him time for the classroom, and that's good news for Utah students.

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