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Radford University paid \$245,000 to bring Katie Couric, Donna Brazile and Ana Navarro to campus on Sept. 19 for the Highlander Discovery Institute’s inaugural event, “Exploring the Nexus of Politics and Society.”

Couric, the first woman to solo anchor a news program on a major television network, hosted the panel. She moderated conversation between Brazile, who has twice served as the interim chair of the Democratic National Committee, and Navarro, who co-hosts “The View” and is a political commentator for CNN and Telemundo.

The two of them dissected the division the country faces while Couric pressed them for their perspectives, all in front of a nearly full Bondurant Auditorium.



Photo Credit: (Radford University) Couric had an invite-only meet and greet before the main event. Here she is pictured with Hunter Mundy, softball player, Colleen McNickle, Student Government President and Breon Case, the student representative on the Board of Visitors.

The Tartan reached out via email to President Brian Hemphill and Vice President of University Relations Ashley Schumaker, who is also Hemphill's Chief of Staff.

We asked how the guests were acquired and how much they were paid.

Schumaker said, "The University worked with [All American Entertainment](#) [AAE] to secure the professional services of Katie Couric, Donna Brazile and Ana Navarro."

Schumaker explained that the rates paid to each speaker were pre-established by the talent agency.

"Based on pre-established rates with All American Entertainment, Katie Couric's professional fee

was \$195,000; Donna Brazile's professional fee was \$25,000, and Ana Navarro's professional fee was \$25,000. All three individuals will be reimbursed for other expenses, such as airfare, hotel, ground transportation, etc," she said.

The contract between AAE and RU stipulated that the university would be responsible for "private jet transportation" for Couric.

The Highlander Discovery Institute (HDI) was announced in Hemphill's [2017 State of the University Address](#). In that address, he said, "we will invest \$150,000 annually to expose this campus to preeminent speakers from around the world!"

Schumaker said the event's costs "were covered by private donations and activity fees."

"Over the three budget cycles since the initial announcement, a total of \$450,000 has been accumulated in the fund," she said.

A steering committee was designated to help HDI plan its first function. Hemphill said the group "worked diligently to plan the inaugural event. The steering committee provided leadership and guidance regarding the selection and invitation for the panel participants to visit our campus."

Hemphill was inspired to found the new institute after one of his mentors, West Virginia University President Gordon Gee, came to campus in the Fall of 2016. Gee told Hemphill, "on a campus, people come together to argue and rebut, to debate and debunk. That is how we learn. That is how we challenge our own ideas and open our minds."

Hemphill believes "the Highlander Discovery Institute is our opportunity to do just that."

Watching RU students, faculty and staff and local community members trickle in until nearly filling up the Bondurant Auditorium, Hemphill "felt a tremendous amount of pride."

All available tickets were reserved a week after the online reservation system opened on Sept. 3; in total, 1482 tickets were requested.

During ticket requisition, applicants were asked to submit questions they'd like to see answered by the panelists.

According to Dr. Timothy Channell, one of the members of the steering committee, more than 70 questions were submitted for review. It wasn't apparent if any of the questions asked by Couric

were ones submitted by the audience.

Watching RU students, faculty and staff and local community members trickle in until nearly filling up the Bondurant Auditorium, Hemphill “felt a tremendous amount of pride.”

“Their attendance demonstrated a strong level of commitment to our country and a positive desire to work together in moving our society forward,” he said.

Hemphill continued, “The speakers embodied our institution’s continued efforts to provide an inclusive and supportive environment for respectful debates and enriching discussions about the current state of our country and the exciting possibilities for our future. The success of our inaugural event has set a high bar for future events of the Highlander Discovery Institute.”

After the panel concluded a post-event was held in Young Hall. More than half a dozen breakout rooms with varying topics, such as environmental politics and fake news, were set up throughout the building.

Haleigh Williams, RU student and president of Young Americans for Freedom, a student-run political activist group on campus, attended the discussion centered on free speech.

She enjoyed the dialogue between students and commended the group leader for giving everyone a chance to speak on the matter. She said, “most of the students there also agreed that if you don’t agree with someone’s speech, you can either ignore it, or protest it, but do not try to ban it.”

Even though the main event featured a conversation between a Democrat, Brazile, and a Republican, Navarro, Williams thinks the university didn’t do enough to bring a diverse cross-section of viewpoints.

“Most of the students there also agreed that if you don’t agree with someone’s speech, you can either ignore it, or protest it, but do not try to ban it.”

“This event was yet again another example of the university indoctrinating the student body with liberal viewpoints,” she said.

She continued, “The problem is that although Ana Navarro identifies as a Republican, she holds very little conservative viewpoints, as shown by her agreement with Donna Brazile on every single topic talked about.”

Williams said she's "absolutely disgusted" the university spent so much money.

"If the university would actually bring speakers that represent the whole student body and not just a group of the students, I wouldn't care as much about the money spent," she said.

A second event for HDI has not yet been announced. This first forum took two full years and three budget cycles to prepare.

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Photo Credit: ([skeeze on Pixabay](#))

Featured: (Couric at a fashion show)