Journalist speaks on politics, Washington and media's role | Journalism

10/03/2013

October 3, 2013

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Published: Thursday, October 3, 2013

Updated: Thursday, October 3, 2013 00:10

On Wednesday, USU students and faculty heard from Matt Canham, a political reporter for the Salt Lake Tribune as part of the Morris Media Lecture Series.

Canham has worked for the Tribune since 2002, covering various sections of the paper. He started working for the paper’s political section in 2007 while reporting out of the Washington D.C. bureau. He spoke about the connection between politicians and journalists and how the news is reported.

“My job for the paper comes down to three primary responsibilities,” Canham said. “I report on who are politicians really are, what they actually do, and what they do not want the public to know.”

Canham also spoke about the main motivations of politicians. He said most politicians want to achieve their policies that can help the country move in a better direction, but said it is very difficult to get questions across.

“It was a long time ago that somebody could just go up to the president and ask him a question,” Canham said. “Since Obama took office five years ago, I have been able to ask him a question twice.”

Students in attendance asked Canham questions during the lecture. William Christensen, a sophomore majoring in journalism and communication, said being able to get his question across was a great benefit.

“He is a very knowledgeable person who had a lot of insider information,” Christensen said. “I knew coming in that he is a great reporter, and he definitely gave a good lecture.”

Canham also talked about how politicians look at journalists. He said some politicians view journalists as wildcards and how politicians have tried to shield themselves from them over the years.

“Politicians love to view us as aliens,” Canham said. “They always have that welcoming smile, but the look in their eyes says they don’t want to talk to us.”

During the lecture, Canham spoke about what his ultimate goal is. He said after the experiences he has had working in Washington, D.C., he wants to be able to write the big story. He has had experience covering big events, such as the Wall Street collapse of 2008.

“When you’re dealing with traditional news sources, the information takes on a whole different sense,” Canham said. “It’s ultimately up to the public themselves to choose which news sources they pay attention to.”

Christensen said he was very impressed with the amount of coverage Canham has done over the years and also was impressed with the big stories he has covered.

“Every journalist has to be able to work towards that one story that will define them,” Christensen said. “It was very amazing with what he had to say.”

During the talk, Canham said every reporter in the country can be independent if they choose. Stewart Ulrich, a sophomore majoring in journalism and communication, said this is advice he will follow carefully.

“When he talked about independent journalists, it made me think of how proactive I need to be,” Ulrich said. “I feel that it is a big skill that everyone, not just journalists, need to have.”

At the end of the speech, Canham took time to answer questions from the audience, and Ulrich said taking time to answer and ask question was a big benefit to him.

“Having the chance to ask a journalist like that my questions makes me feel more appreciated,” Ulrich said. “If you’re not comfortable asking the tough questions, then this career isn’t for everyone.”

Canham ended the lecture by giving the audience a piece of advice.

“If you want to know something, if you question the truth, read wisely,” Canham said.
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