

Help create WikiCandidate -- the ideal presidential candidate

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Step aside, John McCain and Barack Obama. Meet Sen. Julian Polonius Foley Marcos DeWiki III, a true man of the people. DeWiki -- in Internet fashion -- is making an unprecedented run for president of the United States.

He's not on your ballot? Click his Web site and learn all about his sordid past and political acumen ... or, if you wish, change his history or add to it at www.wikicandidate08.com .

Cornell communication graduate students Josh Braun and Dmitry Epstein; Tarleton Gillespie, Cornell assistant professor of

communication; and a team of undergraduates have developed a Wiki Web site where anyone can assemble the perfect candidate -- in this case DeWiki.

A wiki is a Web site that allows users to manipulate information, by editing, adding or subtracting the data or text. Thus, the wiki candidate -- his politics, platform or his family history -- can be altered by anyone. The public is invited to participate.

The students are using the Web site to study online civic participation, researching how people work together online and learning how groups in cyberspace decide what topics are worth discussing.

"The mass media has a major impact on what people say during an election, but we know there are likely to be users with less mainstream interests who may have a big impact on the discourse on the site," says Braun. "We want to know if they mimic the forms of discourse you'd find in the news media or a political campaign. Do they take a more argumentative or persuasive tack? Or might they invent a genre that's unique to the site?"

Currently, candidate DeWiki has 10 sisters and an adopted brother from Mexico; his father grew up on a Texas farm, and his mother was a stripper.

The candidate -- through the eyes of his builders -- speaks on a variety of issues. On outsourcing, for example, the amalgamated senator currently professes strong opinions of isolationism: "If I win the election, I will make outsourcing illegal. I will make sure that U.S. companies pay very high revenues and fines for outsourcing jobs to foreign countries. These jobs should be given to U.S. citizens and legal residents so as to decrease unemployment and social dependence." But with some Wiki-style editing, his opinions can change.

So far, Braun is pleased with the participation. "I've been impressed by the amount of pro-social content," he says. "Because of edit wars surrounding political issues on Wikipedia, people told us that designing a Wiki dedicated to politics might be stepping right into the deep end. We've seen a little ugliness, but there are thoughtful articles and instances where users build from each other's ideas -- and even proofread each other's work."

Other members of the Wiki candidate research team are: Cornell seniors Alan Garcia, Brian Alson and Julie Bai; Jie Teng, graduate student in engineering; graphic artist Cara Jennison, Somerville, Mass.; Dan Cosley, Cornell assistant professor of information science; and Matt Kulik '07, computer science consultant.

Provided by Cornell University

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