

Student intern reflects on experience with Obama campaign

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When President-elect Barack Obama gave his acceptance speech in Grant Park, Jordan Breighner was bawling his eyes out.

Breighner, a senior in economics, spent the last four months working as an intern for the Obama campaign in Chicago, and the last two weeks leading up to the election working 120-hour weeks, waking up at 8 a.m., going to bed at 4 a.m., only to shower, change clothes and do it all over again the next day.

It was all worth it, Breighner said.

When the campaign got word their candidate had won the state of Ohio the night of Nov. 4, Breighner and other campaign workers walked down from their Chicago office to meet the crowd awaiting the victory.

"Everyone was crying, screaming and running," Breighner said. "It was the most amazing, inspiring thing...I was part in shock. It was over and all our work we'd done had paid off."

Breighner worked as a targeting intern for the Obama campaign, where he used the Internet in a way he said campaigns had never done before—identifying "sporadic" voters who would be likely to support Obama based on demographics such as age, sex, where they live and income levels.

Breighner said the Obama campaign used new technology to get ahead as early as the primaries.

"The Clinton campaign had all the establishment and all the traditional campaign tactics. Our campaign had to find non-traditional ways to gain support," Breighner said, such as with YouTube videos, social networking, caucus events and "Get Out The Vote" efforts in swing states.

Most people working on targeting, a technique taken from the banking industry, had economics degrees, Breighner said, and they basically acted as analysts.

Kirk Jowers, director of the Hinckley Institute of Politics, said Breighner's work with targeting was invaluable. The Hinckley Institute helped Breighner coordinate the internship, although they could not sponsor him due to campaign finance laws. "The Obama campaign has taken quantum leaps from past campaigns in so many areas, and targeting is at the top of that," Jowers said. "(Breighner's) experience will really put him at the cutting edge with the entire country on how the methodology works."

Jowers said the targeting techniques could also be applied to other fields, such as charity work and in the private sector.

The Hinckley Institute helped Breighner get the internship through a connection with a former Hinckley intern, Kallie Hanley, who



Jordan Breighner

worked at the Democratic National Committee in spring 2007 and had connections with the Obama campaign. Breighner began working in Chicago Aug. 1.

From day one on the job, Breighner said it was a hectic environment.

"I showed up, the boss met me at the front door, showed me my seat and said, 'Get to work,'" Breighner said. "There's a steep learning curve. Everyone has to pull their own weight."

On one occasion, Breighner did get to personally meet Obama.

Breighner said he was working in an event for big donors and was standing in a room with about 30 people, many of whom were millionaires or billionaires. He said Obama saw his staff badge, walked directly toward him, shook his hand, asked his name and thanked him for his work.

"That little thing to me meant a lot," Breighner said. "He didn't have to do that. It indicated that it's not about the money to him, it's about the people working for him. He cares."

Now that the campaign is over, besides catching up on sleep, Breighner is working on post-election wrap-up work in Chicago as Obama prepares to transition into the White House. He said he is thinking about moving to Washington, D.C. to work.

Amy Code, political programs coordinator at the Hinckley Institute, said Breighner could be influential in helping future interns get jobs in the White House or in the Obama Administration.

Breighner said the internship was the most amazing experience of his life.

"Everyone believed in what we were doing on the campaign because (Obama) was who he was—a great leader," Breighner said. "He will call on people to better their own lives."

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