

Dear Northwestern Political Science Department,

This past spring I received the Farrell Summer Experiential Learning Grant. I used my grant to travel to Central Florida where I worked as an Organizing Fellow for the Florida Democratic Party which eventually became the official Florida branch of the Hillary Clinton campaign. I spent eight weeks as an organizing fellow in the community of Kissimmee Florida, located just south of Orlando in Osceola County.

I can hardly begin to describe just how much I learned this summer, and what a transformative experience it was for me as a student of politics and as a citizen of this country. The learning curve for my job was steep. The Northwestern alum who recruited me was transferred out of Florida one week after I arrived. After only being on the job for one week, I was thrown into a leadership position. I learned the ins and outs of everyday campaign life well enough to help train our region's three newly hired organizers. Together we made phone calls to build our volunteer base, we registered voters, we met with community members to learn how to better mobilize the neighborhood, and we knocked on doors to collect vote-by-mail ballot requests. I learned about the data-driven community organizing model for campaigns introduced by Barack Obama. This model got me engaged with the Kissimmee community in such a way that it became my second home. While interacting with volunteers and registering voters at Walmart parking lots, bus stops and parks, I heard the stories of hundreds and hundreds of people. I learned how massive, media-heavy elections impact everyday people on a very personal level. I talked to immigrants who were not yet citizens, but thrilled to tell me all about their plans for gaining citizenship and voting one day in the future. I spoke to many felons who in Florida were unable to vote because of their prior felony conviction (unless they got their

rights restored, which is an incredibly difficult process). By the end of the summer, I had registered almost 200 people to vote. In this specific area of Florida, voter registration is essential to the success of the Clinton campaign. This area, known as the I-4 corridor for the I-4 expressway I took to work every day, has seen a large influx of immigration from Puerto Rico. The financial crisis in Puerto Rico has caused many people to immigrate to Florida. Puerto Rican citizens can't vote for president while on the island. However, because Puerto Rico is part of the United States, they can vote for president as soon as they arrive in Florida- they just need to get registered. This demographic is essential to Hillary Clinton winning Florida and the country. I used my Spanish to get these community members registered to vote which was an added but essential challenge.

Through my organizing work I learned all about how a coordinated campaign operates. We were the Florida branch of the Clinton campaign but after the Florida primaries (August 30th) we would become the organizing force for democrats up and down the ticket. Our operation grew slowly but steadily. My region did not have an office yet so we worked out of various Starbucks and Panera locations and public libraries with Wi-Fi. I lived in "supporter housing", which means I lived with volunteers who opened up their spare bedrooms for organizers. I lived with Ann and Bob, a retired couple who became like grandparents to me. Because we didn't have an office and I was living alone in a brand new place, I learned how to adapt to any situation I was given. I learned to be fearless, especially when it came to speaking with strangers and asking them to register to vote. I learned to ask for what I needed. Because we were so desperately in need of volunteers, I would recruit all the volunteer help I could get through what the campaign called a "hard ask". These were invaluable life skills to acquire. On

tope of all the skills I learned, I also met so many incredible people while down in Florida. The other organizers in the region became friends and mentors.

To cap off the experience, Hillary Clinton came to our region for a rally on my last weekend of work. I was on the staff, helping the 3,000 plus people in line stay hydrated and helping people with disabilities get priority seating. Because I worked on the rally, I got the chance to shake hands and take a picture with Mrs. Clinton. I thanked her in person for inspiring young women like me. The rally was awesome, and right afterwards the organizers spent hours at a greasy diner that had Wi-Fi. We input all the phone numbers of the people who came to the rally so that we could recruit them to volunteer in the future. I got to be part of the most glorious and the most nitty gritty part of campaigning all in one day.

Thanks to the Farell Experiential Learning Grant, I was able to be part of this historic campaign. It was a life-changing experience that illuminated some of the real-world ways that politics functions. I got to see how a campaign on a national scale affected a small community. I am very grateful to have had this transformational opportunity.

