

Kathleen Keating
February 8 2008
Winter Term Report

Internship With Mass Alliance

It is difficult to create an end project or report for Winter Term because, for me, the end fruit for my labor was winning an election. I spent the bulk of my time on a campaign where my candidate won approximately 64% of the vote. Being one of the five people allowed in the room as the results came in and celebrating with the people I had been putting in 70-hour weeks with all month was the true fruit of my labors. Also, the people I met and processes I observed will be invaluable for my future professional life.

Mass Alliance is a coalition of progressive organizations that works to help further the interests of its member organizations through political action. I interned with Mass Alliance in Boston for the month of January and learned a lot about political organizations and electoral politics. I ended up spending much of my time working on a single campaign; being able to become entrenched in a local election was incredibly beneficial to my understanding of political processes.

The very first day of the internship was spent sitting in on interviews for various candidates for State Representative. There were a few special elections to be held on Super Tuesday and the Alliance was planning on endorsing candidates who would best champion the values of the member organizations. Once endorsed, Mass Alliance helps candidates to run effective campaigns.

On one of the first weekends in Boston, the director of Mass Alliance was presenting at a workshop that prepares women to run for political office. I was allowed to go to the full-day

workshop and observe the various presenters and “students.” The women in attendance were all highly accomplished and motivated to make change in their communities. It was an inspiring experience that gave me faith in the ability of women to self-actualize and make a real change in the world.

The third day of my internship, I went to the campaign headquarters of a candidate Mass Alliance had previously endorsed in a town outside of Boston. This was the first campaign I had worked for and local electioneering was not what I expected. I spent my whole first day making phone calls to senior citizens to inform them about the candidate. Unfortunately, I had a natural ability to engage and persuade people on the phone so would spend countless more hours calling people throughout the campaign.

After a press release I had drafted was published in one of the local papers, I had some legitimacy and was given more responsibility in the following days. I was asked for input on mail pieces, debate preparation, and a host of other issues. I felt the importance of my role early on; the campaign consisted of the manager, the candidate, a consultant who came in occasionally, and myself. With such a small regular staff, there was plenty of room for influence and involvement.

While it was not required, I began spending a lot of time at the campaign; 12-hour days were not unusual and I spent both days of the weekend working for my candidate. It was amazing how quickly I got absorbed into the political game and wanted to do as much as possible to ensure a victory on election day.

The candidate I worked for was amazing and really what inspired me to put in so many hours. She was brilliant, accomplished, hysterically funny, and clearly committed to shared values. It did not take me long to realize she was capable of making great change for her

community and for the Massachusetts State House as a whole if the people of her community elected her. I was committed to ensuring that the voting citizens of Melrose had the same information I did and therefore support her on Election Day.

I spent a lot of my time talking to voters both on the phone and out in the community. It became apparent that with local politics, one of the most important aspects of a campaign is going out and talking to the constituency. The people in the town seemed to respond to hard work and feel that if the candidate worked hard on a campaign, they would clearly work hard once elected to best represent the interests of the town. Volunteers for the campaign helped reach out to voters via canvassing, phone-banking, and mailing.

The end of my experience was a whirlwind. The director of Mass Alliance, an Oberlin alum, had mentioned that I should really stick around until the election on February 5th or I would regret not experiencing election night for my first campaign. After my candidate and campaign manager also pleaded with me to stay through the fifth, I decided to miss my first few days of classes. I was working 15-hour days in the time leading up to election and just arrived back at Oberlin last night. My candidate had a resounding victory and will proceed to face the republican candidate in the general election in a month. I was very happy I stayed through the election and it was hard for me to leave, knowing there was still obviously work to be done.

One of the best parts of my internship was getting to see how accessible a career in politics can be. Through talking with my internship director, candidate, and campaign manager, I began to get a sense for what being successful will entail and it seems entirely within my grasp. I met many spectacular individuals who assure me they would help me find a job after college and I hope to work with people I met through the internship very soon.