

Inside the White House

Written by Brandon Hill
Friday, 25 October 2013 10:20



The best summer of my life was working at the White House as an intern.

I landed in Washington, D.C. in early June, excited but nervous about my first day of work. I was placed in the Office of Presidential Correspondence as a participant of the White House Internship Program (WHIP). WHIP is a highly selective opportunity, and typically receives several thousand applications every year from highly-qualified young servant leaders from all across the nation. I was blessed to be chosen as one of 147 interns the White House invited onboard this summer.

As an intern in the Office of Presidential Correspondence (OPC), I was among a large and friendly cohort of interns and staffers. The mission of the OPC is to listen and respond to the stories of the American people, and supply President Obama with a pulse of what is on the public's mind. Each day, our office sends 10 letters to the Oval Office that were written by everyday citizens.

The OPC is just one of over a dozen offices that make up the White House organization. Within the Presidential Correspondence department, I was specifically designated to the email division. This office team is tasked with reading through, analyzing, and replying to the thousands of online messages written to President Obama daily. Everyday, I was responsible for this mail analysis, but also managing teams of volunteers, and coordinating the efforts to archive and

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digitize correspondence. I also conceptualized and launched development of a new dynamic web application—with a group of friends—for WhiteHouse.gov that provides immediate and individually tailored information to people before they submit an online query to the President.

The day-to-day work was very exciting, however, I think the most memorable experience occurred outside the cubicle. The opportunity of befriending the President's speechwriter, hugging the first lady, asking the vice president about super powers, hearing personal remarks from the President. I was afforded the rare opportunity to meet with the President's counselor in the West Wing and to even play a pick up game of hoops on the South Lawn Court. Like I said, this summer was nothing short of a blessing and was an unforgettable season of my life.

Beyond the grind and glamour of the White House, I have taken away many great life lessons. Reading the heartfelt reflections of the American people everyday has honed my understanding of key issues and has placed a uniquely human quality to the discipline I study at Stanford. These stories, moreover, have given me rich space for introspection – to learn about what drives my passion for public service and where I can grow as a leader. I have gained a window into how the executive branch operates and how politics function inside the White House – the epicenter of our democracy. I think where I was nervous in the beginning; I have been polished by the rigor of the fast-paced, high-octane environment. As a result of working in the President's inbox, I have significantly improved my communication, writing and interpersonal skills. The exposure of building a team around an innovative idea, to delivering a presentation in front of a conference room full of staffers and a special assistant to the President, to building enduring relationships with the interns and supervisors I served alongside furthered my growth tremendously. Lastly, I think this experience reinforced my personal aspirations of government and public policy, as well as provided me with new skills and renewed energy to succeed in my sophomore year at Stanford University as a student and as Sophomore Class President.