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Alumnus organizes students for Democratic presidential campaign

By John Sullivan '09
Staff Writer

At age five, Alex Morgan '07 closely followed the 1996 presidential election. In 2002—seventh grade—he went door-to-door campaigning for Governor Jennifer Granholm. Today, Morgan's done watching political campaigns happen.

Now, he's running them.

Just two years out of high school, Morgan holds the top student position for Senator Barack Obama's presidential campaign in Michigan, as state coordinator of Students for Barack Obama (SFBO).

And in August, he was an assistant sergeant-at-arms at the Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Denver, a title that few people, let alone college students, ever have the pleasure of holding.

But that's just the beginning for Morgan, who was South's Class of 2007 president and a former "Tower" editor. He is also the deputy membership director of College Democrats of America (CDA), the director of communications of the Michigan Federation of College Democrats (MFCD) and the student financial director at Kalamazoo College.

"There's just something about the rush of campaigning for someone or something you feel strongly about," said Morgan. "It gets my blood pumping. I get a lot of adrenaline when I go canvassing. I get really excited about it. I'm a bit of a nerd. I like to look at electoral maps and district maps—that's what I love to do. It's my passion."

And when Morgan is passionate about something, it shows, Morgan's friend and Class of 2007 Treasurer Lauren LoGrasso said.

"When Alex is interested in something, he puts his heart and soul into it," said LoGrasso. "He's very accommodating to people from all walks of life."

In fact, Morgan, a political science major at Kalamazoo, spends more than 40 hours a week working in his campaign roles. Currently, all three organizations Morgan works for are focusing on bringing in college voters.

"We're going to be doing pretty much the same stuff until the election," said Morgan. "We're all attempting to streamline everything we do so that we're working together and not stepping on anybody's toes."

The major goal of each group is, of course, to get Obama elected next week.

"We can really swing this. We're seeing unprecedented turnout in the primaries and caucuses," said Morgan. "We've registered in such high numbers and it's not just that we're registering them, but that they're turning out. Senator Obama is

energizing the youth vote like we've never seen, and the youth vote is going to skyrocket in November."

Morgan's long dedication to Obama started his senior year of high school.

"I've always been interested in politics, but something just sort of sparked in December 2006 when I decided I'd support Obama," said Morgan.

Obama's integrity and commitment to green energy and universal access to health care are among the reasons Morgan supports the Illinois senator.

"A lot of college kids talk a lot about Barack Obama and like him, but I think Alex Morgan has done a good job of actually giving form and organization to the cause and actually doing something about it," said Paul Manganello '07, a fellow Kalamazoo student.

"He's tried to convince several of my family members to switch to the Obama side," LoGrasso said with a laugh. "Now they're going toward John McCain and he's like, 'It's like a bullet to my heart every time I hear them say that.'"

Morgan's involvement in SFBO began in November 2007 when he founded a SFBO chapter at Kalamazoo College. The chapter was so successful that Morgan was appointed western Michigan regional field coordinator. During his time in that position, Morgan helped start several new chapters.

When the previous state coordinator graduated, the Obama campaign thought Morgan would be the perfect replacement. As state coordinator of SFBO, Morgan is the link between the Obama campaign and Michigan's 13 SFBO chapters at colleges throughout the state.

"What's unique about SFBO is that this concept really hasn't played out before," said Morgan. "We've had College Dem (CDA) chapters on college campuses, but they've never really been fully integrated with the campaign."

Morgan receives directives directly from campaign officials, sending several e-mails a day and having several phone conversations each week. He also calls each Michigan SFBO chapter leader at least once a week.

"If students don't feel confident or feel that somebody's not looking out for them or supporting them everything sort of falls apart," said Morgan. "We need to make sure there's a solid structure in place so they don't feel too burdened."

Following his success at SFBO, and prior to the Democratic Convention, Morgan decided to try to run for director of membership of CDA. While he was not selected, he was later appointed deputy membership director after demonstrating his commitment to unifying SFBO and CDA and reaching out to new chapters.



BARACK THE VOTE
At a Detroit Economics Club convention in May 2007, Alex Morgan '07 poses with Democratic presidential candidate and Senator Barack Obama. At that time, Morgan did not know that he would become the Michigan coordinator of Students for Barack Obama (SFBO). Since he began supporting Obama in 2006, he has been highly involved in the campaign and was even the sergeant-at-arms at the Democratic National Convention.

Photo courtesy of Alex Morgan '07

A week before the Convention, Morgan received an exciting phone call. He had been appointed assistant sergeant-at-arms by the campaign.

"The DNC was amazing," said Morgan. "It was surreal to be in the center of the political universe for a week. Every single Democratic politician in American politics was there. It was absolutely wild. Every night you had a lineup of amazing speakers with huge crowds that were absolutely electric."

Sergeant-at-arms was a ceremonial title to recognize Morgan and the entire youth movement.

"I was able to have a nice five minute conversation with (Democratic National Committee Chairman) Howard Dean who I think is an outstanding American political figure," said Morgan. "We talked about the youth vote and we talked about involvement on college campuses. I truly believe we're going to make a huge impact on the electorate and the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign. They (the party) really recognize that, and they are investing in campaigning on college campuses."

While he was at the Convention, Morgan was informed he had been appointed director of communication of the MFCD.

Other highlights of the Convention included watching speeches by former President Bill Clinton, former vice presidential nominee Senator Joe Biden,

and of course Obama himself, Morgan said. The roar of the 80,000 people in the crowd, and the sight of the flood of American flags were extraordinary.

"When I got back to Michigan I realized the importance of this presidential election," said Morgan. "I had this renewed sense of urgency. I decided that I needed to focus heavily on my own college campus."

In the few days until the election, Morgan will be busy. Following Election Day, his SFBO position will dissolve, and he will focus on his CDA and MFCD jobs.

"When November comes around and this election has passed, we're going to do a lot of work to build up this organization for the future," said Morgan.

He will focus on getting former SFBO members to join CDA, and getting new chapters across the state and country, targeting specific demographics.

After graduation, Morgan wants to continue to work for campaigns, perhaps as a youth vote director in the next Democratic governor's election. As for a political career, Morgan said he's undecided.

"I used to say no to that question, but I've noticed over the years that I continuously run for positions," he said. "Who knows what I'll be doing. I always say I love and hate American politics and I'm just sort of looking in the immediate future right now."