



## Student Spotlight

**Aaron Shapiro** is a Ph.D. candidate majoring in American Politics with a minor in Comparative Politics.

By **André Cavaller Guzzi**

**André:** Before coming to school you were working in electoral politics. What were you doing exactly and why did you decide to pursue an academic career?



**Aaron:**

I did campaign work, mostly in the field for a number of Democratic campaigns including Obama in 2008. I went into academia because there were questions and frustrations involved in practical politics that I thought I needed to step back from if I wanted to gain leverage on them. And I was interested in teaching.

**André:** Tell us about your experience as a lecturer at CUNY.

**Aaron:** It's great. Obviously teaching is time consuming, but it's a real benefit to have to relate your academic knowledge in plain English to undergraduates. The diversity of the typical CUNY classroom is really an incredible and unique political laboratory.

**André:** What is your dissertation topic and how did you come up with this idea?

**Aaron:** It's about Democratic Party organization in the age of Obama. Basically we've seen over the last few years a return to electoral strategies based on the mobilization of sporadic but loyal party voters, and so I'm tracing how this has affected the party's organizational infrastructure. I guess the idea came out of a combination of the things that interested me in my professional experience, especially in regard to voter mobilization, and all the political science literature that I've read, along with on-the-ground developments since I've been in grad school – in particular, the development of a presidential electorate that favors Democrats, despite their struggles in mobilizing this electorate in the midterms.

**André:** What are your views about the 2016 presidential elections?

**Aaron:** Well I think what I find fascinating – both for my research but maybe more importantly for American democracy – is how the Democratic Party and electorate will respond without Obama on the ticket. On the one hand I think broadly most elite actors in the party now recognize the importance of mobilizing strategies in presidential elections, but the million-dollar question is, can the Obama electorate be reconstituted without Obama as a candidate?

