

Democracy During a Pandemic

Brianna Brookhart
Shield Senior Editor

Youth and Government (YAG), a model-government club at NRCA, is a popular club and event every year. This year, everything was held online over two weekends, instead of in the Raleigh Convention Center (RCC) over one weekend. While things may have been different this year, students still made the best of the opportunities they were given and were excited for the virtual conference.

Youth and Government is divided into three different branches: legislative, judicial, and media. All three branches play a role in the collective goal of YAG, which is “equipping students in moral and political leadership through training in the theory and practice of developing public policy.”

composed of six presiding officers and many of them were running for office positions this year. Because I had served as presiding officer the prior year and successfully run two campaigns, I was able to advise and guide them through their process as a candidate and as an associate officer.”

North Raleigh also has many students who participated in the judicial conference as officers this year. Trinity Williams (senior) served as the Senior District Attorney, Josh Hogg (junior) as Junior District Attorney, and Nicole Belcher (senior) as an Associate Justice.

“Serving as a justice has helped me to think quickly in debate and understand opposing viewpoints. It was so special to teach attorneys how to use case law and respectfully dissent. I’ve met the most incredible, creative friends and have grown as a conscious leader. I love

This year, the media team had to get creative. Since their videos, interviews, and other presentations would not be broadcast on the big screen of the RCC, they used many outlets to showcase their hard work before, after, and during conference. They created YAGCAST; a podcast for everyone to “catch a glimpse into the minds of Y&G delegates.” The media team also created YAGMAG, virtual “YAGentines” for delegates to be able to send to others, Meet the Candidate spreads, senior superlative video, weekend recap videos, nightly news broadcast, the infamous final video, and many articles posted on the NCYAG conference website.

“I’ve wanted to start a YAG podcast for years! When I became Editor in Chief, I knew that this was the year to start it. I hope to watch it continue to flourish next year and many after that. I actually borrowed the idea of the YAGMAG from the New Jersey Youth and Government program. I was looking at their Instagram and saw that they had a YAGMAG and thought it was the coolest thing. I’m so happy we were able to implement it as well because I think that it is a project that will last for years to come,” Martin said.

NRCA junior Neely Massey and his partner Dale Frederickson are the voices behind the podcast.

“YAGCAST is something that YAG media plans to keep going throughout the year even when Youth and Government is not in session. We have covered current event topics, what media does ‘behind the scenes,’ and just catching up with fellow delegates both local and across the state,” Massey said.

One of the biggest highlights from the media team is the final video. They titled it “The Tea’s Gambit,” in reference to the popular Netflix TV series, “The Queen’s Gambit,” a show about competitive chess and the fight to be the best. The video portrayed Cabot as the main character, fighting for the main prize of sweet tea, a play on Cabot’s campaign to bring sweet tea to the Youth and Government conference this year.

“The final video was mine and Katie’s brainchild. We knew we wanted to include

sweet tea and we knew ‘The Queen’s Gambit’ was popular, so the combination was natural,” Martin said.

The weekend closed with the showing of the final video, senior superlatives, and announcements of the 2022 candidacy results. It was a bittersweet moment for seniors and those who have participated in YAG since freshman year.

“It is definitely bittersweet to know that it was our last YAG. I’m sad that we won’t be able to experience it again, but beyond thankful that I’ve made such incredible friendships that I will take to college. Even online, I was able to connect with my YAG friends. Every delegate this year was super dedicated, and it made me appreciate the program even more. The community aspect of in-person YAG definitely carried on even through a Zoom call,” senior Gabby Pappalardo said.

North Raleigh delegates continue to be in YAG office every year. The positions from NRCA are as follows:

Noah Weyne (sophomore)- Speaker of the House, Hannah Elder (sophomore)- Presiding Officer, Hope Foster (junior)- Associate Justice, Neely Massey (junior)- Broadcast Editor, Lydia Penney (junior)- Print Editor

Special awards were also given out during the closing session of conference. Senior Anna Grace Shoaf was awarded Model Committee Chair and Best Senate Bill presentation along with her partner, Gabby Pappalardo. Senior Caleb Bynum was awarded Model Budget Analyst. Sophomores Hannah Elder and Haley Nix were presented with the Best House Bill presentation, and the Best House Debater was Dylan Lithgow.

Youth and Government is not only a weekend of hard work and diligence, but a weekend of influence and mentorship that delegates grow to love. The virtual conference provides hope for more students to be able to participate in YAG in the future.

“Having an online conference has completely revolutionized how the program will utilize Zoom in the future. Holding a virtual conference opened the door to students who otherwise would not be able to attend due to the price of an in-person conference. I think in the future, I would love to see a virtual option for delegates in an effort to be a more inclusive program,” Humphrey said. ■

The best part about serving as Lieutenant Governor was the mentorship position I gained. – Ashley Humphrey

Students in the legislative branch create and present bills, which are then debated in the Freshman Forum, the House of Representatives, the Senate, and Governors’ Cabinet, a group of talented students selected to debate the best bills.

The legislative conference started on the weekend of February 12, with Connor Cabot, YMCA’s 29th Youth Governor, being sworn in by NC Chief Justice Paul Newby, followed by a message from NC Governor Roy Cooper.

“We actually prerecorded the swearing in ahead of time over a Zoom conference call. It was a lot of fun to talk to Chief Justice Newby and get to know him a little better. Another benefit of it was that my parents and grandad got to stand next to me and hold the Bible as I recited the oath of office,” Cabot said.

NRCA had multiple students on the legislative officer team of YMCA’s Youth and Government. Connor Cabot (senior) served as the Youth Governor, Ashley Humphrey (senior) as the Youth Lieutenant Governor, Will Walsh (senior), Lauren Weider (junior), Noah Weyne (sophomore) as Presiding Officers, and Allaura Osbourne (senior) as Senior Lobbyist. These students worked hard all year in preparation for an online conference like no other.

“From the beginning, I knew that if we were to pull this off, we were going to have to increase communication among all officers,” Lieutenant Governor Ashley Humphrey said. “We were unable to have the annual officer retreat this summer, so I was leading a group with little chemistry and most of them have never even met in person before. This group of officers has prepared and called together more than any other officer team in years past as we were creating an entirely new experience. The best part about serving as Lieutenant Governor was the mentorship position I gained. My associate team was

that even in competitive rounds, attorneys are collaborative, as they are always inventing responses to opponents’ points,” Associate Justice Nicole Belcher said.

Judicial and legislative members both had to campaign for themselves on their social media platforms, instead of the usual campaigning style of buttons and in-person videos and speeches.

“I am super excited to work with the officer team and see a bit more ‘behind the scenes’ of conference. I am also looking forward to being able to learn more about the court process from the point of view of a justice and help new delegates discover a passion for the Court of Appeals,” junior and associate justice elect Hope Foster said.

Along with the legislative and judicial branch is media. Media is the backbone of Youth and Government, as they don’t debate or create bills, but they are always working on something to produce to the entirety of YAG. Normally the media team is split into Print, Broadcast, Photography, and Social Media. But this year, media was one big team collectively working on different projects, with Emmy Martin (senior) serving as Co-Editor in Chief.

“Katie, my Co-Editor in Chief, and I have been planning and preparing for conference since March of 2020! We started so soon because we wanted to have content coming out during the pandemic to keep delegates engaged. I definitely cannot take all the credit for the awesome content we produced over the two weekends, though. Our associate editors worked tirelessly to prepare as well. The entire media team met monthly to brainstorm and pitch ideas leading up to conference. Words cannot describe how proud I am of them. Virtual conference was tough on all branches of YAG, but media had to completely change in order to adapt. The kids in media are definitely my favorite part of YAG,” Martin said.

