

Government. When you hear the word, oftentimes your brain goes directly to the United States capital, Washington D.C. When you hear the word “government,” you may also immediately think of elected officials in the Senate, the House of Representatives, or even the president of the United States of America. My mind jumped to the same thoughts before I spent a week at The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University participating in the American Legion Boys State.

June 9 through June 15, while Caleb Swanson and I spent our time in Collegeville at Boys State, our classmates Hannah Lundborg and Sydney Hall traveled to Bethel University in St. Paul to participate in Girls State.

The focus of both Boys and Girls State, according to the American Legion website, is on “teaching government from the township to the state level” to students across the nation.

The week is jam-packed with learning and activities from the 7 a.m. roll call until the 11 p.m. bedtime. Starting Sunday evening, we were divided into eight different cities. The people within those cities would become our roommates, teammates, and allies for the coming challenges.

Hands-on lesson in government is an eye-opener

The next morning, city elections began for the mayor, clerk, treasurer, councilmen, and police chief positions. By the end of the day, we had attended several classes on topics such as local government or bill writing, and the city officials had carried out several city meetings to prepare for the coming days.

On Tuesday, citizens across the campus were split up into either Federalist or Nationalist parties. Within the parties, the party members decided amongst themselves what they wanted their party to stand for.

On Wednesday, the parties gathered to elect their nominees to run for state offices, such as governor or attorney general. Additionally, the cities nominated

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their picks for positions in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Campaign speeches and debates followed on Thursday along with the first Senate and House meetings. Within the House and Senate, bills created by the citizens were introduced, debated on, and either passed or failed by committees

or the general vote. Those who were not in the House or Senate took up positions within the county and dealt with several predetermined scenarios ranging from drought to financial crisis. When Friday finally rolled around, the elected state officials began adopting the bills brought to them into law or, on the more rare occasion, vetoing them.

When we weren’t in meetings or writing bills, we had the

opportunity to listen to a number of different speakers, including Minnesota lieutenant governor Peggy Flanagan, while the Girls Staters were addressed by the governor of Minnesota, Tim Walz. “I loved all the speakers,” Sydney said.

We could also play sports, watch a flag retirement ceremony, and participate in either the band or choir, which ended the week with a concert that was open to friends and family of the Boys and Girls Staters.

Having a stable and functioning government, whether it be at the local, state or federal level, is essential to how things get done in our country. Boys and Girls State not only gives students the opportunity to learn about the United States government, it gives them the chance to experience the frustration and joy of passing bills into law. Girls

and Boys Staters get to learn the importance of local government, and encounter the challenges that face all levels of government.

When I talked to some of the other participants in Boys State and Girls State, I found we all shared the same benefits and lessons from the experience. First, we met lots of new friends. We were able to meet juniors from across the state, each with different perspectives and experiences. However, our differences allowed us to create diverse parties and address all walks of life. Additionally, the lessons we learned over the week will continue to aid us as we complete our last year of high school and continue into the uncertain future.

Finally, I hope to see an increase in attendance by other high school students in the coming years and would encourage anyone who is even remotely interested in serving their community through government public service to apply.

Contact Pine Knot News intern Jordan Allen via email at news@pineknotnews.com or by calling 218-878-9332; or just stop by the office at 122 Avenue C and see if he’s in. He’d love to hear your feedback, story ideas, and more.



Jordan Allen’s group at this year’s Boys State.

You’ve graduated ... now it’s time for your job fit

Moving beyond high school to a lifetime of work is not easy. In high school, most things are dished up for you. You have some choice over subjects you study. You may have worked part-time, and you chose which extracurricular activities you engaged in. But whether you go on to college or enter the workforce directly, you face daunting choices and tradeoffs.

If you go to college, what will you specialize in and how much debt are you willing to take on? If you go directly into the workforce, what and where and how will you hope to work? Will you find it in a place you want to live and where your work is meaningful?

New research from the Economic Policy Institute offers solid evidence on high school grads’ experiences the past 20 years. Using the Current Population Survey, EPI studied the experience of recent high school grads, aged 18 to 21. The good news is that your job prospects are better now than they were for grads during the Great Recession of a decade ago. But those prospects

are not as good as they were for those who graduated in 2000. A troubling development is the rise of underemployment: not being able to find full-time work. And black workers face a widening gap.

Many of you will go on to pursue and possibly complete college educations. But because of sluggish growth in family income and escalating costs for college credits, many of you may have to shoulder significant debt to do so. Furthermore, college credits don’t improve employment prospects for many college-goers, and especially for those who do not graduate or who attend for-profit colleges, EPI’s study found.

Finding a good job is not that easy. The EPI researchers found that nearly one in 10 young high school grads not enrolled in further schooling is unemployed. And many are underemployed: working part-time when they want full-time jobs, or so discouraged that they have given up looking for work after an active search.

The choices you make now

will shape your work future. It’s worth starting with what matters to you. Of course, income is important. But what about the quality of work? Here are ideas from a piece I wrote for Pacific Standard magazine in 2015.

If you’re going to spend 40 hours a week working, it should be pleasurable and meaningful, including a sense that you are helping others. You hope for:

- growing expertise and greater accomplishment over time, perhaps more responsibility
- agreeable human contact at work
- competence, training and respect from superiors, and for opportunities to cooperate with and learn from others.

We search for work that plays to our strengths and that we love to do. And for work environments where we feel safe, including from sexual harassment.

And as workers, we care about the relationship of our jobs to the rest of our lives. We hope for reasonable and reliable work hours, flexible if possible, and paid family and sick leave. Ample vacation time. Work should not leave us exhausted or debilitated or, worse, sick with an occupational disease or serious injury.

For those of you not pursuing college studies, I recommend a proactive job search. Ask employers you might be interested in working for if you can have an informational interview, where you ask the questions, and write down the answers. Make a research project out of it. Be respectful, curious and maybe even crack a joke. Maybe you’ll impress an employer you’d like to work for in the future.

Inquire about the qualifications they are searching for and whether a certain course of study would be useful. Ask your neighbors, relatives and your parents’ friends to talk about their work: what qualifications and study they needed to land the job, what boss-worker relationships are like for them, and whether they are content or ambitious to move up or to another employer.

Doing this kind of research is important for those of you pursuing college credits as well. Take some time to talk to your professors about what kinds of jobs their students usually land and how to prepare. Ask them for names and contact information for some of their favorite former students. Look for internships that pay something, however

Read more

- Elise Gould, Julia Wolfe, and Zane Mokhiber. “Class of 2019: High school edition.” <https://www.epi.org/files/pdf/167009.pdf>
- Ann Markusen, “Exploring the Quality of Work.” <http://www.psmag.com/business-economics/the-future-of-work-exploring-the-quality-of-work>

modest, but which, more importantly, give you a chance to learn skills and experience employer-employee work relationships.

Good luck. Don’t be discouraged. Looking for a job is a job. You’ll get better at it the more you try. And for a good book on thinking about your work and career, read or listen to an audio version of Richard Bolles’ “What Color is Your Parachute? A Practical Guide for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers,” www.parachutebook.com.

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