

# ON THE RECORD:

## Competition as a means of growth

### How SIPA students find empowerment in competition

“If you ain’t first, you’re last,” said Ricky Bobby, portrayed by Will Ferrell in “Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby (2006).” At the Southern Interscholastic Press Association’s annual convention in Columbia, SC, competition can be found everywhere. From a quiz bowl to writing and layout contests, students from different schools have the opportunity to work with and compete against others from schools across the region. Compared to Ricky Bobby, members of SIPA have a drastically different perspective on the spirit of competition.

Alexander Robinson, junior from Athens, Georgia, is a current nominee for SIPA’s presidency.

“I want to run and win” said Robinson. “[Running for president] is an unique opportunity to be involved in journalism, but to also play the part of a political role. I can’t really get this experience anywhere else.”

Robinson’s passion for government ultimately led to his infatuation with journalism and his desire to run for president, all starting at the Kennedy Space Center when he was just 6 years old. “I began to ask myself, ‘Who was John F. Kennedy? How did he have a space center named after him? One day I want to have a space center named after me.’”

This lead Robison to studying Kennedy on his own time, and opened doors for him past his initial space center introspection.

“I went to the library, I began to reading in depth about what made Kennedy special. From there, I explored the President’s politics, current events, geopolitics, everything involving around him” said Robinson.

Through his efforts in extending his knowledge, Robinson feels inclined to face the world of politics and government when he gets older.

“I know that entails a kind of unique career path because, there’s not a normal way to enter that field. I like the news, and I consume a lot of news” said Robinson. “One day I’d like to be apart of the news, I think it’s good to know how it works.”

Despite running for a prominent role, Robinson wasn’t always so confident.

“I was that kid in middle school who wouldn’t want to call the pizza place to order delivery,” said Robinson. Originally, he didn’t have his public speaking skills, nor was he able to hold conversations with people outside

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of his comfort zone. “I would never go out of my way. I was very awkward.” said Robinson, recalling his now humorous past. “And looking back, it was so incredibly cringey.”

Robinson contributes his journalistic dedication to his time spent abroad and his school’s prosperous publication group.

“Being dropped into a country where I had to go to school without knowing the language forced me out of my shell” said Robinson. For seven months, he lived in Berlin, Germany while in the 6th grade.

“I had to interact with people who I couldn’t really understand. It really just forced me to do things that I wouldn’t otherwise have done if I had remained in the US” said Robinson.

Robinson’s political interests expanded because of the world issues that occurred during his time in Europe, giving him more of a global perspective at a young age

“ISIS began to claim territory, and Russia began to annex Crimea. In America, the Middle East and Russia are somewhat removed” said Robinson, who was in Berlin summer of 2014 where the migrant crisis began to affect Europe. “I looked at issues that were oceans away” said Robinson. “Being in Berlin at the time I realized that these things actually do matter. We need to care. No matter if it affects us directly, it will affect us indirectly in some way.”

Robinson states that his school’s publication was the next step in toning his skills.

Journalism has been really good with regard to stress, time management, and much more. These things forced me to to develop over the years for the better.” said Robinson.

Aside from running for president, Robinson views SIPA as immensely informative to him as a journalist. “SIPA helped realize journalism actually is, and what our place in the world is. It’s done an extraordinary job of doing just that, and has lead me to return twice since freshman year” said Robinson. “As a junior this year, I’ve began to experiment more with like the multimedia cross platform sessions that SIPA has to offer.”



Map of SIPA member states

*If Robinson wins this year's SIPA presidential election, he hopes to reinforce the importance of the truth and factual reporting at next year's conference. He also plans to have lessons that surround the different forms of journalism and communication that have arisen in journalism over recent decades.*  
*Photo by Tristan Lankford, right*



*Davidson and his classmates simulated a SIPA broadcast competition by getting together on a recent Sunday. They filmed for 12 hours then edited for three to become adjusted to planning and shooting a video that typically takes a week to one short day.*  
*Photo by Sachio Goodie, left*

Robinson is just one of innumerable students benefiting from the scholastic convention.

Taylor Mahoney, an 11th grade student from Mount Washington, Kentucky, speaks about her lessons from SIPA last year, and growing from it now in her second year. "I've grown so much with my communication skills, my writing skills, and photography. I would not be standing on the streets right now talking to random people if it wasn't for journalism and SIPA."

On top of the instructional classes, Mahoney is also participating in SIPA's rigorous TOP competitions, where she's in the yearbook contest. "Last year I was here I felt pressured, but we have a lot of time on our hands" said Mahoney.

Many students find SIPA as a great opportunity to solely focus on journalistic work. The first three weeks of school was so stressful. "It was hard and complex your so involved within your your schoolwork you also have to be involved with your photographs and layouts" said Mahoney.

William Davidson, junior and sports editor for his school in Columbia, South Carolina, faces his own obstacles in balancing academic and journalistic work.

"I do a lot," said Davidson. "I take a lot of AP and IB courses, on top of being the sports producer for my school. I'm going out, shooting every game, doing all that type of stuff. It does get charred. I do get

stressed by the end of the day, but it's worth it, because that's what I love to do."

Through the time crunch, Davidson reflects on the advantages journalism has provided him.

"Going into convergence, I was not a talkative person," said Davidson. "I've done this for three years now and I anchor my sports sometimes. I've gotten to enjoy being in front of a camera, being able to project myself, and being a people person. I've gotten to enjoy that because of journalism."

Erin O'Leary is a junior from Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. O'Leary notes the benefits attached to journalism and the SIPA convention as she competes in one of SIPA's rigorous TOP competitions.

"This year I've learned is to be more kind and go with the flow" said O'Leary reflecting on the yearbook contest. "I used to be very shy and very quiet. In yearbook, you have to go talk to people. You can't be afraid to ask people what their story is. I think being in a setting like that has helped me be more open on my own."

As the competition nears its end, Robinson still strives to improve his skills in journalism aside from the pressures of the presidential race. "I feel like we can go further," said Robinson. "I'm still learning through SIPA."