

SGA officers more than figureheads

When Jessica Butler of Hamilton was elected freshman class president at Towson Catholic High School last November, she didn't realize how much work was involved.

As the 14-year-old freshman thought about her demanding high school studies and sports events, on top of the planning sessions, constituent service time and Student Government Association meetings, she said the workload can seem overwhelming.

"Most people don't appreciate how much time and energy goes into being in student government," Jessica said. "I know I didn't beforehand."

Though the commitment does take time away from her teenage social life, the rigors of her office have provided her with a keen sense of purpose and she plans to be a candidate again when elections come up in the spring.

Students elected to Towson Catholic High School's SGA are more than figureheads, asserted Susan Banks, principal of the co-educational Catholic secondary school.

"They do a tremendous amount of work for the school," Ms. Banks said. "Not only do they support a lot of events at the school, they represent their fellow students," and they let the administration know what is important to the population of the institution.

However, once taking office, some of the members of the SGA's current officers found they had less power to affect policy at the school than they had anticipated, an issue that is difficult to explain to their student constituents.

"They think that we can change rules the administration sets," said Kelly Lurz, the 17-year-old SGA vice president who lives in Parkville. "But, we can't change their rules, and sometimes the other students get mad at us for that."

Though the administration has final say on policy at the school, SGA President Christina Aybar said school officials do respect their input and have ceded some responsibilities to students that had previously been left to adults.

For example, the SGA last year lobbied for and was given the task of performing the morning announcements, said Christina, 17, a senior from Parkville.

The morning announcements provide the SGA with an opportunity to be the daily voice of their school and to deliver news that is important to the student body, she said. "It allows us to set the tone of the day."

Events supported by the SGA throughout the year include homecoming, field day, freshman orientation, the Christmas social and spirit week.

The student leaders are also involved with a host of service projects, which include collecting food and clothes for homeless shelters and supporting a foster child in Uganda.

"We also sell candy-grams," said Antoinette Dais, 15, of Parkville, sophomore-class president. "It's not a fundraiser, but something that is fun to do. It gives the students a way to communicate with each other in a fun way."

Helping students communicate with each other in a more positive way is a mandate Tim Wiggins gave himself when he was elected junior-class president last April.

Like many high schools, Towson Catholic has segments of its student population who hang out in tightly guarded cliques, and the 16-year-old White Marsh resident has made strides to promote intermingling among the social circles.

"I feel like I've been able to get through to some of the cliques," Tim said. "I've introduced them to other people and have tried to get them to appreciate the qualities of people from other groups."

Though he believes his time on the SGA has been a good resume builder for his college applications, Tim said he doesn't envision running for office again in the spring elections.

"SGA is not for everyone," he said. "You have to be willing to be judged and ridiculed by your peers. That can be a little hard."

Though most of the officers of Towson Catholic High School's SGA acknowledge school elections can be viewed as popularity contests, several members have faith

that segments of the student body pay attention to the issues and are swayed which way to vote during school debates.

In general, senior-class President Gena Szeliga, 17, of Waverly, said her SGA experiences have been positive and won't rule out a run for student government next year in college.

"We stand as a family in student government," Gena said. "It gives us an opportunity to meet new people and build friendships."