

Arlington Commission for the Arts Report

Avery Erskine

Application Process

The application process for the Youth Ambassador position was appropriate for the position at hand; I do not recommend changing it. It taught me how to build a resume, how to interview, and how to sell myself as an individual. All of these skills have been very helpful over the past few years, especially during the college application process.

Experience at Meetings

I was immediately thrown into meetings as Youth Ambassador, which was my fault because I could not make the introductory meeting for new Commissioners. Even with that introductory meeting, however, I do not know if I would feel comfortable in the first meeting. It was not the people that intimidated me – everyone was extremely welcoming – but the subject matter at hand (budgeting, bureaucracy, etc.) that made me reluctant to participate. It was not until I met with Alison McNeil, my mentor, that I became comfortable with my position. I recommend that the next Youth Ambassador meet with his or her mentor prior to starting his or her time on the Commission.

I only experienced condescension once or twice when voicing my thoughts during meetings. Otherwise, I felt like my ideas were accepted and welcome, something that was admittedly unexpected. Because I was not a voting member, however, I did not always feel inclined to participate. I am in no way recommending that the Youth Ambassador become a voting member; it was simply late in the evening and not a particular priority of mine on nights before a big test or presentation. Maybe instead of a personal project, the Youth Ambassador could be encouraged to participate in other meetings, such as Grants Day or the separate committees, as a guest.

Personal Project

My personal project, Arts in Your Future, was never completed because I did not have the authority nor the time to complete it to its fullest extent; however, I have attached my notes and recommendation for the issue. The project was rewarding, but I do think it was a lot for a seventeen-year-old to take on, even though I did have a mentor. Instead of promoting the development of a personal project, it might be more beneficial with future Youth Ambassadors to recommend participation in events outside of meetings and more focus on grants and other existing tasks. This type of participation

would not only educate the Youth Ambassador on more of the bureaucratic elements of the Commission, but it would also allow the Ambassador to develop stronger relationships with the Commissioners, something that I felt I did not have an opportunity to do.

Final Thoughts

I am incredibly thankful for the time I got to spend on the Commission. I have a newfound appreciation for the behind-the-scenes elements of the arts, and I learned a great deal about communication and collaboration. I would recommend the position to anyone who has not only a passion for art but also a passion to improve the community around them. Thank you so much for this opportunity; I cannot wait to continue my work in the arts at the University of Virginia this fall!

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at paverie@gmail.com. I'd be happy to help prepare the position for the next Youth Ambassador!

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Arts in Your Future Notes

Purpose

The purpose of Arts in Your Future was to expose Arlington students to career paths in the arts and to assist them in finding college programs suited to the arts they wish to pursue in their post-secondary educations.

Contacts

- Pam Farrell, APS Arts Education Committee
- Allison Gilbert, Humanities Coordinator
- Carol Cadby, Yorktown Theatre Teacher
- Brian Bersh, Yorktown Instrumental Music Teacher
- Theresa Severin, Washington-Lee Choral Music Teacher
- Faylinda Kodis, H-B Woodlawn Visual Arts Teacher
- Meghan Traverse, Washington-Lee Counselor

Findings and Recommendation

The primary issue with college counseling for the arts is that both the arts instructors and the counselors expect the other to help the students. As Ms. Severin, the choral instructor at W-L, pointed out to me, the students need to prepare their portfolios starting as early as freshman year. If the students are not receiving adequate counseling, they may not be able to seriously pursue the arts after high school. This is a worst-case scenario, of course, as there are many other college programs that students can join without any prior experience; however, if a high-school student wished to major in the fine art of their choosing, they should be able to prepare auditions, portfolios, etc. with adequate preparation time. I planned to have Arts in Your Future be a website of resources where students could find where they should be in the process and what they needed to prepare. It would have also been nice to include a list of colleges and their arts programs. Though I will not be able to help complete the project, maybe the next Youth Ambassador could help develop something similar, or at least communicate to APS the extent of the issue.

If you have any more questions, please email me at paverie@gmail.com.