

THEN AND NOW

A history of Student Council

Student Council (StuCo) has been the voice of ASL students, the advocate for change, the organizer of dances and protests, and a leading influence at ASL. The Council's members, for more than 60 years, have faithfully served their constituents as participants in one of ASL's most formative extracurricular activities. Here, StuCo alumni and former advisors recall the highlights, hiccups and hallmarks from their council experience.

“It was a special group of kids who wanted to be there after school on Fridays to talk about how to make the high school experience better for their peers. StuCo taught me the value of developing strong, genuine relationships as the critical foundation for any team, and certainly for any leadership position.”

—Morganne Howell '12, student council president 2011-12

1960s

ASL graduated its first Class of seniors—a group of 12—in 1960, and Student Council was one of several clubs available to middle and high school students. **Bob Cavenagh '61**, who served as vice president in the 1959-60 school year, recalls meeting and talking with the other council members before retiring to Camden with some upperclassmen and women for a coffee. “I don’t recall any big issues,” Bob wrote. Similarly, former student council president **Charles Scudder '64** remembers his leadership role as one of many commitments. With the council’s help, the administration sponsored a Sadie Hawkins dance in 1962 and put clocks in the library and lunchroom. Charles’s classmates, **Jim McConkie** and **Dan Sanders**, were elected president and vice president of the junior class in 1962-63.



Dan Sanders, center left, shakes hands with running mate Jim McConkie, shortly after they won their student council election

1970s

If the first decade of Student Council was quiet and routine, the tumult of the 1970s offered plenty of opportunity for civil discourse and student activism. On 1 December 1971, to celebrate the opening of ASL’s new and permanent campus in St. John’s Wood, the School hosted a dedication ceremony. Amid much controversy, the guest of honor was former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science. A group of high schoolers, including student council rep **Martin Hummel '73**, staged a walkout to protest Mrs. Thatcher’s appearance and was subsequently suspended for his actions. “My parents feared deportation for our family,” Martin recounted.



Margaret Thatcher dedicates ASL’s new building in 1971 despite some dissenting students



Martin Hummel, right, in a StuCo meeting in 1972

The following year, Martin served as president, and petitioned for an indoor smokers’ lounge “with a stereo system” on behalf of the student body. Remarkably, the lounge was granted. For fellow council member and president **Kevin Browne '72**, the most urgent protest of his time wasn’t over Margaret Thatcher, but the administration’s decision to replace the upper school director. In response to this teacher’s departure, Kevin led a student walkout during school that lasted for three days, resulting in an emergency board meeting during which Kevin brokered a deal so that students would return to class. Although he and others felt heard, their movement was outmaneuvered, and the council’s demands were ultimately dismissed. “The grown ups played hardcore politics with us,” Kevin explained. “It was an important lesson in realism.”



Kevin Browne, 1972

Still, there were other lessons to be gained from participating in student government. For **Dave Wicks '72**, serving his class infused him with self-assurance and compassion that helped inform his business career. Other council veterans, such as **Nathan Birnbaum '74**, have adapted a new perspective with age and feel softer towards the administration they once battled with. Learning how to negotiate and clearly communicate are among the benefits cited by numerous student council alumni, such as **Lesley Boucher '78**. The issues she and her peers tackled ranged from stocking the soda machines ("to pay for our dances!") to having open campus at lunch—a high school privilege still enjoyed today. **Cindy Butler '78**, president for one semester, believes her initiation into peacemaking started with serving on a panel to resolve hostility between ASL students and those of a neighboring school. Cindy shared, "I remember wearing a navy blue suit—my standard wardrobe when I later appeared in court as an attorney!"

Adam Rose '78 believes a key takeaway from his time in student government was learning Robert's Rules of Order, the standard procedure for running a meeting with motions and seconds. His council also participated in a protest, with some faculty and parents, over changes to the admission policy announced in 1976, culminating in a march to the US Embassy that attracted international media attention.



ASL students and parents march to the US Embassy

1980s

Student Council maintained responsibility for the social life of the School, and the 1980s ushered in a spectacular live music showcase that carries on today: Battle of the Bands (BOTB). **Dan Seligson '85** is still impressed that his council landed the Morrissey McMullin band to perform one year, and that BOTB expanded to include other schools. But the most memorable event of that era, according to **Alice Iacuesa (ASL 1979-2000)**, who oversaw Student Council from 1983 to 1984, was the talent show featuring **Avner Shapiro '85's** rendition of *Roxanne*. "My clearest memory," she concluded. "Anyone who was there will never forget it."

In 1984, new high school social studies teacher **Anthony Linick (ASL 1984-2002)** was asked to be the council's faculty advisor, a position he held for 15 years. Dr. Linick recalls two important initiatives the council undertook during his tenure: the launch of the Senior Award for Excellence in Teaching, which was given annually for almost 30 years; and creating the Student-Faculty Judiciary Committee. Council members weighed in on other issues, from whether to change ASL's colors (no!) to redesigning a letterman jacket—a keepsake Anthony wore to Thanksgiving last year.



Dr. Linick wears his ASL varsity letter jacket, November 2022

The weekly Friday afternoon meetings he presided over, during which students learned to think on their feet and Dr. Linick steered everyone towards "the art of the possible," were time well spent for Dan Seligson. "I so enjoyed the banter and the wit of our young people, and I learned a lot," he explained. Former president **Chad Ruble '89** recalls, "Our relationship with the administration was very collaborative. Our proposals felt taken seriously, and their support of student advocacy gave me confidence, in college and beyond, for navigating

administrative structures." **Jacques Soenens '89** served with Chad, as VP. He shared, "Student Council gave me my first take at how to build community." Jacques now serves as a director on the American School in London Foundation Board alongside **Bill Scheffler '66**. While Chad and Jacques appreciated the opportunities they had to step into leadership, representing the student voice on various advisory committees with faculty and school leaders, he might argue that the 1988 Halloween dance is their council's greatest legacy. "Somehow, we were able to procure a truck full of Hollywood props—tombstones, fake blood and a professional cobweb machine—to transform the Commons into a haunted house!"



VP Jacques Soenens, left, and the Student Council during an offsite meeting in 1989

1990s



Students were once permitted to smoke in an outdoor area known as the pit

For years, one of the most divisive issues between school leadership and the Student Council related to cigarette smoking, first on campus, and then during school hours. The indoor smoking lounge of the '70s was eventually replaced with an outdoor space called the pit, where students took cigarette breaks in between classes. When smoking on campus was prohibited, Student Council proposed the pit be transformed into a

senior lounge. In 1995, with the arrival of new high school principal **Coreen R. Hester (ASL 1995-97; 2007-17; 2022-23)**, came a new policy that officially banned smoking during the school day. Naturally, this was not welcome news to many students. Former StuCo treasurer and president **John Jensen '97** remembers this indignant outrage. "Now, it is crazy to think that smoking during school could have ever been sanctioned," he mused. Former vice president **Brock McCormack '98** stands by Mrs. Hester's decision. "Banning smoking was the biggest controversy of the year," he remembers, "but clearly was the right call."



"I think our greatest victory was extending the hours of the tuck shop!" wrote **Oli Wiener '96**. Mrs. Iacuesa recruited him to Student Council as a freshman in 1992, as a means to help grow his public-speaking skills. "From working to gather support from different constituents, to creating an action plan and then implementing it—I carry those lessons with me to this day," John Jensen wholeheartedly agrees. "Being voted president by the student body remains one of the biggest accomplishments in my life," he said. John learned how to advocate for what he felt was right, make a persuasive case, demonstrate autonomy and earn others' respect. "Dean of Students **Kevin Conaty (ASL 1991-2017)**, Mrs. Hester and other administrators were willing to engage in open dialogue with us," John explained. "This is just one of the many ways ASL stands out and prepares students for life. From presenting to the Board of Trustees to defending open campus, I gained the confidence to lead from the front. I wouldn't be where I am today without Student Council."



The Student Council in 1994

Interfacing and collaborating with adults was a formative experience for Brock McCormack. For him, it was less about the issues they faced than it was the chance to feel like a grown-up who had a seat at the table. "I thought of myself as mature and responsible to be included in adult meetings," he said. "I'm thankful I could be part of something that really impacted the School."

2000s

High school math teacher **Tony Bracht (ASL 2002-present)** has been student council advisor since 2009. A veteran of student government in high school and college, Mr. Bracht was president of his own high school class, so supporting student government is a strong priority for him. "When you look back through the meeting minutes in the '70s and '80s, you find that a lot of conversations repeat themselves over time," he explains. "Do students have enough space, and are we using it effectively? Is student voice represented in decisions that stakeholders make?" To Mr. Bracht, the overarching theme that informs each council's agenda, proposal, debate and dispute is the reach of student influence in a distributed leadership model. "The goal is always for students to have input," he said.



Mr. Bracht, front row left, poses with the math department in 2003-04

Former president **Morganne Howell '12** advocated for students to have a say in the plans for ASL's campus expansion, set forth by the Board of

Trustees and the New Frontiers capital campaign. "My goal for the 2011-12 school year was to expand the scope of the council beyond social events." Consequently, Morganne and the other officers: vice president **Sophia Jennings '12**, treasurer **Taylor Lambert '12**, secretary **Julian Nebreda '13** and PR rep **Elizabeth Robertson '14** attended meetings and several external events, including representing ASL when former US President Obama delivered a historic speech to Parliament. "This was an absolute highlight of my time in London," Morganne gushed.

Senior Sunrise and Senior Sunset also began under Morganne and her council—two events that still serve to meaningfully bookend the senior experience for Grade 12 students.

Student Council today

Now more commonly known as StuCo, Student Council has 24 representatives: six per grade. The council votes on the officers, and presidential candidates present speeches to the whole student body but are not chosen by popular vote. Meetings are no longer held on Friday afternoons, as they did under Dr. Linick; they now meet on Thursdays to accommodate athletes who wouldn't be able to participate in Friday meetings or activities because of sports.

The Battle of the Bands has greatly evolved from the concerts in the Commons of 20 years ago, too. "Bangers and Bash" is a high-school wide, half-day event held at Canons Park in June, where student musicians perform on a live stage. "Some of these musicians have gone on to pursue professional careers," Tony Bracht shared. In an effort to be more inclusive, StuCo events, such as prom, are free of charge. A public Instagram account, @hsstuco, helps promote council activities, reports on meetings and seeks feedback from peers. ■

FOOTNOTE

This is an abridged version of an article that appears on our website. To read the original piece, and more news about ASL alumni, visit asl.org/alumni/alumni-news

Footprints in the dust

A Grade 9 student travels from 1956 to 1945 through a secret passage in the basement of 13 Grosvenor Square.

By Charles B. Gordanier '60

A call for memories a few years ago elicited an intriguing response from Charles, which we asked him to expand upon for Accents.

Charles B. Gordanier '60 attended ASL from 1956–58. After high school he went to sea with the United States Navy. He graduated from The Citadel, Military College of South Carolina, under the G.I. Bill, and was an electrical engineer with the Bell System, retiring in 2001 with 34 years service. He also took a direct commission in the USN's Civil Engineer Corps, Ready Reserve, and served with the Seabees, retiring in 1993 as a Commander. Charles and his wife, Carolyn, live in Oak Harbor, WA, and have three grown children and two grandchildren.



Charles as an ASL student, age 15

In 1956, the American School in London was located at 13 Grosvenor Square and went as high as the ninth grade. Headmaster Eckard gave the "senior class" a place of their own. Even though it was only a

windowless room in the basement, it was a prized class privilege. The only piece of furniture in that room was a ping-pong table, and the room itself was only slightly larger than the table, leaving about four feet of clearance at either end. Light came from a single bare bulb in the center of the ceiling. My classmates and I would run down there and play furiously during our short free-time period. If you won, you kept playing. But when you lost, you had to go to the end of the line of challengers before you got another try. Competition could be intense. One day, we started looking around down there and found an old panel door. It was painted shut with the same dirty white paint used on the walls and ceiling. Obviously, it had not been used for a very long time. Of course, a door leads somewhere. We got it partially open and squeezed through.

On the other side, we found ourselves in the basement of the empty house to

the north. In the near darkness, a spontaneous game of hide and seek broke out as we hid from one another and then jumped out, scaring ourselves to death. What fun! Making it upstairs to the ground floor, towards the front of the house, we could see a little better because some light was filtering through

"I remember thinking to myself, 'These people just got up and walked out of here and never came back.'"

the boarded-up, dirty windows stained with at least a dozen years of accumulated grime. The air was heavy and stagnant, too. We split up and started exploring the rest of house on our own, carrying with us that little thrill one gets knowing you are where you are not supposed to be, doing something you are not supposed to do. We knew we could lose our ping-pong room over this. "But no one forbade it," I was rehearsing to myself, should we get caught. I went into a kitchen or dining nook. The area was bare like the rest of the house, except here stood a stout, straight-legged

wooden table about the size of a card table. However, it was what was on the table that focused my attention.

As I moved in, leaving footprints in the dust, I could see several yellow newspapers with giant headlines announcing the end of the war. Beside the newspapers sat a couple of badly stained cups without handles. Everything was covered in about an eighth of an inch of dust. While standing there, I distinctly remember thinking to myself, "These people just got up and walked out of here and never came back."

I looked at everything; I touched nothing. For all I knew I was the first person to be here after the previous occupants departed. My overworked imagination started turning curiosity into wonder, and then a sense of apprehension. Could this be 1945? Had I trespassed into another time and place? I wasn't sure just then. But I was sure I did not belong there.

Fifteen minutes later, flushed with excitement over our little adventure, we all went back through the door and into the School's basement. I faked the excitement of the others. Personally, I was glad to be out of there. I did not mention my kitchen experience to them or anyone else. They would have just disturbed the mood or, worse, would have taken something. Besides, it was my secret. I don't know if the others ever went back. I never did. It was 1956 and I was a student in the American School in London and glad to be here.

Do you have a memory of your days at ASL you'd like to share? Please contact Alumni Director Laurie Hindley, +44 (0)20 7449 1409 or laurie_hindley@asl.org.

CLASS NOTES



A member of the School's first graduating class, Edward Mayhew '56, third from the left, enjoyed playing football with classmates outside the American Ambassador's home.



Edward Mayhew '56 lived in London for many years before his recent move to Tuscany, where he now owns vacation property.

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Edward Mayhew

"At first, it was just boys, a mixed bag of about fifty of us, roughly Grades 7-11. The School was located in Hans Place, Knightsbridge, a large house with a big echoing staircase. We shared classrooms, maybe three grades to a room, and the noise was pretty horrific — not to us, but certainly to Mr. Eckard, the School's founder, who was quite ready to give us a shout of which any top Marine sergeant would be proud. He was everywhere, teacher, principal, bottle-washer, counselor, driver, secretary.

We went to the Ambassador's residence in Regent's park for PE. I am sure our PE teacher was an actual Marine sergeant from the Embassy detail — if he wasn't, he should have been. We played two games: one was a strange form of football and the other was more rugby than anything else and whomever was unlucky enough to find himself with the ball learned to run very quickly indeed.

For us kids, ASL was a way to keep in touch with the US. This was long before computers and television had such an impact. Everything was very personal, very informal, very friendly and it had to be because we were such a diverse lot. I rather think that spirit has not changed, even though the School has grown and students now come from all over the world.

I only attended ASL for one year, Grade 8, before moving back to the US, but it was a great year."

From the archives



Harry S. Truman, U.S. president 1945-53, visited ASL in 1956. In this photograph we have already identified Mr. Eckard, Jeff Butler, Roger Hogue, Jay Marron '59, Murray Ross and of course Mr. Truman. We would love to put names to the other faces. If you can help to identify others, please write to alumni@asl.org. For extra credit, tell us whose portrait is hanging on the wall.

