

Parish Episcopal School

Parish Students learn about crisis management

Posted 11/12/2015 12:00PM



The scene inside the Situation Room was tense: the President of the United States had been shot, the gunman was unknown and the information was sketchy at best; the stock market was tanking, Americans were demanding answers and members of the Presidents' cabinet were trying to make good decisions while under extreme pressure.

"I was very emotionally invested in this. Even though I knew it wasn't real, I wanted to succeed," Mandalyn Moore, Class of '16.

The scenario was part of *The Situation Room Experience*, an educational simulation created by the [George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum](#) and the [Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library](#). 22 Parish Episcopal Students in AP European History Class & AP English Literature Class were asked to test drive the pilot program this week at the Bush Library.

"It was a tremendous opportunity and it goes to the very heart of our relationship with the Bush Library," says Dr. Frederick Hotz, Director of [Academy of Global Studies](#).

Thanks to that partnership, Parish students have the opportunity to participate in the beginning stages of educational programs and the Bush Library gets to use well prepared students to see what curriculum works and what doesn't. *The Situation Room Experience* is just one of those classes.

The simulation was based partially on the 1981 attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan. Each student was assigned a role to play in either the cabinet, the hospital command center or as part of the press corp. Fictional characters and evidence were added during the simulation to give students an idea of what pressure government officials face during a crisis.

"It was an overload of information. We were trying to sift through it and decide what we should and shouldn't do," noted Moore.

The students had less than 25 minutes to deal with the complexity of the situation and play their parts authentically.

"What they did was really superb," said Hotz.

"The whole idea was to put them in a real time, real life situation of having to make these sudden decisions that really happen in times of crisis and then experience the events as they turn history in one direction or another."

"I think it was a window into what happens in the Situation Room," said Alexandra O'Brien, Class of '16. "It was really intense and stressful."

The Bush and Reagan Presidential Libraries have been developing *The Situation Room Experience* for the past six years. Alan Lowe, Director of the Bush Library and Museum, calls it a simulation on the history and art of decision making.

"I'm very pleased with the results. It seems like the students were having a lot of fun and hopefully they were learning something along the way," remarked Lowe.

"Now we kind of know that there is a time limit on making decisions during a crisis and while the decisions may seem rash, they have to be made," said O'Brien.

Based on the Parish students' involvement and a test run at the Reagan Library, *The Situation Room Experience* will be tweaked and fine-tuned; more technology will be added to the curriculum. The program, which will run an hour and a half, is scheduled to launch in April 2016. It will be offered to local and regional schools and will eventually include curriculum for college students and corporate training.



"If you look at kids, corporate leaders, whoever, we all have to make decisions every day and it is important how you make those decisions," said Lowe.

The Bush Library is also working toward including simulations of other crises such as the September 11th Terror Attacks, Hurricane Katrina and the 2007-2008 financial crisis.

"These kinds of simulation programs would be absolutely fantastic... a new kind of hands on experience that would complement the book learning of traditional education," said Hotz.

"I believe it will make better citizens who are sympathetic, more generous and rational."