



MEDIA PRODUCTION CELEBRATES

by Kelley Cuneo, Director of Communications

20
YEARS



In 2010, Media and Technology Coordinator Mike Callinan and the student media production team put together a retrospective on the first nine years of webcasting at Athens Academy. The script for the video read:

“On September 7, 2001, an important event happened at Athens Academy. For the first time ever in our country, a high school sporting event was webcast over the internet. Since that first webcast, hundreds of Athens Academy students in the media and tech club have worked tirelessly to provide families, friends, and football fanatics from around the world the chance to watch their Athens Academy Spartans on the worldwide web. Over the years these webcasts have been viewed by alumni living in China and Europe; by parents on business from Los Angeles to New York; by grandparents living in London and New Delhi; by uncles serving at sea on the USS John F Kennedy; and by people at home who were otherwise unable to make it to the games. To all the students who have made this possible, we thank you for your time and energy and innovative spirits.”

The video went on to list dozens of students from the Classes of 2001-2010 who participated in those early days of the webcast program at Athens Academy.

The program turned 20 this school year, and last fall the webcast team—now officially part of the curriculum as the Advanced Media Production class—interviewed several alumni who were instrumental in the development of the country’s first high school webcast production.

Interest in media production involving athletics began to really take hold in 1999 and 2000, when Mike Callinan and Upper School Director Wes Smith discussed how to optimize the media production lab in the recently built Bertelsmann Building. They introduced a new, high-tech networking class for seniors to learn how Cisco networking switches are programmed and installed. For their end-of-year class project, students installed an Ethernet Local Area Network in the press box at Slaughter Field that connected to the school’s fiber optics network.

“[Athens Academy parent] Scott Shamp was the director of the New Media Institute at the University of Georgia and had recently received funding for a new media platform: webcasting!”

Callinan said. “UGA recognized two things that would attract potential viewers to Athens were the music scene and football. The timing was important for us as well—it was sort of the perfect storm with Spartan football. Joe Tereshinski ’02 was leading the team and we were number one in the state. People wanted to be able to watch the games, even when they couldn’t make it to campus.”

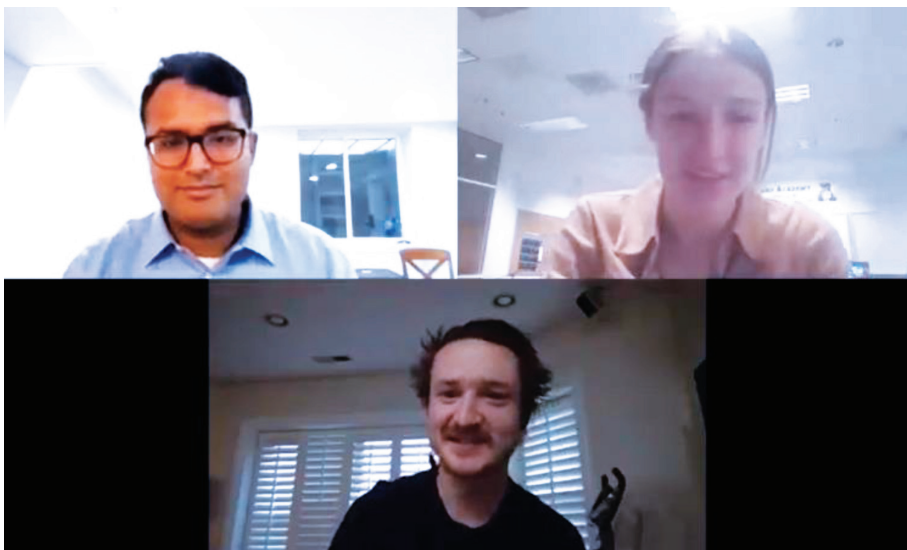
In an interview with senior Popi Marquez last fall, Rahul Singh ’06 noted that Athens Academy’s earliest webcast “pioneers,” including his class, laid the basic groundwork—literally—by helping to run the Ethernet cable to the press box. “In the early 2000’s it was hard to broadcast things over the internet,” Singh said. He described how the club rigged half a dozen monitors and several desktop computers together inside a suitcase. At first the club connected to a server at the University

of Georgia, but after the webcast blew out the server during the very first game, the club decided to turn elsewhere for their connection. Parent Mohammad Doukmak helped the students build their own server, rivaling that of UGA.

Singh describes this time in the Athens Academy Upper School as extremely important, involving a lot of critical thinking and problem-solving: “We would realize that a particular part of the process needed improvement, and we asked, ‘What are we going to do about it?’ I spent three years just troubleshooting things, which is a very, very valuable skill to have going into the real world.” Former media and tech club president Ruby Lai ’08 agreed. “Every week we would set up the webcast, and every week something different would go wrong,” she said. “That kind of on-your-feet thinking and problem solving really helped me later on, even though I’m not in a media-related field any more.”

Dozens of students experienced the excitement and challenges of the media production program over the years. Georgia State Representative Houston Gaines ’13 recalls his days as the “Voice of the Spartans,” from seventh grade through his senior year. “It was a really neat experience...I’ll never forget when Fox 5 came over and did a little interview...I remember talking about some of my mentors—Coach [Dan] McGill and Larry Munson and Jeff Dantzler—and it was a lot of fun. We had a huge response on the internet with people watching the shows.”

In recent years, as media production evolved into an established part of the curriculum, students have worked to enhance the product they offer to the viewers at home. Halftime programming includes student interviews with faculty, coaches, and fellow students. Advertising and promotional videos are produced in-house. Commentators research exhaustively for each game, including preparation done by the school’s first sideline



Top: Mara Thomas ’23 and Thomas Borst ’25 check the lighting on the ACAD Update before taping; above: Popi Marquez ’22 interviews Rahul Singh ’06 and Ned McGregor ’11 via Zoom last fall. Opposite page: Casilda Dalaigre ’24 and Popi prepare segments for the ACAD Update while Mike Callinan works at his desk.

**SCAN TO WATCH POPI'S
INTERVIEW WITH
COACH JEFF SATURDAY!**

reporter, Popi Marquez. Marquez has even taken the time to research and interview several opposing football coaches during otherwise contentious games, including her interview with Jeff Saturday from Hebron Christian. Following a successful career in the NFL, Saturday had worked as an ESPN sports analyst, and he was more than willing to be interviewed. “I’ll never forget the excitement and quality of Popi’s interview,” Callinan reflects. “And it was captured, edited, and streamed by her colleagues who had equally amazing skills behind the camera.”

In addition to the Upper School’s Advanced Media Production class, there is also a Middle School Media Production class, which is under the direction of Middle School Media Production Coordinator Ryder Crosby. Both divisions produce a weekly ACAD Update news show, which students and faculty watch during advisory period or homeroom. Students are responsible for all aspects of production of the show, both on- and off-camera.

Throughout the years, Callinan has been a constant presence in media and technology development at Athens Academy, although he freely admits he led by allowing the students to take

the reins whenever possible. In an interview earlier this year, Ned McGregor ’11 recalled his time in the media production club: “We would figure out what it was we wanted to learn, and then we would learn it. It was a valuable approach to things.” Callinan agreed. “This is what keeps me in teaching. I just love working with students who are so talented and smart. It’s been a privilege to build a foundation with networks, hardware, and software. It is so rewarding to work with bright young people and give them an opportunity to use power tools to install conduit, run and connect Ethernet cables, build and program computers, and set up microphones and cameras. Allowing them to participate in the decision-making process is an important part of media production. Students were encouraged and required to take ownership, including preparing presentations for parents, administrators, and businesses who might be potential donors.”

COVID brought some unexpected opportunities as well, as many viewers opted to watch the 2020-21 athletic contests from home. Webcast numbers doubled and tripled as people tuned in from all over the world, prompting GHSA webcast partner NFHS Network to name Athens Academy to its Founders Club, honoring the “top 50 high schools across the country that have made an impact on the company’s journey and success throughout its history.”

Fans of Athens Academy’s opponents have even tuned in to watch the webcasts. A Christian Heritage viewer took the time to message the school’s Facebook account in the fall of 2020: “I just want to congratulate you on producing and announcing an excellent game vs. Christian Heritage. My nephew plays for the Lions and I have watched many games online because I live out of town. That game was one of my favorites thanks to you guys. What a great idea and a great execution by the students! Keep up the good work!”

While there have been many webcast fans over the years, one of the earliest, most interesting compliments came from Spartan grandparent and former UGA head football coach Jim Donnan. While attending his grandchild’s Lower School play, Coach Donnan thanked Callinan for webcasting Spartan football. “He acknowledged that while working for ESPN as a college analyst on Friday nights in Bristol, Connecticut, he and the other analysts were amazed at being able to watch high school football live from Athens, Georgia,” Callinan recalls.

Happy 20th birthday to webcasting at Athens Academy and to the many students whose hard work and dedication made it happen—indeed, as Callinan put it in 2010, “we thank you for your time and energy and innovative spirits.” Thank you as well to Mike Callinan for his steadfast encouragement and guidance of some truly brilliant individuals, and to Athens Academy and the local businesses without whose support this program could not have developed with the amazing speed and success with which it did.



Freshmen Mikaella Murph and Leni Chandler edit segments while Ian Walker '24 adjusts a light with help from Ryder Crosby.



From top: Current AMP webcast team members Philip Doherty '22, Popi Marquez, and Isaac Rorey '24 are interviewed by Reilly O'Neill from The Westminster Schools' media production program; AMP team members Aidan Brown '19, Jay Bangle '19, Wesley Cline '19, Ethan Smith '17, and Kaleb Bryant '16 in 2015; MET@L team members Ethan Smith, Thomas Suarez '17, Harper Cline '17, Will Divers '15, Raleigh Lumpkin '15, Karl Norstedt '17, Mike Callinan, and Katharine Suarez '17 in 2014.

where are they now?

Following up with the alumni who were interviewed in this article. For more alumni news, see the Class Notes section of this publication.

Rahul Singh '06

Rahul is a senior scientist with medical manufacturing company Baxter International in Deerfield, Illinois. He develops advanced medical and surgical technologies that optimize healing in patients. "I guess you could say I moved through technology and into the life sciences," he says. Rahul has an undergraduate degree from Georgia Tech in biomedical engineering and both his master's and doctoral degrees in biomedical engineering from the University of Michigan.



Ruby Lai '08

Ruby Lai '08 is currently an associate research scientist for Columbia University and a visiting scientist in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering at Stanford University. While earning her Ph.D. in physics from Stanford, Ruby focused on thin silicon solar cells and metal-assisted chemical etching for photovoltaic and electronic devices. She earned her undergraduate degree in chemistry and physics from Harvard University.



Ned McGregor '11

Ned McGregor '11 has been the lead sales associate for Barbizon Lighting Company in Chicago for seven years, but it's his work as the president of the organization Filmscape Chicago that allows him to really express his creative side. As "the Midwest's largest education-focused film and television tradeshow," Ned's organization brings together some of the brightest minds in the production industry for two days of classes, networking, and technology each year—an invaluable resource for budding filmmakers. Ned is a graduate of Northwestern University with a degree in radio, television, and film.



Houston Gaines '13

Houston Gaines '13 currently represents District 117 in the Georgia House of Representatives. He was elected in 2019 at the age of 24. Houston has a bachelor's degree in political science and economics from the University of Georgia, where he served as the Student Government Association president from 2016-2017. In 2020 he was named to UGA's "40 Under 40" list.

