

Meet Five Brophy Seniors

Written by Arizona Foothills Magazine

Meet five Brophy seniors who are gearing up to participate in the Brophy Fashion Show with Saks Fifth Avenue in October.



Jack Allen Herstam

What do you like most about Brophy? What do you like least about it?

There's so much to like about Brophy, but my favorite aspect of the place is the brotherhood that is shared amongst the student body. It's typical for high school students to stick to cliques and only hang out with kids in their grade, but Brophy promotes openness and congeniality. It's common to see freshman interacting with upperclassmen, and on a filial level rather than just discussing school work. There's a place for anyone at Brophy. I hate having to pinpoint a fault of Brophy, and it's hard to do because they're so far and few between. However, there are a few compatibility issues with the tablet computers we use and the school's network system. This only creates minor setbacks and doesn't create a huge detriment to the education of the students.

Who is your favorite teacher and what is your favorite subject?

I have so many teachers that I really like, but my favorite would have to be my English teacher, Mr. Tom Danforth. Not only is he a good instructor, but he is able to relate to every single one of his students. To be able to do this with students in their late teens is a skill few possess, and it makes him one of the most highly regarded figures on campus. I see our relationship continuing after I move on to my next English class.

How did you hear about Brophy?

I heard about Brophy first from my uncle who went to Brophy in the eighties. I also went to middle school in the Diocese of Phoenix at Ss. Simon and Jude, so a lot of kids were talking about going to Brophy. It was my number one high school choice since I was in fifth grade.

How has Brophy changed your life?

The deeper I get into Brophy, the more I realize how my experiences have changed me. The number one contributor to these changes has been the immersion trips I've gone on. So far, I've been to Alabama for a Civil Rights immersion, Kenya, and Nogales Mexico to examine issues surrounding humanitarianism and immigration. This summer (May 27-Jun 7), I'm heading to Guatemala for another cultural immersion experience. All of these trips have allowed me to better understand humanity at its core, and I have made life changes because of what I've seen. I "bear witness" to my experiences in my everyday life.

What did/does your family think about Brophy?

My family really likes Brophy. My parents understand and appreciate the extra-curricular opportunities that are available at Brophy, as well as the community and academics that exist there as well. I also have a twin brother and three cousins attending Brophy, and they love it as much as I do.

If willing, please tell us a time in your life that was particularly difficult for you and how you were able to overcome it. Was the Brophy community apart of helping you get through it?

I've been super fortunate and haven't had to deal with any major adversities in my life yet. However, adjusting to high school in general was a tough experience for me. I came from Ss. Simon and Jude, as previously mentioned, and I was in control of my life there. I lost my way for a bit when I was suddenly placed amongst 320 guys that I didn't know. Honestly, I had a hard time finding my place in the community for my first semester. The teachers at Brophy recognized this and talked to me on the side, counseling me through the change that was taking place. They didn't have to counsel me; Brophy has a department for this. Nevertheless, I received help from my teachers and I will never forget this. These experiences provided a lesson for me to go above and beyond what is expected, or as we say at Brophy, to be a man for others.

What would you tell other boys who are interested in Brophy?

I'd tell anyone who's interested in Brophy to pursue that interest no matter what. I know guys who drive an hour every day to get to school and others who work for hours after classes end to pay for their education. Brophy is also extremely diverse, educating young men of various faiths and ethnic backgrounds. My point is to not let outside influences affect someone's decision about coming to Brophy. Be open to what the place has to offer because there's something for everyone.

Do you have a favorite memory of Brophy?

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My favorite memory of Brophy is sitting on the front lawn by myself about an hour after school closed for Spring break this year. I had had a pretty tough week, but I had a long conversation with a teacher I'm close with and found peace with everything that was going on. It hit me how amazing the school is, and it helped me to figure out it's okay to have a bit of alone time every now and then. I definitely don't take my education for granted anymore.

What will you miss most about Brophy?

When my times up at Brophy, I'll miss being able to walk onto campus every day. Being a part of the community means you have a family away from home, are a part of all of Brophy's events, have access to the best education and teachers in the state. I find comfort in knowing that I've made life-long friends at Brophy, so my experience will live on through my relationships.

What college or university do you plan to attend?

I'm not quite sure where I'm going to college yet, but if I could go to a Jesuit university I'd be really happy. Places like Seattle University, Gonzaga, Santa Clara, Boston College, and Loyola Chicago interest me. Not only do they embrace the Ignation ideology that I've come to love at Brophy, but they're solid academic institutions as well.

What are your plans for the future?

Again, I'm not so sure about my plans for the future. I'm interested in careers in sustainability and humanitarianism, both of which are direct results of my experiences at Brophy.

What do you think Brophy has already done for you?

Brophy has given me my identity. Before I got into high school, I didn't really know what I stood for. I now know that I'm called to be a person for others. Brophy has helped me realize that I'll make mistakes, but it's perfectly okay to do so because I have 1200 brothers that have my back. Through my experiences in leadership positions, I've become steadfast in my beliefs and am unafraid to speak what's on my mind and stand up for what I know to be right. Essentially, Brophy has helped me find my identity. This will undoubtedly affect the rest of my life. I owe Brophy so much, and am so fortunate to have the opportunity to be a part of it.



Mason Swierenga

What do you like most about Brophy? What do you like least about it?

The thing I like most about Brophy is the absurd number of clubs and organizations and projects there are to get involved in. At the beginning of freshman year, I wouldn't have guessed that I would be traveling the world with guys from every grade. Playing intramural basketball at lunch wasn't really something that had crossed my mind before coming to Brophy, but it's an amazingly fun, occasionally exhausting, experience where I got to know some of my best friends here. To think of some of the things that I am involved in and realize that it's only the tip of the iceberg can be overwhelming at times, because I feel like I'm missing out on something if I'm not helping out with the Loyola Academy guys or discussing government policy at a Young Democrats or Teenage Republican meeting. It's incredible to see all that goes on here and to be able to always have something new and unique to talk about with friends who are doing different things around campus.

I don't always like to use my tablet. It's definitely nice to use and speeds things up in the classroom, but it can be distracting and disruptive at times. It's never fun to be in the middle of an essay submission or studying for a test when the computer decides it needs to update for the next 30 minutes. It's usually only a minor setback but it can be frustrating.

Who is your favorite teacher and what is your favorite subject?

Not to exclude any amazing Algebra 2 or US History teachers, but I would have to say my English teacher, Mr. Damaso, is my favorite teacher. I had his class sophomore year and was lucky enough to have him teach my English class again this past year. He has the most authentic enthusiasm for his class that I have ever experienced, which almost forces me into having a similar appreciation for the different literature we read in class. That being said, English is my favorite class. There is always a different interpretation to find in a reading and there aren't too many dull moments in class.

How did you hear about Brophy?

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One of my friends had a brother who was going to Brophy when I was thinking about high school and the more I heard about Brophy and looked into attending, the more it really stood out from some of the other options I was thinking about.

How has Brophy changed your life?

I don't think Brophy changes lives; I could go here for four years without being much different on graduation day as when I nervously walked into my first English class with Mr. Middlemist. I think the important thing to recognize is that change has only happened in my life at Brophy because of the Immersion trips, Magis and Kairos retreats, time spent in Ms. Parise's office, along with many other things. These experiences, which are incredibly important to take advantage of, have allowed me to feel and be a part of a communal brotherhood that comes naturally from honest discussion on retreats and from humbling experiences, whether on campus or in a village in rural Nicaragua. The change that I have most poignantly felt is the potential I see in so many of my classmates to become very close friends rather than strangers I see in the halls.

What did/does your family think about Brophy?

My dad is interested to hear and read about different Brophy events and he is always excited to hear about student involvement in different activities. My brothers are often shocked at the places my friends and I travel to on immersion trips and the experiences we have in those places. It's definitely unusual for a high school to have so many travel opportunities and my whole family thinks it is awesome that I am able to have these experiences so early.

If willing, please tell us a time in your life that was particularly difficult for you and how you were able to overcome it. Was the Brophy community apart of helping you get through it?

The most difficult time in my life started a few days before second semester of freshman year. I was getting ready to come back to Phoenix from winter break when I got a phone call from the police saying my mom was being rushed to the hospital. About two hours later, my dad got a call saying she had died of a pulmonary embolism. I didn't return to school the next week, but I was constantly receiving texts, emails, facebook messages, and phone calls from hundreds of people in the Brophy community. When I came back the following week, my classmates and teachers helped to make the rest of the year tolerable. The counselors were immediately willing to talk with me and I was able to learn from many other students who had gone through similar events.

What would you tell other boys who are interested in Brophy?

Come to campus and check it out! Stop in Mr. Kelly's room to check out some sick ceramic pieces, sing some Taylor Swift with Coach Fuller, and grab a fresh, delicious, homemade, chocolate chip cookie from Mrs. Triplett in the Varsity Shop. There are so many great people to stop and talk with and you'll be able to learn a whole bunch about the school just by listening to them.

Do you have a favorite memory of Brophy?

I have to go with May the Fourth Be With You festivities on this one. Typically, I like to dress myself in the finest Han Solo outfit I can find in my brother's closet and equip myself with a purple lightsaber. It's a fun day to mess around and shift my worries from my next History test to the next victim to have the misfortune of crossing the path of my lightsaber.

What will you miss most about Brophy?

I will miss watching basketball games. Most Brophy sports have incredible student sections, but to feel all the energy packed into the gym is something none of the other games can replicate for me.

What college or university do you plan to attend?

I've been looking at a few Jesuit Universities over the last few months, mostly: Loyola Chicago, Regis University in Denver, and Seattle University. Hopefully I'll be able to continue my run with the Jesuits at one of these places.

What are your plans for the future?

I have zero plans for the future, if you can think of something fun, shoot me an email. I've been involved in different social justice centered activities, so it makes sense to continue something along those lines in college and farther into the future, but I am not entirely sure what I want to do in the future.

What do you think Brophy has already done for you?

Brophy has made me more comfortable with so many different kinds of people. Any preconceived thoughts I've had about any one group of people have been drastically changed by either simple interactions or by sharing in retreat experiences with them. It has helped me to get to know people I would have pushed away otherwise.

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Justin John Frere

What do you like most about Brophy? What do you like least about it?

If you walk onto campus at Brophy and ask this same question (“What do you like most about Brophy?”) to any student, you will likely receive the answer that I am about to give you: the brotherhood. Brophy, more than any other school that I have seen, is a true community. Everybody knows everybody, everybody is friends with everybody, and everybody accepts everybody. This kind of brotherhood creates a unique atmosphere at Brophy that is relaxed, friendly, and accepting; it makes Brophy a really cool place to be.

As for what I like least about Brophy—that’s a hard one. Brophy is really a great place. I guess that one of the things that I like least about Brophy is one of the reasons that I love Brophy: the rigorous academics. Brophy has great academics, but unfortunately, that equates to a lot of hard work in terms of homework and study time. Like I said earlier, this means that I get a great education, but no kid likes homework.

Who is your favorite teacher and what is your favorite subject?

I have always loved science, and this year, my AP Biology and AP Psychology classes have been incredible. Both of my teachers in these classes are well versed and make the classes the best they can possibly be. Mrs. Cheryl Lenox, my biology teacher, is one of the smartest people I know, and her ability to convey that knowledge to the class is incredible. In addition to her awesome communication skills, she keeps the class involved with interesting labs and pertinent discussions. Mr. Matt Williams, my psychology teacher, is one of the most creative and dedicated teachers I have had the pleasure of learning from. It seems that at least once a week our class is doing a fun and inclusive activity to illustrate a psychological concept. For example, during our unit on hypnosis, Mr. Williams did a class-wide hypnosis session to explain the concept. In addition to these activities, Mr. Williams is always finding videos and neat demonstrations that can be shown to the class to help illustrate material.

How did you hear about Brophy?

Honestly, I’m not sure how I came to hear about Brophy. Growing up, I went to a Catholic school, so I always kind of knew about Brophy and the other Catholic schools in the area.

How has Brophy changed your life?

Brophy has had a huge impact on my life. Besides simply providing me with an excellent education, Brophy has taught me to think outside of the box and to consider world issues. Looking back on it, I realize that before coming to Brophy, I was pretty much blind to the issues of the world, but now, after only three years at Brophy, I realize that I have been challenged to see, understand, and provide solutions for world problems, especially relating to social justice.

What did/does your family think about Brophy?

My family has always had the highest opinion of Brophy. In fact, they were the ones that pushed me to go there. Now, after seeing my academic success and the values that this place has instilled in me, they think nothing but the best of it.

What would you tell other boys who are interested in Brophy?

The first thing I would tell them would be to go to Brophy. Brophy is an awesome place, and it has formed me into the person I am today. My decision to attend this school is likely the best decision I’ve ever made in my life, and so, I would strongly encourage them to attend. After this, I would tell any kids that are interested in coming to Brophy to shadow and attend Open House. Shadowing days are incredibly important, as kids who are interested in Brophy will really get the chance to experience what Brophy is about as a shadow. My shadow day was the thing that really convinced me to go to Brophy.

Do you have a favorite memory of Brophy?

This is hard—I have had so many experiences at Brophy that it’s hard to pick out a favorite. Of the many that come to mind, however, one really stands out. This past year, I attended a retreat for Brophy Big Brothers (seniors and juniors who volunteer to take incoming freshmen under their wing and be mentors to them, helping to aid their transition from middle to high school). During the retreat, there was a small prayer service, and during that prayer service, there was a “sign of peace” which is a regular part of the Catholic mass where people shake hands and wish peace upon others around them, saying, “Peace be with you.” However, instead of simply shaking hands, all of the Big Brothers spent nearly ten minutes milling around the Brophy chapel embracing each and every one of their fellow Big Brothers and really wishing peace to all of them,

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Catholic or not. It seems strange talking about this now, but the experience was one of those rare moments where the brotherhood of Brophy was really palpable for me. It was a rare moment in life where I felt totally accepted by everybody around me, and it felt like that was what Brophy was all about.

What will you miss most about Brophy?

I'm going to miss pretty much everything. I'm going to miss the brotherhood, the supportive community, the friends, the challenge, the academics, the crazy shenanigans that seem to randomly occur around campus, the competition, the football games, the intramural games, the retreats, the teachers, and countless others.

What college or university do you plan to attend?

Right now, I am definitely undecided. Stanford is my dream school, but admission and costs are huge issues. I am also considering University of Arizona, Washington University in Saint Louis, University of Washington, Creighton University, and Duke to name a few.

What are your plans for the future?

In the future, I wish to become a doctor. Some fields that seem interesting are cardiology and neurology, and so I will definitely consider a specialization in these areas.

What do you think Brophy has already done for you?

Brophy has done tons of things for me. First and foremost, it has made me who I am today. Brophy has instilled me with intellectual curiosity, openness to new situations and opportunities, a deeper faith, a commitment to understanding world issues, a drive to solve those issues, and a key system of moral values. Brophy has not only stirred this personal development, however, but rather, it has also pushed me to use the skills that I have been taught to better my community. Through countless service projects and a commitment to community involvement, Brophy has pushed me to be a better, more involved person, and this has allowed me to see how I can use my skills to better my surrounding community and live my faith through service to others.



Rajet (Raj) Vatsa

What do you like most about Brophy? What do you like least about it?

The most special aspect of Brophy is the tightly-knit community and sense of brotherhood. I am so thankful to know that I have 1,300 brothers on campus who are always there for me and for each other. It is so beautiful to see students and faculty come together in prayer in times of sorrow and rejoice in times of celebration and happiness. Brophy helps foster this strong support structure which unites everyone in a mission to act for the greater glory of God. I feel so humbled to be a part of the Brophy community and know that I will always remain a Brophy Brother.

The thing that I like least about Brophy is my knowing that I will have to leave this amazing place after my four years as a Bronco. I have come to love and appreciate each and every aspect of Brophy over my first three years here. The teachers, staff, and students are so compassionate, generous, and loving, and I will miss immensely when I move on to college.

Who is your favorite teacher and what is your favorite subject?

Over the past three years, I have been blessed with such amazing teachers. They have always been there to guide me when I am in need of help and have supported me in each and every endeavor I pursue. However, if there was just one teacher I had to choose, I would pick Mrs. Lenox, my freshman year biology teacher and my science bowl/quiz bowl coach. Mrs. Lenox has been so encouraging and supportive of me these past three years, and I am so grateful for her guidance.

My favorite subjects at school are math and science. I have loved the sciences ever since I was in pre-school, and I definitely hope to pursue a career in math or science in the future.

How did you hear about Brophy?

I first heard about Brophy from my friends in middle school. As I had recently moved from Michigan, I was not too familiar with local high schools. However, I shadowed at Brophy during my eighth grade year and knew that very day that Brophy was the place I wanted to spend the next four years of my life.

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How has Brophy changed your life?

Brophy has changed my life in so many ways. It has blessed me with a lifelong family of students and teachers whom I will never forget. However, I am most grateful to Brophy for allowing me to further explore my faith and strengthen my relationship with God. Brophy has instilled in me a genuine desire to serve those around me and live by the principles of the five graduate-at-graduation qualities. Through the retreats and immersion opportunities, I have been blessed with such valuable teachings. Ultimately, I hope that I can integrate all of these lessons in my life to truly become a man for others.

What did/does your family think about Brophy?

My family loves Brophy as much as I do. My parents are so grateful for all of the values that Brophy instills in its students and are extremely appreciative of Brophy's commitment to social justice. Moreover, from an academic standpoint, my parents believe that Brophy provides the best resources in the state for students to succeed.

If willing, please tell us a time in your life that was particularly difficult for you and how you were able to overcome it. Was the Brophy community apart of helping you get through it?

Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to travel to Brophy's retreat center in Manresa for my Magis retreat. Those three days I spent at Manresa were among the most moving of my time at Brophy. At one point on the retreat, I had the opportunity to share my stresses and talk about the things that were burdening my life. I will never forget how quickly my brothers on the retreat consoled me and helped me overcome those tensions. It was a beautiful testament to the strength and permanence of the Brophy brotherhood.

What would you tell other boys who are interested in Brophy?

The best advice I have for students interested in Brophy is the same advice my Big Brother gave to me when I first stepped on campus: don't simply come to Brophy at 8:00 in the morning and leave at 2:45 in the afternoon. Four years at Brophy is not enough to experience all of the gifts that the school has to offer. Thus, maximize your time as a student. Join clubs that you would not normally join and explore the myriad opportunities, classes, and resources available. You will come to love Brophy so much and realize that Brophy is your home away from home.

Do you have a favorite memory of Brophy?

I have so many wonderful memories of my time at Brophy, but the ones I most cherish are the retreats, especially my Freshman Retreat and my Magis Retreat during my junior year.

What will you miss most about Brophy?

The aspect of Brophy that I will miss the most is the brotherhood. However, the beautiful thing is that all of my peers at Brophy will be my brothers for the rest of my life. We are such a strong and resilient community, and I know that we will always be there for each other in our thoughts and prayers.

What college or university do you plan to attend?

Currently, I am not sure what university I plan to attend. I am still exploring all possible options, but I would love to go somewhere on the East Coast and attend a school with a strong academic focus.

What are your plans for the future?

Immediately after Brophy, I aspire to study molecular biology or biochemistry at the university level. I then hope to study medicine and specialize in neurosurgery. It has always been my dream to be able to provide free medical care to individuals in developing nations around the world as a way to integrate my love for science and my passion for service. Later, I would also like to work with students and teach at the collegiate level.

What do you think Brophy has already done for you?

The following is a blog post that I wrote for the Brophy Admissions Office earlier this year. It explains a lot of what I hoped for from Brophy and what Brophy has already done for me:

When I began the high school search three years ago, I remember being overwhelmed at times at the abundance of opportunities there were and the decision that I would have to make about where I wanted to go to school. However, Brophy always stood out to me as the place that I wanted to spend the next four years of my life. When I applied to Brophy, I knew that I was looking at a school that provided the best academic, athletic, and fine arts programs in the state. As a junior this year at Brophy, I can say without hesitation that Brophy has exceeded my expectations in every single one of these areas.

My teachers and counselors at Brophy are remarkable. They are always there for support and guidance. I am in awe of how much the faculty at Brophy cares for its students. It goes out of its way to provide assistance and fosters an environment that allows every student to grow. Academically, the classes at Brophy are a hallmark of the school. Brophy is as hard as a student makes it for himself, but I strongly believe that Brophy does a great job encouraging its students to take challenging and rigorous courses. There are an abundance of opportunities for students of all skill levels. The class sizes are also suitable for active class discussions and teacher-student interactions. Peers also play a critical role in the classroom, and since my freshman year, I have benefited immensely from collaborating with likeminded individuals who have motivated me to work to the best of my abilities.

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I have also grown as a result of the many extracurricular activities that Brophy provides its students. Whether these are academically-, athletically-, or service-oriented, they allow students to try new things and enjoy doing what they are most passionate about. Last year, I was able to start my own club at Brophy known as Brophy buildOn, and within nine months, my team raised \$30,000 and traveled to a rural village in Nicaragua during the summer to build a school.

However, perhaps the aspect of Brophy that I most cherish is the sense of brotherhood. It is amazing to see how easily students put aside their differences and embrace one another. Brophy also does an incredible job reinforcing this spirit with retreats and programs through the Office of Faith and Justice. In closing, these last three years at Brophy have undoubtedly been the best of my life. Brophy is and always will be my home away from home. A.M.D.G.



Ethan Schnitzer

What do you like most about Brophy? What do you like least about it?

Like Most: All of the great academic, social and extra-curricular activities. Brophy also has great teachers who care about their students.

Like Least: There are not enough girls around!

Who is your favorite teacher and what is your favorite subject?

My favorite subject is Spanish with Sr. Cordova because he can teach us the language without boring us to tears.

How did you hear about Brophy?

My next-door neighbor and best friend, Matt Freund who is a Brophy graduate.

How has Brophy changed your life?

When I first entered Brophy I was still a baby, and because of them now I am a man.

What did/does your family think about Brophy?

My family is proud that I am part of the long list of "Men For Others," who exemplifies the mission of the Brophy community.

If willing, please tell us a time in your life that was particularly difficult for you and how you were able to overcome it. Was the Brophy community apart of helping you get through it?

Coming from a public school, it was a big change academically and socially attending Brophy. The community helped me feel like I was in my right place.

What would you tell other boys who are interested in Brophy?

Get involved in as many great activities as you can.

Do you have a favorite memory of Brophy?

Waffles (Father Reese's dog) rescued me from joining the obesity epidemic in America by helping me eat half of my lunch everyday and keeping my calorie count low!

What will you miss most about Brophy?

All of the great friendships that I have made, and the fact that I am so comfortable at Brophy whether I am in or outside of the classroom.

What college or university do you plan to attend?

Because of the preparation that Brophy has provided to me, I am applying to a range of schools.