

MEMBER PROFILE

Paige Boyer and Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology

When she was a little girl growing up in Buffalo, Paige Boyer enjoyed watching television with her father, a licensed pilot. Although they rarely discussed flying itself when she was younger, they often gravitated toward scientific TV shows and talked frequently about physics and mechanics.

Meanwhile, Paige's mother, who regularly traveled for work, would bring home for her daughter gifts of toy airplanes purchased at airports around the country.

And so a little girl's love for aviation grew by talking to dad about science and playing with the miniature planes mom brought home. By high school, Paige had seriously engaged her passion for aeronautics through her school district's local BOCES program.

"I ended up loving it," she says of the aviation industry. "So I started looking at aviation colleges and Vaughn came up. I found it was a good fit, and they offered me a scholarship, which was a huge help, and that's how I wound up here."

Today, Paige is a 21-year-old senior at one of the country's premier aviation schools, Vaughn College of Aeronautics and Technology, located practically in the shadow of LaGuardia Airport in Queens, NY. Paige is studying aeronautical science and also hopes to become a licensed pilot one day.

"I love that it's a small enough school that you can make easy contact with your professors," she says, "and it's really up to you to make the most of your opportunities here."

Which is exactly how Paige discovered NYAMA.

"My roommate was supposed to go to Advocacy Day this year, and then she couldn't attend, so I asked if there was any way I could go, and it all worked out," she says.

NYAMA, which for years has provided stipends for students to help them attend the annual Advocacy Day, as well as the Fall Conference, enlisted Paige and several of her fellow students, along with Vaughn professor Wil Guzman, to help carry the industry's message to the halls of the state capitol in 2017.

“I think the kids got a great deal out of the experience, learning all the little things about what it means to be an airport operator,” says Guzman, whose connection to NYAMA goes back to the 1980s, when he was featured as a speaker at a Fall Conference in Elmira. “The things they’re learning from us in the classroom – how airports are financed, how they get capital funding – being in Albany for the day helped them understand it better and gave them a more complete picture of how it all comes together.”

Paige, who also attended this year’s Fall Conference with several fellow students and Vaughn’s Executive Director of Distance Learning Ray Axmacher, says she was particularly impressed with NYAMA’s egalitarian approach in Albany.

“I’d never really thought deeply about airport financing, so it was really interesting to me to see people talking to legislators and their staff about all their needs,” she says. “What was good was seeing how NYAMA was advocating for everyone, for all of New York state’s airports. No one was out there saying JFK or LaGuardia or this airport or that one was the most important. Everybody was coordinated in a way that would benefit all the state’s airports.”

It’s a philosophy that mirrors Vaughn’s own, Guzman says. While aviation colleges across the country provide the specialized training often needed to work at airports, New York’s own Vaughn College also offers something no other institution of higher learning can: the top ranking for all colleges in student upward mobility. That is, Vaughn is No. 1 among colleges in providing low-income students access to higher education and greater success rates relative to their previous generations.

“That’s a really important point to get across,” Guzman says. “Vaughn takes its role and responsibility very seriously. We’re very proud of helping all our students, including the underrepresented, to grab their share of the American dream—the American *aviation* dream.”