What is Model United Nations?

Model United Nations are simulations of the real United Nations in which undergraduate student delegates assume the roles of diplomats of the countries they represent in an attempting to reach solutions to the major problems facing the global village today. Model United Nations is a curricular activity in which students typically role-play delegates to the United Nations and simulate UN committees. Thousands of college and university students across the United States of America and around the world participate in Model United Nations, which involves substantial researching, public speaking, debating, and writing skills, as well as critical thinking teamwork, and leadership abilities.

Model United Nations is an authentic simulation of the United Nations General Assembly, UN Security Council, the Council on Human Rights, The International Court of Justice, or other multilateral body, which catapults students into the shoes of ambassadors/permanent representatives of the United Nations member states, from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe to debate current issues on the organizations vas agenda. The students, better known as “delegates” in Model UN, prepare draft resolutions, plot strategy, negotiate with supporters and adversaries, resolve conflicts, and navigate the UN rules of procedure – all in the interest of mobilizing “international cooperation” to resolve problems that affect almost every country in this global village. At the end of most conferences, outstanding delegates in each committee are recognized and given an award certificate.

In this “learning-by-doing” approach students can, through the Model UN program, be involved in the vital decisions made in the international affairs area by diplomats and world leaders today. This first hand involvement leads to a deeper understanding of world issues and the context these issues are negotiated and resolved in.

Research concludes that the Model UN environment, as a cooperative learning center, is a valuable educational tool. Cooperative learning promotes higher achievement, greater motivation, more positive interpersonal relations among students, more positive attitudes toward the subject area and teacher, greater self esteem and psychological health, more accurate perspectives, and greater social skills (Johnson and Johnson, 1988). In simulating the actual workings of the UN, Model UN provides an essential feature of the cooperative learning environment.

Model UN fulfills the objectives of multicultural education as stated by James Banks, the major theorists and researchers in multicultural education agree that the movement is designed to restructure educational institutions so that all students, including middle-class white males, will acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to function effectively in a culturally and ethnically diverse nation and world.

Model UN offers opportunities for anyone who wants to learn about the processes of international diplomacy. Each country represented at a conference needs a diverse delegation to be successful. To succeed the delegation will need to have followers as well as leaders, researchers to determine a national policy, writers to convey the country’s position, and speakers to present and support that position to the body.

The teamwork needed to prepare a good delegation is excellent experience for students who work mostly on papers and test in college but are expected to function as team members in a work force. This is one aspect of Model UN that is valuable to business school students. The communication and negotiation aspects of Model UN should also be considered by some non-traditional majors as justification for attending a Model UN.

Model UN is not a program just for International Affairs or Political Science students. The broad nature of the skills learned cut across nearly all majors and it is valuable for any major if the student has an interest in the functions of international negotiation and policy-making. Former Secretary-General Daj Hammarskjold stated: “everything will be all right when people stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird Picasso abstraction and see it as a drawing they made themselves” (Childers, p. 8). A first step in the process of understanding that will lead to a clearer understanding of the UN is education.