

I. Model United Nations: An introduction

A Model United Nations (Model UN) is an interactive opportunity for students to become familiar with international issues and the workings of the United Nations organization. At a Model UN conference, students assume roles of diplomats representing various member-states of the UN and simulate various committees, agencies, specific organs, and programmes of the United Nations system. By simulating the discussions held between states at the UN and by striving towards a majority agreement in the form of a resolution, delegates learn about the challenges facing the UN today and learn how to put international issues in a more local and personal context.

The goal of a Model UN is to have students learn and debate the policies of the state they are representing with other students with the same aim. By participating in Model UN activities, students will learn about matters of international importance, about the unique challenges nations face in UN deliberations, and about the many factors that influence political outcomes. In addition, students will also gain considerable experience at a personal level including:

- Improving independent research skills;
- Developing organizational skills;
- Expanding knowledge of international issues and conflicts, as well as of national interests and motives;
- Strengthening ability to negotiate and debate;
- Sharpening intellectual aptitudes;
- Learning about diplomatic behavior and tolerance;
- Improving leadership skills;
- Improving public speaking skills;
- Learning outside of the classroom context;
- Meeting people with interesting and varied backgrounds;
- Engaging in regional and international interconnectivity;
- Learning about the value of multilateral discussions; and
- Realizing the value in role-playing.

Goals of a Model United Nations

At the heart of every Model UN simulation - be it the General Assembly, the Security Council, a crisis committee, or a tribunal simulation - there are several objectives. These goals include:

- Increasing the students awareness of international events, issues, and trends, with particular emphasis on the role and limits of the United Nations;
- Gaining a comprehensive understanding of other states viewpoints, motives, and actions relevant to the context of the UN;
- Understanding the interaction of various national policies and the kinds of pressures each one brings to the discussion of world issues;
- Identify the limitations within the international system when confronting trivial global issues such as conflict or war;
- Developing skills in research, personal expression, cross-cultural understanding, creativity, and negotiation; and,

- Encouraging awareness of global issues through applied research on states, their national and foreign policies and their culture.

High School Curriculum-related subjects taught at a Model UN simulation

Students participating in a Model UN event will immediately draw connections between the Model UN activity and the subject matter they learn in school. Some examples of the curriculum-related areas in which delegates can expect to hone their skills include:

- Social Studies: including practical lessons in history, geography, economics, politics, social development and health issues.
- English: comprehension and expression will improve through research efforts such as, the compilation of relevant research, the extensive writing that goes on prior to and during committee sessions, as well as through oral and visual presentation.
- Other languages: some conferences operate in two or more languages, encouraging students to practice a second language and to appreciate the role language plays in the thoughts and actions of a nation.
- Art: including the presentation of costumes, flags, posters, and backdrops.
- Drama and Public Speaking: through role-playing situations and the need for diplomatic approaches.

The benefits of Model UN conferences extend beyond academic curriculums and introduce delegates to subject-areas not always addressed in school, such as:

- **Role-playing:**
The push-pull lobbying inherent in political strategies and compromise is the essence of Model UN Conferences. These situations are fundamental in involving students in the lively negotiation process,
- **Self-directed cooperation:**
Without direct interventions of a teacher or professor, it is up to the students to mediate discussions amongst themselves while seeking compromises in global issues.

The Model UN Delegate

Model UN activities are for students who are not only interested in learning more about how the United Nations works, but for those who are keen on engaging in challenging discussions with others about matters of global importance. Model UN conferences are entirely oriented towards the participation of delegates, so their dedication and efforts are very important as driving forces behind their success.

Students should be involved in every step of a Model UN, including the formation and maintenance of their local Model UN club or society, as well as the fundraising required to attend outside conferences. Every aspect of Model UN should have input from its participants, from budgetary concerns to delegate training. It is important that students feel a sense of pride and ownership of their Model UN club or conference, as it is their investment in the project that will help Model UN organizations survive from year to year. Moreover, a strong personal commitment ensures a ready and capable delegate.

Model UN activities also promote community leadership, as participants will become more aware of their responsibilities as global and local citizens. Having gained important skills and self-confidence through the entire Model UN process, and having experienced world issues in a more hands-on way, students will see classroom material as more personally relevant and will, therefore, be more likely to promote awareness and resolutions for local issues on a daily basis.

The Model UN Faculty Advisor

The Model UN faculty advisor can be the source of stability for a Model UN club, society, or conference. They ensure the continuity and sustainability of a Model UN organization, whether it consists of 2 or 200 people. The advisor also provides students with encouragement and holds them accountable to their commitment to the project. The role of the faculty advisor is of particular importance at the high school level, where students often require a higher level of guidance and institutional support in order to organize and/or participate in Model UN events.

At the High School level, the Model UN faculty advisor should be the primary liaison between the students and the administrative body of a school and/or university. Model UN advisors are useful in the process of setting up a Model UN club or activity, and in looking after administrative matters. It is important to remember, however, that Model UN events are intended to be run by students, for students. While this can sometimes be a tricky balance to strike, a good faculty advisor plays a crucial, though often silent role in helping a Model UN event succeed. Once the preparations, research, and conference begin, an advisor should bear in mind that for the objectives of a Model UN event to be achieved - independence and free thought - students must be left to their own resources and creativity to fully benefit from the conference opportunity.

At the university level, a faculty advisor may have an even less active role, leaving it to the students to organize delegations. The faculty advisors role at this point is to ensure the continuity of the club as well as the fulfillment of the clubs mandate. Examples of this are creating transition reports and meeting with new organizers to ensure they understand their duties and responsibilities.

