

Student Officers

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**THIMUN: Preparation
and Practice –
Booklet 10**

STUDENT OFFICERS

The day-to-day running of an MUN conference, both in terms of conducting meetings and supervising the content, is the responsibility of the Student Officer team. This team consists of the Secretary General, the Presidents and Committee Chairs of the various forums, together with their Deputies, and the Head of the Administrative Staff.

The Student Officer team has no exact equivalent in the real United Nations, since, at the UN, the Office of the Secretary-General is part of the Secretariat and the Council Presidents and Committee Chairs are elected by the delegates from among their own members.

At THIMUN conferences, however, the Presidents of the General Assembly, the Security Council, the ECOSOC, the International Court of Justice and the other major forums as well as the Committee Chairs are appointed officials and, therefore, part of the General Secretariat, rather than delegates elected by their respective forums to serve for a period of time, which is the procedure at the UN.

The Student Officer Team

The Student Officer team usually consists of some or all of the following, with or without deputies:

- A Secretary General
- A President of the General Assembly
- A President of the Security Council
- A President of ECOSOC
- A President of the International Court of Justice
- A Registrar of the International Court of Justice
- Presidents of other major forums
- Committee Chairs
- A Head of the Administrative Staff

Selection

Since the Student Officer team is drawn from many schools, sometimes situated in different parts of the world, and since the students themselves will often come from diverse national and cultural backgrounds, the Student Officers epitomize the truly international character of the conference and act as role models for the delegates.

The Student Officers are normally selected and appointed well in advance of the conference from amongst applicants who have a wealth of MUN experience. They have usually started as delegates, have then moved on to positions as deputy chairs, gaining experience at smaller conferences, before applying for senior positions at larger conferences such as THIMUN.

Students who have ambitions to become Student Officers need to find out about the application procedures from the conference organisers at an early stage.

Preparation

Student Officers need to develop a consensus about the ethos of the conference and a high level of consistency in their approach to the rules of procedure.

It is important for them to generate a team spirit. since they set the tone for international cooperation, becoming a real “Model”, i.e. offering an example to the delegates of how “Nations” can really be “United.”

Contact between the various members of the Student Officer team should, therefore, be established as early as possible, either directly, via social media or by email.

Well in advance the Student Officers have to write Research Reports on the issues before their particular Council or Committee. Naturally, they have to do the necessary research first. They need to be at least as well informed as the delegates.

Before and at the beginning of the conference, there will be a briefing session or workshop, possibly online, in which you can get to know your fellow Student Officers. This is an important team-building event at which the final details concerning your role and function can be worked out.

Once the conference starts, Student Officers play a crucial role in determining the success or failure of the negotiations and debate on the agenda items. For this they must be actively involved in the substance of the issues, both in the lobbying process and during formal debate.

During the lobbying process, their role is that of intermediary, bringing the various interest groups into contact with one another in order to ensure more worthwhile debate during the formal sessions.

Student Officers, therefore, need to know more than just how to apply the rules of procedure, they need to have studied current world affairs in general, as well as the particular issues on the agenda and should be aware of the interests of the various national and regional groups.

Student Officers should have a good speaking voice, have authority without being authoritarian and have a sense of humour without being sarcastic.

They should apply the rules fairly, exercise impartiality and patience, but above all be natural and friendly.

They deal with others in a confident but personable way, working closely with fellow Student Officers under the direction of the Secretary General.

The Secretary General

It is the Secretary General's responsibility to make sure that the conference runs according to plan, according to the agenda and according to the rules.

The principal function, therefore, is that of Chief Executive and thus final arbiter in all disputes between delegations or between delegates. At most MUN conferences they will be assisted by Deputies who will also ensure the smooth running of the conference.

This necessitates having the personality, maturity, tact and diplomacy to deal not only with one's peers, but with organisers, conference managers, guest speakers and VIPs.

The requirements of a good Secretary General are as follows:

- boundless energy and patience;
- organisational talent and management skills;
- a thorough knowledge of the United Nations Charter;
- ability to apply the rules of procedure and the bye-laws of the conference fairly and impartially;

The student who takes on the role of Secretary General must be someone who can shoulder a great burden of responsibility and who is prepared to devote a great deal of time to carrying out the various tasks effectively both before and during the conference.

The President of the General Assembly

As well as having the skills normally associated with presiding over and chairing an important meeting, the President of the General Assembly (PGA) has the important role of opening and closing the conference.

The PGA needs to have poise, charm and dignity.

At the Opening Ceremonies, which may well be attended by important persons in local or international public life, ambassadors or diplomats from many countries, there will often be a very distinguished guest speaker to address the General Assembly. It is the PGA's job to greet and introduce such VIPs in an appropriate manner.

During the Committee Sessions, it is part of the function of the PGA to supervise the work of the Committee Chairs, giving advice and/or assistance as required.

The Presidents of the Main Forums

The Presidents of the Security Council, the ECOSOC, the International Court of Justice, or of one of the other major forums at THIMUN, also bear a large measure of responsibility for the smooth operation of the conference.

As President of one of these forums you will be given a large measure of autonomy. You also need to display tact and courtesy in dealing with guest speakers, teacher coordinators and delegates alike.

You are responsible for the formal opening and closing of the plenary sessions of your forum, for introducing guest speakers, for setting the agenda, for conducting debate in a dignified manner and for making sure that the resolutions produced by the forum are registered in their final form for publication.

It is, of course, essential that you possess a thorough knowledge of the issues on your specific agenda as well as a wider view of world affairs in general.

The President of the Security Council

As President of the Security Council, you need to know the United Nations Charter very thoroughly, especially with regard to the special provisions for the Security Council on voting and veto rights.

You must also have detailed knowledge of current world affairs, particularly in relation to peacekeeping.

You will often find yourself directly involved in the substance of the deliberations and in the formulation of resolutions, which are usually generated in the Council chamber itself rather than in the lobby.

You must, therefore, be an expert diplomat in trying to bring opposing factions or belligerents together around the negotiating table.

Since the Security Council consists of only 15 member nations, a less rigid style of chairing is required than in the GA Committees and every delegate wishing to speak can be recognized. Nevertheless, a firm hand is sometimes required in spite of the less formal atmosphere.

The President of ECOSOC

Like the President of the Security Council, as President of the ECOSOC, you will often find yourself directly involved in the substance of the deliberations and in the formulation of resolutions, which are often generated in the Council chamber itself.

You need to make the country delegates aware that they should heed the advice and expertise of the NGOs and UN Agencies represented in the forum.

Above all, since the goal of the ECOSOC is to achieve consensus rather than simply obtaining a majority vote, you have the task of uniting 54 very diverse nations, developed, developing and less developed, in a common purpose for the well-being of the whole world community.

For this you require a great deal of tact, diplomacy and above all patience and persistence.

The President and the Registrar of the ICJ

The President and the Registrar of the International Court of Justice play a special role since, although the President presides over the Court and the Registrar assists in conducting the business and administration of the Court, they are also judges. Thus they take an active part in the deliberations of the Court. Their conclusions carry equal weight with those of the other judges and are included in the final judgment of the Court.

Committee Chairs

The primary function of the General Assembly Committee Chairs is to work actively with the delegates in their committees throughout the conference, especially in the lobbying process.

They should encourage and help the delegates to merge draft resolutions where there is a common intent and to compromise where there is a difference of view.

Thus, when a resolution is eventually passed by the committee, the committee as a whole, or at least a sizeable majority of the delegates in that committee, can identify itself with the resolution.

Role in Negotiation and Lobbying

All Student Officers need to see themselves as intermediaries between groups and facilitators who understand and can communicate clearly the various positions represented, who can lead and direct the work of the forum, and who can determine its goals.

This work may well have started even before the conference, but certainly Student Officers need to be active from the very beginning of the conference in the lobbying process.

The most effective means of stimulating a positive lobbying effort is for the President or Chair to call ad hoc meetings of the delegates in the forum concerned. The purpose of these meetings is to facilitate communication between the delegates.

Gather the delegates together in one location and allow those with draft resolutions to present their ideas. The job of the President or Chair is to bring groups with mutual interests or similar points of view on a particular issue together, and to encourage these groups to merge their draft resolutions.

The groups may go off in separate directions and lobby independently but you should remain in touch with several groups at the same time and attempt to bring them back together as necessary. Finally, you need to check through and authorize any merged draft resolutions before they are registered and approved for debate.

Chairing a Formal Debate

Point out, before debate starts, that the purpose is not to form camps or to become divisive, but to recognize differences and to try and achieve consensus for the benefit of the international community as a whole.

Be familiar with the content of the draft resolution under discussion and stay focused on the substance of the debate as it progresses.

This will help to maintain steady progress and prevent delegates from becoming side tracked by trivialities, irrelevance, rhetoric or dilatory points of procedure.

Encourage the involvement of as many delegates as possible without neglecting key parties involved in an issue or sacrificing the substance of debate.

Key parties involved in an issue may need to be invited to take the floor and make a statement or answer questions even if they have not requested it.

Direct individual delegates, or the assembly as a whole, on procedural matters as required.

Develop a sensitivity to the will of the assembly, making your decisions reflect this general will and communicating this clearly.

Conduct the debate impartially- your credibility will be determined by how the delegates view your objectivity - but never allow the rules to become obstacles to communication.

Order of Events

Establishment of order in the Commission or Committee with all delegates seated, and proceed with Roll call.

Opening remarks by the President or Chair, emphasizing their own particular role, the significance of the issues and the assembly's objectives.

Reading of the draft resolution to be debated, with the submitter reading the operative clauses only.

Entertaining of possible objections to the consideration.

Setting of debate times.

Allowing the speakers to present their arguments, requesting that they be sensitive to the need to accept points of information, allowing them to yield the floor appropriately, making sure that all sides of an argument are presented fairly, and entertaining amendments as required.

Bringing the debate to a conclusion by conducting an orderly vote, clearly announcing the result of the vote and entertaining explanations of vote as appropriate.

Making sure that a copy of each resolution passed, including all the passed amendments, is taken to the central registration point for editing prior to publication.

Reports to the General Assembly

At the Closing Ceremony the presidents of the major forums are often required to give an oral report on the activities of their particular forum to the General Assembly.

An example of a typical report by the President of the Security Council is given below.

Report of the President of the Security Council to the General Assembly

Distinguished President, honourable delegates,
The Security Council remained in session until late this afternoon and has ended its week-long efforts with commendable success.

The Question of the Situations in the Middle East, Africa, Korea and the Ukraine comprised our agenda items. Members of the Council demonstrated their experience, dedication and innovation, while discussing all of these crucial world conflicts.

The Security Council is built upon a predetermined set of principles. The members convene at a designated time and place, following official pleas to consider urgent security matters. The draft resolutions are formulated quickly because the mandate foresees timely intervention in areas of conflict. After the lobbying session, debate on the resolution at hand begins.

The procedures require close examination of each single operative clause by opening them to discussion separately.

On Monday morning, the delegates began lobbying on the issue of the Middle East with special focus on Palestine. Another group merged their ideas and prepared clauses on the item on Africa. The resolution on Africa was written to encompass a broad range of locations: both continent-wide and specific solutions were offered.

In the afternoon, the Council made its first achievement and a draft resolution on Palestine was proposed after only two hours of lobbying. Once the debate began, however, members decided that numerous amendments had to be made, addressing problems pertaining to security and peace. Towards the end of the session, however, due to increased disagreements, this resolution was tabled to be reconsidered at the next opportunity.

The resolution on Africa was a pioneer in the Security Council. It was six pages long and contained 29 operative clauses. As can be imagined, the discussions continued until late in the day.

A record number of amendments were submitted to modify the resolution. A final vote on the whole resolution was taken, but, unfortunately, the P5 nations withdrew their support and the resolution failed.

Members of the Security Council also discussed the situation in Iran. The resolution took two days to be written and it was submitted with the support of all P5 nations. The Ambassador of Iran informed the Council by revealing Iran's policy and confronting the suggestions of the Council. The Council worked hard to ensure the protection of the national sovereignty of Iran. The resolution was passed.

Evaluation of the Conference

Student Officers are usually required to write a full report to the organisers, outlining the work done by themselves and their particular forum, and making recommendations and suggestions for future conferences.

This should be done as soon as possible after the end of the conference while everything is fresh in your mind. It is very easy to forget some details once you get back to school and get involved with your normal everyday activities.