

The Educational Objectives of Model United Nations

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THIMUN: Preparation
and Practice –
Booklet 3

Simulation

Simulation exercises are used in government, the military and throughout industry and commerce as a highly effective means of training the participants in particular skills for a specific purpose e.g., flying an airplane. Therefore, simulation is a process in which real life procedures are recreated in a reduced, controlled, and perhaps idealised, set of circumstances.

Simulating the United Nations, however, has much wider educational objectives.

The achievements and personal gains can be divided into four principal areas:

- the goals of humanity,
- increased awareness of others,
- the acquisition of knowledge,
- the development of practical language skills.

The goals of humanity

The Preamble to the United Nations Charter clearly states the objectives of the United Nations so these should be, as far as possible, the ultimate objectives of Model United Nations as well.

- Saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war;
- Believing in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and of nations;
- Maintaining justice and respect for international law;
- Promoting social progress and better standards of life;
- Practicing tolerance;
- Living together in peace and security;
- Promoting the economic and social advancement of all peoples.

These are the goals of the peoples of the world. By simulating the UN, students will learn not only how these goals might be put into effect but also why they sometimes seem to be beyond reach.

Increased awareness

MUN participants gain an awareness and adopt attitudes important for their own lives and for the lives of those around them.

No nation, however rich and powerful or however geographically isolated, can stand alone. Human beings, in order to live together on the planet in a spirit of tolerance and respect for the diversity of human culture, need ethical and social skills. These are necessary for developing rules and procedures, agreements, contracts and treaties. Such skills are acquired, fostered and developed through Model United Nations.

Knowledge acquisition

To understand how people of nations and cultures other than our own live, why they believe certain things and why they behave in certain ways which may seem unfamiliar or even hostile to us, we need to know something about them.

Taking on the role of a diplomat representing a Member State of the United Nations or representing an NGO or a UN Agency requires detailed knowledge of the country or organisation concerned.

But more than this: it requires knowledge of all the other countries and organisations you will be dealing with or negotiating with.

Furthermore, you will be assigned to a particular forum or committee, dealing with specific issues and problems. Before you can reasonably discuss them with your fellow delegates you will need to know a lot about the issues and the current situation with regard to these issues. It is no use proposing solutions to problems which have already been implemented or which have been tried and have failed in the past.

Practical language skills

There are a vast range of issues currently on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly, the Security Council and the Economic and Social Council for you to research, discuss and debate about. The skills you will acquire will be beneficial to you for the rest of your life.

Most Model United Nations conferences are conducted in English. However, regardless of which language is used, a very high level of competence is required in comprehending and using language which is appropriately diplomatic, legalistic or specialised.

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You need to be able to read, both intensively and extensively, not only to acquire knowledge of, and facts about, the countries, organisations and issues, but also to learn the appropriate vocabulary and style of language for diplomacy and the technical terms needed for the issues under discussion.

You need to be able to listen to and understand what people are saying and be able to respond in your own speech, both at an informal level, for example during preparation and lobbying, and at a formal level during debate. Again, you will need to acquire the appropriate language in order to do this.

You need to be able to formulate your ideas logically in clearly understandable, written language. Writing a resolution requires a very formal style and a very precise means of expression.

You need to acquire and develop this level of language competence for:

- studying appropriate material on the internet, especially UN documents and reports, official government policy statements of the various nations and organisations and by reading relevant books, quality newspapers and periodicals;
- formulating position papers, policy statements and draft resolutions;
- lobbying and negotiating with allies, interest groups and international organisations in order to gather support for, or to organise opposition to, the various proposals;
- editing and rewriting draft resolutions before presenting them to the committee for debate;
- presenting resolutions by speaking for and defending them in debate;
- opposing, in debate, resolutions one does not agree with;
- drafting and proposing amendments;
- speaking on the resolutions discussed during plenary sessions;
- negotiating and drafting trade agreements, peace treaties, ceasefires, etc.;
- conducting and participating in meetings according to rules of parliamentary procedure;
- writing reports and articles.

Specialist skills

If you are to be a Secretary-General, the President of a Council or Commission or a Committee Chair, or a judge or advocate in the International Court of Justice, you will need all the above skills and more. You will need to be thoroughly conversant with the United Nations Charter and/or the Statutes of the International Court of Justice, the complex rules of parliamentary or trial procedure and the specific rules of the conference you are attending. Furthermore, you will have to have the personality attributes and leadership qualities necessary for leading a discussion or making judgments in a fair and impartial way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us return for a moment to the higher objectives mentioned above - the goals of humanity. There is in MUN a hope for the future. Participation can be useful, of course, in improving your individual career prospects but, as you move forward into performing your role and function in society, you will take the values of peace, justice, tolerance and respect for human rights and dignity with you and hopefully exercise and promote them in your daily life.

You know, better than most, that UN resolutions such as those you are working on today are not just pieces of paper, are not just technicalities or legalities, that they represent more than language. They represent an opportunity to change the world.

Because you know this, because you in this room are blessed with intelligence, and education, and youth, and energy, and idealism and vision, you have, more than most, both the obligation and the opportunity to do more. You have the opportunity to work through politics and through education to bring others along: to reach people by teaching people, to mobilize your classmates and your colleagues and your families as part of this great peaceful army to achieve the goals of the United Nations. This is the challenge of the 21st century.

Gillian Martin Sorensen, former United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for External Relations addressing the THIMUN General Assembly