
Chapter 1: What is Model UN? A basic examination of what Model UN is all about.

Model United Nations or Model UN is an amazing academic opportunity for high school, and even middle school students. The program in a nutshell is a simulation of the proceedings of the United Nations organization, It is a program that raises student awareness in all avenues of world affairs including but not limited to, Disarmament, Trade, International Sovereignty, International Disputes, Sanctions, Development, Peacekeeping, Regional Relations, and the fostering of peace and diplomacy throughout the world.

Students research and prepare positions on a specific country's policy, as well as specific topics assigned to them. Major universities traditionally sponsor conferences; although a large number of small-regional high school competitions are becoming quite popular. Also participation in Model UN is not limited to attending a sponsored event. Quite often, schools organize their own meetings and discussions as a way of introducing their students to the process.

This manual is designed to examine all the nuances and subtleties to getting your own Model UN chapter off the ground, or turning your existing program into a nationally recognized award winner.

Student Behavior

Model UN would ideally be about the academic performance and success of the students and the school; unfortunately there are times when other “distractions” can supersede the student's attention. I wish I could write this book and say that there have never been incidents on any of the overnight trips that I have chaperoned, but I would be naïve. The key is to eliminate the major incidents and control the minor ones. Think about it, it's a bad combination--teenagers in big cities with idle time—a chaperoning nightmare. There will never be any guarantees that your students will do there best not to misbehave. Ultimately it comes down to trust—however, there are some things that you as chaperone can

do to limit your own liability. We have all heard horror stories of teachers losing their licenses or their homes or whatever from a negligence lawsuit. If you are going to be an absentee chaperone then you take whatever risks on your own. But if you are the kind of responsible and diligent chaperone that I run into all the time at these conferences then more likely than not, you will be protected by the “Safe and Harmless” clauses in your districts policies and appropriate State Education Laws. Sometimes though teachers like all their ducks in a row—for piece of mind more than anything. What I have included is a participation contract that Franklin High has utilized as a deterrent BEFORE the conference even begins. If students are made aware of their responsibilities both verbally and in writing, it removes a lot of wiggle room.

Ultimately you wish that the purity of the experience would be the motivating factor, and for some kids it is. However there are some students who know that a Model UN trip means a week in the city, and that committee is something you go to in between room parties and other nocturnal adventures. These students are usually very easily identified. They are the ones who congregate in the back of the room, and eventually stop showing up to committee all together. That is another thing that I shake my head at in disbelief. How some chaperones and advisors let their students get away with such behavior. Now don't get me wrong I am not going to get on any moral high horse and try and tell you about social propriety or anything of that nature, BUT you can darn well be sure that when kids are under my care, I am going to know where they are. If there is a time when me or my other chaperones make a committee check and one of my delegates is not present—everything will stop until the explanation will be found. I don't mean literally. I am not walking up to the front of the committee room and demanding everyone's attention. No, I will more likely pull the missing students partner aside and ask them where they went. Usually in the time it takes for me to ask the question the missing student will have returned from wherever they were. I will say that I am very blessed with kids that have been extremely dedicated and responsible. They make my job easy because I can devote the bulk of my energy to helping their performance, rather than dealing with their behavior.

Still one of the first questions I get asked by new advisors to Model UN is how do I handle such a large group of kids. Traditionally Franklin will bring anywhere

from fourteen to sixty students to a given conference. Now this is not so crazy a number. Many schools will bring delegations equal to or surpassing our size: East Brunswick High School, Hillsborough, J.P Stevens, and the two West Windsor Schools (North and South) from NJ; Horace Mann from Pennsylvania, Corpus Christie in Texas, Mater Dei High School in California, Arlington in Virginia--depending on the conference these school can bring upwards of eighty people, so by no means am I claiming Franklin to be unique with our large delegation. However I do feel pretty proud of the system we have put in place to help regulate our students' behavior.

The first rule we have amongst the chaperones is to be visible. Students are less likely to try and skip out on a session, or even cut one entirely if they know the chaperones will be around to check on them. You would think this would be a simple rule for adults to follow—to look in on the kids who they have been responsible for—yet it amazes me to see how few of the advisors actually do. Eventually if you run your Model UN program long enough, you begin to see a lot of familiar faces amongst the faculty. This is because these are the same people who are walking around and doing their jobs. You cross paths with them on your way into a committee room, or you will see them at the advisor meeting, or sitting near the committees in case they are needed. But these people represent a very small portion of the total number of actual faculty members attending. There are many more who just stay in their hotel room, or worse, use the time away as a mini-vacation to do with as they see fit. Why am I so concerned about what someone else does with their time, because ultimately their irresponsibility becomes by burden. I watch the kids running amok in and out of committee. Invariably they will all be from one or two attending schools with no adult supervision. Kids will be kids but they have a way of “infecting: even the most steadfast of students. Then when it becomes one of my kids falling under this spell, as you will—it becomes my problem. Thing is try and find the advisor to complain to. You can't—because the very reason why his/her kids are acting so free is the reason you can't find them.

Thank goodness the majority of the people chaperoning these conferences do their jobs, and coupled with the diligence of the secretariat running the conference these nuisances are generally limited. There is a normal breakdown in

the level of debate as attrition begins to take its toll. Truthfully I do not know who students can go at it as hard as they do in committee for as long as they do. As a matter of fact many conferences are scheduling some down time into their itinerary's so as to allow the students to get a small break. This can be either a blessing or a curse. Idle time is the devil's workshop and all that. I mean if there is a committee session going on, you pretty much know where your students can be found—however give them three or four hours off in New York City, and suddenly you have a whole new world of responsibilities.

What to do? Do you put your kids on lock-down? This is the toughest call any chaperone can make, and truthfully I cannot advise you on how you grant your students their freedom. What I can suggest is that you be consistent with your rules, and expectations. Let your students know what it is they are supposed to be doing. They do not mind the guidance. If you are leery about letting them go around town, perhaps you can organize them into groups with you or your co-chaperones as the lead.

I am fond of bringing my Play Station 2 with me on trips. Generally one of the kids will know how to hook it up with the hotel's TV, but you could also contact the engineering department of the hotel you are staying at and they will be happy



Figure 4: Franklin students enjoying a little down time on the PS2.

to install it for you. This serves two purposes. The first it allows me to get a little mental health break. Nothing like a quick game of Tiger Woods golf to relax after a long day. Also it doubles as a DVD player, which allows me to gather the troops at night to watch a movie. OK, wait—watching movies after committee? Shouldn't they be asleep? Well ideally they would, but take enough kids on the road long enough and you will know the answer to that one pretty quick. Night is when the mischief occurs, so I figure if they are all with me, well I can keep an eye on things. It's a good system for us, but I know it's not for everyone.

The one thing I can say is that Franklin's Model UN program really feels like a family. We eat together, play together, argue, and even date—well the kids not me. The point is we enjoy each others company, so watching a movie together feels like being home. The kids see it as entertainment whereas I see it as safety. Discipline doesn't have to be NO or STOP. It is about maintaining control of the chaos.

Another nice thing about modern technology is that pretty much every student will have a cell phone. I make a list of all cell phone numbers and include it with any emergency contact numbers. I make a copy and give it to each of my chaperones so we all have it. I will also give out my number to the kids. Now there are some people who would not be comfortable, again this is an individual thing. But I find having the line of communication between us an invaluable asset.

I wish I could say that I learned these lessons without incident, but sometimes it is because of the problems we face that we learn our biggest lessons. When I first began the Model UN club I was facing a whole different set of problems than the ones I deal with today. I had only eight kids in the club and monitoring there activities was much easier. When the club began to expand I tried to keep the same conduct policies in place, but I soon learned that what works for eight does not work so well for twenty. The larger number of kids required a whole new set of disciplinary rules, but sadly this only became apparent when one student exposed to weaknesses in my earlier system—unfortunately that exposure meant that she got in trouble, and I became all too aware of the vulnerabilities of taking seventeen to eighteen year old away. See up till then I believed the kids. I trusted what they told me because I was used to the small numbers and being able to monitor them much more closely. If I didn't see one of those kids, I knew

they were gone, but when the numbers increased so did the opportunities for them to hide. Did I see her or not? I can't recall? Suddenly everything couldn't be done with quick visual inspections, I needed organization—I needed lists.

One interesting facet of Model UN is the midnight crisis. Certain committees are called Crisis Bodies, and traditionally they simulate that experience by dragging the kids out of bed for an emergency session at 2:00 AM. Well Stephen Foster and I have a rule, if our kids are up, so are we—call us masochists. So generally when the two or three kids we had on the specialized committees were called to session we would show our support and go sit in on the committee, at least for a while. Our other chaperones would man the fort in our absence. Well one night in New York, Foster and I stopped off to get some caffeine for the late-night session. As we were waiting to check out, I saw a girl walk by that looked strikingly familiar. I turned to Foster and asked, “Was that Stephanie?” He looked at me, and said “It has better not be.”

Well sure enough, we stepped outside and lo and behold it was in fact our Stephanie. She was a senior, and a bit of a free spirit. She was walking back to the hotel at 2:30 AM, and to make matters worse...she was not alone. There was some random guy walking with her. Well I let her get to the end of the block, when I stopped her dead in her tracks. Reluctantly she turned and walked back towards me, but the guy she was with ducked around the corner—the little sneak.

“What are you doing out of the hotel?” I asked her.

“I had a feminine problem, that I had to take care of.” She replied. This is the most classic lie in the history of male/female student teacher relations. No male teacher will ever question a girl about her period. I asked her why she didn't get Ms. Torok, our female chaperone. The girls knew that any personal female issues were handled by Joanne Torok. Stephanie said that she didn't want to wake her, and that it wasn't any big deal, she just needed—supplies. I knew she was lying but didn't want to make a federal case out of it on the street, besides I wanted to see what that guy was up to who was with her. I told her to get back to the hotel. So she turned and walked away back to where we were staying, and sure enough the guy rejoined her. Foster and I just laughed. “They can't be that dumb.” I said.

“That kid better not be anywhere near our hotel, or else he is going to have a very bad day.” Foster sneered.

We followed them back to the hotel and sure enough they were heading up to Stephanie’s room., except I noticed the elevator skipped her floor and went up to the floor with the boys rooms. Ok, now what was going on?

I knocked on the door to the boy’s room, and Mark opened the door pretending to be half asleep. “Knock it off Mark, I want to talk to Stephanie.” Mark half-heartedly opened the door. “She’s in the shower”.

I couldn’t believe my ears. What the heck was she doing in the shower? She just walked into the room no more than 1 minute ahead of Foster and I.

Stephanie opened the door to the bathroom and came out fully dressed with a wet head—to this day I do not know why. I was about to say something to her, when a strange boy caught my eye. There on the bed was sitting this kid from a boys school in Canada. They had met during committee and planned to have a little party in our hotel. I asked the boy his name, and all I remember is I never heard more yes sirs, no sirs in my life. I wanted to deal with Stephanie, but I had to get this kid back to his advisor. This is where Foster comes in. Here is a little back-story on my friend.

Foster’s nickname in high school was Mad Dog, and he was one of the best football players in the state of NJ. He went to Springfield College, became an all-American and eventually played for the New England Patriots. Suffice it to say, he is not a small man, even in his forties he still goes 6’4 and about 240 pounds. Well when he walked into the room, I saw all the color on this Canadian boys face wash out. It was like he was looking up at a skyscraper. I think he thought his life was over. Foster was milking it for all it was worth too...it was priceless. Later on he told me that the ride in the elevator was particularly uncomfortable for the kid. I don’t want to know what Foster did but Canada (as we call him) seemed to be particularly happy to see me return.

I walked him back to his hotel and woke his advisor to tell him about his wayward student. To my surprise his advisor was completely drunk. No wonder his kids were out and about, this guy didn’t care. Oh well, that wasn’t my problem. I had to get back to dealing with Stephanie.

I decided to spare her parents a wake-up call, something I still wonder if it was the right idea or not, and notified them of her transgression the next morning. We talked on the phone about what discipline I was going to give Stephanie, and how the school was going to handle it. This is where I learned about pre-planning. Her parents didn't like the idea that I wanted her to go home. They argued with me about how she didn't really do anything wrong, and I didn't catch her violating any rules. Sadly they were right. What did I see, Stephanie on the street dealing with a medical problem? There was never any alcohol or drugs or anything like that. Sure there was the strange Canadian boy but where was that in the rules...in fact where were the rules? That is when the light bulb went off. If I could get parents to sign in writing the expectations I have for them and their kids conduct, I could simply say that things were in the rules.

So I learned a valuable lesson from the Stephanie story, and hopefully you can take some caution out of that tale as well.

At the back of this book, you will find both Student Participation Contracts and a sample and blank Conference Checklist.