

Aditya Balasubramanian

: United Nations History
April 12, 2011

Between Diplomacy and “One Big Party”: A Brief History of Harvard’s Model UN Conferences

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to the Secretary General of Harvard Model United Nations 2011, Alexander Nathaniel Barrett, and the staff of the Harvard University Archives at Pusey Library for enabling me to view and utilize the Harvard Model United Nations and Harvard National Model United Nations Conference Records. Without them, this project would not have been possible.

Prologue

Drawing a total of almost 5,500 participants from all over the world, Harvard’s Model United Nations conferences enjoy the unique distinction of being the most geographically diverse and globally conscious student groups at Harvard. Secretariat members, the student leaders, of both Harvard Model United Nations (HMUN) and Harvard National Model United Nations (HNMUN), which are high school and college conferences respectively, hail from locations as far apart as Warsaw and Seoul. Conference participants make their way to Boston each year from both Illinois and India. No other organizations produce such large gatherings of individuals over a sustained period of time across the University. For four days in January, 2500 high school students from over 200 schools make their way to Boston’s Sheraton Hotel in the Prudential Center to debate some of the world’s most pressing issues, just as their real-life counterparts might in New York. A month later, some 3,000 college students do the same a stone’s throw away, at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel. Conferences forge both short-term romantic trysts at the numerous social events taking place after committee sessions as well as lifelong

friendships. To the undergraduate-only conference organizers, they are often the be-all and end-all of life at Harvard.

The conferences are structured as a four-day simulation of the United Nations in New York. Undersecretaries General oversee committees that are part of the General Assembly, Economic and Social Council, Regional Bodies, and Specialized Agencies. Committees vary in size from the small to the large. The Harvard conference staff numbers well over 200. Most committees discuss two topics over the course of the conference and members work together to draft resolutions. Each committee is overseen by a moderator, who ensures that Robert's Rules of Order are being adhered to, a director, who serves as the substantive expert of the committee, and assistant director. Outstanding participants are honored with Best Delegate, Outstanding Delegate, and Honorable Mention Awards.

This brief history of HMUN and HNMUN, which are, as will be shown, joined at the hip, will seek not only to identify milestones in the lives of these organizations, but also to highlight peculiarities and controversies intrinsic to these two conferences compared to others held around America and the world. As these are student-run conferences, the archives are what students deemed worthy of or had time to go about archiving. As a result, what has survived is an incomplete record, mixed in with files from the parent International Relations Council (IRC) and the *Harvard International Review*, a quarterly journal of international affairs. What has stood the test of time are mainly study guides on committee topics for delegates from the past and conference handbooks, which change as global issues do on a yearly basis. Rather than attempting to track themes and tendencies in such guides, this history picks a few aspects of the conferences and select examples to highlight how they have changed over the years and offer interesting comparisons to today. In looking at the origins and growth of the MUNs, the crucial

year of reforms in 1976, the HMUN Press Corps, student media coverage of the MUNs, and controversies surrounding the hotel venues for the MUNs, the legitimacy and prestige of the organization will be subjected to scrutiny. The MUNs are substantial revenue sources for their parent organization, the International Relations Council, and while they provide educational value and intellectual enrichment for participants, much of their continued success comes from opportunities to socialize and party. These joint aims are often contradictory and have been the two themes that have dominated the history of these organizations.

Origins and Growth

The first gathering barely resembling a Model United Nations simulation was said in 1976 to have been a Model League of Nations held at Harvard in 1925.¹ Records on what happened for the next thirty years are scant and the archives provide no real clues. In 1953, the first year covered in the archives, HMUN held its first conference for high school students in Harvard Yard. Two years later, HNMUN opened its doors to college students, ten years after the founding of the actual United Nations. Both have run continuously ever since, without interruption. Ever since the early days, both conferences have enjoyed great cooperation under the umbrella of the International Relations Council (a UN Department of Public Information 501c (3) organization), and students often staff both conferences. Although it is difficult to track the exact sizes year by year of the conferences, *The Crimson* reports that the 1962 HMUN conference, then held exclusively for Massachusetts students, anticipated 200 participants.² By 1984, participants numbered 1700.³ The 40th HMUN, held in 1993, boasted 2200 delegates, close

¹ Conference Handbook, HNMUN 1976, Harvard University Archives, 3, 1998.

² "Council Will Sponsor Model U.N. For Secondary School Students," *The Harvard Crimson*, January 19, 1962.

³ "Budging Politicos Flock to Model U.N.: High School Debate," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 8, 1984.

to today's size.⁴ Until the last decade, HMUN was held in December, while now it is held in January.

HNMUN's (the college conference) early history is less well-covered, with the first records dating back only to the early 1970s. During that time, the reputed Harvard academic and co-founder of international relations theory neoliberalism Professor Joseph Nye kept in close touch with conference Secretariat, weighing in with his advice to help the simulation reach a new level of debate and legitimacy.⁵ A much hand-edited, undated letter from Ken Hansen, a former HNMUN Secretary General, solicits the Professor for his availability to host a group discussion with faculty advisers to the 1972 conference on the topic of "International Organizations and World Politics".⁶ Hansen seems overly eager to please Nye; after suggesting a number of times that Nye could possibly hold his discussion, by the end of the letter, Hansen somewhat desperately writes "Basically, as you can see, the weekend is open for whatever you would like to do with these people."⁷ Even in planning for the conference, the art of diplomacy and careful flattery was generally required.

Although the size of the first HNMUN is unknown, by 1976, the conference had 550 participants.⁸ Six years later, the size of the conference had exceeded 1,000.⁹ Although *The Crimson* reports that the 1996 HNMUN conference was the world's largest, trailing HMUN in size, the conference had still failed to cross the 2,000 mark by 1998, when 1900 delegates

⁴ "Model UN Holds 40th Conference: More than 2200 Students Descend on City this Weekend," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 11, 1993.

⁵ , HMUN 1971-2 Office Archives, Harvard University Archives, 6, 2006.

⁶ Ibid. To this day, Nye is involved in advising IRC activities, serving on the Advisory Board of the *Harvard International Review* and having contributed to that magazine as recently as Summer 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Harvard Model UN Is Held This Year With New Reforms," Mary Jacobs, *The Harvard Crimson*, March 01, 1976.

⁹ "Model United Nations Delegates Meet—Today in Science Center," *The Harvard Crimson*, February 13, 1982.

attended.¹⁰ So it was in the last decade that HNMUN became a more well-attended conference than HMUN. The conferences started off as a New England affair, but then gradually expanded too the rest of the country, Canada, and then finally, to the rest of the world. Although the exact dates are unclear, HNMUN was fully domestic throughout the 1970s, and the first international students' handbook was published by HNMUN in 1998.¹¹ Both conferences were originally held in Yard classrooms. But as conferences grew in size and length, they moved into some of Boston's largest hotels, including the Marriott on Copley Square, the Sheraton Plaza on Copley Square, and finally the hotels they now hold the conferences in, the Boston Park Plaza and the Sheraton Hotel and Towers. Until recently, however, committee sessions would alternate between the Yard and the hotels. Now, though, for logistical reasons, none of the conference is held at Harvard. "Harvard Day," a dedicated time when delegates could spend a day attending classes and visiting the UN Depository Library in Pusey Library, was done away with in 2008 because of the logistical challenges of chaperoning a trip from the hotel to the University and back.¹² In 2010, the MUNs went international, partnering with WEMUN in China to host the first HMUN China in Beijing. August 2011 will mark the first HMUN India conference. 2011 also marks the first time HNMUN has held a foreign language committee, held entirely in Spanish. In 2012, HNMUN will first host a Latin America Conference entirely on its own, to be held in Buenos Aires.

1976 as a Watershed Year

The year 1976, coincidentally also the year of the city of Boston's bicentennial, appears to be a year of great substantive change for both the HMUN and HNMUN conferences. As will

¹⁰ "Model UN is Largest in the World," *The Harvard Crimson*, February 17 1996.

¹¹ Conference Handbook, HNMUN 1998, Harvard University Archives, 5, 1998

¹² Conference Handbook, HNMUN 1976, Harvard University Archives, 3, 1998.

be later mentioned, it reined in a new era of spending austerity for the conference because of the expense scandals of the previous years, but the Secretariat also used the opportunity to change considerably the substantive aspects of the conference. 1976 was the first time resolutions for HMUN were drafted in the conference itself, as opposed to being prepared beforehand. The HNMUN introductory letter from Secretary General Rolf Goodwin notes these innovations, and he “particularly emphasize[s] that the aim of HMUN 1976 is to get away from the trap of being involved in the conference for the sake of the conference itself; rather, we are more international relations-oriented.”¹³ Although the conference did not yet boast participants from foreign countries, it seemed to be making an effort, for the first time, to think beyond the limited box of a New England simulation and tried to grapple with larger issues in earnest. Because “HNMUN 1976 is a Model UN, but not a mock UN,”¹⁴ according to Goodwin, making it clear that the conference had neither the time nor the resources to match actual UN committees, he had singled out topics that “are not necessarily related to the current action in the real UN, but are selected for their importance in the general field of international relations.”¹⁵ Goodwin set out four concrete goals for the conference, ostensibly because previous conferences did not satisfy these aims. First and foremost was the goal that HNMUN would be a valuable learning experience. Second, the conference would attempt to increase understanding of “why the UN does and does not help the causes of peace and justice through the experience of attempting to work with a large number of people of widely conflicting interests.”¹⁶ Thanks to the “mock vs. model” distinction, HNMUN would use its own rules “designed to maximize the possibility of

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

combining realism and creative diplomacy.”¹⁷ Third, HNMUN would make use of the area’s resources, leading trips into the heart of historic Boston. Fourth, the conference would provide opportunities for students to go into Harvard and partake of its offerings. In that year, the conference formally institutionalized Harvard Day, which involved a half-day trip to the UN Depository Library at the Harvard Archives and the opportunity to attend classes like “Comparative Politics of Latin America” with one Professor Jorge Dominguez.¹⁸ In addition, that year the conference had multiple speakers participating from across Boston area schools, including Professors Lincoln Bloomfield from MIT, John Gibson from Tufts, Walter Jones from Northeastern, and both Guido Goldman and Edwin Reischauer from Harvard. That differs considerably from today’s Model UNs, where the lone speaker is usually a current or former UN diplomat rather than an academic.

Although the rationale behind the reforms is clear, there is no explanation provided in the conference brochures as to what made 1976 in particular ripe for reform, other than expense scandals in 1975 (to be expanded upon later), and even that should not have impacted substantive aspects. The peculiar circumstances of the MUN-IRC relationship shed some light on why this year would have actually been more difficult to make changes to the conference. More than a third of the year’s IRC board members (very often MUN Secretariat alums and members) had resigned their posts, and without 2/3 quorum, a reform of the IRC’s obsolete by-laws—including those dictating the governance of the MUNs—was almost impossible.¹⁹ While there is no indication why such resignations took place, it meant that participation on the board had to be “creatively reinterpreted” and that 1976 was an odd choice indeed. And according to *The*

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. Incidentally, however, the next mass exodus from the board would take place just two years later in 1978.

Crimson, the reforms had been made upon the recommendation of the then-dean of students. Ambitious as they were, they did have the hand of the faculty behind them, in contrast to the MUNs of today, where all decisions are made by students. However they came about, the 1976 MUN reforms gave the organizations new legitimacy and professionalism. Although events like Harvard Day would be abolished, many of the practices instituted have lasted to the present day. As is evident from the archives, these reforms carried over to HMUN as well. 1976 then, was the beginning of MUN as we know it.

Study Guides

Planning the MUNs is a huge, year-round effort for the Secretariat, many times requiring both academic and social sacrifices. During the summer, committee directors write study guides for their delegates, which the relevant Undersecretary General goes on to edit. In the days before internet, these were mailed in, often from vacation spots all over the world, and Secretariat members staying at Harvard for the parts of the summer would read and edit them. A look at Study Guide edits from the 1988 HMUN Conference reveals some key features of staff dynamics from decades past.

A letter from the Undersecretary General for the Economic and Social Council, a certain Grace, to the President of the IRC and Director of the Security Council Alex “Bangsy” Bangs dated 15 August, 1987, shows a great informality in relationships and genuine friendship perhaps lost to official MUN communication today as they constantly strive to professionalize.²⁰ Despite the considerable amount of editing Grace did (she complains a lot about syntax and dictions, so much so that at one point, she writes, “How very Expos like of me. I long to teach Expos, secret fantasy don’t you know?” referring to the painful required freshman course on expository

²⁰ Letter from Grace to Alex L. Bangs, 15 August 1987, HMUN 1998 Study Guides, Harvard University Archives, 1998, 2.

writing) she does so with an unmistakable sense of humor.²¹ She confesses to Bangs that “My mind is swimming with red ink and nice ways to say ‘this section blew wind.’ It’s not an easy task as you well know. Frankly, this is what diplomacy is all about.”²² Evaluating his cover letter to delegates, she drops her diplomatic pretensions, writing “For a Midwestern boy, very clever. No real problems other than typos. I deleted some of the more flagrant examples of snideness, a syndrome which has struck other directors as well. I hope this doesn’t become a motif for this conference. I love to dish, but not in such large amounts.”²³ But in the end, she signs her letter off with “Love,” a word almost never seen in today’s MUN correspondences. Bangs and other committee directors that year wrote very informal cover letters to committee delegates, often self-deprecating. The tendency to list all one’s activities and commitments at Harvard to bowl over conference participants had not yet taken root.

More generally, study guides (and conference resolutions) grew in size and depth as the conferences aged. 1979 was an important year for MUN study guides, and the introduction of assistant directors and moderators for committees was complemented by a marked increase in the “length and scope of study guides...to shift the focus of the conference back to substantive matters” since it had previously “become so bogged down with procedural matters and meaningless resolutions.”²⁴ The topics selected were more in-depth and controversial, to bolster the intellectual caliber of the event. The change in the sheer size of the study guides is evident in the archives after this year, and generally held up the same until the 2000s. Previously, study guides could all be fitted into a single booklet, but they have since moved online to accommodate size (they are often more than thirty pages long) and the growing number of

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid. Indeed, the archives seem to be full of such sarcastic references to what “real diplomacy” actually is.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ HMUN 1979 ECOSOC Study Guide, Harvard University Archives, 1998, 1.

committees. In some years, guides have been overambitious in what they ask of participants. The Director of the 1996 HMUN Economic and Financial Committee, Michael Passante, asked high school students to debate “Currency Stabilization” and “The Future of the World Trade Organization,” flooding them with college-level economics and details on international exchange rates that even economics concentrators at Harvard would take time to grasp.²⁵ Moreover, as Passante himself acknowledged, the topics were outside the purview of the United Nations’ mission. His guide cited an impressive 56 sources in the bibliography, an impressive combination of textbooks, *Economist* articles, and books by economists. Appendices for the study guide were as follows:

- A: Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization
- B: WTO Organization Chart
- C: UN Resolution 49/97: Strengthening International Organizations in the Area of Multilateral Trade
- D: Exchange Rates with the US Dollar
- E: Determination of Exchange Rates in a Free Market
- F: “Drawing Lessons from the Mexican Crisis: Preventing and Resolving Financial Crises—The Role of the IMF” (From “The IMF and the Challenge of Globalization by Michel Camdessus)²⁶

Other study guides are less detailed, but the larger take-away message is of deep research on topics on the part of committee directors. As the substantive backbone of the conference, the study guides formed the majority of the academic preparation for the conference and display an interesting application of skills and concepts learned in Harvard classrooms.

The Press Corps: Reporting on HMUN Activities

Harvard’s Model UN conferences have always been considered by participants to be of the very highest quality in the MUN circuit. Ever since early days, whether attracted by the high level of debate or the prestige of the institution sponsoring the conference, participants have

²⁵HMUN 1996 Study Guides for General Assembly, Harvard University Archives, 2006, 6.

²⁶ Ibid.

taken their participation seriously. As one 1995 HMUN attendee said, ““This conference is the top, since the intellectual competition far surpasses that at all the other conferences.”²⁷ Making this point even more clear is the press corps of the conference, which deems the conference’s events worthy of news coverage. Unique to HMUN, every year, 24 precocious high schoolers apply to be on the Press Corps and provide 24 hour website news coverage of committee happenings. They also do exclusive interviews with Secretariat members and conference staff. However, unlike typical MUN participants, press corps members hail from different backgrounds. They are generally not extremely involved in their high schools’ MUN teams, but come instead from journalistic backgrounds. Many are editors of their school newspapers or participants in school television media. On all accounts, admission to the corps is extremely selective and aspirants go through a thorough application process. The application of one student for the 1998 conference includes writing samples (one about the Bible rather boldly titled “The Most Controversial Book Ever Written, and Why Everyone Must Read It”) a recommendation, and a resume. Like a college recommendation, the student’s guidance counselor offers high praise for the aspiring Press Corps member:

Jonathan takes all the honors and Advanced Placement classes available to him each year. In an extremely competitive class, he is ranked number one. This is a reflection of his ability and dedication. All of his teachers speak highly of him. His Spanish teacher commented on his writing, “He wrote compositions without them being assigned and his work only got better throughout the year because he enjoys writing. He is courteous, intelligent, and a great wit.” The honors science teacher stated “Jonathan does excellent work very quickly. He never wastes time during class and his work is neat and logically organized. He has excellent problem-solving skills. Most of all, he accepts responsibility. If he was going to be absent, he asked for assignments in anticipation of it.”²⁸

²⁷ Geoffrey C. Upton, “Model UN in Full Swing: 2500 High-Schoolers Wielding Briefcases Attend,” *The Harvard Crimson*, December 16, 1995.

²⁸ HMUN 1998 Press Corps, Harvard University Archives, 2, 2006.

It is worth noting that these Press Corps recommendations are on the order of seriousness that a standard college recommendation would be and that it was completed by a guidance counselor. It appears that the schools too, not just the delegates, take Harvard Model UN very seriously. A case for being included on the Press Corps includes information on all aspects of a person's character and activities on school campus.

Press Coverage

But lest there be any doubt, the Model United Nations is not always synonymous with prestige, idealism in solving the world's problems, and high level debate. Power politics, alcoholic parties, and controversy, in some ways the antithesis of ideal diplomatic behavior, are much a part of the MUNs as well. For one, at the 1996 HNMUN, a Park Plaza Hotel bodyguard was unimpressed by the delegates' forgetfulness, skeptically noting that "These are supposedly some of the great minds of the future, and they can't remember their room keys."²⁹ Press coverage of the MUNs, particularly that of the University daily *The Harvard Crimson*, seems to exemplify the philosophy that news either had to be big or bad to make its way into print. Consequently the treatment of the MUNs is almost all negative. Despite a few articles that blandly announce the outcome of the MUN elections (back in the days of fewer Harvard student organizations, all of which could be covered by *The Crimson*), most reveal much controversy.³⁰

The 1975 HMUN conference drew the newspaper's attention for quite a scandal. Organizers spent over \$5000 on personal expenses during the four days of the conference, which in today's terms, is probably more like \$50,000, far exceeding their budgets, on expensive

²⁹ "Model U.N. Is Largest in World"

³⁰ For example, the 1999 Secretary General Election, for example, was reported in *The Crimson* on March 4, 1998.

dinner and alcohol.³¹ As a result, in the following year, in consultation with the Dean of Students for Harvard College, the conference for the first time instituted the position of comptroller and reduced the size of the petty cash fund available considerably, from \$1000 to \$50.³² Years later, in 1978, HMUN participants scandalized hotel staff and Boston residents by throwing rolls of toilet paper and cans out of windows, mooning St. Germain Street residents, and creating so much noise that many hotel guests decided to leave early.³³ The problems continued throughout the 1980s, as will be expanded upon in the next section.³⁴ A rare 1998 article was relatively non-controversial and seemed only to inform people of and laud the management of the conference, which was depicted almost as a model of diplomatic behavior and efficiency.³⁵ But this was by no means the norm, as we will see presently. Despite the lofty ideals of the conferences, it seems that Model UN was well-covered on campus thanks to boisterous behavior.

Hotel Controversies

The Pusey Archives of the Model United Nations, although very incomplete, are nonetheless replete with information about hotel reservations and correspondences with hotel staff. *The Crimson* articles offer just a preview of the extent and severity of the problems and bad behavior that the MUN staff involved themselves in, one that threatened to sabotage future conferences. It is indeed an embarrassment for a group that seeks to uphold the ideals of the United Nations and remains the biggest blotch on the otherwise glorious history of the Model

³¹ Nick Lemann, "Blurred Distinctions: Brass Tacks," *The Harvard Crimson*, March 13, 1975. Incidentally, Lemann went on to become President of *the Crimson* and have a distinguished career as a journalist. He is now the dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism.

³² "Harvard Model UN Is Held This Year With New Reforms."

³³ Robert O. Boorstin, "Holding Down the Fort: Crisis Containment at Model U.N.," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 6, 1978.

³⁴ For more, see "Budding Politicos Flock to Model U.N.: High School Debate," *The Harvard Crimson*, December 08, 1984.

³⁵ Alejandra Casillas, "There's Been a Coup: Fun at Model U.N." *The Crimson*, February 09, 1998.

United Nations conferences. The HMUN 1984 conference was relocated to the Marriott because of rather rambunctious behavior on the part of conference participants. The Managing Director of the Sheraton Boston expressed certain indignation to the conference Secretary General in a letter dated December 15, 1983:

The November 28-December 2, 1984 high school conference is officially cancelled by the Sheraton Boston Hotel.

The basic reasons that necessitate our canceling this group are as follows: Seven fire alarms throughout Thursday evening, the students' drinking, excessive noise, the shattering of the glass pool dome, obscene phone calls to guests, unexpected checkout of guests due to noise complaints early in the morning—and at this point, several written guest complaints about your group during the dates they were in the hotel...

...Your group also necessitated our putting on extra security—approximately eleven more people per night than usual. We also found the faculty to be ineffective in helping us control this group. I might add that to date I have given out \$1100 in guest rebates and I am sure there are more to come. I have an \$1800 bill to repair the pool as well as to replace broken furniture in several of the guest rooms.

My feeling, as I expressed to you, is that these 1900 high school youths are not controllable under the present structure of the conference. The Hotel cannot afford to take the greater than normal risks of accidents, injuries and damages that may occur, and certainly could occur, while your group is in the hotel. We do not have such severe problems with any other group.³⁶

For the next two years, the conference was held at the Marriott Copley. Ultimately, in 1986, conference staff started running security themselves, lending more manpower to the oversight of rowdy delegates. But even then, problems continued, and they were not endemic to just the high school students. After the 1987 HNMUN, Bradley Boyer, Secretary General of HNMUN, wrote to Marriott Hotel staff dated February 22, 1987 to Marriott staff apologizing “for the difficulties and expenses that delegates to Harvard National Model United Nations have caused.”³⁷ He listed

³⁶ Hotel Correspondences, Harvard University Archives, 1998, 4.

³⁷ Ibid.

a series of reforms that HNMUN would implement to ensure that damages would not occur in the future and even suggested limiting the number of future conference attendees to ensure this. The HMUN Business Manager report of the same year reports that conference staff was at risk of being reprimanded by hotel staff for underage alcohol possession, noting with caution the advice of a Marriott informant:

Word **of** **Warning**
Jeff Calmus has given HMUN and HNMUN a friendly piece of advice: **Watch it!** From various sources, Jeff has ‘discovered’ that we consume alcohol in the VP Suite. As a friend, Jeff is understanding and indicated that everything was cool as long as we keep discreet about it. However, as an officer of the Marriott, Jeff told me that if there is reason to enter the VP Suite due to excessive noise or whatever, alcohol will be confiscated and HMUN and HNMUN will be reprimanded.³⁸

In 1988, the MUNs had to pay over \$4800 in damages due to broken crystals in the ballroom and damages to guest rooms.³⁹ Further problems resulted in the conferences being moved back, ironically to the Sheraton in 1989. Problems continued off and on, although in the past five years they have gone off without trouble, due largely to the increased security staff (each member of the staff is required to do a security shift) as well as a new attitude of professionalism of the staff. Nonetheless, the memories of hotel damage loom large over the MUNs and the IRC as a whole, and there is a constant attempt to wipe them away with good behavior each year.

Conclusion: Between the Lake and the Mountain

The history of the Model United Nations conferences at Harvard thus offers two competing and often contradictory stories. The first is of a long tradition of high quality debates increasing awareness and interest in international relations and bringing people together from across America and the world. The second is of a group of spoiled Harvard students engaged in a

³⁸ HMUN Business Manager Report 1987, Hotel Correspondences, Harvard University Archives, 1998, 4.

³⁹ Hotel Correspondences, Harvard University Archives, 1998, 4.

quest for political legitimacy and the pursuit of a fun social activity who misrepresent the very ideals of the organization they seek to represent and often receive high school participants not too different from themselves. As one Sheraton staff member told *The Crimson* of the 1982 conference, “It’s just one big party like a dorm after finals.”⁴⁰ After debate, do the labors of having been on one’s best diplomatic behavior weigh so heavily upon participants and organizers that they go wild? The reality is probably somewhere in the middle of these two interpretations, and the MUNs have cleaned up their acts a good deal over the last decade. However, questions linger. Despite the financial aid policies for certain participating schools, the conferences are for the most part only for those institutions that can afford to house their students at expensive hotels and pay delegate fees. Similarly, there is a question about the profits the Model UNs turn, which allow the fiscal continuity of the International Relations Council, but also attempt to profit off of diplomacy, a disturbing idea. After all, the real United Nations’ recently instituted simulation of their activities is not-for-profit. And the Secretary Generals of virtually all Model United Nations conferences of the past, a simple Google search reveals, go on to become corporate lawyers, a far cry from the diplomats they represent at these conferences. Perhaps, as the 1975 *Crimson* article discussing the expenses controversy perceptively noted on the MUNs, the problem is intrinsic to Harvard and being a student at the country’s most storied academic institution:

Harvard is a confusing place where it is hard sometimes to get the strong ethical education that administrators are always saying the University should provide. It is easy to get things mixed up here in thinking of ethics, because Harvard's ambience is one of delicately inter-related bigtime-ness and education--just like the Model U.N.'s To someone coming here from a place very different in scope, ambitious and eager to find a niche, Harvard could impart the desire for big expense accounts almost as easily as the desire for knowledge. The people in Mather 311 [on the Secretariat] staged a conference

⁴⁰ Dora Y. Mao, “Model United Nations Delegates Meet-Today in Science Center,” *The Harvard Crimson*, February 13, 1982.

that seems to have been almost a mirror of what they saw in Harvard. They created a United Nations that really was a Harvard model.⁴¹ Perhaps it is the decadence of Sanders Theater, Widener Library, or Annenberg Hall that shape the grand visions of a Model UN conference that secretariat members have, blurring their idealism about impassioned careers as diplomats concerned with conflict resolution over pomp and circumstance. Nonetheless, as one can tell from Study Guides, the enthusiasm college and high school students alike have for the conferences, and the usage of Robert's Rules in the conference, for over half a century, the MUNs have worked hard to educate and inspire people to develop genuine passion and interest in international affairs.

Bibliography

Records of the Harvard Model United Nations, 1970-98, Harvard University Archives

Records of the Harvard Model United Nations, 1998-2006, Harvard University Archives

The Harvard Crimson, Online Archives. Available at <http://www.thecrimson.com>

“What is HMUN?” Harvard Model United Nations. Available at <http://www.harvardmun.org>

“History of the HNMUN Conference,” Harvard National Model United Nations. Available at <http://www.hnmun.org/about/history-of-hnmun/>

⁴¹ “Blurred Distinctions: Brass Tacks”