

## Model United Nations Club

### The Role of a Visiting Director at a Model United Nations Conference

Teachers who are chosen to accompany a student delegation to a Model UN conference are responsible for the four tasks outlined below. The size of the delegation and the length of the trip will influence the relative importance of each task.

1. Serve as chief executive.
2. Coach students through the MUN process.
3. Assist the hosts during the conference.
4. Manage documents and fees.

The following paragraphs provide more detail about each task.

1. Serve as chief executive.

When traveling with students, you have accepted them into your 24-hour care. Both the parents and the school administrators support you in this role, otherwise you wouldn't have been chosen. Students are expected to follow all school rules during a trip. They are also expected to perform a specific role at the MUN conference. To be successful, they should eat properly and rest at night. If students miss one or more days of school on the trip, they are responsible for missed assignments. As the trip leader, you must enforce school rules and should encourage students to maintain healthy habits.

MUN trips encompass a variety of enjoyable, meaningful activities even during the non-conference hours. You are the final arbiter in the management of these activities. A typical conference day starts at 8:00 am and ends by 5:00 pm. Occasionally, social events are planned for one of the evenings of the conference. On the other evenings, however, you can lead the group in the selection of a dinner location and an activity following dinner. Students will be eager to participate in the planning, and you have the freedom to manage their input to the extent you feel is appropriate. Longer trips, such as the trip to BEIMUN, include an extra day for sightseeing, and it is best to work with the students in planning this day before you leave Hangzhou.

Team meetings have been very useful for me on MUN trips. Each day begins and ends with a team meeting. This affords you the opportunity to check the pulse of the group and communicate expectations as needed. At BEIMUN, the team meetings have always been in my hotel room or in one of the common areas in the hotel. At smaller conferences, they are usually in the lobby of the hotel or school. The morning meeting takes place before or after breakfast. The purpose of the morning team meeting is to review event times for that day, check the delegates' supplies, distribute lunch tickets (if the conference uses them) and assess the appearance of each delegate. For better or worse, during a morning meeting it is not unusual to find yourself helping a boy tie a necktie or reminding someone not to lock all their keys in the hotel room again. At the end of each conference

day, a second team meeting takes place. The evening meeting usually takes place before dinner and is specifically focused on the accomplishments of the day. I get the delegates to open up and share their conference experiences. I do this by surveying the group to see who raised points of information (questions), who spoke for or against a resolution in debate, or who was listed as a submitter on a resolution. It usually doesn't take long before everyone has reported something and then the colorful stories begin about showdowns in debates, witty debate chairs, etc. The evening team meeting can also be used to plan or review the evening's activities.

The enforcement of curfew is, generally speaking, not difficult. At the team evening team meetings, remind students of their curfew times. There are usually two levels of curfew. The first is the time when all students must return to their own room. The second is the time for "light's out." If the group returns from an evening activity before the "in your own room" curfew, they will usually want to socialize in some location, such as a common area in the hotel or one for the hotel rooms. I have found that they like to separate themselves by gender. However, if boys and girls do want to socialize together, I allow them to be together in the same hotel room only if I am also present. This is one of the reasons that I maintain my room as a central meeting point. When it's time for the "in your own room" curfew, I simply visit each room and confirm that the correct inhabitants are present. When it's time for "lights out" (30 or 60 minutes later), I again walk to each room and listen at the door. If students are being loud, I will remind them that it's time for lights out. Otherwise, I don't feel the need to disturb them. In my experience with HIS students, they are quiet by the time it's lights out. I sometimes walk the hall again, or sit in the hall, during the 30 or 60 minutes following lights out. Up to this point, I have never experienced instances of students being loud or sneaking out of their room.

Our experience until now has been that HIS students are low-maintenance, enjoyable travelers. However, if any problems arise during the trip, it is best to communicate clearly and early with HIS administrators. Written descriptions of incidents and consequences are essential. Your colleagues and administrators are prepared to assist you in dealing with all situations. The Trip Behavior Form lists expectations and consequences. All students must obtain a parent signature on this form in order to travel. In the case of a medical emergency, one teacher should accompany the student to the hospital while the other teacher(s) stay with the group. Parents must be contacted as soon as possible so they can join the group and assume care of their child.

## 2. Coach students through the MUN process

An MUN conference is full of opportunities for self-discovery and risk-taking. Epiphanies are never planned, but they do happen. As a teacher, it is always a privilege to be present when a student has a true moment of learning, and MUN conferences do provide some of these for students. Enjoy the opportunity to coach students as they encounter intellectual and technical challenges at the conference.

It is not necessary to be an expert "MUNer" when attending a conference. In fact, probably the best teachers at a conference are actually the older students who serve as leaders. The delegates will learn the most about MUN from those student leaders. Some of those student-leaders will be very happy to guide you through the MUN process as well. I never pass up the chance to learn from these students.

First and foremost, a conference is an opportunity to discuss government and politics. Share stories about your life. Students find them interesting. In this regard, MUN has always made me feel good about getting older. When you can share personal anecdotes about life during the Reagan administration, for example, you do have something special to offer. Even if your MUN experience is limited, all delegates will take interest in your stories and knowledge. Whether you share information about science in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the purpose of taxes, a battle to save a forest from development, or your trip to the UN headquarters, students are more appreciative about receiving these stories during an MUN conference. Their minds are focused on big issues and big questions. Therefore, don't hold back. Enjoy the intellectual atmosphere.

A second area where you can help any MUNer is use of language. Students put tremendous pressure on themselves to use technical language at a conference. Most of the time, they want to sound like adults but need help coming up with the right words. You can help them with vocabulary and phrasing. You can also help them to read critically. A delegate may have found an article relating to their topic without understanding fully what the article is saying. It's rare that a typical student focuses closely on the contents of an article, but MUN encourages this behavior. For the students, it's always good to have an adult nearby who can help them to decipher the dense, nuanced writing used in a typical BBC or New York Times article. Students also have to learn how to read the resolutions written by other students, and this is another area where you can help. Delegates can also use your help in phrasing terms for debate. This is not rocket science. It's another case of helping students find the appropriate vocabulary for expressing their idea.

The most difficult part of MUN is writing a resolution. It is difficult for many people, not only students, to generate ideas appropriate for a resolution. That said, most students find the process doubly difficult because they do not have a realistic idea of the role governments play in solving world issues. Governments can pass laws, for example, but they can't inspect every house within their country in searching for missing cultural artifacts. In a similar fashion, the UN can create an agency to study the problems faced by migrant workers, but it can't use a resolution to block migrant workers from reaching a given country. These are examples of the misconceptions students carry with them about the powers of government. By discussing some of their ideas with them, you can help them see some of these limits and suggest more realistic measures.

In the end, you will find less opportunities than you may imagine for these great discussions. In my experience, they happen at haphazard times – on a subway car, as you're making the rounds during curfew, in the rushed minutes before opening speeches begin, etc.. In MUN conferences, the students spend most of the time working with other students. The couple of hours you spend with them in the evening are their down time, so they often prefer not to dwell on MUN, though there are always one or two MUN nerds in every group.

### 3. Assist the hosts during the conference.

As a visiting MUN director, you are expected to help monitor student behavior at the conference. This is accomplished in two ways. Each director is assigned a duty time. This usually lasts for one hour or two hours per day, and the general expectation is that you stay in one location and be present as an adult. The expectations for duty times are usually

communicated at a directors meeting, or you can touch base with the conference director during registration if you have questions. It is rare that you will need to intervene in any situations involving poor student behavior. It is much more likely that you will help students address a simple problem like changing the temperature of an air conditioner or locating the nearest restroom. In fact, at the bigger conferences, duty time is usually so quiet that a lot of directors use it to mark student papers. At a middle school conference, admittedly, there are usually more opportunities for teachers to guide student behavior. However, there are also more opportunities with middle schoolers to get in the trenches with them and be part of the resolution-crafting process, which is fun.

The second requirement that you will typically encounter is that at least one director from your school is always present at the conference. This does open the possibility for shopping or sightseeing if more than one teacher is assigned to a trip. If one or more of the teachers wish to leave the conference for a period of time, the teachers on the trip should work out a schedule that is acceptable to them. The duration and destination of any off-site travel be chosen strategically just in case there is a medical emergency involving a student.

In Model United Nations, the students run the show. They set their own schedule during the day, so you are not expected to help them get lunch or keep an eye on the time. The delegates also like to be on their own in the debates, figuring out strategies and making decisions on their own. In other words, adults fade into the background. The following are some of the things that you can do during conferences:

- Listen to debates. I will often sit through entire debates, even taking notes on the strategies and speakers. This is how I pick up new ideas for coaching my own students. You are allowed to enter and exit debate rooms as you wish, just do so quietly. There are almost always seats available for guests, and the administrative staff can supply you with a copy of the resolution being debated, just get their attention.
- Take pictures of our students. You can never have enough of these, although I admit that indoor photography can be really challenging.
- Network with other directors. At the smaller conferences, you should introduce yourself to all the other directors. At the larger conferences, you will find varying levels of interest in networking. Some directors are eager to meet you, many are busy focusing on their delegation, and others are busy grading papers.
- Do schoolwork. It is not hard to find a quiet corner for grading papers or checking e-mail.
- Take a break, drink coffee, and have a snack. At smaller conferences, a director's lounge is provided and stocked with refreshments. At larger conferences, these are available for purchase within the venue.
- Keep an eye out for situations that could use attention. No conference is perfect. Once in a while, you'll see an opportunity to help.

There are, of course, student crises that pop up from time to time. I have helped students print extra copies of their speech or resolution, correct a misspelled placard or name badge, or obtain another copy of their room key from the front desk. The conference will usually have a registration desk where you can go for help. However, it can be hard for students to find you and vice versa, especially at the bigger conferences. For this reason, I

capture the cell phone number of each student on the trip. At the end of the trip, I delete all of their numbers from my phone.

#### 4. Manage documents and fees

Each traveling teacher will receive a packet containing vital information for the trip: itinerary, conference schedule, hotel and ticket information. Travel costs for the teachers are paid by the students. The packet will also contain your per diem. This is your compensation for accepting 24-hour responsibility for the students and is yours to do with as you wish. In my role as MUN coordinator, I ensure that travel and registration arrangements have been settled before the trip begins. You will not need to pay the hotel bill or buy tickets on an MUN trip. On some trips, the director organizes the payment for cultural outings. In the end, it is necessary for you to keep the final hotel bill and plane/train ticket stubs, as well as some fa piao for tickets purchased for cultural events. These are important for the program records.

Student passports are required for check in at the hotel. You should collect these when you leave HIS and return them to the students at the end of the trip. While traveling, keep them in a zip lock bag and in a safe place. At the hotel, lock them in a safe if it's available. I will show you how I label passports for ease of access during hotel check-in and flight-boarding.

It is best for you to manage student tickets. For flights, collect student tickets and hold them until they are needed for passing through security or boarding the plane. For train trips, you will be given the student tickets while still at school and should distribute them to the students only when you reach the train station.

When you arrive at the conference, you will first visit the registration desk. Students can do this for you. In the packet you receive, you will find name tags, conference handbooks, and other items that need to be distributed immediately. You might also find lunch tickets. If yours is a multi-day conference, keep the tickets with you and distribute them daily in the morning meeting. At some point, you may receive the student certificates. These can be handed to you at registration, later in the conference, or even sent via e-mail. I usually keep the certificates and distribute them after the return to school so they are not lost or damaged.

Thanks, again, for your commitment to the students and to the MUN program. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact me.

Thomas Robinson  
HIS MUN Coordinator