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Representing Italy: Midwest Model United Nations 2020

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Ouachita Baptist University

Analysis & Summary Paper: Representing Italy

Midwest Model United Nations 2020

Spring 2020

Model United Nations

Dr. Brennan

The United Nations is an integral actor in international relations, as well as in politics more generally. As the world becomes ever more interconnected, intergovernmental organizations play an important role in shaping the lives of nations across the globe. Through much research of the treaties and resolutions that are passed by the UN, it has been realized that a member states domestic policy is not only framed under UN agreements (with significant flexibility in implementation), but much policy is being created to reflect values in international law. With this, the work done by the UN, and how these frameworks are implemented by specific member-states, affects the lives of people greatly, making it an intriguing process to reflect upon.

When first entertained with the idea of being a delegate to the Midwest Model United Nations (MMUN), I was both honored and excited about the opportunity to grow more deeply. By definition, a simulation such as the Model UN provides hands-on experience that allows students to put what they have learned into practice. It also provides a deeper understanding of the actual UN, as it seeks to reflect and represent the real-life institution. The key words here are *seeks to*. With any simulation, there are inherent weaknesses that keep it from living up to a “perfect” model. For MMUN, some of these weaknesses are found in the simulation itself, such as strict time constraints in the scheduling of the conference. Other weaknesses have to do with the delegations: students representing a particular country in the simulation are not real-life delegates of that country; they do not carry with them the qualifications or background of an actual delegate, leading to variance in delegate participation based upon the time spent researching prior to the simulation, as well as inaccurate representation based upon personality of particular students (delegations) and other circumstances (such as distractions that come with being a college student juggling responsibilities). As mentioned, the simulation also carries with

it particular strengths, such as experiencing the process the of United Nations and its balancing values (sovereignty vs consensus), as well as areas of personal and academic growth for delegates. These strengths and weaknesses will thus be further discussed

Weaknesses:

Firstly, what could be characterized as a limitation of the simulation stems from its basic organizational structure and inherent time restrictions. Due to MMUN being a four-day learning experience, there is a strict schedule planned by the faculty in charge of the event, which, on the one hand, allows the simulation to run smoothly and as expected, fostering a more conducive environment for student participation. On the other hand, though, there is a limit to the work that can be achieved by delegations as it is restricted to pre-planned “training time” versus “committee time” versus “plenary time”. This can be exemplified in the United Nations Environmental Assembly (UNEA) and the topics we had to time to cover, as well as the resolutions we had time to pass. The first two days of MMUN were dedicated to “committee time”, at the beginning of which UNEA decided that *Topic B: Illegal Trade in Wildlife* would be discussed first. The majority of the hours spent over the next two days were on this singular topic, which saw three draft resolutions passed. The resolutions were a great achievement made through caucusing, yet, *Topic A: Sustainable Production and Consumption* almost had no time at all to be covered. Late on Thursday night, with only an hour left in the mandated committee time, Topic A was brought to the floor. Though some delegations used the following recess time to briefly work through Topic A and create a priority list, as I looked across the room, it seemed as if other delegations viewed this remaining time as pointless, by talking about off-topic, personal matters. The Dais had only allowed a short recess time, at the end of which they claimed they, “would look favorably upon adjournment” until plenary the next morning. Though

the actual UN is limited to time restrictions that occur in life generally, it is the nature of the short-term simulation that only an hour would be spent on a topic; an hour that was not taken as seriously by many delegations as the previous hours were, nor in which there was as much energy for delegations left to give.

Also, as the UNEA was the first committee to have their topic heard in plenary, allowing us time to caucus on our Topic A, as well as the “emergency topic”, which was favorable for UNEA as it addressed climate change and sustainability. Plenary in this way seemed redundant in nature, as the point of it is for draft resolutions to be heard by the General Assembly (GA) as a whole, yet most committees were only participating in formal session when their topics were on the floor. While plenary is also used to implement edits on the resolutions, why go through another round of discussion and voting if points being made were already heard by the same delegates in committee? In the actual UN, all delegates in the GA may have to participate in formal session, which would address this redundancy. Allowing more “committee time” may thus be more effective in the simulation, while it also has the potential of delegates “burning out” from the intensive hours.

There is also a “rush” factor found in the simulation. MMUN only lasted four days, with delegates recognizing that after those four days we would never meet again as the same “simulative body”; we had to make the most of our time. This sense of finality was so much so that in plenary, other committees threatened to “table” our topic if we did not pass our resolutions. This caused the GA to pass all three resolutions by consensus, when a very important edit had not yet been finalized. Even more so, the UNEA continued to caucus during plenary and create an extensive working paper addressing the emergency topic, which was sent in minutes before the end of the session and thus was not brought to the floor or passed. Here is

a seemingly key distinction from the simulation versus real-life: Resolutions passed by the UN hold international weight; resolutions in the simulation do not. Even though UNEA did not finalize an important edit or pass a pressing working paper, after the simulation, the world still went on as it was. The “real-life” UN hopefully takes the consideration, editing, and passing of resolutions more seriously, as they have actual consequences for member-states.

Furthermore, for a simulation to work perfectly, it assumes that all delegates are equally informed (or are informed as much as the actual delegation would be). This is hard to achieve when delegations arrive with varying degrees of preparation. For example, some delegates attend the simulation as part of a club (or a class they do not get credit for). With this, they may not have spent as much time researching their country, which affects the accurateness of their delegation and the simulation – There is less of an incentive to be a wholly participatory or informed delegate of the country you’ve been assigned. Others who have more of a stake in their active participation, though, may also taint the accurateness of the simulation if they are a delegate for a country that may not be as vocal in real-life. In the UNEA, such was the case with Kenya, Afghanistan, and Cuba, who pushed passionately to be leaders of caucusing, as well as asking questions and speaking during session for the sake of participating. These countries would not be classified as international leaders on environmental issues, yet they were in the simulation. This impassioned participation was partly to do to with students (acting as delegates) worried about the grade they would receive from their sponsor if they did not do so, exemplified in one Cuban delegate who was afraid to take a break when the moment did not call for any work to be done.

This leads to a further point that the simulation is susceptible to the lives of college students. While even UN delegations are susceptible to uncontrollable circumstance, they are

not college students with class grades to consider, or other academic responsibilities to consider. In real life, the United Kingdom delegate would not be working on a paper for another class in sweat-pants, rather than participating in committee session. Additionally, the United States delegation would likely not fail to show up to a UN formal session, as certain delegates did in the simulation (though this may be more accurate during the current affairs of the U.S.).

Lastly, another factor in inaccurate representation is the personality of a delegate. Personality does have weight in the UN. Such is the case with any leadership roles, where a dominating personality is often paid attention to more. Arguably, personality plays a more concentrated role in MMUN. This is related to the already mentioned “student” aspect, as a highly competitive school is likely to choose delegates who will have a recognized presence. Such was the case with Denmark who immediately took the lead in UNEA, though they are not a major world power. Personality should not be overemphasized, however, as meaningful work is done in the UN, as well as MMUN, by delegates who are not domineering. Oftentimes in the simulation, domineering personalities said more, but did not have substance behind their words.

Strengths:

There are important lessons learned from participating in MMUN, exemplifying its purpose and offering a flip-side to its limitations. The first of these is a deeper understanding of the UN in simulating its inter-workings. Learning about the UN in a classroom setting is beneficial for a basic understanding of it, however, the various rules and motions can be difficult to understand on paper. Being able to play the role of a country, by making motions, speaking in session, and caucusing during recess, is an invaluable form of learning that further explains and exemplifies what is known, as well as making students aware of factors that were not yet known. Doing so over four days also helps to solidify the “lingo” of the UN.

Consequently, participating in the simulation process also fosters invaluable academic skills more generally. Dependent upon the extent that a delegation prepares for Model UN, the simulation fosters great research and communication skills. Research is important in any field of study, as it is the basis of gaining more knowledge. It is, however, particularly important in today's society to be able to communicate research and knowledge effectively. This process, of research followed by communication, is found in Model UN. Delegations are advised to research their committee topics, as well as their country's positions, prior to the simulation. Then, the expectation is that delegates will use this research to accurately represent their country, through working with other delegations. Even if a delegate is not necessarily representing their country accurately, they are still fostering this communication and team-work aspect. These values can be seen particularly in caucusing.

In the UNEA, informal caucus "groups" were formed. Within these groups, delegates were able to share their countries positions and be an active contributor to discussion and working papers. Thus, even though the draft resolution submitted for the emergency topic did not get passed, working together to create it is still valuable and not wasted. Similarly, when resolutions are passed in plenary that delegates have put hard work into, despite not having been perfectly edited, there is sense of accomplishment and honor. Though it is a simulation, being able to participate in caucusing, writing your countries priorities into resolutions, and then having this work recognized by the GA, there is a realization and connection to the actual UN, which makes it seem closer to attainability rather than a looming, disconnected international body. Communication and team-work within and between working groups also displays the continual balance between sovereignty and consensus at the core of the UN. While consensus is

likely overemphasized at MMUN, it provides insight into the difficulty and value in it, as well as a deeper understanding of countries who may emphasize sovereignty more so.

Lastly, MMUN illuminates a rather sociological phenomenon of how seriously some take roles assigned to them. The power of assigned roles can be seen at the onset of the MMUN, where, before sessions even begin, delegations walk around and attempt to caucus with other member-states. What is interesting is how strictly some stick to the role. Such was the case with the delegate from Spain, who, despite forming friendships during the simulation, never revealed her actual name. The dedication of delegates to remain in character of their assigned country can be viewed as a strength, as it supports the accurateness of the simulation.

Overall Assessment:

The heart of Model United Nations is educational; it is a set-apart week devoted to learning. Though many weaknesses can be expanded upon that limit the extent to which the simulation accurately represents the United Nations, the wider goal of education is still met. Students are given the opportunity to learn about the United Nations on a deeper level, as well as to grow both academically and personally. Representing a country and their viewpoints, through research and communication with other representatives, forces one to think beyond themselves and consider other perspectives, while simultaneously building confidence in their personal ability to do so effectively.