



## Teens debate weighty, global issues at Model United Nations



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Should the United Nations involve the Iraqi government in developing an educational system for the Middle Eastern country? The question drew heated debate on Tuesday from delegates to the U.N. Security Council.

Who will fund the building of schools? Will girls and boys be educated equally? Will the Iraqi government retaliate if it isn't involved in developing its own educational system?

The topic yielded a lively discussion - especially for a group of teenagers.

Hundreds of teens from across western Montana and Idaho dressed in suits and high heels and set out to solve some of the world's problems during the 44th annual Montana Model United Nations Conference, sponsored by the University of Montana.

About 400 high school students from 17 Montana and Idaho schools took part in the two-day event on the UM campus. Each student represents one of the United Nations' 192 member states. Then they are broken into various committees where they debate, draft resolutions and vote on topical international issues.

UM students enrolled in a Model United Nations course this fall through the UM Political Science Department organize and staff the event. The top 12 college students enrolled in the course will then participate in the national collegiate Model United Nations conference this spring in New York.

The conference draws 4,000 college students from 250 schools nationwide. Last year, UM students were chosen as one of the top delegations at the convention, an honor bestowed to only the top 25 percent of participating schools, and received accolades for their position paper.

At the state high school event, UM scholarships are offered to the top five delegates.

Mauro Whiteman, a senior at C.M. Russell High School in Great Falls, enjoyed one of the coveted spots on the U.N. Security Council. It was his third year attending the Montana Model United Nations Conference. The 18-year-old represented Costa Rica, a peacemaking country with no military, so much of Whiteman's efforts during the conference took a peaceful approach.

The conference allows like-minded students to meet. The British Broadcasting Corp. (BBC) is the home page on Whiteman's computer. He reads the New York Times at least once a day, he said. The aspiring journalist says the research leading up to the conference is just an extension of his daily ritual.

"High schoolers don't take ownership in the world they live in," he said. "They, too, are members of the national and international communities."

Claire McGuire, 18, of Helena, possessed influence - and she knew it, too.

"I've been giving people veto looks," said McGuire, who represented China, but had yet to act on any of her looks.

In past years, McGuire represented Panama and Belgium. But China has some weight to throw around the international community, which made the conference more fun, she said.

Though in real life the Capital High School senior opposes many of China's actions and policy decisions, such as the country's humanitarian record, she found herself seeing the validity in some of the country's positions after having to represent China and argue on its behalf for two days.

Model United Nations teaches high school students, and gets them excited about, international issues and government operations through role playing, said UM political science professor Karen Adams. Montana's conference is one of the largest in the country sponsored by a university.

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