



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
of the United States of America
A PROGRAM OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

Mini-Model United Nations (Climate Change) for High School Students held at Mercy College February 4, 2017

The United Nations Association of the UNA, Westchester chapter (UNA-Westchester), in collaboration with Mercy College, the Links, Inc. and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. (AKA), held a Mini Model United Nations Conference on Climate Change for high school students on Saturday February 4th 2017. It was coordinated by Professor Michiko Kuroda of the International Relations and Diplomacy Program (IRDP), School of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Mercy College.

The mini-Model UN simulation gathered Westchester high school students from Woodlands High School and Sleepy Hollow High School, led by teachers Christopher Vaccaro and Claire Heskestad, respectively.

The participants were welcomed by Marcia Brewster, President of UNA-Westchester. She thanked the partners for supporting the event, particularly Mercy College and its award-winning Model UN team, the high school students and their teachers, AKA and the Links. She noted that UNA had received a grant for conducting mini-Model UN programs on climate change, and thanked the Mercy team for updating the original mini simulation.

President Timothy Hall of Mercy College warmly welcomed the high school students and guests to Mercy College. He said that “I personally met with the students who participated in the Model United Nations Conferences and learned how exciting an experience it was.” Dr. Karol Dean, the Dean of the School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, stated that “Our School has the International Relations and Diplomacy Program (IRPD), which sends students to the National Model United Nations Conferences. I am very proud that they have been winning awards at the Conference. It is very interesting to observe their transformation through this experience.”

Professor Michiko Kuroda, IRDP, who coordinated the Mini-Model United Nations Conference on the day, told the participants that, “The United Nations is an inter-governmental organization in which Member States play the most important role. You will be taking the role of diplomats representing the Member States today. You will experience how the United Nations makes decisions and policies on global issues.”

The participating high school students represented different countries, and presented those countries’ positions on climate change at the full-day session. They were ably assisted by IRDP students, who have been on the award-winning Model UN Team from Mercy College. Even though some of them have already graduated, they volunteered to update the Mini-Sim on Climate Change App from UNA-USA and to lead the

participants through a model United Nations simulation. The high school students discussed their assigned countries' positions on climate change, negotiated and formed coalitions with other countries based on their interests and goals. They gave prepared statements, wrote draft resolutions and voted on resolutions. The conference was a success. Both Mercy College students and high school students took their jobs very seriously as they collaborated with each other to find solutions. The participating high school students were all awarded a certificate of participation for the remarkable work they had done as delegates of the countries they were assigned. They had an inspiring and productive day.



High School delegates to the mini-Model UN at Mercy College

The event was attended by several members of the UNA Board, the AKA Sorority and the Links, Inc. The latter group, led by Jackie Boucher, had been instrumental in bringing the enthusiastic participants from Woodlands High School.

One thing that the students learned from this experience was that the mini-sim on climate change prepared by the UNA-USA Education program is not sufficient for students to have a good understanding of the way that Model UN and the UN itself work. Claire Heskestad, former UNA Board member and adviser to the UN Club at Sleepy Hollow High School, noted that she had tried several times to use the Mini-sim app with her students for a one-hour classroom session and it was not sufficient. This one-day session, led by members of the experienced Model UN team from Mercy College, was a much more meaningful and valuable experience for her students.

Part of the reason for the better outcome of the full-day session was that the Mercy College students had updated the Mini-sim app on climate change, including the positions of the selected countries. The app did not take into account the Paris Agreement of 2015 and subsequent developments on climate change at the global level.



Mercy College Model UN Team leaders: L to R: Edwin Diaz, Co-chair; Sayra Rafiuzzaman, Co-chair; Michael Levinson, Secretary-General; Kathleen Parrinello, Deputy-Secretary-General

Thus, as UNA and AKA expand this mini-Model UN to other high schools in Westchester, someone will have to update the background information and the selected countries' positions to have a meaningful discussion of the issue. This takes time and cannot be done in a one-hour session. Students need to prepare in advance, at least on their country's position, to make it a useful exercise.