

★ PLUS: UT'S CHAMPION PROFESSORS ★ LISA WAGNER PUTS HER MBA TO WORK FOR WYOMING'S INDIANS ★ ELI WALLACH AT 90 ★

# THE ALCALDE

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# Worldly Wise

## Students bring Model United Nations to UT

★ by Ashwin Kumar



High school students from the Austin area are hosted by members of the UT Model U.N. club each January. In turn, the UT club aspires to travel to collegiate conferences.

**M**OST OF US SPEND OUR TIME FOCUSING ON ISSUES AT A LOCAL LEVEL — our school, our job, our family, and our city. It's easy to lose sight that we also belong to a larger community — the world. Being in this community has required us to be aware of global issues and interact with other members at a global level. Today, this global awareness is increasingly important in a world in which some issues — from gender equality to globalization — can only be dealt with through combined international action.

Model United Nations is a fascinating and authentic simulation of the United Nations' General Assembly and other committees. Model U.N. programs exist throughout the United States, as well as in other countries. Approximately 200,000 high school and college students take part in this program yearly, from participating in classroom discussions to attending regional and national conferences. There are also international conferences, involving students from all over the world, such as The Hague International Model United Nations and the Geneva International Model United Nations.

In Model United Nations, students learn how the real United Nations works through a developed form of role playing. In the program, participants assume the roles of delegates from various U.N. member states and take part in simulated committee sessions. During the simulation, they try to formulate resolutions to solve current international problems and conflicts that the world faces. While

doing so, they gain an understanding of international relations, problem-solving, negotiating, and the art of diplomacy.

To excel as Model U.N. delegates, students must explore the cultural, economic, and political aspects of their assigned country and become familiar with its history and foreign policy. This helps students to resolve conflicts with other countries and gives them a better understanding of how nations must work together to end international conflict and achieve global peace.

For the past 12 years, students from the Central Texas area have been attending a Model U.N. conference held at UT. In 2004, the Model U.N. Club at UT asked to take full ownership of the conference from local high schools. (The conference was started by a previous

Model U.N. club at UT, but eventually had to be taken over by Austin high schools.)

At the 2006 conference in January, nearly 400 students from 16 high schools throughout Texas convened at the McCombs School of Business for two days. The prestige of the event was first displayed at the opening ceremony, held at the Texas State Capitol. An array of speakers welcomed the group, including UT professors Frank Gavin and John Sunnygard, Student Government president Omar Ochoa, Mexican consul general Jorge Guajardo, Judy Sadegh of the U.N. Association's Austin chapter, and keynote speaker Derek Woodgate of The Futures Lab. They provided personal accounts of Model U.N. experiences and gave students fruitful advice for the conference. Woodgate, a highly regarded futurist, gave a thought-provoking presentation on the future of society and the world. Undoubtedly, the highlight of the ceremony was the reading of a letter endorsing the conference from U.N. secretary-general Kofi Annan himself. Annan's letter outlined key issues the United Nations is tackling and encouraged students to overcome their initial differences so as to participate in effective multilateralism.

On the following day, student delegates separated into their individual committees — including the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council, and the International Court of Justice. They spent their time heavily immersed in discussing issues ranging from the current conflict in the Middle East to the assurance of rights for asylum seekers. Delegates successfully passed resolutions in each committee, which will go on to be published in the annual conference book. After spending nearly eight hours in debate, the day ended with the conference's closing ceremony. Students from each committee who showed exemplary performance during the conference were honored with either the highly coveted Best Delegate Award or given an Honorable Mention. It's a

relief to know that the future of our world is in the able hands of such motivated and inspired students.

### **Model U.N. at UT**

For the past few years, the Model U.N. club at UT has been trying to rebuild what was once one of the most successful programs in the nation. Many of the students that are involved are former high school Model U.N.-ers trying to continue their experience at the collegiate level. Other than hosting the CTMUN conference, the Model U.N. Club also raises funds to send UT students to collegiate conferences.

In November 2004, five UT students were given the opportunity to attend the Invitational Model United Nations conference in Washington, D.C., to represent Egypt. Participants for such conferences must pay for the airfare, hotel, and all conference fees. As this becomes a major concern, most of the funding for this trip is either self-paid or is provided by other channels. However, "There is no money for Model U.N. in the University's budget, and it takes two years before any request can be fulfilled," says senior club member Clare Richardson.

The CTMUN conference was designed to help fund trips for UT students to attend conferences. But this money is only enough to send one or two students, while most conferences require at least four or five to comprise a delegation. To overcome this challenge, the club recently incorporated the CTMUN conference and formed a non-profit organization.

The club is about to embark on a tremendous fundraising campaign, as it has been selected to attend the National Model United Nations conference in New York City in April to represent Spain. This is a huge opportunity for the



**Futurist Derek Woodgate addresses conference attendees, while current UT Model U.N. Club president Ashwin Kumar looks on.**

UT club, and its members are looking forward to attending.

The organization hopes to improve and build the Central Texas conference. Enthusiasm at the recent conference showed that students want more time; one day was not enough to fully discuss all the committees' goals. The organization also will be looking for more schools to participate in 2007. The secretary-general for the conference, Sofia Avila, also hopes to build a stronger partnership with the national U.N. Association.

On campus, the club hopes to promote its activities and recruit more students to join. As the conference continues to grow, more students will be needed to help run the organization. They also want to attend more collegiate conferences, including the permanent ones in the fall and spring.

Taking part in a Model United Nations program is an invaluable experience on many levels. It provides students with a sense of the practical applications of international politics and negotiation. They realize the power of public speaking and persuasion. Most importantly, they learn and experience what it takes to be a leader. It is an experience in which all students should have the opportunity to participate.

*Ashwin Kumar is an economics junior and president of UT's Model U.N. Club.*