



# Model citizens

by Holly HARVEY

You don't have to take a trip to New York City to get a taste of what the United Nations is like. Collin College's award-winning Model United Nations program gives students the opportunity to learn about other countries and practice their leadership skills right in Collin County.

"Through the program, students get acquainted with many different cultures and ideologies and they have to learn how to negotiate and consensus-build," said Collin College professor and Model U.N. Director Sonia Iwanek.

For more than 40 years, Model U.N. has been a part of college and university campuses. At Collin College, students become a part of it by taking Iwanek's political science courses. Students are then assigned a country to represent and they begin the task of learning about their country and its goals, challenges, ideology and culture.

"Last year, the students represented Azerbaijan," Iwanek explained. "Representing other countries really gives students a different mindset and sometimes they have to argue for something they personally might not believe in. Fully immersing themselves in the mindset of another region really gives them a better understanding of the world."

After researching their countries, 12-16 Collin College students form a

delegation and head to Model U.N. conferences in New York City or Washington D.C. to compete with hundreds of other students and work to pass mock resolutions.

"You have hundreds of students working together to establish negotiations, get bills passed and handle delicate situations," Iwanek said. "Even with all of their research, students have to use critical thinking and leadership skills to work together and get things done."

Model U.N. is open to all colleges and universities including Ivy League institutions such as Harvard. Collin College has consistently ranked in the top tier. At the last conference, Collin College competed with other U.S. universities as well as universities from more than 30 other countries.

"It's really eye-opening for the students to attend the conferences and realize there are other students like them who are interested in changing things," Iwanek said. "Our students realize that they can compete with anyone."

Last year, the two Collin College teams representing the countries of Yemen and Somalia finished in second and third place and were named an "Outstanding Delegation" as well as "Outstanding Delegates in Committee." There were two eight-member teams; one comprised of returning students who had completed

a Model U.N. conference before and a group of students new to the conference. The two Collin College teams worked together to create policy.

"I wouldn't say that we bulldozed people, but we definitely dominated," Iwanek said. "Even more than working to write bills and pass legislation, students have to stay in the character of someone from their represented country at all times."

Team placement and awards are based on how well the delegations work together and stay in character and negotiate. There are no score sheets and students are monitored and judged the entire time by unmarked judges.

Collin College alumni who have been involved in Model United Nations have gone on to related careers in civil rights activism, law and the United Nations Children's Fund.

"Students always say how much this experience means to them and how it's helped them," Iwanek said. "Even if they go a different path, the skills they learn here translate to other opportunities. So many Collin College students who have been involved are trying to better our world."

For more about Collin College's Model United Nations or other programs, visit [www.collin.edu](http://www.collin.edu). ❖

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