

High schoolers develop global skills at MCC United Nations event

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For the 24th year, Mesa Community College recently hosted high schools from across Arizona at the annual Model United Nations Simulation-Sonoran Desert Conference to help students develop their worldview and global decision-making abilities and expand their research, writing and problem-solving skills. | Source: Mesa Community College

For the 24th year, Mesa Community College (MCC) recently hosted high schools from across Arizona at the annual Model United Nations Simulation-Sonoran Desert Conference to help students develop their worldview and global decision-making abilities and expand their research, writing and problem-solving skills.

The two-day conference was attended by 320 students from 26 public and charter high schools in multiple school districts, said Brian Dille, Ph.D., MCC Political Science and Social and Behavioral Sciences faculty. Dille has been consistently involved in the program since the first conference in

1999 when he first served as a volunteer. Today he oversees the conference, topics and student preparation for the event.

"I never left the program," he said.

Dille works with high school advisors to recruit high-performing students for the conference and pre-event workshops where they learn how to improve their skills in writing papers, doing research and public speaking.

"This is to ensure that students come prepared for the experience. Often students aren't prepared for how focused they need to be to benefit from the conference," Dille continued.

"This is an intensive program in which our student 'delegates' learn about global issues and affairs, diplomacy and negotiation," he explained. "Students representing select countries are given particular issues and challenged with creating viable solutions for these issues. They must have the capabilities to explore and analyze these issues and write a compelling paper offering their solutions," he added. "Our goal is to provide a rare learning experience for tomorrow's diplomats, community leaders, social workers, engineers or whomever these students choose to become."

The event has also evolved into a successful recruiting tool to generate student registrations at MCC.

"This year's event changed the minds of several students who said they planned to attend MCC instead of the school at which they initially intended to enroll," said Dille.

This year's theme centered on promoting the global status of women. Some of the session issues included Women and Sustainable Development, Protecting Against Gender Violence, Women in Peacekeeping, Access to Healthcare, Climate Refugees and Racial Discrimination, among others.

The conference agenda consisted of two days of sessions preceded by a presentation by a student secretary general and a plenary speaker who is typically a community leader, retired diplomat, non-profit director or a scholar. This year's speaker was Arizona Rep. Lorena Austin (D-Legislative District 9), an alumna of MCC and Dille's former student.

Newly added to the 2023 conference was a world press simulation in which student "reporters" observed the various sessions, interviewed student delegates and wrote news stories that were posted to Twitter (as simulations). The student reporters in the sessions wrote their stories from a regional point of view to reflect the biases of the regions they covered. During this exercise Dille said the delegates also learned to use the media in a way that benefited their agendas.

Among the volunteers who work with Dille to produce the event and who share his passion for the program is conference co-advisor Ryne O'Reilly, an MCC alumnus, staff member in the MCC Student Life Office and a 12-year conference volunteer.

"It's so rewarding to see high school students meet the challenges of the conference," O'Reilly said. "You can see them gaining confidence with every step in the process."

Dille agreed.

"Students develop an appreciation for how difficult it is to find solutions. It's hard to find one that everyone agrees with. Even harder today is to talk across differences," he pointed out. "Watching them do the hard work to find consensus gives me hope for the future."

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