

“The Club That Changed My Life”

Delaram Takyar, The Persian Powerhouse, BHS 2011, Harvard 2015

Flashback.

I’m wearing my favorite red button-down shirt. It’s supposed to bring me good luck. My hands are slightly trembling and my carefully memorized speech is slipping through my fingers. I don’t want to do this. I don’t want to be here. I’m a sophomore in high school, sitting in my very first committee session, and my nerves have taken over. For weeks I have been writing and editing my bill. I have practiced my speech in front of the mirror, in front of my parents, in front of my four-year-old brother. I hear my name called, and I walk to the front of the room. I begin my speech and my voice shakes. I speak too fast. But once the debate starts, once the other delegates bombard me with questions, attempting to make me stumble, that’s when I find my confidence. I fight for my bill because I believe in it. I look around and I see that it is not my words that convince my committee, it is my confidence. For close to an hour there are questions, amendments, and speeches against my bill. I am frustrated, but I am determined. I give one final speech. And then it’s time to vote. I hesitatingly glance around the room. “All in favor of passing ‘An Act to Mandate Paid Maternity Leave’ raise their placards” and the hands shoot up. Not a single person in opposition. ***I’m a sophomore in high school, sitting in my very first committee session, and I have found confidence. I have found conviction.***

Flashback.

It’s past midnight, it’s raining, and I’m walking around a hotel just outside of Princeton, New Jersey. I’m with my best friend. We have been walking for an hour now, talking about our lives, laughing and sharing memories. Tomorrow, we will wake up at 8 AM, take a shuttle to the Princeton campus, and compete in our first moot court tournament as partners. We’re not talking about that, though. We’ve spent hours practicing. We have prepared for this weekend. Now we try to be calm, we try to ignore our nerves. We’re ready, we reassure each other. ***I never competed in a varsity sport in high school. I didn’t identify as an athlete. But I knew what it meant to be part of a team. I knew because Caitlin taught me. I found the meaning of “team” in her reassuring look after I was sure we lost our first round. I found it when I was sick at the beginning of the tournament and Cait hugged me and told me that she still believed in me. I found it in our synchrony, when the judge commended us on our balance. I found the meaning of “team” two days after that walk in the rain, in Whig hall at Princeton University, when Cait and I held hands, closed our eyes, and waited to hear the results of the final round. I found it in the tears in our eyes when we accepted our trophy. In our shared laughter and triumph. I found my team when I found my best friend. And I found my best friend when I joined Model Congress.***

Flashback.

I’m in a conference room in the Hyatt Hotel in Washington. For the next four days I will act as a member of the Supreme Court. For someone who aspires to enter the world of constitutional law, this is a dream come true. Along with 8 other “justices” I will help rule on the most pressing judicial matters of our time. We will make decisions about free speech at funerals, about Miranda rights, restrictions on violent video games, and the meaning of marriage. I want to spend the rest of my life doing this. Our debate starts with a simple question, “do we need the Bill of Rights?” ***I have known that I want to pursue a career in law for a few years now. But it is in this moment, in the millisecond that it takes me to react to another delegate’s suggestion that the Bill of Rights is superfluous, it is in that second that I find my passion.*** When I turn to him and in an effusive outburst rant about the importance of liberty, ***it is in that moment that I realize; I want to spend the rest of my life doing this. I have found passion.***

Flashback.

It’s almost 6 PM on a Friday night. The school is empty except for a few students finishing up sports practices and waiting for rides home. I’m sitting at my locker and I glance across the senior balcony. There is a single light on in a classroom. I’m not surprised. That light is always on, because that teacher is always working. In the book, *The Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch makes a comment about hard work that has always inspired me. He writes, “I got tenure a year early. Junior faculty members used to say to me: ‘What’s your

secret?' I said: 'It's pretty simple: call me any Friday night in my office at ten o'clock and I'll tell you.'"

This is what I think about as I walk to Petela's room. I walk in and as always he's sitting at his desk, a billion to-do lists spread out in front of him, busy writing away. He looks up. "Takyar! What are you still doing here?" I laugh. I have lost count of the number of times I have walked into this classroom. Happy, sad, discouraged, exhilarated. I always find inspiration. It's not just the plethora of books in every corner, the motivational quotes, or the photos filled with memories. It's the teacher behind them all. The teacher, who for three years now, has shown me the value of hard work. The teacher who has reassured me when I have been concerned about the prospect of college decision letters. The teacher who always has confidence in me when I am ready to give up. Petela has given every student who has walked into his classroom a gift. It is not the gift of a good grade, comfortable couches, festive Christmas decorations or Academy-award winning films (though, of course, he has given us those as well). It is the gift of inspiration. ***On any given night I know I can walk into room A23 and find my favorite teacher, working hard at his desk, ready to offer advice and inspiration, yet again. That is the secret. And it is for that, Petela, that I want to thank you.***

Flashback.

Today is a sad day. After three years of attending conferences, writing bills, giving speeches, and debating at practice sessions, our time has finally come. ***It is the day of the Model Congress banquet. Our final MC event as high school seniors. Today is a sad day.*** Everyone gathers in the auditorium. I have given hundreds of speeches. I have learned to overcome my nerves. I know how to speak confidently. And yet somehow, on this night, just before I begin, my mind goes blank. I'm filled with sadness. My voice cracks. And then, out of the corner of my eye, I see a familiar face, smiling and snapping yet another photograph. I nod and begin to speak. ***My last Model Congress speech ever.***

Fast forward to November 6, 2011.

I'm on the highway between New York and Boston. We've been driving for close to two hours, and my teammates in the car are all slowly drifting to sleep, exhausted after a difficult weekend. ***I'm on my way back from my first college mock trial tournament and I'm writing my model congress reflection. I'm writing it six months after graduating from high school. This is unconventional, I know. But I have gained a perspective now that I didn't have at the time of graduation.*** I left high school exhilarated by the opportunities that awaited me. I was excited by the idea of attending college, making discoveries, and creating a new life for myself away from home. The thought of leaving did not sadden me. ***And yet somehow, 6 months later, there are tears streaming down my face. I'm writing my Model Congress reflection, and the memories are overwhelming me.*** I am remembering the first time I spoke in a full session, in front of 200 people. Making new friends over lunch at Louie's during Yale Model Congress. Receiving my first gavel at Columbia. Leading practice debate sessions as a senior. Seeing pieces of myself reflected in the new members of the club. I am remembering saying goodbye. I am remembering thinking that a chapter of my life had ended.

I heard my voice for the first time in college. I had never really heard it before. I heard it at two in the morning, when I turned to my roommate and burst into a passionate tirade about individual rights. I heard it during my American Constitutional Law class, when I cited Supreme Court precedents and argued the importance of free speech. I heard it when I fervently discussed politics and election outcomes with my friends. I heard it at my first Mock Trial tournament. I heard it sitting in the dining hall around midnight, talking about education reform. ***And somewhere along the way, I realized that this voice hadn't always been mine. I did not used to speak with this conviction, with this confidence. This was the voice that Model Congress gave me.***

I do not miss high school. I love being a college student. But sitting here, six months later, looking back, I do miss late-night committee session. I miss parliamentary procedure, and nerdy Model Congress jokes. I miss midnight bowling and seeing the Blue Man Group perform. I miss debating politics, and being Moot Court partners with my best friend. I miss seeing the flash of a camera in the room just before I'm about to give a speech. I don't miss high school. ***But I do miss Model Congress, the club that changed my life.***

Delaram Takyar, BHS MC President 2011, attended 12 conferences winning an amazing 5 gavels & 1 hon. mention. She won the Princeton Moot Court Tourney w/ Caitlin O'Neill in 2009, was Runner-up 2010. At the world's 2nd greatest university Huhverd, Takyar plans to major in social studies w/ sights on law school, hopefully Yale, the world's #1. I would not be surprised one day to see her seated on the bench of the Supreme Court. At Harvard, Takyar is on the mock trial team, is a jr staffer for HModelCongress Boston, HMC SanFran and HMC-Europe as well as a member of the HMC mentoring board. Needless to say, our fifty+ bhsmer's goin to HMC in Feb. will be well taken care of and prepared by the Persian powerhouse ☺

“Discovering Who I Am, Who I Want To Be... What I Truly Love”

By Keah Lonergan, President 2010

What Model Congress has given me, first and foremost, is a place where I feel confident, limitless, challenged, and respected. It has given me an outlet to discover and really *do* what it is that I truly love. Model Congress has shown me that debate excites me and motivates me more than anything else I've done so far in my life. I'm willing to work harder to do well than I am for anything else because *I love debate*. Through Model Congress, I have learned to capitalize on both my flaws and my talents. I've always been argumentative, but it wasn't until I had a forum in which arguing was praised that I realized that my tempestuous nature is not a curse but a gift. Since beginning Model Congress, I've grown from having a chronically aggressive attitude to understanding that disagreeing with an idea is not the same as fighting it. Challenging another's opinion is not offensive, rude, or wrong—in fact, it pays them a great respect by insisting they stand on a stronger foundation of reason. Demanding a better explanation does not have to mean demanding an explanation the same as mine; it simply raises the level of logic in the conversation and makes the exchange more valuable. Model Congress has taught me that debate strengthens thoughts and ideas, fosters passion, and helps me find truth.

Model Congress means more to me than I could express, but its significance goes far beyond just the debate aspect. I find this club so meaningful because of the respect and love it has fostered between myself and my peers. I have learned how to deal with all types of people at conferences, but I've also learned how to work well and closely with people by working my fellow presidents. I can honestly say that at the beginning of this school year, the transition from being treated as an adult over the summer to the immaturity of high school life made me extremely unhappy and angry. I strongly considered graduating early, but one of the primary reasons I didn't was that I couldn't stand the thought of not attending all my senior MC conferences. In a sense, Model Congress is what kept me going through the restlessness and frustration of my senior year. I found an oasis in Model Congress because it was the one place in the school where I could be challenged, respected, and given the same kinds of freedoms and responsibilities that I had this past summer. I was treated like an adult, and that means more to me than almost anything else.

I've learned more from Model Congress than I could ever explain—how to articulate my ideas, how to stand up to intimidating situations, the intricacies of foreign policy legislation, the weight capacity of the Sheraton Boston elevators, the effects of sleep deprivation, how to walk in four-inch heels—but there are two lessons this year that stick out. The first was at Princeton Moot Court earlier this year, although the same lesson snowballed until the final Moot Court in the Spring. Basically, I had set my goal for the conference just to make it to the quarterfinals, so we would beat the round we got eliminated in the last time. But when my partner and I continued advancing all the way to the final round, I started to believe in myself much more. I realized, in a way, that if I can actually believe that I am good at something or capable of achievement, I can do it. It's a clichéd lesson that became a reality as I went on this year to win double awards at Princeton (including a gavel from a MC, which I had never before attained) and a 1st-place win at the spring Moot Court tourney. The second lesson was at a practice session, when I was helping some underclassmen draft bills for Columbia. I was getting inwardly frustrated by their carelessness in bill writing, but I came to understand something very important about myself. Interacting with underclassmen this year has mirrored something I should have realized when interacting with upperclassmen in past years: that I often have unrealistic expectations of people. Though this isn't the most attractive quality in a person, it's an important lesson that I will take into account in other aspects of my life.

I realized that this year has been the best yet. I hope it only gets better, but even if this was the (gasp!) peak, I could be satisfied. Because this past year has included everything I really want out of life: a challenge, the avoidance of hunger, sickness, and bad haircuts, good music, the promise of something radically different next year, and the unconditional love and support of a few extraordinary people. Model Congress has made high school not just tolerable, but enjoyable. And that in itself is practically a miracle for someone as much of a product of this deplorably apathetic generation as I. Thank you.

I have appreciated my presidency because it has given me an opportunity to impart the knowledge and wisdom four years of MC has given me on younger students, which I have found very rewarding. As a chair, I tried my best to be fair but firm. I know I pushed certain students out of their comfort zones at times, but I firmly believe that this is necessary to ensuring success at conferences. I tried to be supportive of both my peers and younger kids, especially when they were first getting their feet wet, but I also wasn't afraid to correct them when they were wrong or make suggestions for improvement. I really liked showing the underclassmen how to write bills and brainstorming topics with them because I got to add my own

shadow of experience on everything I helped them with. I know what it's like to struggle to find a topic, so it was nice to help kids find one that they are passionate about. As a sophomore, I kind of figured out my own method for bill writing, and it felt good to pass it along to younger kids who had yet to develop their own process for writing a thoughtful, thorough bill. Beyond just the moments where I had a claim to legitimate authority (prep sessions, the concert, chaperoning at Yale and Columbia, overseeing the PMoot bus home), I feel the biggest way I've contributed is by setting a positive example for the younger kids and continually expressing my passion for and dedication to the advancement of the Model Congress program. I have put so much of myself into this program because I really believe it is the best, most rewarding, challenging and educational activity available to the BHS community.

Advice for underclassmen:

Voice Your Opinion -- Either in committee or prep sessions, the most important thing you can do is participate by actively speaking and paying attention. There is never an excuse not to speak. If you don't understand something, ask a question. If you don't like something, say why. If you do, say why. If you don't know, make a speech about that. At the very least, you can always say that a bill is either overly vague or unstructured or it is too specific and structured.

The most important thing is to form an opinion and voice it, even if it is an incomplete or preemptive opinion. One of the most important things to learn from debate is that if you do not express your opinions, you cannot properly see the flaws in your own logic or the prejudices they contain. If you do not speak, your ideas will not progress beyond the confines of your own mind—and that means your ideas will not change. The single most important lesson from debate is to open your mind so you can change your mind. There is no honor in a static mind.

Respect -- There are many people in the world who you will not like. There are many who you will find stifling and intolerable. There are some who are downright mean. Too bad. Work with them anyway. Treat them with dignity. You have to give respect to earn respect, and you cannot function well in any setting without feeling respected. This is true especially for Model Congress, where bold opinions are expressed. Don't be a hungry wolf. Don't deliberately incite discord—it inhibits the level of debate where you will actually start to learn something about yourself and change your ideas. Understand that you can respect a person without liking them, agreeing with them, or understanding them.

Passion -- If you care about something, you'll want to work harder to do it well. Use this. Direct your time and efforts toward things you care about. There are many times in life when it is necessary to control our emotions (see Respect, above), but we can also use our emotions to fuel our efforts in other areas. Choose committees where you will be interested in the bills, and write bills on topics you feel a strong personal or moral connection to. Speak passionately in committee. People can tell when you are speaking from the heart, and it makes them listen. Never just copy a bill, because then the bill doesn't have any of you in it and you don't have any of the bill in you. You can't speak as passionately about something you didn't work for. When you work hard for something you care about, its success is all the more meaningful.

My fondest memories of high school, by far, involve Model Congress. I cannot help but smile ☺ [sic-petela insert] every time waking up with a neck cramp brings me back to sharing a bed with three girls in Model Congress hotel rooms. I know the first all-nighter I pull in college, I will be energized by the memory of that fateful night at Harvard, whispering like fugitives while working out an argument for our emergency case, only later to find the wall separating our team from our opposition was nearly sound-proof. How could I ever forget learning to iron at 3:00 in the morning, or spending more time in heels than I ever have? Four years ago, I was not so close with my fellow Model Congress senior peers. They were annoying, they were immature, and they seemed comfortable acting their own age! It took me nearly half of my high school career to realize that these were the very attributes that we fundamentally shared, and which made us excellent candidates for teamwork and friendship. I truly love these people more than anyone else in the school. Model Congress has bonded us together in a way I am positive that nothing else possibly could. Even when we wake up in the middle of the night and toss each other unceremoniously off the bed or smack our bedmate in the face while calling them names of varying vulgarity, I have an abiding love for them. Even when I make an epic mistake in court, they forgive me. And even when we annoy the living hell out of each other, yelling "I'm so sick of you!" we make up almost immediately and go back to laughing hysterically.

I have spent over 38 days of my life on MC trips, and yet it's not enough. I don't want it to be over. My best memories from high school almost exclusively involve Model Congress. Model Congress has been instrumental in discovering who I am and who I want to be. I know I will never stop debating, and I know the countless lessons I've learned will stay with me for a lifetime. I am more grateful for the existence of this program that I know how to express. I am infinitely thankful for the gifts of debate, friends, and the splendor of success and camaraderie that I have found through this program, and I will carry them with me for the rest of my life.

Keah attended 12 conferences, winning 7 Awards (5 Sr year--2 Gavels & PMoot Tourney Winner). She has deferred admission to the University of Toronto to travel and volunteer in South America for a year, after which she will go to Toronto to major International Relations or Ethics, Society and Law. She is one of our best, ever. My bet for her future – lawyer, activist, Nobel Prize Winner ☺



Lonergan Hobbs -- Petela & The Legends, Princeton Moot Champs 2010 -- O'Neill Takyar

“A Mighty Gift. This Club Can Work Miracles...”

By Caitlin M. O'Neill, President 2010

I want to start with a recent experience. I had been asked to give a presentation on Invisible Children on the first Saturday in June this year. We (JVenegas and I) made a PowerPoint for the presentation, but after fussing with the computer for a while, it froze, just as everyone filed in to see us present. We had to present extemporaneously. As I was doing so, I realized just how much I had grown in four years: I never could have presented off the cuff like that even three years ago! And I know there is only one reason I ever learned to speak comfortably in front of an audience: Model Congress. As a ninth grader, I was eager to try new things but pointedly withdrawn before older students or adults—this club has enabled me to become a confident person capable of fending for herself and presenting herself well before a group or another individual. These skills also proved valuable during my college interviews this winter. I have learned that what I have to share with those around me is worthwhile. I don't consider it an exaggeration to say that Model Congress has been the single best all-around experience of my life thus far because it truly has been here for me during my years of greatest growth. I have been a delegate at 11 conferences over the years and they have all provided me with opportunities and experiences I couldn't have gotten elsewhere.

This year in particular I have been able to advance as a debater at the PMoots and Harvard. I have won five awards this year alone—something I never would have predicted or believed possible last spring. I regret not finding my niche in Model Congress sooner—I'm sure you'll agree with me when I say partners' debate is my strong suit. I may be the only senior President to have attended all of the conferences over my four years (since we only went to SanFran once), and I can say with certainty that I feel most comfortable debating with a partner at my side. Presenting individual bills for debate never excited me much. Despite that, I also found several other modes of debate which I liked: Harvard's larger committees where bills are made through compromise and large group work, and Harvard's District Court. To speak of the former first, I think it is quite interesting that my first conference as a delegate was in one such 60 person House Committee and that I was terrified to speak at all! Yet, there I was again, a year later at Harvard SanFran in a room of 50, able to debate, bolster the speeches of my fellow delegates, and win a gavel. District Court was an entirely new endeavor for me this year—not as much like moot court as I'd first assumed. I acted in the capacity of an attorney and a witness, each for two trials, and acutely felt the stresses of both roles. I don't think such group work is necessarily my forte because I was often holding my tongue when it wasn't my turn to speak yet I wished to jump in. I didn't enjoy the uncontrollable aspect of DCourt—not knowing if your teammates will make their points successfully and be prepared for whatever might come. The hardest night of the trip was without a doubt our midnight case—first because we received it so late; then because we had to work on it, both teams, on either side of the connecting door; and because it was scheduled to be presented early the next morning. CLiu and I stayed up for the majority of the night to ensure that we would actually wake up the next day, dozing for only about half an hour when everyone else zonked out. Presenting against our fellow BHS MC-ers was an odd experience; our team had taken BLEvy as a seventh team member for the case, which effectively made it harder to ensure all were prepared because of the way the lawyers had to split their jobs up. It is always hard to compete against friends and have everyone feel so passionately about their side of the case (especially if everyone is sleep deprived) but I am pleased we were able to see each other debate and act as attorneys and witnesses. I think it is very different and beneficial to view people outside of their regular personas, as we were able to do. Following that day, I slept and slept and slept and still felt the lapse in sleep (the price to pay for winning awards perhaps?).

Anyway, I want to discuss some of the highlights, positives, annoyances, and other notable times I have had the ability to live this past year through Model Congress. I've already mentioned my sleep deprivation at Harvard this year, but I don't think I've sufficiently covered the great pleasure I got out of being on such an intimate trip with the other seniors. It was a lovely way to spend the weekend and I thank you so much for allowing us the privilege of attending as I know the stress of having two conferences at once must have been high. My closest friendships have been cemented and tried by Model Congress over the years, and I truly think that through cramped hotel rooms, buses and plane rides, and debating opportunities I have found people I can always rely upon. Having friendships capable of weathering the ups and downs, the competition and partnership, is an invaluable gift for me. I cannot express how immensely such trials have impacted me, especially this past year. Nicole and I have become so close since last year's moot court. In her I have found a reliable, intelligent, calm and measured friend able to balance my occasional bursts in reasoning or non-reasoning. She has definitely been my senior buddy throughout all our meetings, jobs, and decisions. Next, I know all of my Harvard teammates much better, have seen their strengths and weaknesses, and also, to be specific, experienced the captivating performance of Patricia Liu as a mesmerizing witness and a confidence-sharing roomy with Catherine Liu, Rachael Cassella and me. One of the best things Model Congress has taught me has been to forgo determining what an individual is capable of because the minute you decide, he or she will surprise you.

Aside from these great friendships, I have one more for which I owe an enormous gratitude to you specifically. When I contacted you last summer asking about an independent government class, you told me about Delaram Takyar, the junior planning some craziness about taking two independent APs in the areas I was interested in. From there, it all just sort of fell into place, with the two of you convincing me that taking AP US Gov't with AP Comparative Gov't couldn't be that much more work so "why not just take both and see what happens?" Well, the result has been an amazing friendship and two phenomenal Moot Court competitions! Thank you for pairing us together and bearing with all the anti-photo, hyper-excitement, crazy endeavors we have undertaken this year. (Hopefully our balancing acts will pay off with decent exam scores in July, fingers crossed!) I think it is fair to say that Delaram has always been a superb debater, but I think that she is now truly ready to take on the responsibilities of a leading senior. I know that I am relinquishing my participation in Model Congress to a group of competent, dependable, award-winning-and-potential-for-more members. Though that doesn't lessen the difficulty I feel in concluding my high school Model Congress experiences, it does allow me to do so without undue worry that you'll be searching for help next year.

Next I want to speak briefly about the Moot Courts I attended this year. The fall Moot was tough because of the sickness going around, but was a great chance for me to once again become attuned to the needs of a partner and learn to speak fluidly with another. Spring Moot was an experience unlike any other—I absolutely loved the fact that the competition was hard and challenging from the first round on! It did make us feel beat upon at times, but it also made the tourney so much more trying, interesting, and enjoyable! (Also note that I may be alone in saying all this but I really did feel myself benefit from the microscopic viewing window utilized by all the judges.) Having Kenny Alter FLOWN in especially to judge was incredibly intimidating. (And his obvious arrogance still nettles me but...!) That round marked the greatest and deepest thinking on morality and justice I embarked upon throughout the entire tourney—and probably for several months surrounding the tourney! It was what I would later consider a highlight but in the moment considered only a horribly unfair and terrible experience. It left me feeling inadequate and unable to reason—but also led me to feel like I had actually used my brain for twenty minutes and put some difficult questions to it. The conference hit home the mantra 'expect the unexpected' because I never expected such tough, astute, questioning judges and competitors. The level of competition at the spring Moot Court was intensely amazing and I am so grateful that my ultimate time as a delegate & debater was connected to such exceptional rivals and impressive rounds of debate. (I was oppositely stumped by the overall silence of the judges during the final round because they sent so few questions to either side. They tripped us all up a bit with that...)

I watched the movie "A Beautiful Mind" the other day and there is one line in particular which really struck me as important: "Conviction is a luxury of those on the sidelines." I have often felt conflicted by right and wrong—but Model Congress has taught me not to be content to sit on the sidelines of life despite the questions which come with action. I know that a lack of action often yields nothing but stagnation, and I have learned I would rather act and fumble than wonder about the maybes forever after. Conversely, Model Congress has taught me a bit about temperance when dealing with several different personalities and opinions. I think I've become rather well-rounded in my dealings with people and situations, determining the best course for each.

I have a great deal of respect for my fellow presidents because I think we each juggled immensely complicated and crammed full schedules this year. Yet we all seemed to also be able to devote time to Model Congress, often making it the week's priority to chair the meetings or critique an underclassman's bill or attend a conference as a chaperone. I didn't need to be the chair holding the gavel or making all the speeches, but I greatly enjoyed demonstrating proper rules and listening to members improve over time. I will miss being in a mentor-type position with the underclassmen because I think it benefited me as much as it ever might have benefited them. I tried to lead by being myself, quietly authoritative in meetings,—and through my debating example at Princeton Moot Court (especially for the freshmen attending). I might not have been the warmest or most enthusiastic mentor of us all, but I do hope that my example and my style of passing on knowledge positively impacted someone. I remember a feeling of awed respect for some of the accomplishments of the seniors when I was a ninth grader, and I hope I have provided an example to be likewise aspired towards, met, and maybe even exceeded by some worthy future President.

So what have I given MC you ask...Well, I have given my time, through many nights introducing the new freshmen members to the basics of debating, working with those going to conferences on bill writing, and then chairing the committees. I have given my smiles and love, for all the new members who made their first nervous speeches, for the returning members who misspoke during their speeches, for the silly and serious sides of each Model Congresser, for my fellow Senior Presidents, and for my growing friendships with underclassmen and talented juniors. I have given my voice

and my poise to debate and share my passion with the up-and-comings (having first gained those skills through MC). I have given my skills at photo collages and resizing pictures (regrettable weak compared with certain other presidents, but then again, having a variety of talents among us is also something quite important haha). I have given weekends filled with travel and picture taking and excitement. I have organized papers in envelopes (after a little coaching☺) and at times acted as the contact between you and the other presidents on meeting times. I have helped set up for and clean up from the Concert. I typed up & compiled the preliminary 'presidential tip sheet' for the underclassmen. I gave all my free time from the fall play to chaperone Yale MC, walking with sophomores to committees, sitting to tape full sessions, and applauding for the award winners at closing ceremonies. I attended the approval BOE meeting in October for the fall conferences and the dinner at La Luna in February to explain Model Congress and reinforce our appreciation for donations. I have given prestige through our trips to Princeton Moot Court, bringing home first place twice and second most recently. I spent Columbia MC as a chaperone, visiting committee rooms, again taping bits of full sessions, and corraling in Times Square. I gave time working with the freshmen on their moot court case, attempting to ready them for the tourney. I also gave my permission for my mom to chaperone several trips this year, the most crucial being Harvard MC, where all attending acted with the respect, restraint, and talent required to trust fourteen students on a trip without their primary advisor (thank you Petela!). I am leaving Model Congress one of my dearest friends, all trained up you might say to fill the shoes we will be leaving behind and—with the other future presidents—perhaps capable of surpassing us (but that remains to be seen haha). I have always tried to be available to help whenever necessary. However, all that I can say I have 'given' Model Congress pales before what Model Congress has provided me with.

To any and all underclassmen: I advise involvement. Become as involved in this club as possible because, if you allow it to suck you in, it will transform your life. I have become confident in myself and my talents through my experiences with **Model Congress and that is a mighty gift. This club can work miracles if** you devote yourself to its improvement and continuation. I challenge you to read the newspaper, inform yourself on world events, talk about substantial things with your friends, take a chance and stand for something, refuse to make drama where it isn't needed, keep your confidences, and step up to meet your own potential. Model Congress has meant friendships and happiness and struggles and excitement to me—and I know I am not alone in being so affected. Take advantage of the tremendous opportunities available through the patience, persistence, and perseverance of Petela. I caution future leaders to not fall victim to a feeling of entitlement or inflated greatness because it can mar and distort your ability to successfully impact underclassmen and share a wonderful experience with other MC members. Don't let your past record or limits define what you do today. If Petela gives you a shot at a conference or an officer ship, don't screw it up. You'll only find regrets that way. Where you start is not where you end: it all depends on your effort and commitment. Oh, and most importantly: **thank Petela for everything** you can remember because, without a doubt, you probably still don't remember or recognize everything he has done for you.

Petela: I want to thank you for my wonderful college recommendation—you have helped ensure my future schooling in a very concrete, important way. Thank you for agreeing to be the advisor for my government classes and for all the trust you have given me this past year especially. Thank you for documenting each step and conference of my high school years because those photos will allow me to reflect on these experiences years into the future as clearly as I can now. Model Congress, as I hope this reflection shows, will follow me into college and guide my future. Thank you for continuing to lead this program; it is singular in its level of inclusion, in the passion it can instill in its members, in the opportunities it affords and in the growth possible through it. I am not sure how you manage to take us to so many conferences each year without going insane—but I am infinitely indebted to you for continuing to do so because it has truly made my high school years as significant and special as they have been. I admire all the care and attention you take in planning our trips and I hope some of the recognition we are leaving as a legacy helps to justify and prove exactly how amazing Model Congress is and how much opportunity it provides its members. Thank you for listening to my opinions and for never revealing your own (☺☹☺!). Thank you for your patience and for the high standards you have held me to. Thank you for making me appreciate smile faces. I appreciate all the guidance, support, and humor you have shared with me throughout my high school career and promise I will keep in touch and most likely visit whenever possible!

Caitlin attended 11 conferences, winning 8 Awards including 4 Gavels & two 1st place PMoot Court Tourney victories. She has been one of our most dedicated and award winning members, ever ☺ She will be missed very very much ☹ Caitlin will be a Blue Devil attending Duke University next fall, most likely majoring in History, Anthropology, or Pre-Law.

Model Congress Was My Liberation... And That One Word...

Vinny Roca, Prez 2013, Boston College 2017

"It's a club for rich kids" she said. I stared back with an uneasy expression on my face. I wanted to tell her that I bought my first blazer at Goodwill and saved for months to have some spending money for each trip; but I didn't, it was too difficult of an argument to make. What people see front the outside is that we wear suits or dresses, eat at fancy restaurants, and debate politics; all things one tends to associate with money. I could not blame her for believing this. She didn't know of scholarships I received and the sacrifices I had to make. From this one conversation, however, I couldn't help but think, how many students believe this about MCongress? How many assume it is solely a club for the rich elite of Branford high school? And more importantly, how many students stopped themselves from joining Model Congress because the idea of paying \$600 for a weekend of debate is just undoable?

Knowing now of the tremendous amount of support Model Congress provides to its students, it's hard to imagine that, like this girl, I once believe that money would stop me from joining Model Congress. The prices seemed daunting, and the reward seemingly too little. I wish that young, naïve freshman, sitting in that first general meeting for this new club, didn't stop reading those tri colored, stapled, packets of paper as soon as he saw the bolded and underlined numbers \$250, 500, 600. And I wish, instead of thinking, "Well maybe Model Congress isn't for me," I had looked down a little bit more and saw that one word, **That One Word that would make the difference in this younger me's life**; changing him from a student who went through the motions of high school, feeling unworthy of a higher intellectual life, to one who would become engaged and enraged by the news, sacrificing sleep to read innumerable articles on the AIDS patient crisis, the greed of Big Business and Big Pharmacy, and brought to tears by a speech made by a young girl from Palestine who hopes that one day maybe her country and Israel will reach peace. This one version of me would never have found existence if it wasn't for That One Word, **Scholarships**.

Reflecting back now, I think where would I be, who would I be, if it wasn't for the generosity of many that made my journey with Model Congress possible, affordable, from my first trip to Yale and all the ones thereafter, that also involved emotional and financial struggles and sacrifices. This struggle surpassed the material world of not having, and manifested itself into a feeling of unworthiness. Moving from East Haven to Branford many years ago is where this struggle seems to have begun, but I have Model Congress to thank for its destruction. **A laborer among the intellectuals, a poor kid among the rich, however it is phrased, I know Model Congress, for me, brought an end to these class distinctions and brought forth a feeling of worthiness.**

When I sat down in my first committee session at Yale Model Congress, I was sitting in a classroom that made no sense to me. The wooden walls, carved and molded, seem too nice to be used for only the practical purpose of a wall. The desks, wooden as well, were filled with graffiti of the students who graduated and became politicians and physicians. The desks, too, I thought, were too well crafted, too much money invested in them to be used for the simple use of a mere classroom. I felt they shouldn't be there and that I shouldn't be seated in one. They should, I believed, be in a museum, representations of times gone by. But instead I was doodling on a piece of paper, in this historical setting, as I sat, silent and awkward. I felt unworthy in that room. Although only a sophomore, **I had some idea of the people who fill the halls and classes of Yale University**, and I did not believe I was or could ever be one of them. These students had parents who went to college, or so I believed, and were chosen for a life of higher academics. I was an imposter, putting on the façade of an intellectual, as I sat at a table filled with people who could see beyond my disguise. I may have been able to fool the walls and desks, but these students, with their piercing eyes, knew I was not supposed to be there, unworthy of this room; **or at least I thought** they did.

As I stood up to make my first speech, my rubber soled shoes squeaked as I inched my way to the front of the room. My stomach turned, but not from nervousness, it was something deeper. I had spoken in public on many occasions, but this was different. In this room, in that spot, my intellect and esteem would be put to the test. I wish I could say that when I finally took a deep breath and began my speech everything that was creeping underneath my skin vanished. I wish I could say I suddenly began to speak with confidence, but instead, a slur of unintelligible sentences began to pour from my mouth. I painfully continued for a minute, as I stared at confused faces, and when I yielded my time to questions, not a single placard was raised; it wasn't that my speech was irrefutable, but rather, incomprehensible. I was thanked and preceded to rush back to my chair, hoping that I could slowly fade into the background, away from the presence of my failure, my unworthiness. **For the remainder of the conference I sat silently in shame.**

In spite of this event, I continued with model congress. The trips were exciting and entertaining, and I could bare the confusing, brief shame that came with committee sessions. I know now I was **simply refusing to face my feeling of unworthiness, refusing to acknowledge how I felt about myself and what I could become**, but I'm thankful, despite this, I felt the want to attend more conferences. **It was my choice to continue that eventually lead me to attend Penn Model Congress, the conference that would change my views and myself.**

We began debate late on the first night, and I was preparing myself with things to do throughout committee to pass the time as I let those who knew what they were talking about command the room and win the awards. **The first bill was introduced, and the Horace Mann student** walked to the front of the room in a tailored suit that looked more expensive than our family car. His wooden soled shoes click on the floor with a sense of confidence. He **gave his speech with utter clarity and conviction. His bill: An Act to Allow for Racial Stereotyping.** The words he spoke, although so well rehearsed, were dins in my ears; filled with immorality. I was angry, confused. "How could someone say this, believe this?" He ended his speech and the Chair asked for an opposing argument. My hand went up. I remember looking at the placard in my hand, the only one raised, and thinking, "What have I done? That boy was destined for an Ivy League school, there was no way I could follow his speech." I looked at the faces of those around me, and the expressions on their faces all seemed to say the same thing, "You? You're going to try and following him?" But before I had the chance to retract my perceived mistake, the words, **"Yes! Delegate Roca!" filled my ears.** I regretfully stood up, took a breath, walked to the front of the room, and had no choice but to begin speaking. Perhaps it was the flood of emotion that filled my mind as that last delegate gave his speech, but when I began to talk, my mouth began to speak on its own. I felt as though I were outside my own body, letting my mouth do the speaking, recalling news articles, quoting famous politicians from APUS history and giving a speech with a sense of dignity. I look back now and imagine the image of me staring at my mouth with a dumb look on my face, as it just continues to talk for four minutes, but that isn't the truth. I wasn't just my mouth, it was me. The emotions of my inner sense of morality, my conscience, blocked out the feeling that I shouldn't be able to do this, shouldn't be able to give a speech better than a student from Horace Mann. **When I finished and sat down, I stared at my feet, looked at those worn, cheap looking dress shoes that I wore to every conference, and thought maybe I am worthy. I didn't realize then, but this moment would be the one in which my view of the world and myself would change.** The change was not immediate. It happened so organically that, only now looking back, do I realize it was at that very moment where I began to think I was worthy of an intellectual life. Who I am now is directly related to that very moment. **In that moment, at Penn Model Congress, I felt worthy.**

This feeling continues, and will forever continue, as I begin to learn more about myself. I would learn my senior year, as I dove deeper into politics and society, that not all that we think is by our own doing, and much of it is the influence of others. We, as a people, must learn to distinguish our own thoughts and the thoughts of others. My beliefs about who I was, and who I could become, were very much intertwined with the ideas that had been placed on me, ideas I repeated internal as my own. Model Congress allowed me to realize this wasn't only my voice, but the voice of others; **Model Congress was my liberation.**

To change my tone slightly, I like to finish my reflection with a few notes of gratitude and advice. As mentioned above, **I owe who I am today, in part, to all who have ever sponsored the Model Congress Program.** Without this generous support I would have not have been able to pursue Model Congress throughout the three years I participated. If you donated to the club, thank you! And if you don't donate (yet), please considering doing so. Not only will you help to change the lives of students like myself, but you will also be forever immortalized in the wonderful literature that Petela creates.

And to Petela. You are one of the very few people who I most strongly and sincerely thank for who I am now. The nights you spend typing letters, asking for donations, organizing our trips, meetings, concerts etc. are countless. Your dedication to this club is what allows it to not only exist, but to thrive, sending innumerable graduates to top Universities around the globe who become great people in all that they do. **Being President my senior year, was a journey with you and my co-presidents that will forever be a unforgettable part of my life, with all the good, bad, ugly and fun memories!** As president of Model Congress you showed me a world that I had yet to witness. With presidential dinners at the Pine Orchard Club, Mory's, and tours through the halls of Yale, I lived a life that at one time I felt unworthy to be a part of. You opened our eyes and minds to different cultural experiences with your carefully selected dinners and choices of entertainment and guest speakers for each trip. I don't miss high school, with all its structure, rules, and imitations, but I do miss those great MC and presidential trips filled with incredible food, laughter and conversation.

Finally, a word of advice to the underclassman. I know high school is a place of awkwardness and, often times, shyness, but if you know of a friend who doesn't think they could do Model Congress because it is unaffordable, let them know there is help available. Petela will always be able to assist those in need, don't be afraid to stop by and talk to him about your situation. As for committee sessions, I know how easy it is to get caught up in winning awards (and, trust me, I know - Wirtz and Ortiz were my co-presidents) but don't let it consume you. In comparison to what you can gain, they mean nothing. When I won an award, it was a merely a representation of what I gained from the conference. If you care deeply about what you are debating, and give it space to let it move you, your passion for the topic will shine through the words of your speech. Caring about awards is not the same as caring about the reality of what you are speaking about. Even so, I like to tell you that the person who is the most dedicated, and is the most insightful always wins the award, but truly, this isn't always the case (just look how many Ortiz won!). Just speak with confidence and conviction, and if you think that you are awful at Model Congress, you are not. Some people show up the first day freshman year and can speak almost as well as some seniors. Some others, like myself, take time to develop, and as they mature both in and out of the committee room, become powerful speakers. **The only way to succeed in Model Congress, from a more technical and practical approach, is to get up to the front of the room as many times as possible, give speeches that probably sound awful, and trust in the fact that it soon all will begin to make sense and sound convincing.** Believe me when I say that part of the model congress experience is sitting down after a speech and feeling awful about yourself as a human being, humbled. Just know you felt this way, not because you are unworthy, but because you know, deep within, you can and will do much better. So, go forth! Make awful speeches! Make quirky parliamentary procedure jokes! Enjoy the culture the Petela provides, and thank him for all that he does! Your time with Model Congress is short; don't waste a moment!

Vinny was a devoted, loyal and gavel president, a model of humility in a company of some very competitive and not so humble presidents! An artist at heart, with wonderful wit and talent, Roca appreciates the struggles of life, nuances of nature, and is excelling as expected with the Jesuits at Boston College, majoring in art history and studio art, no surprise.

"...I couldn't even begin to imagine high school without it."

By Nicole Hobbs, President 2010

"Focus and grind." "Eyes and teeth." "Game face." My high school experience would not have been complete without hearing these phrases incessantly over the past four years. I am not the same person that I was when I entered high school, and I owe so much of that to MC. Freshmen year I was so quiet and shy that I didn't make any speeches at HMC freshmen year. Seeing the seniors that year was inspiring, and I wanted so badly to be as good as they were one day. Looking back, I have gained so much confidence from MC. If you had told me freshmen year all that I would accomplish by the end of my MC career, I wouldn't have believed you. I have had so many amazing experiences because of MC. I have been able to travel so much and I have had so many great times at all of my MC trips. Better than any textbook could teach me, I was able to see history in action as I read the Gettysburg address inscribed on the walls of the Lincoln memorial, looked in Al Capone's cell in Alcatraz, and walked the same streets of Boston that the founding fathers did during the time of the American Revolution. To pick a favorite memory would be impossible, but the moment that stands out the most from my four years of MC would be winning PMoot my junior year. That was the turning point in my MC career. Each time Caitlin and I advanced to the next round, I was so shocked I didn't even know what to think. I was speechless when they announced that Caitlin and I had won. The nine presidents this year are my best friends and I would not be so close to them without MC. I owe those friendships to this program. I have so many vivid memories of all of my MC trips. While so much of high school feels like a blur: walking to and from class every day, sitting in class, taking notes, discussing homework, all of the MC trips I have been on feel like moments frozen in time. I remember those trips like they were yesterday; when I think back to my high school years MC will be my most vivid memory. Those five-day (sometimes even less) trips stand out in my mind and I can't help but smile at all of the great memories and the friends that I have spent the past four years with. I know that all of the presidents this year have left a legacy; something to which future generations of MCers will aspire. MC has been the most important and the most memorable thing I have done throughout high school and I couldn't even begin to imagine my high school years without it.

Although I didn't win any awards until the end of junior year, since PMoot '09 I won an award at each successive conference. However, I feel that some of the most valuable contributions I have made to this program have been outside of the conferences. Especially this year I feel I have given so much to MC. I have helped stuff so many envelopes this year that I feel qualified to list it as a skill on my resume. I have also helped hang photos and decorate for Christmas, both time consuming, but more fun, tasks. Recently I have helped with the ad for the Sound which has been a very time consuming project...Aside from secretarial things, I feel I have also gone out of my way to help the underclassmen. Between the prep sessions and being there for them at the conferences I hope I have left a lasting impression on the underclassmen and that they feel I have helped them along the way.

To the underclassmen: Enjoy the experience and make the most of it because in the blink of an eye it will be over. Don't be afraid to try something new, whether it's a different committee or special programs. Take the time to enjoy each conference because they are so much fun. Many of my best memories from high school are from MC. Especially for the freshmen and sophomores, know that I was once where you are. I was once afraid to speak in front of the upperclassmen, and that's okay. But you can get over that, gain confidence, and accomplish some really great things through MC if you work at it. You don't have to be great at it right away to be successful; it's something you have to work for. Everyone's experience is going to be different, but find some really great people to spend your four years with because that will make your four years with MC all the more amazing. I don't want to give you too much advice, because you need to make your own memories and find your own way, but don't worry if you become discouraged. There were so many times when I felt frustrated and that I wasn't as good as everyone else, but just take that energy and focus it into something positive. Set a goal and believe that if you work hard enough you can achieve it.

Finally, I'd like to end by saying thank you Petela for everything. Without MC I would not have been given all of the opportunities I have been given and I owe that all to you and all that you do for the program. This year I have really gained an appreciation for all of the hard work that goes into making this program run and smoothly and efficiently as it does and I commend you for that. It is really amazing how much time and effort you put into this program...

Nicole attended 11 conferences, winning 6 awards including 3 gavels and two PMoot Tourney victory Trophies. To my deep delight she will be a Bulldog attending Yale University as a Political Science major and insuring future bhsmyc YMC awards as chair for the Yale MCongress! She is one of our most dedicated and best debaters ever ☺ and she won't be missed because she will be close by☺

"Model Congress Really Is An Empire..."

Jena Greene, MC Prez 2012, Trinity College 2016

BHSMC has given me so much. The one major skill I attribute to MC is my public speaking ability and comfort speaking in front of others. Before my extended time and commitment with MC, I had no idea how to eloquently and properly conduct myself in front of others. I was uncomfortable and unsure of my words. However, after spending much time in the debating rooms, I slowly began to see a process of growth take place. I noticed that I was able to hold and entire room's attention and make my audience believe that my words had merit. I began to learn the fun of being able to convince people that I knew what I was talking about, and it was worth one's time to devote their time and attention to me. **I found that when I was able to properly argue a point and express myself, it felt good and empowering.** A few days ago while I was at my college orientation, I found that I was the most outspoken person in my advising session. I was able to get all of my questions answered, simply because I was unabashed in a new environment. Later, a person of a similar personality asked me if I was interested in law. I told him it was interesting but not a chosen career path of mine. He seemed surprised and told me that I came across so eloquently, and that he could see me in the law department. Though it certainly isn't my first choice for a career path, it's nice to get those compliments and know that 4 years of model congress hard work have paid off.

There have certainly been several amusing instances that can be attributed to my MC experience. It is virtually impossible to describe every hilarious moment that I have experienced with the club because there are simply too many. This year, the hands down best experience of Model Congress was when we went to Princeton. This conference was my absolute favorite. I feel that I debated successfully at this conference and I was able to enjoy myself with a variety of cool, hilarious, and intelligent people, both in other delegations and in my own. Pourmaleki, Carlson, two other boys from a different school, and I were able to go into Georgetown for the day (on the boys' dime) and we got a tour of the entire area. Looking back, we all laugh about how hilarious it was when we had to chase a bus down the street to get back to the hotel on time. We also laugh about the time we attacked Villegas with a sharpie marker on the way home. We laugh about the elevator jams that plagued our floors and made the commute from our floor to our committee rooms interesting.

If Model Congress hadn't existed, my life would certainly be different. I wouldn't have as much drama to worry about, this is true. However, I wouldn't have nearly as many positive memories either. **This club was truly formative and influential in so many ways during my high school years. If not for Model Congress, I wouldn't have met my very best friend, Kelly Laske.** We wouldn't have been able to enjoy the many laughs, tears, worries, and celebrations together. I also wouldn't be as comfortable speaking in front of others. I have done so much during my high school career that's called for public speaking (whether it's a classroom presentation or making a news appearance). **I certainly have Model Congress to thank for my success in public speaking situations, and there will be many more to come.**

This year I like to believe that I have given Model Congress **my cheery and positive attitude.** No, I did not win awards. However, **I wholeheartedly believe that one gains the respect of his/her peers by being knowledgeable and by treating others with respect.** If I had a gavel but treated my peers and delegates-in-training like a tyrant, I don't think I'd get very far. It simply isn't in my nature to hand out unnecessary orders. I believe that the best work is done in a relaxed and nurturing atmosphere. **The ultimate key to success and learning is when everybody feels comfortable and able to speak their mind.** I wanted to encourage an environment of love, humor, and relaxation so we could all get back to basics and work on what truly matters. When I ran rooms, I wanted to eliminate all that made high school so daunting in the first place, e.g. judgement, stress, and pettiness. I don't think this could be measured in quantity. It should speak for itself.

The biggest piece of advice I could possibly give to future MCers is to have fun with your experience. I have lived by this philosophy especially since my world was rocked when I was 10 years old, when my dad died. I realized that life is far too short to worry about the little things. Life is meant to be lived. One shouldn't waste his/her time getting swept up in drama. And the drama is inevitable. As long as you are great, there will always be a critic, somebody waiting to bring you down. Things happen. Some friendships run their course then terminate. This is high school. The key is to remember who you are, what you stand for, and to stick with what you believe, especially during debate. There are much bigger things than high school. If anything, every MCer should remember to keep their head held high, and to enjoy every sweet moment. **The club is what you make of it. You could have the time of your life and become truly engaged, or you could sit on the sidelines and spectate,** MC truly accommodates all.

Last but not least, thank you Petela. We know that you truly do so much for the club, the delegation as a whole, and for each and every individual member. Not one action you do goes unappreciated, you're always helping somebody out. Through all our hard work (especially this year) I truly realized that it takes a lot of work to make this club run. And you make it so much more than a club. **Model Congress really is an empire,** the entire school views it as a powerhouse and a collection of hard workers and brainiacs. I truly feel honored to have been such a large part of this amazing organization. Thank you again Petela.

Jena attended 9 conferences, and was always a cheery and positive force, along with her bf & co-prez Kelly.

A Journey To Find Your Niche... Buckle Up, and Enjoy the Ride...

It will take you to a tremendous place

By Kseniya Shavrova, BHS MC President 2011

Model Congress isn't just a club. It isn't the practice sessions, the bills you write, the committee sessions you attend, or the awards you win. Yes, those all are small parts that comprise the experience. But what you get when you look at Model Congress as a whole is so much more. Model Congress is a vehicle for finding yourself. At least for me it was. This club has accompanied me on a four-year transformation from awkward, over-eager "Super-frosh" to a focused, collected president. It has helped me find my niche, and without it, I would have been utterly lost throughout these high school years.

It took me 3 years to realize that I really hate the traditional committee setting. To be completely honest, I am horrible at it; my bills always seem to have loopholes, and my speeches often don't contain any real facts. Like many of you, I tried to speak often in committee, researched my bill extensively, and even sucked up to the chairs occasionally. But alas, each of the 8 conferences I attended in my freshman to junior year ended the same way: in tears. I began to feel frustrated and devastated as most of my friends won awards while I kept walking away empty-handed. I kept asking "Why not me?" I had wanted this so badly! I even gave myself an ultimatum: either you win an award by the end of your junior year, or you are not attending any conferences next year.

It was the last conference of my junior year, and still no awards. I had already accepted that this was my last conference when they called my name as a Top Attorney winner. That same conference, Engel 73 (Joe and I) advanced to the quarterfinals of the Princeton Moot Court Tournament- farther than either of us expected to make it. Following that experience, I began to realize that "Hey! I like doing this, and I'm actually kind of good at it!" My senior year, I continued with the club, won the Moot Court Tournament in the fall with Billy Irwin and placed 4th in the spring with Ricky Weiss, picking up three Top Attorney Gavels along the way. (Thanks to both of you, by the way, for putting up with my crazy, nervous, and often anal antics! I am extremely lucky have worked with the two of you.) I've still never won an award in a committee session, and probably wouldn't have won any awards if I didn't start competing in moot court competitions.

The point of this story? My first two pieces of advice. First, Model Congress is a journey to find your niche. Embrace the journey by exploring different things! Try different committees, join the Press Corp or participate in the District Court at Harvard, apply for the Supreme Court at Princeton, and find a partner to do P-Moot with. I found my place in being an attorney: Ricky Weiss in District Court: Kelsey Mullane in the Presidential Cabinet; you may find yours in something completely different. Whatever it is, find the thing you are most passionate about and stick to it. I have no doubt that if you do that, you will have the greatest successes in the Model Congress.

But what about the journey to finding this niche: my 3 years of not winning anything? My second piece of advice: never let the award-less conferences get you down. Never give yourself the ultimatum I gave myself. You may not listen to me, because I didn't listen to the presidents before me when they told me I had potential. I didn't believe Petela when after every conference, as I was sulking on the bus, he sent me the text, "Don't worry Shavrova. You'll get one next time. I believe in you, trust me". The disappointment is all a part of the journey, but

don't let it shape your travels; shake it off and move on to the next thing, because you will end up regretting every moment you were sad. I know I do. Know that everyone in the club is here to help you: your classmates, your presidents, and especially Petela. We see your potential, even when you don't.

Model Congress has significantly shaped me into the person I am today, but it can only have as big of an impact on you as you want it to have. For everything I've given to the club, it has reciprocated me tenfold! Throughout my underclassmen years, I have always been eager to help in whatever ways I could; I volunteered at the fried dough booth every year, I helped set up, put packets together for and served food for the concerts and banquets. I attended most practice sessions, and made the most out of the time I was there by speaking often. My senior year, I continued to be committed to attending practice sessions, this time to help write bills, and chair practice sessions. I tried to give underclassmen feedback on their bills and speeches (which I hope you guys found helpful). And of course, my favorite part of helping was chaperoning Yale and Columbia Model Congresses, and becoming mini-Petelas with Hannah Young when he wasn't there to take pictures. I was really happy to see a record number of you helping out at the fried dough booth; keep it up! The club is now in your hands, and it can be as great as you want it to be.

Petela, I cannot thank you enough for everything you've done (but of course, I'll try to now). You believed in me when I was ready to give up. You were the one I trusted to write my college recommendation letter, the one to proof-read my college essay and the one I called the day I needed to decide on a school. You have treated us to countless president-bonding lunches and dinners. You put hours upon hours into organizing the year's trips and fundraisers. Most surprisingly, you put up with, and often laughed at, our ridiculous antics. Thank you, thank you, thank you for all you do for the club, and all you have done for me. I can only hope to make the same type of relationship I held with you with my professors at Boston College.

Underclassmen, my third piece of advice: thank Petela after every conference! Many of us don't realize how much he actually does; he coordinates with the universities to allow 100 of you to attend Yale MC instead of the 30 students most schools bring; he makes reservations for the restaurants we eat at, buys tickets for the Blue Man show, makes an appointment for us to do yoga at Penn MC, schedules the Yale Whiffenpoofs to sing at our school, sends out hundreds of sponsor packets so that students who can't afford to can be a part of this club, and much more. He is the driving force behind this club, and he does so much simply because he cares about all of us. So stop in, say hello, and thank him for all he does. Everyone likes to feel appreciated!

I conclude this part of the journey in my life a more informed person, a better speaker, and someone who truly appreciates the American democratic process. I can say without a doubt that Model Congress has shaped me into this individual. So if you haven't stepped into this vehicle yet, get involved, buckle up, and enjoy the ride. I guarantee it will take you to a tremendous place.

Kseniya Shavrova attended a record 15 MConferences winning an impressive 4 Top Attorney Gavels at PMoot & Harvard DCourt, and one PMoot Court Tourney Victory with Billy Irwin in the Fall 2010. She is currently attending Boston College School of Arts and Sciences Honors Program, and is an attorney on their Mock Trial Team, an impressive feat for a frosh, thanks no doubt to her bhsmc experience! She is one of the all time great focus and grinders, eyes and teeth presidents. Her perseverance is second to none. She is much missed ☺☺☺

My Best and Smartest Decision So Far. No Doubt About It.

Ryan Hackett, MC Prez 2012, Syracuse Univ 2016

Almost every day since I received my acceptance letter into Syracuse in your classroom, decorating for Christmas week with the other mc presidents, I have been forever in debt to Model Congress. Almost every day my dad reminds me how Model Congress got me into college, not literally but consequently. I am forever in debt to the "club." I am forever in debt to you. **Participating in MC for these past four years has undoubtedly turned into my best and smartest decision so far. No doubt about it.** I changed a lot through school but MC has been my only constant, my greatest influence. It has made me what I am today and has created a flame inside that will always shine and never be blown out. Debate and Congress are my callings. Law and politics are what I believe I am supposed to do in the future.

Model Congress has changed many things about me. It changed my work ethic in school, my education drive, my overall knowledge and my interests. Most importantly, it made me more confident. It allowed me to find that famous niche everyone searches for throughout high school. Since October 2008, I felt like I belonged. If my future leads me to where I hope it does, I can always recall my experiences in MCongress in speeches I may make or different resumes I may build. To me, Model Congress isn't just a name, and it's more than a group or program, it's a living, powerful force.

Throughout my Model Congress career, there have been a few downs but mostly ups. I have created almost all of my friends in the group and have gone and done things a very small percentage of high school students get to do. Not many other high school students get to go to D.C., Philly or Boston in the middle of the school year. That is just awesome. But without a doubt, this year and the past four years, the best experience has been Harvard D COURT. Absolutely the best. It felt like everything of my career had finally come together. Our team was masterful and such a variety throughout the 6 of us made everything fun. I was finally rewarded for all the hard work. Everything about that conference was great but to know we were such a dominate force going in and coming out made it even greater. We were a winning team, which is the greatest feeling. The Saturday night dance we sat in the lobby for 4 hours and prepared our case instead of having fun. **We had our own fun amongst ourselves, and after all, we came there to fight not dance.** And we fought and we won. It was so satisfying winning our gavels. So much I learned from those five days I will carry with me for years.

I have given Model Congress so much of myself. I have given MC my passion, commitment and have proved my ability to be relied on. Since freshman year and my application was accepted I gave Model Congress everything I could. As a result, I rose to the ranks of president this year but never stopped. Congress is made up by people for the people. To give to MC I must first give to the people, my peers. I did this by passing my email and phone number to underclassmen and telling them I am always there to help. I did this by always pulling aside other kids after practice sessions to help them and give them feedback. I gave the good and bad of their speeches and participation and continued to see them get better throughout the year. With helping others like this, it is truly the gift that keeps on giving; it's like teaching a man to fish. They continue to get better and this will soon reflect on the rest. What everyone will know and hopefully remember is me being part of the group for the past year. They will know the good and sometimes bad and will know what I have given. They will know I have given more than just giving a man to fish for that one day.

Since the first time I started giving speeches about MC, I have always given the same advice. The usual is having confidence, have fun, put in the time and you will be rewarded. Everyone says that, it's the usual. What my added line all the time is, WHO CARES! Simple as that, who cares. I always say, nobody will remember if you forgot a proper introduction. Nobody will remember if you slipped up on a speech or had a typo on a bill. Nobody will know, maybe a few, and of course yourself, and most likely you'll forget about it. If you dwell, it will ruin your day. So don't dwell. Learn from your mistakes, forget about them and move on. They can only make you stronger and nobody is perfect. So relax, picture them all in their underpants during your next speech, focus, grind, and move on.

Most importantly, however, is something else everyone should remember in Model Congress and in life. That is - enjoy it while it lasts, it goes by way too fast. As does life, high school and Model Congress. It is just a small chapter in the large books all the MC alumni eventually write. Take advantage of every conference you may be able to attend. Take advantage of all Petela is offering to you, or else you will regret your missed opportunities. You can't slow or stop time, so you might as well enjoy it.

When I was accepted freshmen year it was the greatest feeling and I was so excited. And look what has happened now... **a flame was lit inside of me that has been lit for four years now.** It is time to re-create that competition and light more flames. Model Congress should not be guaranteed to anybody anymore and that sense of competition must be felt in everyone. The true debaters will rise. **The true Model Congressmen and women will come forward and will supply the tools to build the house to get it up and to keep it up, hopefully forever.**

Ryan attended 11 conferences winning 4 awards, he is majoring in Political Science at Syracuse.

No doubt he will be a politician that WILL CARE and WILL MAKE a difference.

Hobbs is College Democrat of the Year

PERSON OF THE WEEK

By Pam Johnson JAN. 2014

Sound Senior Staff Writer

For her remarkable work revitalizing the state-wide Connecticut College Democrats (CDC) organization, Branford's Nicole Hobbs has been recognized on the national stage as 2013 College Democrat of the Year.

The Branford High School (BHS) Class of 2010 alumna has no doubt BHS Model Congress (MC) helped her get where she is today.

"I have no idea where I would be today, but I would not be here," says Nicole, a senior-year history major at Yale University.

From her start as a self-described "quiet and shy" BHS freshman, Nicole went on to make MC history, winning the spring Princeton Moot Court gavel as a junior (with partner Caitlin O'Neil) and repeating the win as a senior (with Keeah Lonegren).

"Moot Court was where I found my voice," says Nicole. "It's the two of you versus two other people. You had to say something... You had to be on your toes and always have a response, and I loved it."

BHS MC also brought Nicole to some of the country's top universities, giving her the confidence to apply to Yale.

"The Model Congress exposes you to these Ivy League schools that otherwise you wouldn't have the opportunity to really see. Your chair's are other kids who go there and a lot of them were very encouraging," says Nicole, who shares Yale campus tours with BHS MC members.

Involved with Yale Model Congress during three of her four years (as a chair sophomore year, board member and attorney general junior year, and chair senior year), Nicole joined Yale College Democrats (YCD) as a freshman.

"I signed up because I'd registered as Democrat over the summer and did the Model Congress thing, which was like politics, and this seemed like politics, so maybe it would work. But



Pictured here at home in Branford over winter break, Yale University senior Nicole Hobbs has enjoyed a whirlwind college experience with many accomplishments, including being named 2013 College Democrat of the Year. She credits Branford High School Model Congress with giving her a confident start in her college career and her political work at the college, state, and now national level.

Photo by Pam Johnson/The Sound

I really had no idea what I was getting into at the time!"

Nicole's very first YCD meeting was attended by then-Stamford mayor Dannel Malloy, making his first gubernatorial run.

"He was talking about his campaign and his platform and what he was looking to do, and it kind of struck me that someone running for statewide public office was here to talk to this group of college kids," says Nicole.

Inspired, she worked the YCD phone bank for Malloy and now-Senator Richard Blumenthal.

"I was kind of hooked," Nicole admits. "This is my home state and this is an opportunity, especially with the governor's race, to turn the state blue... and so I just kind of started going to all of the meetings."

By freshman year's end, Nicole was encouraged to run for YCD office and was elected secretary. The following year, she was elected treasurer.

"I did that for a semester and over the summer of 2012 I was an intern with Senator [Chris] Murphy's campaign, which was an

amazing experience. I got to work for a candidate that I thought deserved to be the next senator for the state of Connecticut, and apparently the voting public agreed."

When the YCD elections coordinator stayed in Chicago to work the Obama campaign that fall semester, Nicole stepped into fill that YCD role, organizing weekly meetings, coordinating twice-weekly phone banks, canvassing for Murphy statewide Saturdays and in New Haven Sundays. She made two trips to Massachusetts for Sen. Elizabeth Warren, a New Hampshire trip supporting Obama, and, during Yale's fall break, "We took 40 kids on a bus to Pennsylvania and canvassed for President Obama," says Nicole. "So it was a whirlwind fall semester."

The following semester, Nicole became YCD president and also took over as College Democrats of Connecticut (CDC) president.

"At the time, it was pretty much a defunct organization," says Nicole of CDC. "There was

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Hobbs is College Democrat of the Year

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an outdated list of contacts I was given, and that was kind of it. So I assembled our new board in January and said, 'We have an opportunity to do something with this; let's do it.'

Nicole reconnected chapters, established regular communication with emails and monthly newsletters, increased social media presence, and launched a CDC website. She rallied chapters with a letter-writing campaign during the state legislature's gun control debate.

"A lot of our chapters had never done anything like that. They'd

done some electoral work, but for them being involved in the legislative process was new. So we coached them through that," says Nicole, whose semester culminated in a spring CDC convention at Yale.

"Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro stopped by, Governor Malloy came and spoke with us, and it was also great because we reconnected with the state party, so we had their executive director and deputy executive director come and talk to us, and representatives of Connecticut Young Democrats," says Nicole.

Also attending: representatives

of College Democrats of America (CDA), the official youth arm of the Democratic National Committee. CDC had reconnected with CDA through Nicole's efforts.

In the summer of 2013, Nicole took up an invitation to be a press intern in Murphy's Washington, D.C., office. While there, she signed up to attend the CDA's summer conference in D.C.

"I was already down there, so I thought, 'Well, I should definitely go and represent Connecticut,' which hadn't been represented at the conference, if not ever, then in quite a while."

On the final day, an awards

ceremony included naming College Democrat of the Year. Nicole had no inkling she was in the running.

"Before they said the name, they were running through a list of accomplishments... This person had revitalized their state organization, had been a key player on a statewide senate campaign in organizing students... and I was sitting there thinking, 'Wow, this person sounds so impressive!' I was sitting next to a good friend of mine, and they got to the end and said my name, and I just kind of looked at her. And she said, 'They just said your name.

You need to go up and get your award now.' I had no idea—it was a complete shock!"

Nicole holds the honor for a year, but will likely remain involved with CDA a bit longer. Last semester, Nicole applied for and was appointed CDA Women's Caucus chair. She'll continue to work in the national role through the summer of 2014.

"We are responsible for thinking of different projects and ideas that promote woman. I think, without the award, I wouldn't have decided to get involved in that capacity, on the national level," says Nicole.