

A Few BHS Model Congress Reflections 2006

“I feel that I have grown a lot this year thanks to Model Congress. Being part of the club has given me a great deal of confidence. For most of my life, I have been shy and quiet. I never considered myself a good public speaker, and I don’t think many other people did either. I always, without fail, got at least one “needs to participate more” comment on my report card. Model Congress was really the first situation where I was required to speak out and share my opinions. To my surprise, it wasn’t as scary as I had thought. My first experience last year really boosted my confidence, and it has continued to grow. At Princeton, I was in the Armed Services committee...not my first choice. Although I thought I wouldn’t have anything to say, I learned that just because I may not be extremely interested in something, I could still develop and share opinions about it. At this year’s Columbia Model Congress, I felt more confident as a speaker than I ever have before. I made a speech on almost all the bills in my committee, and two speeches during our full session. Model Congress has made me realize that when I have something to say, I don’t have to keep it to myself. I can express myself eloquently and intelligently, even in front of a large group of people.

I constantly notice the changes that my Model Congress experience has brought about in me. I’m no longer afraid of participating in class. When I have something to say in class I don’t worry about whether or not I will sound stupid. I know that I can say what I need to intelligently. I don’t shy away from public speaking anymore. Instead, I gravitate towards it. At the National Honor Society induction ceremony, I volunteered to give a speech. Four years ago, I never would have believed I could do that. Now, I am eager to speak in front of a large audience. I was barely even nervous-I knew that it was no different than delivering my opening speech for a bill. I was prepared and knew what I wanted to say, so there was no need to worry. Public speaking is an essential skill for almost any career field. I know that the confidence I have gained through Model Congress will serve me throughout the rest of my life. I am very grateful for this experience. Without it, I would still be that shy little girl from freshman year who could never even raise her hand in class.

Model Congress has also increased my civic and political awareness. I understand the process that goes into making a law. Going to my first Model Congress last year made me realize how little I paid attention to politics and current events. This prompted me to read the newspaper, watch the news, and take an interest in what was going on in my own country. Although I had never taken the time before, Model Congress helped me realize how important it is to be informed.

In addition, Model Congress has motivated me to become more educated in general. Seeing highly intelligent, motivated students from other schools made me realize that while I might do well in the Branford school system, there are many people who are a lot smarter, work harder, and accomplish more than I do. The intellectual atmosphere of the conferences and the excellent speeches that some delegates made showed me what a high standard I need to keep for myself in order to compete with the brightest students. Model Congress has helped me focus on the rest of my school work and has shown me what I can do if I simply work hard and put in effort...” – ***Kate Lonergan, Senior MC President***

“In the past two years that I have spent in Branford High School, my most valuable and enriching experiences have come from outside the class room and inside a Model Congress Conference. I have learned how to properly and effectively present a bill, and then once I have presented that bill, defend it and get it passed. Before my freshman year, and before Model Congress, I wasn’t all that interested in politics and the way this country works. Now, because of Model Congress, I can’t get enough of politics and I absolutely LOVE debating. Although Model Congress has taught me a lot about politics and the way our government works, I have also learned about culture and life in some of this country’s greatest cities. I have experienced first hand what it is like to live in these cities and how many college students live their college lives. Model Congress has done something for me that no teacher can teach and no book can offer. Model Congress has helped me become more confident with my speech and my abilities to do just about anything. I am no longer afraid to meet new people and try new things. I am more assertive in class and I speak my mind more now than I ever have in my entire life...” – ***Ryan Sullivan, Junior MC President***

“No other extracurricular activity I participate in has helped me intellectually and personally advance in so many ways as Model Congress. The program has not only taught me simple facts about my country and its rich history, but it has also helped me live it by allowing me to visit the actual places where history was made. No tiny textbook photo of Abraham Lincoln can compare to seeing his granite replica looming above you in the

Lincoln Memorial. Before Princeton Model Congress I had never seen most of the presidential memorials. I had never felt more proud to be an American than when I stood on the lawn and saw all the memorials gleaming all around me. Academically, the Model Congress program has helped me better understand the complex judicial system of the United States. By writing bills, I have learned about laws and legislation I never would have been aware of otherwise. I also have learned facts simply by listening to my more knowledgeable peers during committee sessions. By learning the ins and outs of government I will be a more involved intelligent citizen by the time I reach voting age. Lastly, Model Congress has increased my confidence more than my knowledge. I have learned to enjoy public speaking through committee and full house sessions. Before Model Congress I would never have been able to confidently debate anything in front of strangers. I spoke more at Princeton than I did at my first conference and I look forward to being an even more active participator next year..." – **Jen Altavilla, Senior MC VPresident**

"If conversation is an art, then public speaking is a masterpiece. Personally, I often feel like I have a lot to say but not the words to say it. I can't articulate the idea or emotion, which I would like to convey, with the linguistic skills I have. Of course, you can say whatever you like, but if no one understands you then what is it worth? The key to public speaking is to clearly enunciate your thoughts so that they are understandable and also persuasive. Being engaging or charismatic is of course helpful, but even the most charming person would find speaking difficult if he or she did not know how to verbalize what they were thinking. MC gives an open forum and practice ground for public speaking, and I believe that it has helped me become better at clearly speaking my mind. At Model Congress, you can tell many people have practiced their mannerisms and their delivery the moment after they open their mouth - At Penn one girl used the same phrasing and construction for every argument she gave. Although it produced good sounding speeches, once you heard it the second time the similarity was apparent and what she was saying lost value and power.

To succeed in presenting a bill, you need to do solid research, thoughtfully write your bill, run it by peers, and prepare thoroughly for your presentation and defense. All this teaches you the value of academic dedication and perseverance. I think that especially today, the typical youth is too lazy when it comes to working hard on assignments; the advances in luxury technologies and the ease of things has given rise to a generation who wants everything done for them, and who give up at the first signs of difficulty. There are few independent learners in the younger generations, and I can say that MC has taught me the value of being able to learn independently for my own development.

Travel, I believe, is the top form of gaining appreciation for our world. Just taking in the sights and sounds of a large metropolitan area is an experience, let alone seeing sights whose historical significance is paramount. Pieces of American history like the Liberty Bell & Independence Hall can only be truly appreciated in person; I think many of the feelings and emotions of the founding fathers are lost in the perception that they were dusty old men. They were passionate revolutionaries with fire in their stomachs, fervor for freedom in their hearts and dreams of a great independent democracy on their minds. The foresight they had to write our Constitution as it is written is an amazing achievement, as is the all the raw physical strength and exertion that built this country. Visiting historically significant sights can only give you a slight sense of what was once there, and I felt closer to the ancestors and founding fathers of our country after having seen the monuments and buildings of Philadelphia.

Growing closer with your fellow MCers is definitely a large part of the MC experience. The trips spawn unlikely friendships that are very unique; these people, who you would typically never really get to know, become your friends who you bond with and have a really fun, memorable time. I think the trips act as a gentle ground where people can relax and be themselves without much peer pressure. A lot of the typical high school social pressures and baggage is left at school when everyone boards the bus, and this allows people to associate and socialize easier. I had never met Lyndsey Maher, to site an example, before the Penn trip, but I had a genuinely great time and many laughs with her. Unfortunately, some of these MC friendships don't keep as well once everyone gets back to the daily grind of BHS, but still some do and the good times definitely make it worthwhile. Of course, meeting people outside of the BHS is another great benefit. By meeting people from different schools from different parts of the country, you get different perspectives on current issues while also seeing the regular teenager, to whom you relate, behind the political position being discussed. You get the serious side with the relaxed side, and it gives everything a more genuine feel. BHS MC has, for me, been a truly real extraordinary experience..." – **Liam Killion, Junior MC President**

These are just a few of many similar sentiments students have expressed over the years. It is why I do MC. – Petela ☺