

# BHS MC Reflections 2002

A large majority of my life has been spent hiding from questions I did not wish to answer. I had never desired to be the center of attention, and such interrogations filled me with intense feelings of shyness and an inexplicable nervousness. Indeed, I have cried countless tears over encounters with others that left me feeling awkward and embarrassed. In particular there was always one situation that filled me with more terror than even the most upsetting exchange: public presentations.

Yet, being center stage did not scare me— I have always enjoyed acting and reading aloud, and have had a fair amount of experience in both. But there is major difference, the words read from a page are not my own, and as such do not reflect my character in anyway. I was not afraid of criticisms of my talent - my fear was caused by the knowledge that I, as a person, would be on display. The thought of being analyzed by anybody, especially a large group, caused more dread than anything else I knew.

At the beginning of the year, I found the drive to change my long-set ways. I worked hard to give myself the preparation that led to a greater sense of comfort during presentations. But by the time I realized I was improving, the deadline to join MC had long passed. Even at the time, I had considered it. I knew that many of my friends wished to be a part of the club, and I also knew that my brother had enjoyed it immensely, and regretted not getting involved before his senior year. Yet, I was scared, for I knew what it would entail, and I was not quite ready for that. When Annie {Baron} called me to ask if I wanted to go to U-Penn, it was both a dream and a nightmare. I had the chance to do something that I knew was vital if I ever wanted to completely overcome my fears, but on the other hand, facing such terror is not the easiest thing to do. Yes, my courage had grown, but not to the point where such a decision was easy. When I decided to go, I was relieved, and satisfied with the choice I had made. Admittedly, I was terrified the first few days – never more so than when I presented my bill in committee. Although I was obviously nervous, I lived through it, and even found myself able to laugh about the mistakes that I had made.

With that ordeal over, I had nothing left to do but wait, and, pray, that my bill would not go to full session. However, despite my wishes to the contrary, it did. I can remember sitting there; literally shaking at the prospect of wait I was destined to face. To ease my nerves, I began to write. When I was done, I realized, to my utter amazement that I had written a ‘paper’ of over 4 pages that was brimming with facts that I remembered without looking up. I think the knowledge that I knew so much about my bill, helped me in the first few seconds of my presentation.

My hands were shaking as I stood at the front of the room, trying to block out all the faces. Looking down, the words on my carefully written paper were nothing but a blur. I remember swallowing once, and then croaking out an opening sentence. I paused just long enough to realize what I had said, and the words fell into place. The ink on my paper changed from an unintelligible blob of black into a message of truth. And as I stood there, my hands stopped shaking, and I began to talk. I do not claim to have given an amazing speech, for it seemed more a self-revelation than a display of oratory prowess. But for the first time, I lost my fear. I allowed my character to shine through the words that came tumbling from my mouth. I knew that what I said was right, and I was able to convey some of the passion that I felt about it. I didn’t have to concentrate on the paper before me; for I knew what it said in a way that had little to do with memorization. Instead, I was able to focus on emphasizing the key facts, and using my voice to convince the listeners of my bills virtues. It was something that I had never before experienced.

I cannot say that this was the end of all my troubles, and that my nervousness completely vanished henceforth. It was only the beginning of a long struggle to change, but at least I now had experienced the courage I was fighting to attain. Through class assignments, and even more influentially, my time at Model Congress and Moot Court, I am slowly starting to emerge from my chrysalis of 16 years...

Model Congress gave me a lot. It helped me to meet new friends, and to understand the value of ones I already had. It increased my comprehension of the American Government far above what I had expected when I first moved here from England. But above all, it gave me the chance to change for the better... For me, the most appealing benefit is the opportunity to get involved in something that I enjoyed and that has helped me grow. I only hope that it will influence somebody else in the way that it did with me...

--Sarah Hummel is a frosh at Yale. At BHS she was an MC president and an award winner for Top Attorney at Princeton Moot court. She came to America from Newbury, England in 1997 and unfortunately has lost her accent☺

## *Reflections 2002*

First, the Model Congress has definitely improved me as a person. The lessons that I have learned in public speaking, problem solving, and interpersonal relationships have been absolutely invaluable. One of the most immediate effects that the MCC had on me was to boost my confidence in talking in front of a group of people. As I continue through high school, I find out more and more how useful this skill is. Because I have the courage to stand up and let my ideas be heard, I am learning so much more now than I have ever before. I am now active in class discussions where before I might have been a passive observer. Also, I have learned to solve problems between myself and other people. For some reason, people who share my Republican viewpoints are rather few and far between at these Model Congresses. That makes it all the more necessary for me to listen to the other person's side and gently try to persuade them that they are in fact wrong! Which leads me to the next advantage I have gained: I think that now I get along with people better because I am better at listening first, and then stating my opinion...

Also, I have discovered a newfound passion for the field of law/government through my MC experiences. I am strongly considering a major in Political Science, and my background with these mock gov'ts will certainly help me out. The benefits that I have received from this program really showed when I attended the National Youth Leadership Forum last winter. While the other delegates to the forum were trying to get their footing with the parliamentary procedure and case law, I already had a thorough understanding of these because of my Yale Model Congress Supreme Court experience, and it showed and helped. As leader of my mock Supreme Court debate team, we romped the opposing council in a 9-0 decision in our favor. Debate and government are two things that certainly would not have been part of my high school experience had it not been for BHS Model Congress...

--**Greg Storer** is a plebe at the US Naval Academy. At BHS, he was MC president, attended TEN model congress events, won a gavel at Harvard MC and reached the semis at the Princeton MCourt with Christine Welch. A top student, stellar sailor, Music Maker, and lead for the musical, he was our Renaissance officer. He has survived the summer and first semester at Annapolis and was seen over vacation in uniform, relaxing ☺

---

From the new surroundings and personalities I have experienced, to the academic challenges I have been presented with, to the personal gains I have acquired, Model Congress has been extremely impacting on my life. I have never gotten involved in one single activity that has opened so many doors and exposed me to so many different things the way MC has. Every experience I have had with this club has taught me a great deal... Because of this it is very difficult to pick out one aspect of my MC experience that rises above all others. However, as I think back through all my MC memories I continually come across a lesson that I learn and relearn at every Model Congress or Moot Court I attend. I have many dreams in my life and not all of them will come true, but some of them will and this is what Model Congress has taught me. When I selected the role of Supreme Court justice at Yale MC I wanted to win a gavel very badly. I read and reread the case law before the conference and while I was attending sessions I tried my hardest and put forth my best effort. I put a great amount of time into preparing for that conference and made a number of sacrifices along the way. At the conclusion of the conference I did not receive a gavel, nor did I receive an honorable mention, and this hurt. At the time I felt that my efforts had been a waste, but there was nothing left for me to do than to accept my loss and move on.

Later on in the year I decided to participate in the Princeton Moot Court competition and see if I could vindicate myself. When I received the case law for the competition I was pleasantly surprised to find that many of the cases were like the ones that were used as precedents at Yale. I was able to learn from my past mistakes and put together a set of strong arguments for both the petitioner and respondent in the case at hand. My partner, Greg Storer, and I worked diligently in preparing for the competition and all I can remember thinking before it began was "we worked so hard, please let us do well." To our great satisfaction we placed fourth out of sixty teams that attended the competition and got an opportunity to compete in the semi finals. I can think of no prouder moment in my high school years than that in which Greg and I marched, with our heads held high, through the beauty of Princeton's Ivy League campus to compete in those semi finals. From that point on I realized that I will not find success in everything I do but if I keep at it my hard work will catch up to me. If I point myself in a general direction I will get to where I want to be in the overall scheme of things. I guess I could say that my participation in Model Congress these past years increased my confidence, but I think that it goes deeper than that. It taught me to have faith in my abilities. I have come a long way since I was a freshman. I have taken part in activities that I could not have even imagined back then and Model Congress has helped me to do that. It has taught me to believe in myself and this is something I will value for the rest of my life.

--**Christine Welch** is frosh at George Washington Univ. And just for the record, she and Greg should have won their semi final case and been in the final at PMoot Court. They were clearly better but sometimes the judges are wrong, and this time they were. Then again, what can one expect from Princeton judges! Christine compliments Greg as the female BHS MC Renaissance President with her many interests and talents ☺

## *Reflections 2002*

What has been my most valuable MC experience? Well I have to say one of the most exciting and rewarding one was when my bill passed in committee about instituting a cultural diversity club in all high schools nationwide, a club that is very important to me personally. It was exciting for me to present it because I knew the topic very well, and furthered my background knowledge with facts. Thankfully, my bill passed in committee but regretfully, my bill failed in full session, however I think I learned more than I would have if my bill passed. It's something about the feeling you get when you hear people debating your bill, the con and pro speeches. I know your not supposed to take criticism personally, but I couldn't help to feel hurt and proud when my bill was being criticized and praised. The feeling I got inside when my bill passed 10-2 was like hitting two free throws at the end of tie game to bring our team to victory. I've never really had those feelings before outside of a basketball court or field hockey field, but its really cool as an athlete to experience that fluttering feeling in your stomach in a room of strangers that are not your teammates but mostly opponents.

--**Sophia Diamantis** is a frosh at Northeastern Univ in Boston. At BHS, she was a MC vice president and attended the Yale, Princeton & Penn MC's. She was one of BHS's nicest model student, athlete, and person.

---

I stood alone in front of fifteen people. My bill had just been passed, and I was overjoyed. But there was another feeling in my heart – I knew I could listen to the gavel rapping forever. This was for me. I was in Washington, DC at the Princeton MC, and I had just discovered my career choice: politics.

I'd become involved in BHS MC because my freshman study hall monitor, Mr. Petela, was the club's advisor, and because I heard it was fun. It turned out to be much more. Once my bill passed, I felt liberated. Suddenly, my nervousness was gone, and I was able to express my opinions openly. Eventually, this earned me the gavel for my committee, although at the time I didn't realize this was a prestigious award. The chair gave me a note prior to receiving this award, saying he felt I'd debated thoughtfully, spoken my mind freely, and didn't seem to be just after the gavel. The whole experience enthused me: politics, I realized, wasn't just a cold matter of debating points, but involved meaningful topics and the passion of speaking out...

From just one activity that started out as fun, I found what I can see myself doing with the rest of my life. I have so much to thank Model Congress for, and every time I hear the gavel rap I give MC a little thanks.

--**Max Whalen** is a frosh at NYU. At BHS, he was MC President, attended EIGHT model congresses (winning a gavel at Princeton), captain of the swim team, student adjunct to the Board of Education, and an active member of a number of other clubs at BHS. Max was one of the most loyal and tireless workers for BHS MC.

---

The most valuable lessons from MC trips that I have learned have not all come from within committee or full sessions. While in sessions I learned how to become a better speaker, think quicker, and convey my arguments in an eloquent manner. I have also learned different tactics for persuading those opposed to my positions. While I value these lessons, I value the lessons learned from interacting with my friends in a setting outside of school. During the trips, not everyone agrees with everyone and the art of compromise is one that must be employed quite often during the trips. I have learned to be more patient when I become frustrated with my peers. I have also gotten a small taste of being independent. Many times, it is up to us to find our own food and transportation. One must be confident and aware of your surroundings at all times. During Penn MC, Sophia, Sonnie, Sarah and I managed to navigate ourselves around Philadelphia safely. There was no time for poor judgement or not being able to read the map or being unable to find the bus. Model Congress has also given me the opportunity to see places that I might not have seen otherwise. After visiting Penn, I made it one of my top college choices. I loved the campus and city. I may never have even thought about Penn had it not been for Model Congress...

--**Niamh Cunningham** is a frosh at UCONN, and still running well. At BHS, she attended SIX model congress events, was captain of cross country and track where she has won numerous awards for her fleetness of foot. Her sister Orlaith is a junior at BHS and running in her sister's footsteps, sometimes faster☺

## Reflections 2002

As for my impressions of the Model Congress program...I would first tell you that my former teaching career took place solely in private schools. Consequently, I got myself sort of "caught up" in the private school thing with my own kids. My older daughter attends Sacred Heart and my younger one attends Hamden Hall. Most of my former students attend either Hopkins or Hamden Hall. So, all in all, I think I have a fair idea of what the relative value of education is. In my mind, it is programs such as Model Congress that **make** Branford High School. Every school has a government and history classes. I don't know of any schools, including the private ones, that have anything like Branford's Model Congress program. The quality of the program and the number of students involved puts this club far and beyond any other similar ones I've heard of. As for the actual experience my son had, I'll loosely quote him as saying he learned more about government and history in one weekend than in the past 10 years of school...This is exactly the kind of activity that encourages kids to really stretch themselves... The town should recognize the value of this program and run with it...

--**Sandy Conlon** is the mother of junior MC president Ben.

---

Over the past three years Model Congress has given me so many opportunities to explore myself, and to really find out who I am. It has given me the confidence to speak publicly. The knowledge that I have gained through my MC experience has been boundless. I have made friendships in my school as well as with students from all over the country. Model Congress has given me the confidence and skills to debate important issues on a level far above where I was three years ago...Finally, from my MC experiences, I have been inspired to pursue a law degree in the future. In sum, model congress has been one of, if not the most positive and educational experiences in my high school career and I know it will reap dividends in the years to come.

--**Kristin Murphy** is a frosh at Union College. At BHS, she was a devoted and beloved MC president and attended TEN model congresses. She was president of student council and star captain of the golf team. She was also not too bad on the field hockey field either, helping to lead the hornets to a state championship title.

---

Model Congress has shaped my high school career academically and intellectually. It has made me want to challenge myself to the fullest and to excel and exceed expectations of not only my peers but my parents and teachers as well. The level of confidence I have achieved through my MC experiences is far above what I ever imagined it would be. It is a powerful experience in so many ways, to so many degrees...Model Congress has also given me a newfound interest in politics, history, and current affairs... And the summer officer retreats have been some of the best times in my life. I can only imagine how high school would have been without model congress: it simply would not have been as special or memorable.

--**Ryan Ulstad** is a frosh at UCONN. At BHS, he was MC president, attended 8 model congresses, earning a gavel at Harvard, was captain of baseball, a fine artist, and the best break dancers at BHS! He is Mr Nice guy☺

---

The day I left Philadelphia and the Penn Model Congress, I wished that I didn't have to leave; I wanted to stay there. After 5 days of living the life of model congress, it seemed like a way of life. The next day when I arrived back at school, all I could think about was how much I had gained from the trip, and how sad I was to be back home. The model congress experience has taught me so much... I will be forever grateful.

--**Melissa Ringer** is a frosh at Fairfield Univ. At BHS, she was an MC president, attended 6 model congresses, a Music Maker, and a member of Amnesty. She was a devoted officer for BHS MC and has a lovely☺

---

No matter what path my life my take, Model Congress will forever be an experience that has shaped me. From the learning of many debate skills and current issues to the amazing new people I met and the bonds that were created between my friends and me, I know MC has changed my life and prepared me for the future...

--**Samantha Smart** is a frosh at Eckerd College in Fla. Like Melissa, she was an MC president, attended 6 model congresses and was also a Music Maker and a devoted officer for BHS MC. Sam also has a lovely ☺.