

Some Student Reflections from BHS MCers 2007

I have had hundreds of valuable learning experiences because of the BHS Model Congress program. The most important one being that I have learned how to speak with confidence, poise, and when appropriate a bit of flair, when I entered the program as a freshman I was nervous, anxious, and awkward when speaking in front of people. Model Congress has made me more comfortable when speaking in front of large groups of people I do not know and has taught me how to mask my nervousness when I do make speeches. I have learned to hide my nervousness by speaking loudly, and pretending that I am the best Senator they have ever heard or seen when I make a speech. Model Congress has taught me how to speak well in front of a large group of people and this is a truly valuable lesson that everyone should learn. Model Congress has also taught that an indecisive person is a weak person. One must know what they believe and what they want to happen. A person should not be closed to change but rather should not straddle the fence between two issues. If a person keeps changing in what they believe then they will never accomplish anything great for they will be too busy jumping sides on an issue instead of furthering one.

Another thing that model congress has helped me learn is the difference that one person can make. Both years that I have gone to Penn we have gone on the Kensington tour (Phili's poorest section) with Sarah Forgione, a BHS MC 1994 alum and Duke grad who is dedicated to helping the poorest in our society. She always ends each tour with reminding us that the laws we pass have the power to affect people who are poorest and most need our help and that our actions can have a significant impact on society if we pursue and push them. She has helped hundreds of families survive and find shelter and food, and she taught me that one person can make a true difference in society. She certainly has.

Model Congress has also let me meet some college students. While I was at Penn last year both of my chairs were majoring in the sciences, one was pre-med and one was pre-dental. Model Congress allowed me to meet people in my future area of study and ask valuable questions to them. I was able to ask how competitive is the field? And what is it like to study the sciences at Penn? Through this interaction I was able to decide that I did not want to attend Penn for college. Without Model Congress I would not know the real story about being pre-med at an Ivy League University.

-- **Jaclyn Milici**, Sr MC President, won a gavel at Penn MC last spring.

Out of all of my Model Congress experiences up to this point, the areas that I have advanced most in are personal and social gains, academic and intellectual growth, and more confidence. If we go back to my personal turn around, I would like to talk about the changes in friends that have occurred. These new friendships are not only regarding me, but I truly feel that our whole group of juniors have become more tightly knit. I used to be a part of a crowd that I felt was "popular", but nothing that we did together was important, gratifying, or "good feeling." I was usually in trouble, because I did things just to impress these people (Yes, we have talked about my eighth grade times). I wasn't great with expanding my horizons either, often ostracizing others who weren't a part of our group. But Model Congress changed that in me, as I met so many great people in my first conferences. Two years ago, I barely knew this kid named Ted Gargano, I was an acquaintance with Mark Bombalicki in my freshman Biology class, and I was on "iffy" terms with this kid Ryan Sullivan. Seeing how Model Congress was a major factor in bringing us together, I feel that this club has given me those social advances and personal gains. Another area that has been valuable to me from Model Congress is academic and intellectual growth. When I am in committee, I am often with many very intelligent seniors, who talk about how they got into Princeton/Harvard/Penn for the next year. Then I hear them speak, and their eloquence and intelligence just fills the room. Inspired, I set standards within myself on how I will have to perform in committee, and I always want to live up to what the people around me are doing. I was able to out-perform them at Princeton Model Congress 2005, when I won an Honorable Mention in committee as a junior. That is something I am very proud of, because obtaining that award was not easily come by at all, and it took academic and intellectual excellence. Thus, I have made gains in both the academic and intellectual fields from the conferences that I attended. Finally, another valuable lesson that I have gained from my trips is confidence, and I feel that this is most important. In anything that I do, whether it is golfing, school work, or singing, confidence and trust in myself is what leads to success. Unlike other various trips that I have gone on, when ever I am attending a weekend at MC, I feel very comfortable with the people around me, and also have been able to become a presence in committee rooms. Thus, if I were to get on a bus for a conference right now, I am confident enough to know that I will have a great time with the other BHS MCers, and do very well in my committee due to intelligence and poise. In sum, the "Model Congress opportunity" that came to me earlier in high school has been a major factor in my turn around, and has proven so extremely valuable to the student and person that I am today.

--**Mark Schissler**, Sr MC President, won a gavel at Princeton 06 this fall and in December was accepted early to Duke University.

I can easily say that Branford Model Congress has been the largest driving force behind my self-confidence out of any club, school event/ workshop or extracurricular activity I have participated in. Not only am I comfortable speaking in front of large crowds, I have found that it is something that I enjoy and am good at. Literally thousands of opportunities are available to a high school student able to publicly address and impress peers while also people of higher standards. I

owe all of those new experiences to the speeches of Model Congress, which has forced me to come out of my shell and think outside the box -- not an easy thing to do for a teenager.

By being forced to experience new things and meet new people, I have made so many for friends through both the conferences and lessons learned by them. I have no inhibitions now, going up to a group of people I do not know and introducing myself. And most of the friendships made I still keep in contact with. I talk to Erin Connors from Illinois on a weekly basis. And yet, not all of the new friendships were long distance. I keep in touch with Nina Fattore, MC Prez 05 and have built new relations with other upperclassmen ever since my first event.

I participated in Columbia, my first, back in 8th grade thanks to Mr Peterson. Being young, I was intimidated by the length of a bill, or the complexity of the vocabulary used. That seems so long ago. Over the many conferences I have attended, I have honed another important trait, reading comprehension. No amount or length of words can scare me now, because I know how to interpret their meanings. This is essential in all areas of life, including SAT's and future jobs.

--**Ben Robbins**, Jr MC President won an H Mention at Princeton this fall. Last summer Ben attended & excelled at the Global Youth Leadership Conference in Washington DC for 2 weeks.

The influence that my participation in Model Congress has had on me I believe is invaluable. It has had a major part in shaping what my interests are and what I would like to do with my life. Before I joined MC I was very naive about what my future would hold for me. While I had always done well with things like history, literature and classes of this sort, standardized tests and teachers had always told me that my real talent was in mathematics and science. So I had always assumed that my future would contain some kind of scientific career, and I accepted that. I did enjoy the sciences and math and all of these things, but perhaps I had only enjoyed them more than reading, writing and forming opinions better because I had had more exposure to the sciences. However MC gave me a new exposure, and I grew to love the idea of creating an idea and then presenting and defending it, or of taking a stance on someone else's idea and then supporting or attacking the idea, not necessarily the person. And while reading, writing, and speaking may not be as natural for me as solving a math problem has always been, I have embraced my deficiencies, and I am working harder than ever before in these subjects in order to make myself the best that I can be in these areas. I now feel that my future may hold something which has nothing to do with the sciences, such as law, or some kind of writing. MC has helped me to try and do what I love to do, rather than what I could most easily do.

On another level, MC has helped me to grow socially. Many good friendships have grown out of MC, new ones have been formed, and friendships I already had, have deepened. As long as one is not too provincial at these events, sticking with only the people that they already know best, it would seem hard not to foster new relationships with others. Given the opportunity to be in a big city with many and diverse peers from all over, it is inevitable that many lasting memories and friendships are bound to be created long after the return home to Branford. For these I am very thankful.

--**Tim Shea**, Sr MC Vice President, won an H Mention at Princeton this fall and in December was accepted early to Boston College.

I've said this every year thus far, but Model Congress has changed me more than anything else at BHS. I've matured so much more in the past year, although it may not always seem like it. I've grown as a person; I've become more tolerant of people and issues and more resistant to others. Model Congress has taught me so much about people, about life, and about myself. It forces me to take a side, and ask myself questions that normally would never come to mind. How many kids find themselves pondering the effects of giving government aid to Hamas on a regular basis?

I love arriving at a conference and getting handed a fresh bill docket. Within minutes, my committee's section is covered with various scratches, and scribbles. When I look at a bill, I ask myself a few simple questions. The first one is always, is this possible? The second thing I ask myself is if the bill can be implemented. I look at funding, enforcement, and other numbers pertaining to the bill, mostly how much will it cost. It's fairly simple stuff, but funding can make or break a bill. Then I ask myself if this bill is necessary. Some bills at model congress aren't necessary, but sometimes I have to ask myself while I'm reading a bill, why anyone even bothered to write it. Then I look to see if it can be amended so that it actually makes sense. In some committees there has been some serious surgery done on a bill to make sure it passes, other times no one has been in the mood to amend a bill and we've just failed it. I've just learned how to dissect a bill to its core over the last three years. I'm indebted to past MC president Christian Storm for teaching me how to make a great bill look weak and vulnerable. This year I've been trying to pass this skill on to our new members.

The single most important thing I've learned this year is that MC is 70% personality, 30% knowledge. The kids who win gavels always seem calm, cool, collected, and confident while doing it. I tried this at CMC last year. It worked.

There is just something about Model Congress that makes it the perfect setting for priceless moments. I can't imagine what my high school career would have been like without MC. I do know that it would not have been as good, or as meaningful, or as fun, or as memorable. I'm going to miss BHS MC next year, but I'll never forget it...

--**Imani Williams**, Sr MC President, won a gavel at Columbia MC last year.

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