

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

It will take you to a tremendous place

By Kseniya Shavrova, 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.

Shavrova attended a record 15 MConferences winning an impressive 4 Top Attorney Gavels at PMoot & Harvard DCourt, and one PMoot Court Tournery Victory with Billy Irwin in the Fall 2010. She is currently attending Boston College School of Arts and Sciences Honors Program, and just made 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 will be much missed ☺☺