

A Schissler Special

[Mark is currently a Dean's list student at Duke University as an Economic and Sociology double major, with hopes of Investment Banking and Business School after graduation. As BHS MC President, he was surely someone special, topping his career off with a gavel at Princeton ☺]

Our relationship dates back to the days when I was a five and a half foot tall middle school student trying to find my way around the Pine Orchard golf course. We then met again when I was a freshman who had no sense of what classes to take or what clubs to join. For the majority of my first year, I took care of business and dabbled my foot in many different areas. I picked up an application and considered applying for Model Congress, but I was initially discouraged by fellow freshman and upperclassmen due to their description of the organization's limited space and competitiveness. But sophomore year proved to be a turning point, as you graciously gave me the opportunity to attend the 2004 Yale conference, not to mention I was treated with care and justice despite not being in the club freshman year.

As for the vital statistics, I was a delegate at six conferences and a chaperone at one over the past three years. I was in the competitive Ethics committee at Yale 2004 where Katie Ringer made my transition into Model Congress much easier. With comfort and experience after that, I joined the same committee for Penn 2005 where my chair informed me that I just missed out on an honorable mention award. After having two memorable conferences under my belt, there was no way I was going to miss out on Columbia 2005. I was in the same committee as John Weber and we were both upset when we were robbed of awards by an "inexperienced chair." ☺ After that eventful and successful Model Congress debut year, I was floored when I was selected to be one of the club's ten junior presidents for the upcoming year. With that title in hand, I was able to be one of the select juniors given the opportunity to attend Princeton 2005. Feeling rejuvenated and motivated, I put on a show in committee session by acting gracious and easy going in front of the members while being in a "cutthroat" mentality. After that four day performance, plus the best overall trip of my life to that point, I was awarded with an Honorable Mention (an award that was presented when we were chasing trains...lol.) Meanwhile, I was gaining confidence in a lot of areas of life (academically, socially etc.) so that award contributed further to my developing image. I then went to Penn that spring with the mentality of "gavel or bust." Unfortunately, I did not get along with my chair and I was in a loaded committee, so an award was not to be for that conference. Finally, senior year arrived and it was time for me to lead the club as a president, help make a name for Branford High School at the conferences, and ultimately leave behind a Class of 2007 legacy (more on this later...). I attended Princeton again in the fall and experienced even greater success than last year. I earned my first Gavel award despite battling stress and anxiety in my life with college as well as other things (again, more on these things in the "thoughts" section). That was the last conference I attended as a delegate, and was a presidential chaperone at Columbia 2007, where I had an awesome time helping and encouraging the younger bhsmcers, and taking over the video camera from you! I previously mentioned the college process, which looking back now could not have turned out better -- thanks again for your unbelievable recommendation.

I sit here the day before my high school graduation a completely changed person, contemplating this strikingly thought provoking question. What exactly has Branford High School Model Congress given me? To ease the understanding of all the qualities I have received and developed, it is best to break down the gains into three categories: academic, personal, and social. As I previously mentioned, my junior year was a time of transition for me in a number of ways with an emphasis on academics. I was enrolled in two daunting AP courses where I began to learn what education at the next level was like. I became a more motivated student who began to gain skills in comprehending complex material and appreciating a wide variety of perspectives in scientific and political history. **Model Congress added to and further catalyzed that process. First by composing bills and understanding other delegates' works, I became more educated and enlightened with repeated exposure to new material. Especially weeks leading up to the conferences, I was pushed to become a better analytical reader, efficient note taker, and polished writer. Then the conferences gave me some great new skills that are related to academics but not quite the same one gets in books or the classroom. The one thing I love to put my finger on is how the conferences have taught me how to "think on my feet." One of the keys to winning an award at a prestigious conference is playing the devil's advocate, in other words, you have about four minutes to make up two cogent arguments (pro and con) for the bill at hand. Thus, model conferences have not only made me a more open and diverse thinker, but also a quick and efficient brainstormer. Moreover, I have always had trouble with public speaking and performing, but this program has alleviated that anxiety. For the last academic gain, I have learned a great deal from my peers and opponents. At Model Congresses, the best and the brightest represent their schools with a wide repertoire of information and opinions. I vividly remember one committee session at Princeton 2006 when some delegates in my group were having a heated discussion about global warming, and I could have never anticipated the amount that I actually learned from both sides of the debate. In short, I have made academic gains from prepping, debating, and just interacting with my fierce opponents.**

The next area in which BHS MC has been valuable to me is in the area of my personal well being. First, so many great places I have been able to go to over the last three years thanks to MC. I had never traveled to Philadelphia or even to our nation's capital. At Yale 2004 we took an in depth tour of Yale University (especially Timothy Dwight College). That was my first experience with an Ivy League school, and seeing how beautiful and rewarding Yale was certainly had an effect on my academic and MC motivation. Then in Philadelphia, we went to famous places like the Liberty Bell, Independence Hall, the National Mint building, and of course the mysterious bench where we were able to talk to one another across the vast wall. Moreover, a personally shocking, yet inspiring moment was our tour through Kensington with BHS 1994 alum Sara Forgione, who has made a significant difference in so many neighborhoods with such poverty, by her overwhelming empathy and compassion to help so many people. Finally, my two trips to Washington DC provided so many sights and experiences that completed my young life. I took a tour through both the White House and the Capital Building, which are two places that all of America's youth should see. Also the Midnight Monument tour provided an opportunity to see patriotism in another light, so to speak.

But I can't describe completely what BHS MC has given me without talking about social gains, because the changes that this organization has catalyzed make up my current identity. I just want to apologize in advance because I have the feeling that you have heard this story over and over again from me in all the other apps and reflects I have written. However, if there was one time where I wanted to express thanks to you for social growth, this is the time. **When I joined Model Congress as a sophomore, I really had no idea where I was heading in the world and I didn't truly know who I could trust. I used to hang out in a crowd of popular but morally flawed kids, so I alienated many other members of my class by my association and demeanor with them. However, those first two conferences of tenth grade forced me to meet so many new individuals.** At first, I had no anticipation of becoming their friends, but nature took its course and I befriended several members of BHS MC. Most notably during that school year was the beginning of my friendship with Ted Gargano, because without us being roommates at Penn that spring, who knows if we would be great friends right now. I just remember spending significant time with him on South Street and exploring the possibility of returning to school as great friends. As you can tell, I am moving from general acquaintances to deep friendships that BHS MC has made possible. So I began junior year with one major change in my life, as I was fulfilling a dream of singing in the school's performance group. Mark B was a kid in that program who immediately reached out to and welcomed me, and in the early months of junior year we steadily became friends. I know this is hard for you to believe now, but it took a lot to get the four of us into that room together because we simply weren't that close yet. It's funny, I had to randomly walk up to Mark at school and say, "I saw your name on the list for Princeton and I was wondering if you wanted to room with Ted, Ryan, and me." But it was that trip to Washington that brought the four of us so close together that we remain an inseparable crew. As the four of us attended more and more conferences, we only gained additional memories to add to our great book of friendship. **I always put an emphasis on the strong friendships that this club has fortified, but MCongress has also greatly increased my number of acquaintances school wide.**

The big question remains, "What would my high school career have been like if it weren't for this grand opportunity?" Contrary to the paragraphs above, I will begin with the social implications without the Model Congress club (and since I did have this great opportunity, I'm at my desk imagining this now). **Either one of the following two things would have happened. I could be with the same group of hoodlum friends that I had as a freshman/sophomore, which means that my happiness would be fragile and my clean record could potentially be tarnished by one or two poor choices. Or, I would have similar friends as today but not be in as strong of relationships as I currently enjoy. Thus, BHS MC has forced the righting and development of my social life at BHS, which has contributed to a cherished high school experience. Another thing I would love to touch upon is my future plans at a prestigious university, which may not be existent if it weren't for Model Congress.** The first aspect of that idea is the reputation that your superstar organization carries. **Very few people in the country have the great opportunity I had, so participating in conferences and winning awards allowed for some distinction in my extra-curricular life. Also, I talked about that exposure to new people and places, which had a major**

impact in motivating me towards my commitment to excellence. Finally, my presence in BHS MC over the years has led to a great relationship between us, clearly reflected in your sparkling letter to the admission committee. The bottom line is that the academic, personal, and social qualities I have gained from this club are an integral part of the well rounded person that my friends currently respect and that Duke accepted.

I have gone in depth into all of the wonderful things that Model Congress has given me as a student, delegate, and person. **John Wooden once said, “You can never have a perfect day until you do something that someone can never possibly repay you for.” I don’t think there is anything in this world I could do to repay BHS MC for everything it has given me,** but I truly feel that I have made a strong effort for most of my two year Junior/Senior presidency. My most quantitative and qualitative work was done throughout my junior year, where I actually felt like one of the senior presidents. Ryan, Kelly, and I did a lot of extraordinary work alongside individuals like Katie Ringer, Kate Lonergan, and Jared Sparks. Two things where I applied all of the effort, strength, and time that I had at the moment were the fundraising concert and the final banquet. After spending significant time editing and finishing photo albums the days before the concert, I went around town with Ryan to pick up foods for the food court on that Saturday morning. My day at the concert endured from 11:00 AM to midnight. I remember doing significant work for the lobby setup, the food court, and the decorations; as a matter of fact, Sullivan, Weber, and I were the last people there. As the year went on and I became more motivated to do great things for your club, the banquet preparations took almost everything I had. At the end of a challenging and at times grueling year, time and energy were low in supply but doing work for this club was absolutely at the top of my priority list. I stayed up very late (~3 A.M.) the nights before the banquet because I was given hundreds of Penn pictures to put into albums in about two nights. However, I persevered and did them all in my Dad’s office. The quality of my work was the best for those two events during junior year, but there was a lot of quantity that can not be forgotten. I stayed after school on several occasions to fold papers and stuff mailing envelopes, as Ryan and Kelly would stay after period 8 AP US and I would come up from my locker after choir. Also, I remember the night Chris Giordano was impressed by the junior presidents’ work when he commented “Wow, it looks like the juniors are really stepping up.” That was because of our performance and frequent attendance at prep meetings. On several occasions, I was a chair in the practice room and really did a quality job. While teaching the kids serious parliamentary procedure, we had some great debate in the sessions I ran and we pushed for three bills most nights. Affiliated with Model Congress is the Exchange Club, who has been a long lasting and generous sponsor. To show our appreciation as junior presidents, a few of us spent a great deal of time setting up their fried dough tent and working shifts at the Branford Festival.

Then senior year began and I was presented with many high expectations in several different areas of my high school life. I was to be the head of several school activities thanks to my tireless work and dedication throughout my younger years. Coming off an unbelievably successful junior year in Model Congress coupled with a fabulous, unforgettable trip to The Island (THANK YOU), our talented group of

presidents had much work, success, and fun to look forward to. **I was a contributor to the record (16 award) performance at Princeton Model Congress 2006. It was my first gavel ever, so after all of your guidance and past advice, I had finally gotten over the top.** As a result of that team effort at PMC, we had a substantial article in the Review, where I was one of the primary interviewees. We also were invited to dinner with the Exchange Club at La Luna. The stories and successes that Ryan, Kelly, Mishkin, and I shared validated the Exchange's continual super support for MCongress.

As for the steps for success to win an award as well as some social/personal advice for future conferences, here goes. The first key to success is preparation and motivation. When getting ready for a trip, your bill must be written, debated at practices, modified, and ultimately polished. A fact sheet is crucial, because some annoying delegate from a prep school will be unable to refute anything of a factual matter. You must be ready for attacks, so prepare a list (w/ potential explanations) of possible drawback/con arguments that may arise during the presentation of your bill. You should be attending a conference with motivation (reflected in your prep), because BHS MC has created a name for itself on these trips and it is your calling to continue that legacy.

The second key to success is flexibility and consistency. In order to be victorious at any conference, you must have exercised the devil's advocate phenomenon at some point or another. If you ever feel that you haven't given a speech in a while, prepare both a pro and con argument so you will almost inevitably be recognized to speak. If you are an advocate of stem cell research, but can still give a great con speech about it, go ahead and speak against your preconceived notion. My Duke Orientation packet says, "We can't change unless we survive, but we can't survive unless we change." Nobody will remember your political views after the conference, but they will remember your gavel, and your award will be a life long memory. As for consistency, you must be at all sessions on time and participate frequently and actively. If you thought about the cute girl from Moorestown all throughout the night of the delegate dance, don't be upset with or mock another delegate they receive your committee's award☺; he/she was consistent and earned it!

Finally, the last key to success is benevolence and extraversion. I would like to provide an anecdote from my own personal experience. At Princeton one year, I spoke powerfully and fiercely but my personality, optimism, and friendliness I think made me popular and respected by my committee members. My award did not only result from my knowledge and performance, but also the committee's support. Later that year at Penn, I spoke even better and felt even more intelligent, but I was also more vicious and deliberate. While appearing dominant over my committee, I was not well liked at all by my fellow delegates, a situation which led to a small number of votes on the last day. **That moment marked the realization of this third step to success, "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar."** And one last note on extraversion, if your committee ever has extra time for a joke or unrelated bill, please have fun and be involved. Composing or speaking for a fun bill reveals a lot about your personality to the chairs and the delegates. During my gavel performance, I debated relentlessly over how Quiznos is better than Subway. It is.

While the above steps to success are extremely important, one can not forget some universal advice for the experience as a whole at a MCongress. The personal and social gains that one can experience at a conference are unequalled in the large scale of high school opportunities. Go on these trips with an open mind and a motivation to become a better overall person. Don't be the person who just follows the usual group of friends; you have the whole school year for that. Meet new people, talk about new ideas, see new places, and try new foods...Mongolian BBQ, best ever. It is fair to say that I wish I was a freshman again with the whole world of Model Congress in front of me. Take this opportunity, grab it by the horns, cherish it, and ultimately remember it. At your high school graduation, you will be thanking Petela too for helping you learn, make friends, and ultimately find your way in the world.

This has been a lot of writing and since you know me pretty well, you know how much I write; so after a million history essays, applications, and reflections you have gotten from me over the last three years, sorry for the eye strain one final time. **I could not be in a better situation going to Duke next year, and you were a factor three times in my application plus all of the abstract things I discussed above. In AP US, you taught me to be a meticulous, neat, and an efficient worker; all of your guidance and care led to an A+ in the course and a 5 on the AP Exam. Then, this BHS MC opportunity was certainly a major factor on my application, not to mention being named one of the top three presidents at last year's banquet. And finally, you wrote that great recommendation for me, and I know Duke takes the recs extremely seriously.**

Looking back, we have been a great group of kids that ventured through your program. It started with those "lucky ones" to go on an overnight trip freshman year, continued with me and a few friends working tirelessly for a couple years, and ultimately concluded with that excellent group of six top presidents. I may not be a top president now, but I know that I have made my mark on this club in many ways. Whether it has been teaching younger bhsmcers the ins and outs of being an effective mc delegate, my skills with the media/community, or even all those awards, I hope that my legacy and that of our Class of 2007 is leaving will not be forgotten.

Thank you one final time for everything you have given me. I have done many things in your class and in model congress over the years, but they will never equal everything that you have done for me. Referring back to the aforementioned John Wooden quote, I will never be able to repay you. We have been teacher/student, mentor/protege, and I will always be grateful.

~Mark Schissler