

Some Student *Reflections* on BHS Model Congress 2005

At Model Congress I can be outgoing and say what I feel and be who I want to be without someone shooting me down or telling me to shut up. At MC I have the floor and no one can take it from me. I want to help better my country and speak for all those people who have the same problem I have about speaking out about certain issues. That's why I've chosen to major in political science/law. A lot of the people I met had very different opinions from me, and I got along with them anyway. I gained respect for people who may not necessarily hold the same values as me or live the same way I do. Plus, I'm now obsessed with America, perhaps a bit over patriotic -- my cell phone plays America the Beautiful and I pledge allegiance to the flag before I go to bed, ok, I did that once but still! Now that I've done MC, I realize that a lot of people are ignorant to what America really is and how it works. Some people just live here and trust that the government will do what they want it to. But how will the gov't know what you want if you don't say anything? Well I was one of those people before I joined BHS MC. And I'm really grateful that those days are over. But honestly I think the most important thing I experience when I go to conferences is that I can be who ever I want to be. People in my sessions don't know me. To them I'm just another debater, but in Branford people still see me as the fat girl from the 7th grade that had no friends and ate lunch alone. There are some people that didn't even know I existed till high school, and these are people who were on the same bus as me. MC has been one of the most important activities of my BHS career and my only regret is that I didn't have the courage to join it sooner.

-- *Nina Fattore*, Sr. MC President & multi award winner, joined BHS MC end of junior year

The Model Congress experience has taught me the true workings of leadership and government in our country. It has made me realize the effort and determination it takes to make decisions for millions of people. I have learned that there are many steps one must take in the government in order to help the people. When a piece of legislation is created, in my opinion it has an ambiguous and uncertain future ahead of it. There will always be a rival, a nemesis, an adversary. From MCongress I have accepted the fact that we must face those adversaries, meet their challenges, and answer their questions. Model Congress has taught me that you should defend any argument logically, calmly and passionately. In the countless hours of committee session I have realized that there are good and bad people in this world. Ones who hope to manipulate government in hopes of personal gains and others, like me, who feel that it is the people we are here to benefit. Selflessness is the true key to victory.

-- *Andre Gabriel*, Soph. MC VP, and two time award winner

Last year at Harvard Model Congress, I was delighted to be a member of the District Court. Let me tell you, nothing beats District Court. The very late night work sessions and tedious jury sittings were some of the best times of my life. I was able to become closer to many of my peers and also gain an overwhelming amount of knowledge of the judicial system...As a member of the District Court at Harvard, I was able to prepare lines of questioning, cross examinations, and opening and closing statements. Although I do not wish to become a lawyer, this experience has widened my intellectual awareness of how the judicial system functions. I've also learned that coffee does wonders, without it I wouldn't have lasted ten minutes! Just to give you an idea of how much coffee I drank that weekend, when I got back to Branford and resumed my normal schedule of one coffee each day, well, let's say Ibuprofen became my best friend. As an all around nervous person, I was leery of presenting my questions in front of a jury. But surprisingly I had no trouble at all. I even was able to think of a redirect question which may have won the case for us (the judge complimented me on it later on :-).

I have definitely improved my ability to think on my feet and write comprehensive questions and statements in a very short amount of time which will greatly help me in the future. Something I found cool was a judge who was very personable; he joked around with us while we were deliberating as a jury and surprisingly remembered every one of our names when we saw him later on, although I myself am blanking on his. Our DCourt team became friendly with a team from Pennsylvania, who we hung out with in the mall and chit chatted during cases; it was nice to connect with other kids my age from a different state. Finally, it was fascinating to watch video clips of some very famous court case movies with a visiting professor from Harvard who was able to tell us how horribly wrong they sometimes do things in court scenes. --*Adam Prins*, Sr MC VP

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I have definitely learned a great deal about politics, about public speaking, and about myself. Model Congress is great because it incorporates so many different ways of learning and bettering one's self. Of course, you have the aspect of learning about politics and the way government works. This was great for me because I love politics and love discussing, debating, and learning about the latest developments in our world. I love to know what I'm talking about when I debate the most recent politics, and MC challenged me to prepare for sessions with my peers and to learn with them while I'm there...I also learned a lot about public speaking and social interactions. It's hard to be an introvert and unconfident and do well. Model Congress has helped me to gain a stronger sense of self, a person who is not afraid to talk in front twenty or one hundred other kids, even if I'm not sure exactly what I'm talking about...MC has allowed me to view things outside of Branford that I would not have seen otherwise. I've been to New York City and saw Times Square at night, to DC twice once visiting the White House and always the monuments, and three times to Pennsylvania enjoying a first class hotel on campus, South Street famous cheese steak subs, and visiting the Kensington projects, the poorest section in Phili. All of these events opened my eyes to the wealth of knowledge and culture, blessings and blemishes that our east coast cities (especially cities with Ivy League universities) have to offer.

-- **Christian Storm**, Sr MC Preident & Two Time Gavel Award Winner

From my experiences at Model Congresses, I have made several new friends from BHS, other high schools, and colleges. I still communicate with a few of them regularly, discussing politics, social lives, world issues, local issues, food, colleges, SAT's and just about everything else. Also, with aspirations of entering college as a Politic Science Major, my Model Congress experiences over the last three years have deepened my appreciation for the job our politicians perform, and furthers my desire to have a part in it... The most enjoyable part of any and every conference has been the chance to meet and debate with my peers, about issues that are affecting us now and in the future. I am always amazed at some of my peers' points of views. Some are simply mistaken while others are set in their thoughts, and I love trying to swing their minds; beyond that greedy desire of always being right I try to see where they get their stance and accept and understand how they can see their way. "If you can't change your mind, are you sure you still have one" & "A closed mind is a wonderful thing to lose," are two quotes I go into every MC session repeating over and over in my head...

-- **Seth Olson**, Sr MC President & Gavel Award Winner+

Model Congress has really allowed me to open up and make more of myself. Some of the most important things I've learned over these past 3 years in high school have resulted because of my involvement in the club. Firstly, I would never have had known half of the people I consider to be good friends of mine if I hadn't joined. Secondly, I can read a bill now, online or published and understand the "language". I've actually expanded my vocabulary & speaking through the likes of Tim Moran, Conor Reardon and Ron Solevo, who have encouraged me to write better my own bills and later my AP U.S. History essays. I'd have to say I've definitely grown intellectually and academically owing it in some part to MC and its members.

In addition, even if sometimes my face still gets red when I stand up in front of a crowd to present my opinion or defend my argument, at least now I can get up there and do my thing. My confidence has grown incredibly. At conferences I've learned a few tricks of the trade; I know how to get the chair's attention quicker so that I can make my point first and I can actually use a map better now because I've had to walk campuses (including Yale's) to find my rooms! And MC has also allowed me to be exposed to a lot of different people and structures throughout our nation... Plus, how many HStudents can say they've been to D.C. 3 times in their lives. And not many people can say they got to experience many historic places and great restaurants without their parents. For 5 days I was able to go with friends and teachers without worrying about school or home. And then @ Penn -- shopping and hanging out with Kara and Dana, Dee and Christian, Sean and Conor and Whit in addition to meeting some really cool underclassmen. Honestly, how else would I be able to do that as a regular high school junior? Also because of these trips I'm looking forward to going to college in one of these cities because of the great feel I experienced while there. I cannot describe to you how much these MCongress experiences have shaped me. Thank you Petela for BHS MC ☺

-- **Charlotte Coulter**, Sr MC President, Gavel Award Winner +