

My MUN Journey: From Bird Flu to Military Juntas and Everything In Between

by Tim Gorde
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When I came to Old Dominion, I immediately sought out joining the Model United Nations. I had done it all four years in high school, and was excited to join. I quickly met one of my best friends at ODU through MUN, and was excited to get ready for the year.

Every fall, ODUMUN hosts UN Day on campus, a one-day event open to the entire university. I got to be Saudi Arabia, and the topic was human rights. Of course, Saudi Arabia isn't exactly the shining beacon of human rights in the world, so I figured it was going to be fun. As I researched the Saudi position, I found a speech made by the Saudi UN Ambassador discussing how great Saudi Arabia's women's rights were. In one of my speeches, I quoted from this speech. Immediately, I was accosted. One of the delegates in fact started screaming at me about how I was lying. In the end, I won Outstanding Delegate, and was ready for my first college conference.

This conference was the University of Pennsylvania Model United Nations Conference, affectionately known as UPMUNC. My partner, a grad student, and I were representing Mexico on the Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee (SOCHUM). Our topic was the bird flu (yes, the big flu scare before H1N1). My first thought was, this committee is huge (approximately 100 delegations) and how the heck are we going to be able to speak. My partner told me to relax, we would eventually get called, and of course we were. And we did really well. Our delegation became known for attacking everybody else's resolutions; Brazil in particular got very upset with us. In the end, we discussed the bird flu for four freaking days, and won an Honorable Mention, against delegates from schools such as Yale and Columbia. My freshman year was off to a great start.

The next major event was ODUMUNC, the high school conference. I was probably the most excited for this. I had attended the conference all four years in high school, and was ready to be on the dais for a change. I ended up being the director on SOCHUM. Most of my dais was new at chairing a MUN committee, and so there was a lot of consultation among us on how to do things, but in the end we worked it out and ran a great committee. After serving as director, I was ready to chair a committee, I thought.

Our last conference we attended was National MUN in New York City. We stayed at a hotel in the middle of Times Square. It was a five-day conference, and I was on one of the General Assemblies. The negative was I was representing the Bahamas as a single delegate, while on crutches. The rules for National did not allow for moderated caucus or questions, so the entire debate was formal speaker's list, and unmoderated caucus. Never before had I hated a Model UN committee like this one. It was another massive body, with over 125 delegations. The dais was directing us with who we should merge our resolutions. It was a rough experience, but New York City was amazing, as we came up with a new term: jay-crutching.

At the end of my freshman year, I applied to join the officer corps, and was elected Assistant Secretary-Treasurer. The role is to help the Secretary-Treasurer with registering students for UN Day and the High School Conference and collecting dues. As we returned from the summer, the Secretary-Treasurer announced she had an internship for the fall semester, meaning she wouldn't return until before the conference. This made my task much more difficult since I had no idea what I would be doing, since I was supposed to follow the ST. Luckily, our President helped out with UN Day, and she came back for the high school conference.

Being in the registration office for the conference is interesting. You have boxes of stuff that go to the delegates: name badges, programs, folders, etc. You also have all the sponsors coming in, sometimes all at the same time. Then you have to deal with the financial side of the equation: dealing with and collecting money, printing receipts, etc. It is really busy Thursday morning, but if you have everything together, then the next two days is pretty easy. Which for us it was, and I was able to help with the crisis staff in some of the committees. However, Saturday was a nightmare as we had to do awards. If the chairs give us the awards early, we can get it accomplished: the delay in getting the certificates done occurs when the chairs don't give us their awards in a timely fashion. For this, I was again by myself, as the ST, a senior, had to take her Exit Exam for ODU that morning. And the lovely program we used at the time, Microsoft Access, did not want to cooperate. Furthermore, we were running out of ink in the printer. My experience at that High School Conference was to never ever run for Secretary-Treasurer.

Later that year, we attended a college's first conference, the Five College Model United Nations Conference (affectionately known as FCMUN), at Mount Holyoke College. I was the United Kingdom on the Human Rights Council, discussing universal health care for children. Since it was their first conference, there were a lot of drops, and my committee was a total of nine people. Needless to say, we quickly finished the topic, despite some intense debate over accountability of donor funds and the right of NGO's to distribute aid. We spent most of Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning watching movies and checking everybody's Facebook page. I ended up winning the Honorable Mention on our committee, and two other members from our school also won awards.

Junior year was probably my most intense year in college. I took most of my hardest courses that year, had a jam packed work schedule, and also served as Secretary-General for ODUMUNC. I had originally been elected as Under Secretary-General, but was promoted when the original SG resigned. We also had a new faculty sponsor, and had quite a few officer vacancies at the beginning of the year. But the experiences of this year were really rewarding.

One of the first things that our new sponsor wanted to do was have us attend more conferences, which I whole-heartedly supported because conferences are probably the most fun you can have doing MUN. We decided to attend Georgetown's conference in the fall, in addition to UPMUNC. Despite registering late for the conference, we ended up getting decent assignments. I represented Djibouti on the Historical Security Council, 1993-94. This was also the first conference I served as a head delegate for ODU, since we did not have one elected when we were organizing the conference. Despite being a small African state, I did have fun. 1993 was when Somalia really began to collapse. Having a border with Somalia, I was able to begin attempting to meddle in Somali affairs, which turned out to be a big mistake. I was forced to accept French peacekeepers after my attempts to close the border to hordes of fleeing refugees

failed. Also, I was one of the organizers of the non-P5 veto caucus, which by midday Saturday had become determined to vote against any resolution supported by the P5, who had really taken control over our committee. This was probably the most organized conference I had ever attended in my life, as we had numerous crises occurring at the same time. This conference probably prepped me the most for helping to organize the crises for our high school conference.

Before being promoted to SG, my area of focus had been on the specialized committees, including our crisis committees. As such, I was in charge of making sure crises got moving. Probably the best committee to plan is the Future Security Council (FSC), because we essentially get to make the world as we see fit. Many of our plans just came from us brainstorming in the MUN office during lunch, seeing if stuff would fly. Our grand scheme was a multi-polar world in which the US, Germany, and Russia (all energy titans), were the major powers. We also threw in President Sarah Palin, in honor of the 2008 elections, which were in full campaign mode while we were discussing this. After our sponsor encouraged us to add some realism to our scheme, we had a strong foundation.

Once promoted to SG, I found the hardest part was registering schools and e-mail. Registering doesn't take long, but you have to take into consideration a number of factors: which country the school was last year, how many delegates are they bringing, what country does the school want, and what countries do we need to assign. At the beginning this is hard, because you want to accommodate their requests, but also realize you need certain major countries to be represented. Likewise, you can't give one school too many good countries, to be fair to all the schools. E-mail is also intense. It could take upwards of over an hour to get through all the e-mails from fellow officers, faculty sponsors, and delegates. My conference was also under-staffed due to some miscommunication with the MUN class offered at ODU. So, I was constantly running around, usually with crisis, to make sure the conference ran smoothly. Luckily, I had an amazing USG who helped make sure the other committees ran as well. After the conference ended, I was determined not to run for another term as SG.

After the high school conference ended, it was almost freedom. I saw almost, because there was the insane amount of schoolwork I had to attend to. So I really didn't feel as much relief as some past SG's have. But I did attend one conference in the spring, FCMUN. This time was the CIA Director on Kennedy's Executive Committee on the National Security Council dealing with the Cuban Missile Crisis. Being a CIA Director is fun, between running covert operations and assassination attempts and intelligence gathering, you are very busy. And my character didn't really involve himself in the actual debate between diplomacy and air strikes, I had flexibility in debate to change sides as I saw fit. It was a blast, and I won an Outstanding Delegate award, bested only by RFK.

For my senior year, I was President of ODUMUN. I felt prepared for the job, since I had been involved in almost every other officer position, so I had an idea how to oversee each officer. I didn't really have any grand projects in mind when I took office, except to expand our presence at the conferences we attend to. And we did, attending SCSY (Yale's conference) and CHOMUN (University of Chicago's conference) for the first time.

This year I also won my first gavel on the college circuit, at Georgetown. I was on the military junta of Myanmar, as Vice Senior General Maung Aye. I was the highest-ranking delegate, as only the chair had a more senior position in the Myanmar government. This committee was a blast. I and a fellow general caused the chair to freak out when we sabotaged

an attack on an ethnic group we didn't support. In a different situation, I worked with another general to create an excuse for us to attack an ethnic group that we did want to attack, and then lied to the committee to get them to support the attack. I also secretly negotiated with North Korea for arms when China threatened to stop selling us weapons, prompting the US to almost enter our territorial waters. My committee also had to schedule an election, in which our techniques were ballot stuffing, dissident crack down, sabotage of opposition candidates, and placing monks under house arrest.

Perhaps by biggest task my senior year was planning our joint-crisis committee (JCC) at the high school conference. This was the first time we had done a joint-crisis at ODUMUNC, and it was difficult to prepare for. The biggest task was juggling it with the FSC, which also requires a great deal of preparation. The hardest part of planning the JCC was not knowing what the delegates would do once there. But in the end despite a shortage of staff on the crisis, the committee occurred successively, and if the delegates had been in charge during 1961-62, I would not be alive to write this.

Overall, MUN has been a rewarding experience over the last nine years of my life. I had some of my best memories of college from these conferences, and have met many of my closest friends through MUN. In short, if you ever get the chance to do MUN in college, do it. You won't regret the experience.

Tim Gorde grew up in Newport News, Virginia and graduated from Warwick High School. In 2010, Tim graduated from Old Dominion with degrees in International Studies and History. He begins a new adventure at the University of Minnesota Law School in August 2010.