Harding students representing Argentina and the U.K. debated fiercely for sovereignty of the Falkland Islands during the Arkansas Model United Nations Conference 2011 on Friday, Nov. 16, at the University of Central Arkansas.

Model United Nations is a program provided primarily for students to simulate United Nations proceedings and educate participants on current events and diplomacy. Participants usually represent a single country on a certain council within the U.N., which they must thoroughly research and argue in the country’s best interest during a debate on a certain international topic. Senior Alan Elrod and junior Emily Wood argued the case for their respective represented countries (U.K. and Argentina) in the Model International Court of Justice while high school students worked out possible diplomatic solutions and asked questions. Senior Nick Rogers and freshman Jake Windley led the court on Saturday and discussed a conflict involving Turkey and Cyprus.

“I learned a bunch about the case I was arguing, the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus,” Rogers said. “The high school kids were fun to be around and they really impressed me with their questions.”

The political science majors — Elrod, Wood, Rogers and Windley — along with Dr. Mark Elrod, professor of political science, traveled to the University of Central Arkansas Nov. 16 and 17 to interact with high school students in the Model U.N. by leading the Model International Court of Justice. All the students, except Windley, who is a freshman, belong to Pi Sigma Alpha, the national political science honor society.

“It’s good to be involved in anything that helps kids think critically in a global way,” Alan Elrod said. He said the high school students “are forced to consider moral questions in critical ways. I think it was encouraging to see a room full of high school students engaged in thinking critically and globally and aware of international events and the international community.”

More than 400 high school students, who were enrolled in an international relations class or in their high school’s Model U.N. club, served as delegates from schools across the South for this year’s conference.

“Although I did not participate in this exact kind of tournament in high school, I was a debater and I was glad to be able to give back to the same system that gave me so much as far as critical thinking and public speaking skills,” Wood said.

Last spring, Pi Sigma Alpha took part in a Model Arab League at University of Arkansas-Little Rock, and while at the league, Elrod met the coordinator of the Arkansas Model U.N., Dr. Mark Mullenbach, associate professor of political science at UCA. Mullenbach invited the Harding
students to assist in the Model U.N. this year.

“The MICJ was a perfect fit for us because the World Court is a subject I cover in my International Law course and most of our majors are familiar with how it works,” Dr. Elrod said. “I think it was a good opportunity for [my students] to work on their public speaking, research and critical thinking skills in a competitive environment. Because this was a bit of an experiment this year, I selected four students I knew would be comfortable in those situations.”

Mullenbach invited Harding students to conduct the complete MICJ section at next year’s Model U.N., which includes selecting three cases to be heard and three teams of litigants.

“I plan on taking making good use of that,” Dr. Elrod said.