Student serves as conference leader

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Junior Willis Arnold, who has been involved with Arkansas Model United Nations (AMUN) for five years, was the Secretary-General for the 46th Annual AMUN conference, a conference held each year at UCA. The conference activities began Nov. 18 in the Ida Waldran Auditorium in Main Hall where students from 25 high schools from Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi and Florida met and continued into Nov. 19. About 400 high school students and teachers participated in this year’s conference.

The staff for the conference was composed of 40 students from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, Harding University, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and UCA. Arnold was a sophomore at Conway High School when he first became involved with Arkansas Model United Nations. The conference is designed to mock the actual U.N., which has its headquarters in New York City, Arnold said. High school students study and research their respective countries, as well as their respective committee topics. As a result, the conference serves as a significant learning experience for the high school students.
After the students research the backgrounds of different countries, the schools meet at an annual conference to report the countries’ history, economy, political state and policies, financial procedures, security concerns and other issues. “AMUN forces students to think on their feet and portray a country with very different views from their own,” Arnold said. Arnold became involved with AMUN when he was signing up for classes his sophomore year in high school. He said his dad, who is a political science professor, recommended the class to him. “When I first joined, I didn’t even know what the UN was. I was really nervous but I kept participating as a high school delegate because I wanted to be part of the staff,” Arnold said. He had to research other countries and “pretty much become that country” in high school and represent that country in one of the conference’s committees and in the General Assembly.

As Secretary-General, Arnold works closely with AMUN Coordinator, Dr. Mark Mullenbach, who is an Associate Professor of political science and the Director of the International Studies Program at UCA. Their job is to make sure that the conference runs smoothly. Arnold said making sure every committee has what it needs to function during the conference is one of his primary focuses. He was also responsible for helping to read and evaluate position papers that were submitted by participating delegations. Deputy Secretary-General, Senior Matthew Peterson, said that participating high schools choose to represent one or more countries during the conference. Arnold said, “A school can choose to represent as many countries as it can handle.” Each country or delegation to the AMUN conference generally consists of between four and eight delegates. Peterson said high school faculty advisers select their countries through a lottery held during the previous AMUN conference. Faculty advisers choose numbers and then take turn picking their countries for the following conference.

Peterson said the conference is very successful each year in terms of attracting hundreds of returning and new high school delegates from several states across the region. Every year, the high school students come together during the conference to write and debate resolutions pertaining to the committee topics. “Many of the delegates even come back to join the volunteer AMUN staff after they graduate from high school,” Peterson said. As far as the future is concerned, Arnold said he hopes to find an international job that relates to what he’s done with AMUN after he graduates. He also said he plans to stay involved with AMUN after graduation.