High school students to pose as world diplomats

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UCA will host the 48th annual Arkansas Model United Nations Conference Nov. 22–23. Each November, the conference is held at UCA with schools participating from across Arkansas and surrounding states.

This year’s keynote speaker is Brett Newcomb, who was one of the original AMUN founders at UCA as a student in 1966. Newcomb served as president of the General Assembly during the first annual AMUN conference held at UCA, which was the State College of Arkansas at the time.

Mark Mullenbach, political science professor and international studies program director, is the AMUN coordinator. The AMUN program is located in the political science department and the College of Liberal Arts. Mullenbach served as the graduate student advisor of the Arizona Model United Nations at the University of Arizona before becoming the AMUN Coordinator at UCA in 2001.

Professor Sims McClintock served as the AMUN coordinator at UCA for more than 25 years before his retirement in the 1990s. AMUN has been a regional Model UN conference since the 1970s, with participating delegates coming from Arkansas and neighboring states.

Mullenbach said last year’s conference hosted more than 425 high school students, along with faculty advisers, from Arkansas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Mississippi and Florida.

This year, he says he is expecting about the same number of high school students from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Tennessee.

AMUN is an educational program originally founded by a small group of UCA students in 1966, and the First Annual AMUN Conference was held in January 1967.

“Thousands of Arkansans and others have participated in the AMUN since that time. We will be celebrating the 50th AMUN conference in 2015,” Mullenbach said.

Mullenbach said the AMUN conference allows students the opportunity to work with other students in representing various countries around the world in dealing with global problems.

The two day AMUN conference consists of an opening session, which includes the keynote speaker and other addresses; formal meetings of the Security Council, Human Rights Council,
International Court of Justice, Economic and Social Council and four General Assembly committees; a Plenary Session of the General Assembly, including members of the four General Assembly committees; and the closing session, which includes the awards ceremony.

Mullenbach said during the formal meetings the Plenary Session of the General Assembly, delegates have the opportunity to debate and vote on draft resolutions concerning a variety of global topics.

“The AMUN conference is also a competition, in which participating high school students compete for Outstanding Delegate and Outstanding Delegation awards, as well as other recognitions,” Mullenbach said. “This year, UCA, University of Arkansas at Little Rock and Harding University students served as the AMUN conference volunteer staff, including serving as committee chairs, co-chairs, and legal counsels.”

Senior Stephanie Gray has been involved with the AMUN for eight years, throughout high school and college. She has been a delegate and staff member, both of which she considered “incredibly rewarding experiences.”

“Originally Model UN was just another activity that I could add to my résumé, but it turned out to become a much more significant part of my life,” she said. “When I participated for the first time, I realized that I hardly knew about the vast number of international issues transpiring all around me. This motivated me to research further on them, and before I knew it, my knowledge of international affairs grew exponentially.”

Gray said participating in the AMUN has improved her speaking and communication skills.

“I [have] learned how to become an effective leader through my years in Model UN,” she said. “The young men and women with whom I compete with or lead in committee are going to be the lawmakers, politicians, human rights advocates, defenders of liberty of tomorrow, and that I was also one of them. Ultimately, AMUN can have a real impact on the lives of students participating; it is more than just a conference,” Gray said.