



# Modeling the world

## MODEL UNITED NATIONS

### Natasha D'Souza

*International affairs major*

Run as an officially recognized student organization, Model United Nations is an extracurricular activity that dates to 2008 in which students take on the role of a delegate to the U.N., representing a chosen country alongside other delegates in simulated U.N. committees.

The organization's 25 members simulate world issues and crises at their weekly meetings, and between six and 16 students vie to compete in conferences at other East Coast universities during the November-April season.

"It helps with the question, how do we necessarily target some of the most pressing issues of today's world and how do we do it effectively," D'Souza says. "I think that's something that's imperative for the youth of our nation to be able to do."

Students gain critical life skills and a broader global view as members of simulation teams BY JANET SMITH ('81)

Fueled by intensive research and public speaking practice, JMU students are learning the arts of diplomacy, debate and compromise in five simulations modeled on the African Union, Arab League, European Union, United Nations and Moot Court.

Approximately 60 undergraduate students participate annually in the model simulations, each designed to hone understanding of complex international bodies and their deliberations as well as legal matters.

While other universities have model simulations, "It is unusual that there be this many at JMU," said Chris Blake, professor of political science, the academic department that sponsors most of the JMU model simulation teams.

The university's proximity to the District of Columbia is a factor, Blake adds, noting that JMU draws students from the D.C.-New York corridor who have people with global affairs experiences in their networks. "There is a higher literacy level and interest level of the average JMU student in these sorts of activities than we might find at a similarly sized university in a fair number of the other states."

Students' participation in the international and Moot Court teams is a logical extension of his department's and the university's commitment to experiential education. "There is an engaged learning opportunity tied to simulations," Blake said. "Our department does a lot of simulation within courses because it's a problem-solving application of what the students are learning. The technique is useful."

Membership in the model teams is open to all JMU students on a competitive basis. "It's not essential that a person be a major in political science, but it is essential that they have a sense of international relations and a sense of the substance involved of the simulation at issue," Blake said.

Beyond being proven educational tools, simulations also provide JMU students with the development of broader networks of people—other students, faculty and governmental representatives—that increase their vision of the world and offer a valuable group of colleagues.

Gifts to the political science department's annual fund account support students' participation in the simulation teams. Other university departments, colleges and offices also support specific simulations.

### MODEL AFRICAN UNION

JMU's newest model simulation team, the Model African Union, was formed in October 2015 to participate in the 14th annual National Model African Union, held in Washington in February. Once Besi Muhonja, a professor of Africana Studies/women's and gender studies as well as African literatures and cultures, discovered the MAU while helping a student look for academic conferences, she immediately contacted JMU administrators and within the week had the OK to form a JMU team.

"Our team had to embody the country of Namibia," said Muhonja, who advises the team with Anta Sane, visiting professor of political science. Their six students researched Namibia's history and culture

**'It is unusual that there be this many [model simulations] at JMU.'**

— CHRIS BLAKE,  
*professor of political science*

to craft resolutions for discussion, learn the ropes of securing sponsorship for those resolutions among other MAU delegations and immerse themselves in the complex rules of the African Union, by which the MAU functions.

The JMU team also met with two representatives of the Embassy of the Republic

of Namibia while in Washington.

"I've really begun to appreciate the work that goes into policies and decision making," said Kara Burgess, an international affairs major who was part of the delegation from Namibia. "All 49 of my peers in my committee had national interests, just as I had my own. In the calm confines of a classroom, it is easy to say, 'This is the solution,' but in reality, in the heat of the moment, there were 50 different solutions that we all had to agree upon, and that is no small task. It really changes how I approach the classroom because I now take an extra second to think, 'but in practice...?' and that helps me think more realistically."

MAU is supported by the departments of political science; justice studies; and for-

### MODEL AFRICAN UNION

#### **Kara Burgess**

*International affairs major*

JMU's newest model simulation team, the Model African Union, was formed in October 2015 to participate in the 14th annual National Model African Union, held in Washington in February.

The six students, assigned to embody Namibia, researched the country's history and culture to craft resolutions for discussion, learn the ropes of securing sponsorship for those resolutions among other MAU delegations and immerse themselves in the complex rules of the African Union, by which the MAU functions.

"I've really begun to appreciate the work that goes into policies and decision making," Burgess says. "All 49 of my peers in my committee had national interests, just as I had my own. In the calm confines of a classroom, it is easy to say, 'This is the solution,' but in reality, in the heat of the moment, there were 50 different solutions that we all had to agree upon, and that is no small task. It really changes how I approach the classroom because I now take an extra second to think, 'but in practice...?' and that helps me think more realistically."



eign languages, literatures and cultures, as well as Research and Scholarship, the College of Arts and Letters, Cross-Disciplinary Studies, International Programs and Africana Studies.

**MODEL ARAB LEAGUE**

The 10-member Model Arab League team was the delegation from Egypt for the Capital Area Regional Model Arab League Conference, which simulates the general and specialized councils of the 22-member League of Arab States. The team’s participation came on the heels of a “trial run” in 2013 before a competitive application process, which included coursework in Middle Eastern and Arabic studies and/or travel in the region, set the 2014 membership.

To prepare for the conference, held at Georgetown University in November 2015, team members enrolled in a one-credit course taught by advisor Manal Jamal, professor of political science. Meeting weekly, the team researched regional issues and possible MAL crisis scenarios, which are challenging components at many of the model simulations.

“The students learn a lot in their own preparation and that of others,” said Jamal, who added that students often met beyond team sessions to update each other on research and to improve their adherence to Roberts Rules of Order, the MAL’s standard.

“It was a great way for me to meet new people who share the same passion for Middle Eastern politics as I do and taking

their viewpoints and opinions into consideration,” said Marina Shanoudi, an international affairs major.

**MODEL EUROPEAN UNION**

Another first-year team, the Model European Union, is made up of 10 students selected by a committee. Representing the delegation from Hungary, the students researched refugee and foreign policy questions to prepare for this year’s migration crisis simulation.

They were one of 15 college teams participating in the Mid-Atlantic EU Simulation in November 2015.

In addition to researching as a group at weekly one-credit course meetings and more individually to prepare for their role, team

**MOOT COURT**

**Tre Allen**

*Psychology major, pre-law student*

Students interested in earning a spot on JMU’s Moot Court team complete the political science course The Appellate Process and Practice in the spring semester before being considered for the six-member body. Then they take the Moot Court course in the fall semester to prepare for the American Collegiate Moot Court Association Competition’s Mid-Atlantic Regional. The competition is one of 10 regionals that are national qualifying tournaments.

The Moot Court, in its fourth year at JMU, requires students to be prepared to argue either side of a case.

“At competition, we present our argument to current lawyers, judges and law students,” Allen says. “It has really helped me to always be prepared for public speaking and to know how to handle difficult situations.”





members had to gain a deep understanding of the formal procedures of the European Parliament, a complicated set of rules.

MEU differs from other international body deliberations in that participants represent not only the official government policy positions, but also dissidents and opposing political parties, said advisor John Scherpereel, professor of political science. “The experience is not simply about negotiating with other students who are playing other countries’ roles.”

The JMU team also met with policy advisors at the Hungarian Embassy to the United States.

“We want students who participate in the simulation to get a stronger sense of the diversity represented in the EU and the ways that the EU’s international institutions manage that diversity,” said Scherpereel. “In this sense, the experience provides excellent training for students interested in pursuing diplomatic and policymaking careers.”

### MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Model United Nations is organized differently than JMU’s other model simulations. Run as an officially recognized student organization, MUN is an extracurricular activity that dates to 2008 in which students take on the role of a delegate to the U.N., representing a chosen country alongside other delegates in simulated U.N. committees.

While Model U.N. participants receive awards for their ability to play assigned roles, Adam Miner ('16), president in 2015-16, said, “What I would rather my members do

**‘What I would rather my members do is grow in their abilities, specifically public speaking, research gathering, critical thinking and overall confidence.’**

— ADAM MINER ('16),  
*former Model United Nations president*

is grow in their abilities, specifically public speaking, research gathering, critical thinking and overall confidence.”

The organization’s 25 members simulate world issues and crises at their weekly meetings, and between six and 16 students vie to compete in conferences at other East Coast universities during the November-April season.

### MOOT COURT

Students interested in earning a spot on JMU’s Moot Court team complete the political science department’s three-credit seminar course The Appellate Process and Practice in the spring semester before being considered for the six-member body. Then, they take the one-credit Moot Court course in the

**Model simulation experiences hone critical thinking skills as students delve into cultural complexities and competing interests to solve problems and resolve crisis scenarios.**

first block of the fall semester to prepare for the American Collegiate Moot Court Association Competition, which held its Mid-Atlantic Regional in November at Regent University in Virginia Beach. The competition is one of 10 regionals that are national qualifying tournaments, explained advisor and political science professor Elaine Chisek.

The Moot Court, in its fourth year at JMU, requires students to be prepared to argue either side of a case. The 2015 topic related to the free exercise of religion and the Equal Protection Clause of the Constitution. The team meets twice a week to share case research and to practice oral argument.

In addition to critiquing her students’ performance, Chisek arranges alumni speakers and field trips for her team. In Spring 2015, the group visited the Virginia Supreme Court, and JMU President Jonathan R. Alger, who holds a J.D. degree from Harvard Law School, served as a judge for the 2014-15 team. That team performed well at the regional competition and went on to the national competition.

“At competition, we present our argument to current lawyers, judges and law students,” said Tre Allen, who is majoring in psychology and working on a pre-law program. “It has really helped me to always be prepared for public speaking and to know how to handle difficult situations.”