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bringing expertise to MUN simulations

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The UN Forum and Faculty Lecture at NMUN: Bringing Expertise to MUN Simulations

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Abstract

Expert briefings are important parts of the real UN world and therefore are a requisite event to ensure the authenticity of the MUN simulation experience. Not only do they offer important up to date information for the UN meeting delegates who are being briefed, the feedback on questions from the UN meeting delegates provide the experts with renewed focus and clearer senses of where they (the experts) might direct their future research. This short paper will report on one under-reported aspect of MUN simulations—that of the expert interventions seen in the UN Forum and Faculty Lecture. NMUN Japan 2016 offered both of these forms of expert briefings at two discrete points during the week of events.

Key words: Model United Nations simulations, expert briefings, community of practice,

1. Introduction

MUN simulations are experiential learning events designed to provide young people with the chance to learn, negotiate and exemplify representatives of the global community. They do so by constructing resolutions related to the security, human rights, environmental issues and other humanitarian interventions that are current in the world. This short paper will report on one under-reported aspect of MUN simulations—that of the expert interventions seen in the UN Forum and Faculty Lecture. NMUN Japan 2016 offered both of these forms of expert briefings at two discrete points during the week of events.

2. Background

In order to better understand the connections between MUN and expert interventions such as UN Forums, Faculty Lectures, or other expert briefings, it is necessary to first describe and define these events. Then, one must situate these briefings within the flow of the MUN simulation—Where do they typically occur? This is followed by a discussion of their *raison d'être*—What purpose do they serve?

2.1 Expert briefings in UN and MUN communities of practice

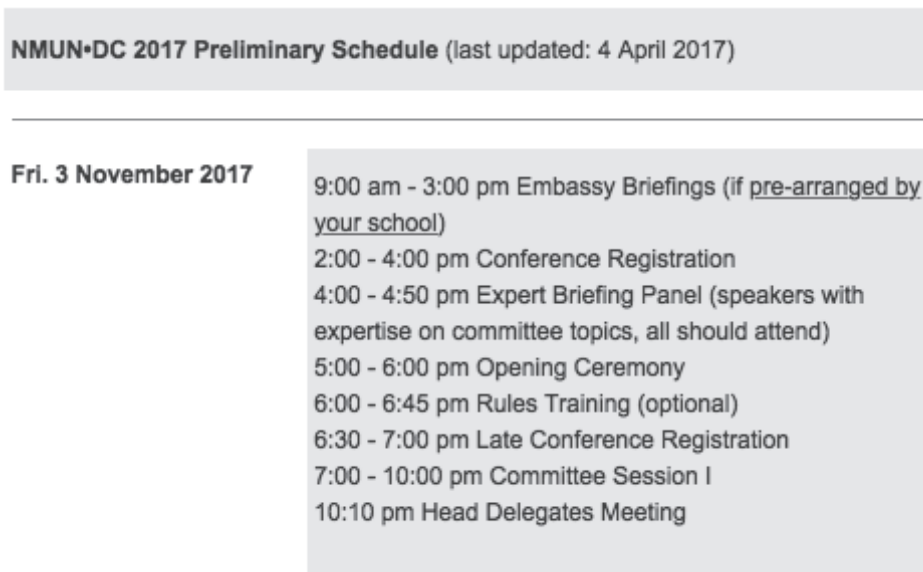
As mentioned by Tatsuki in Chapter 10 (in conjunction with the notion of ELF—English as a Lingua Franca), MUN simulations can be considered a community of practice. This is because they possess three criteria that according to Wenger (1998), characterize a community of practice—mutual engagement, a negotiated joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire.

The purpose of an expert briefing session is twofold. First, it provides the expert panel (through the initial briefing request and subsequent Q&A interactions) with focal points and a clear sense of the questions and issues Member States are most concerned with in relation to the topic in debate. Second, it gives Member States an opportunity to interact directly with the experts on those issues (UN DESA, 2012). Experts routinely synthesize relevant research in order to summarize relevant content, define and analyze categories, highlight stakes and interests in the debate, explain the various limitations of proposed/recommended actions from domestic to international levels and discuss the perceived cost and benefits of those same proposed/recommended actions.

2.2 Situating expert briefings in NMUN events

Since NMUN Japan was an offshore version of the main NMUN events in New York and Washington DC, it would make sense to look at where expert briefings are located in the “home” events. A screen shot (see Figure 1) of the preliminary schedule of the NMUN DC 2017 event shows that the expert briefing occurred before the opening ceremony and before even the first committee sessions.

This positioning of expert testimony or briefings prior to the start of the meeting is not



The image is a screenshot of a document titled "NMUN•DC 2017 Preliminary Schedule (last updated: 4 April 2017)". Below the title, there is a horizontal line. Underneath the line, the date "Fri. 3 November 2017" is listed on the left. To the right of the date, a list of events is provided with their corresponding times. The events are: 9:00 am - 3:00 pm Embassy Briefings (if pre-arranged by your school), 2:00 - 4:00 pm Conference Registration, 4:00 - 4:50 pm Expert Briefing Panel (speakers with expertise on committee topics, all should attend), 5:00 - 6:00 pm Opening Ceremony, 6:00 - 6:45 pm Rules Training (optional), 6:30 - 7:00 pm Late Conference Registration, 7:00 - 10:00 pm Committee Session I, and 10:10 pm Head Delegates Meeting.

NMUN•DC 2017 Preliminary Schedule (last updated: 4 April 2017)	
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Figure 1. Expert briefings at NMUN DC 2017

by chance: The briefing is meant to augment preparation before negotiations begin. Related to this, NMUN has a policy regarding the introduction of world events to committees:

Time freezes at 12:01 am the morning before the first committee sessions for all committees except the Security Council simulations. After this time, delegates will not be able to introduce real world events to committees. The Security Council is an exception because they have an open agenda that allows them to introduce topics in addition to those in the background guide as world conditions warrant. (NMUN, 2017 FAQs)

The UN Department of Public Information (UNDPI), which runs many UN4MUN workshops with the express hope of informing MUN conference organizers about how the UN actually functions, also includes expert briefings in its plans (Best Delegate, n.d). It should be noted that a “Panel of Experts” would be mandated to support the work of any committee established by the Security Council (to name only one of the many organs of the UN) for a set period of time. One such example can be seen in the committee formed to deal with sanctions against the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) (see information at <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/panel_experts/work_mandate>).

2.3 The *raison d’être*—the function and purpose of expert briefings

The world is a complex place and so too are the issues faced by diplomats and law/policy makers. Regardless how educated a delegate/diplomat (in real life or in a MUN simulation) may be, it is impossible to be knowledgeable at an expert level on more than a few issues. For this reason, experts are regularly invited to brief the incumbents of the various meetings at the UN.

3. Expert Briefings at NMUN Japan 2016

Knowing the integral nature of expert briefings as part of the workings of UN policy development, it was considered paramount to include them in the NMUN Japan event. The expert briefings at NMUN took two forms: 1) the UN Forum, and 2) the Faculty Lecture. The following sections will explain the selection process and then describe the contents and execution of each event.

3.1 The UN Forum

NMUN Japan was host to four UN committees: General Assembly Plenary (GA), Economic and Social Council Plenary (ECOSOC), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Security Council (SC). All four of these bodies had two assigned topics to prepare. One of these topics (topic two for ECOSOC) had unique relevance to Kobe and Japan: “Building a Resilient World Through Disaster Risk Reduction.” The reason for this relevance is that Kobe survived the Great Hanshin Earthquake in 1995 and Japan frequently suffers from the aftermath of seismic events. Therefore, it is not surprising that Japan has been hosting major world conferences related to disaster reduction.

In 1994, the first World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction held in Yokohama adopted what became known as the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World. In 2005, the second to acknowledge Kobe's 10th year of recovery after the Great Hanshin Earthquake, it hosted the World Conference on Disaster Reduction where the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Countries and Communities to Disasters (HFA) was adopted. The Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction was held in March of 2015 in Sendai City, Miyagi Prefecture, Japan which resulted in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Furthermore, of the many UN agencies in Japan, UNISDR (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction) resides in Kobe. Therefore, UNISDR Kobe was asked to provide support and assistance to find appropriate experts to brief delegates on topic two. Through connections with UNSIDR, we were introduced to the senior program officer (Yuki Matsuoka, PhD), who agreed to help assemble a panel of experts and moderate the event. NCCA representatives and our organizing committee members visited the offices and began negotiations in July 2014. Dr. Matsuoka nominated the following speakers early in 2016: Professor Yoshiaki Kawata (Director and Chair Professor, Research Center for Societal Safety Sciences, Kansai University), Mr. Kimio Takeya (Visiting Senior Advisor, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and President, Pacific Consultants International), and Ms. Sandra Wu Wen-Hsiu (Chairperson and CEO Kokusai Kogyo Co., LTD., Co-Founder and Director, Japan Asia Group Limited).

United Nations Forum

NMUN · JAPAN

WEDNESDAY, 23 NOVEMBER; 10:00am - 12:00 pm, Main Hall, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies



OPENING REMARKS: 60 Year Relationship between the United Nations and Japan

Kaoru Nemoto
Director, UN Information Centre in Tokyo

After working as a TV Asahi announcer and reporter, Nemoto joined UNHCR in 1996. In her career at UNHCR until the end of 2011, she was active in the field to assist and protect refugees as well as in developing policies and managing fund-raising from the private sector at the Geneva headquarters. Nemoto also worked as spokeswoman for WFP and Executive Director at Japan Association for UNHCR. She assumed her current position in August 2013. Her publications include "Refugees Finding Japan: Strength to Survive, Strength to Support" (Eiji Press).

PANEL DISCUSSION: Mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction: Japanese and Global Perspectives

MODERATOR:

Ms. Matsuoka joined the UNISDR Headquarters (Geneva) in 2004. Since April 2005, she served as Special Assistant to Director at the UNISDR Headquarters. In 2008, she moved to Kobe to manage the newly established UNISDR Office in Japan. Prior to UNISDR, she worked as Special Adviser of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan in the area of Human Rights at the Permanent Mission of Japan to the United Nations in Geneva. She holds a PhD in Global Environmental Studies.

PANELISTS:

Prof. Kawata graduated Kyoto University. He was Fulbright Senior Research Fellow at Princeton University, USA. He also lectured at Harvard University, MIT and University of California, Berkeley. He was Professor and Director of DPRI, Kyoto University and Director of Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution (DRI) after Kobe earthquake. He had 13 awards such as Laureate for 2007 United Nation Sasakawa Award and 2009 Distinguished Services Commendation awarded by the Prime Minister.

Mr. Takeya, is well known Disaster Risk Reduction and Reconstruction Policy Expert and deeply involved in the formulation process of Sendai Framework for DRR as a main member of negotiation team of Japanese Government. He is one of 20 members of UNFCCC Executive Committee of Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage, and Intergovernmental Expert Working Group Member for Indicator & Terminology of Sendai Framework for DRR.

Ms. Wu is Co-Founder and Director, Japan Asia Group; since 2013, Chairperson and CEO, Kokusai Kogyo Co., Ltd. Member, Global Agenda Council on Infrastructure, Disaster Resource Partnership, Advisory Board for Global Risk Report 2016, and Climate Leaders CEO, World Economic Forum; Board member, UNISDR Private Sector Alliance for Disaster Resilient Societies (ARISE), DRR Champion from the private sector, UNISDR; Chair, Private Sector Advisory Working Group, UNISDR Asia and the Pacific Regional Office.



Yuki Matsuoka
Head, United Nations
Office for Disaster Risk
Reduction (UNISDR)
Office in Japan



Yoshiaki Kawata
Executive Director,
Disaster Reduction and
Human Renovation
Institution
Director and Chair
Professor, Research
Center for Societal Safety
Sciences,
Kansai University



Kimio Takeya
Distinguished Technical
Advisor to the President,
Japan International
Cooperation Agency (JICA)



Sandra Wu Wen-Hsiu
Chairperson and CEO,
Kokusai Kogyo Co., Ltd.
Co-Founder and Director,
Japan Asia Group Limited

Figure 2. UN Forum page from NMUN Japan Program

As well as addressing a pertinent agenda topic, the UN Forum was seen as a way to celebrate some history; 2016 would mark the 60th year of Japan's membership in the UN. To memorialize and honor that milestone, it was decided that Ms. Kaoru Nemoto (Director, United Nations Information Centre in Tokyo) would offer an opening speech on that topic.

3.2 The Faculty Lecture

It is a tradition at the offshore NMUNs to offer a lecture that would be of interest to the faculty advisors who accompanied their students to NMUN events. Usually one afternoon during the week would be set aside for the lecture followed by a tea break. All faculty were invited to attend a lecture (titled, *The Challenge of Global Aging*) on the Thursday of the weeklong event given by Keisuke Nakashima, Associate Professor at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies; Senior Associate at the Global Aging Institute. He discussed how demography would reshape public finance, economy, society, politics, and even international relations in the 21st Century.


	FACULTY LECTURE: The Challenge of Global Aging
All faculty are invited to attend a lecture on Thursday given by Keisuke Nakashima, Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, Senior Associate, Global Aging Institute. Come hear his views on how demography will reshape public finance, economy, society, politics, and even international relations in the 21 st Century.	

Figure 3. Faculty Lecture in NMUN Japan Program

4. Final Comments

In order to provide an authentic experience and to legitimize what students are doing, to enable them to experience their imagined selves in an imagined community (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Dörnyei, 2009) those kinds of events are invaluable. It not only motivates, it validates. Furthermore, these kinds of briefings also validate the education that we the instructors are attempting to provide in spite of our own limitations as non-experts (albeit interested ones) in these various fields. This has strengthened our resolve to bring expert sessions to all future MUN events.

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