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A story of resilience: Bringing Ukrainian universities to the NMUN global community

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# A Story of Resilience: Bringing Ukrainian Universities to the NMUN Global Community

Halyna PROTSYK

## 1. Introduction

In 1945, Ukraine emerged as one of the founding members of the United Nations, recognizing the crucial role of the UN in addressing complex global challenges through multilateral efforts. Despite facing a long-lasting aggression from the Russian Federation and devastating effects of the war, Ukraine remains steadfast in its dedication to the United Nations' work in promoting international peace and security and committing to advancing the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030. Ukraine actively engages in the activities of key UN organs, such as the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, and Human Rights Council, among others (Activities in the UN, 2023). Raising awareness about the United Nations (UN) among Ukrainian citizens and youth is essential to empower them to become active global citizens and contributing to the UN's mission of promoting peace, justice, and sustainable development worldwide despite all the adversities. This necessitates robust collaboration among governmental, academic, and civil society organizations. Academia plays a crucial role in this endeavor as it possesses the means to cultivate future generations of global citizens. This can be achieved through integrating UN-related topics into educational curricula, organizing Model UN programs, establishing international academic partnerships, engaging with, and serving local communities, and facilitating international exchange programs. By leveraging these academic tools and approaches, Ukraine can effectively promote UN awareness, foster a sense of global citizenship, and contribute to the development of a more globally engaged Ukrainian society.

Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) recognizes the vital role of academia in nurturing Ukraine's global engagement and utilizing this global perspective for the benefit of the common good. This recognition is rooted in the institutional mission and vision which calls UCU to raise the leaders of the nation, professionals, for the ministry both in Ukraine and abroad – in the name of God's glory, common good and human dignity (UCU Mission, 2023). Accordingly, UCU Graduate Profile sets the seven key attributes of such a leader that are embedded in the university curriculum system: humanity, the ability to make ethical decisions, professionalism and entrepreneurship, civic activism, global involvement,

responsibility and accountability, adaptability, and resilience (UCU Graduate Profile, 2021). We recognize the importance of understanding local challenges through a global lens and acknowledging their interconnected nature. Within its Strategy of globalization and international solidarity (2020), the "from global to local" approach has been adopted as a method for organizing the academic process. This approach focuses on equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in the global labor market and navigate life in an interconnected world. Our commitment extends to addressing sustainable development issues at different levels. UCU strives to synchronize its curricula with global objectives, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals. It aims to integrate learning outcomes that tackle global challenges at the local level and link local initiatives to broader global aims. We prioritize effective communication within communities and in society. Guided by the vision of a "University that serves" UCU promotes student volunteering and advocates for service-learning approaches. Through this integration of global goals and a commitment to service, UCU equips students with the ability to navigate arduous situations and convert challenges into opportunities to drive positive change in society.

The pivotal decision to merge UCU with National Model United Nations community in 2019 was a significant milestone in our journey to accomplish these ambitious goals. By partnering with the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, we became pioneers of Ukraine in integrating the NMUN methodology into our educational process. Through collaborative efforts, we proudly formed the first academic team in the history of NMUN to represent Ukrainian higher education institutions at global and regional conferences. Since that time, our universities have been upholding the reputation of the NMUN community in Ukraine. We have worked diligently to enhance the NMUN institutional capacity through resilient international partnerships, creating training programs, promoting collaboration among faculty advisors, bringing student delegations to numerous NMUN conferences, and involving key stakeholders including governmental representatives in constructive discussions about Ukraine's UN policy.

## 2. A road to NMUN through international engagement: Canada-Ukraine NMUN partnership

While many universities in Europe, North America, and Asia have well-established Model UN ecosystems, which are integrated not only in the educational process, but have a developed network of student UN clubs at universities that organize delegations from their universities to participate in international conferences, modeling in Ukraine is still less common. As our research findings show, in Ukraine since early 1990s Model UN events have been primarily organized at the school level, occasionally extending to regional or national levels (Kuzmenko & Reshetniak, 2015). Although there have been sporadic successful attempts to organize university-level Model UN conferences, the involvement of foreign university and high school students has remained relatively limited (Model UN

at NaUKMA, 2017). Projects organized by civil society organizations in collaboration with higher educational institutions have yielded more successful attempts at UN modeling, as they have involved participants from various regions across Ukraine. For example, in 2015, the Ukrainian Catholic University partnered with the NGO Institute of Social Initiatives, with the support of the Representation of Ukraine to the UN and local authorities, to organize the Lviv Model UN. This event, which brought together students and pupils from 17 regions of Ukraine, is considered one of the pioneering nationwide Model UN conferences in the country (Lviv Model UN, 2015). However, since its independence Ukraine has not yet sent student delegations to global conferences, making modeling at the international level relatively uncommon in our country. Hence, although the Ukrainian academic community has obtained pedagogical and methodological expertise in UN modeling, it has not effectively incorporated this practice into the wider global NMUN framework through learning enhancement, international academic partnerships, or participation in international conference competitions. A significant limitation has been the insufficient integration of modeling into university curricula, coupled with the absence of vibrant UN student clubs and student-led projects aimed at promoting awareness of the UN's role, structure, and activities in Ukraine.

A significant turning point occurred in March 2019 when UCU, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NAUKMA), and MacEwan University (Edmonton, Canada) facilitated by Ukrainian Resource and Development Center (URDC) formed a historic Canada-Ukraine NMUN partnership. This collaborative effort aimed to integrate Ukraine into the global community of the National Model United Nations (NMUN), the largest and longest-standing university-level Model UN in the world that gathers participants from more than 100 UN Member States each year, offering a platform to tackle pressing global issues. Since then, these three committed universities have forged a collaborative partnership, actively engaging in joint endeavors such as creating, teaching, and learning together. They achieve this through a combination of in-person and virtual meetings, training sessions, and active participation in conferences.

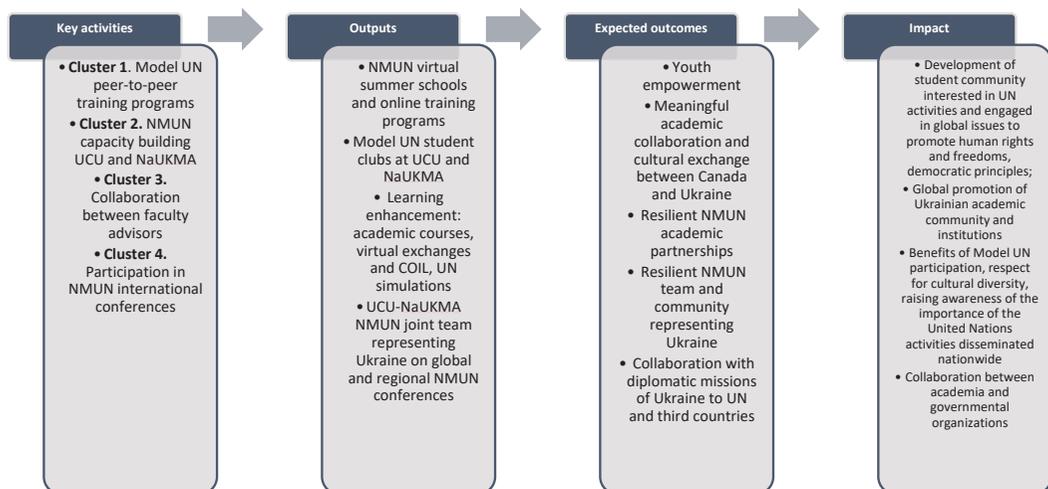
The participation of MacEwan University in this collaboration with Ukrainian universities was not a random occurrence, but a deliberate decision. Canadian Prof. Chaldeans Mensah, an associate professor of political science at MacEwan University, played a significant role in this endeavor. In 1993, Prof. Mensah introduced a class simulation of the UN General Assembly as part of his International Relations course. This experience inspired his students to establish the MacEwan United Nations Club, which has thrived for 25 years. Prof. Mensah's contributions to the field were recognized when he was elected to the NMUN board in 2005, serving as president from 2018 to 2020. As Prof. Mensah pointed out, the inception of the Canada-Ukraine Model UN Project was sparked by a suggestion put forth by a former NMUN board member from the Czech Republic. The proposal aimed to specifically focus on Ukraine as a candidate for the NMUN board scholarship, an initiative designed to bring students from countries

that had not previously participated in the NMUN New York conference. Prof. Mensah proactively reached out to URDC and its director, Mrs. Larisa Hayduk, to transform the project into a tangible reality (URDC Newsletter, 2021). Recognizing their established and fruitful collaboration with the URDC and driven by a commitment to enriching students' global exposure, UCU readily embraced Larisa Hayduk's initiative and commenced efforts to enhance its own NMUN institutional capacity.

With the vision of fostering collaboration, the Canada-Ukraine NMUN project embarked on its journey, marked by the *initial joint cluster of peer-to-peer trainings* which resulted in numerous cross Atlantic video conferences. Driven by the leadership of Dr. Chaldeans Mensah, Ashlee Rolheiser, and the dedicated executive members of the MacEwan United Nations student club, this partnership set the stage for future cluster endeavors (Figure 1). Notably, *a faculty learning community* was built as a result of this initiative involving Dr. Dmytro Sherengovsky, Dr. Halyna Protsyk (Department of Political Science, UCU) and Dr. Dmytro Ishchenko, Dr. Galyna Solovei (Department of International Relations, NaUKMA).

**Figure 1**

*Canada-Ukraine-NMUN collaboration framework. Source: author's own development*



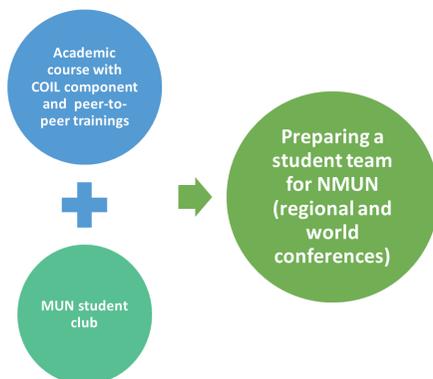
In June 2019, following three months of cross-Atlantic video conferences, members of the MacEwan United Nations Club finally had the opportunity to meet their Ukrainian counterparts from UCU and NaUKMA in person in Kyiv. This marked the culmination of their first collaborative efforts, as they engaged in a condensed, one-week training program (Levantovych, 2019). Drawing upon their profound NMUN expertise in diplomacy, public speaking, and research, the MacEwan club members facilitated the establishment of NMUN joint delegation of UCU-NaUKMA which would later depart

for their ever first NMUN regional conference in Erfurt November 2019. These events served as a catalyst and source of inspiration for another significant milestone. In December 2019, the Ukrainian Catholic University witnessed the establishment of its first-ever NMUN university-based student club in Ukraine which reinforced the NMUN capacity building at UCU and later at NaUKMA.

The cluster of peer-to-peer trainings was strengthened with another ambitious aim to prepare Ukrainian delegation team for their first National Model UN New York 2021. The Ukrainian students had planned to come to Edmonton in March 2020 but unfortunately, COVID-19 forced students in Canada and Ukraine to remain at home. However, faced with unexpected challenges, the MacEwan UN Club, in collaboration with the URDC and UCU, devised an innovative and interactive solution: *the Canada-Ukraine Virtual Summer School (July 2020)* that gathered 67 participants from 11 Ukrainian and Canadian universities, which consisted of students, faculty and esteemed guest speakers. MacEwan UN Club Director-General Kiera Brown led this rewarding experience, creating a condensed curriculum for the program that encompassed a full school years' worth of lessons in just five days. The team developed engaging lectures and interactive activities on research, position paper writing, and public speaking. Brown, along with MacEwan UN Club alumni and current members, presented these lectures and facilitated interactive experiences to actively involve their Ukrainian peers during the lessons (URDC, 2021). At this stage, the NMUN Canada-Ukraine project began actively engaging government stakeholders, specifically heads of diplomatic missions, whose engagement aimed not only to inspire student participation but also to initiate an academic-government partnership to support the NMUN community in Ukraine. As a result, the program was attended by the Ambassadors of Ukraine to Canada (His Excellency Andriy Shevchenko) and Japan (His Excellency Sergiy Korsunsky), as well as the Ambassador of Canada to Ukraine (Her Excellency Larisa Galadza). This intensive summer program marked the first attempt of Canada-Ukraine partners to invite other Ukrainian HEIs to develop NMUN community in Ukraine.

**Figure 2**

*MUN as academic toolkit at UCU. Source: author's own development*



The successful enactment of collaborative clusters on Model UN peer-to-peer training programs and NMUN capacity building had a spillover effect on the collaboration between faculty advisors of three universities. To ensure the long-term viability of the project and involve more dedicated students in the development of the NMUN community, Dr. Halyna Protsyk from UCU took the initiative to launch the NMUN learning enhancement project in Spring semester 2022. This project was based on her academic course titled "International Organizations and Global Governance," specifically designed as a mandatory discipline for third-year undergraduate students in the Ethics, Politics, and Economics program. For Western universities, this may seem like a regular practice, but we are very proud to constitute that UCU and Dr. Halyna Protsyk became the pioneer to integrate NMUN module into the academic course, creating an experiential learning ecosystem around MUN activities. This included a practical-oriented 7-week Model UN module based on collaborative online international learning (COIL) between UCU, MacEwan and NaUKMA, peer-to-peer trainings, and a student UN Club. Over 130 students from three Universities were offered to participate in this compulsory course, and have been trained for professional events, conferences, and competitions, including the National Model United Nations in New York. This comprehensive approach provided practical skills, intercultural understanding, and personal and professional growth opportunities based on NMUN methodology. Internationalizing the learning process was vital enabling Ukrainian and Canadian students to engage with peers from different countries. Our aim was to develop their global competence, comfort in diverse settings, and self-confidence in intercultural interactions. By integrating Model United Nations into our courses, it brought significant benefits to educators and students. UCU and NaUKMA students became pioneers in Ukraine, embracing the NMUN methodology and its additional educational opportunities.

The inaugural COIL course was scheduled for the spring semester of 2022, and we commenced our joint module in early February. The course brought together 130 students from three universities in Ukraine and Canada, forming 38 diverse student delegation teams with a UCU, MacEwan, and NAUKMA student in each. These mixed groups were supposed to collaborate on country-specific assignments, including written and oral tasks, which would be evaluated using a jointly developed common set of criteria for all three institutions. The course was designed to conclude with a two-day virtual Model United Nations (MUN) simulation on the Zoom platform, utilizing a customized NMUN ZOOM guide developed by Dr. Halyna Protsyk. Undoubtedly, this has been one of our most fulfilling teaching endeavors. It is with great regret that we acknowledge the interruption of our course due to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, which forced us to suspend the project amidst student relocation and the onset of armed attacks. However, after a two-week hiatus, the teaching at UCU resumed, and the significant role played in its continuation was the strong spirit of solidarity and partnership between the universities. Specifically, individual members of the MacEwan MUN Club served as mentors and trainers for UCU students, conducting training sessions and ultimately taking part in the final online simulation of General Assembly meeting, assuming the role of Dais.

Indeed, this force majeure situation has demonstrated the resilience and determination of our partnership to overcome challenges and move forward. The NMUN Canada-Ukraine project did not come to a halt; instead, it expanded its horizons and mission. This mission was primarily focused on not only establishing the NMUN community in Ukraine but also showcasing a unique Ukraine's identity to the global NMUN community. The success of Ukrainian students in global and regional conferences and the invaluable support of NMUN Board played a significant role in achieving this endeavor. Since 2020, Dr. Halyna Protsyk has been dedicated to leading the UCU NMUN team on this transformative journey.

### 3. Breaking Barriers and Making Strides: the accomplishments, recognition, and awards achieved by Ukrainian team in the NMUN conferences

#### 3.1. NMUN Germany, Erfurt 2019: nice to meet you NMUN

Following months of intensive training with Canadian peers, six students of UCU-NaUKMA joint team eagerly took part in the National Model United Nations (NMUN) conference held in Erfurt, Germany. During their participation in the Erfurt conference, the Ukrainian team had the honor of representing Austria in the Human Rights Committee, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the General Assembly. To accurately embody Austria's role, the team members diligently examined Austria's perspectives on key issues in international cooperation and articulated positions that closely reflected Vienna's foreign policy framework. We were immensely proud to receive our first prestigious NMUN Honorable Mention Delegation Award.

The experience proved to be truly remarkable as it provided students with first valuable insights into the workings of international organizations. Additionally, they honed their skills in public speaking and negotiation, while forging meaningful connections and friendships with individuals from diverse corners of the globe simultaneously immersing themselves in the rich history of a modern European city. Erfurt, with its blend of medieval and Cold War heritage, provided a captivating backdrop for the conference, which unfolded amidst the charm of its historic downtown, complete with artisan chocolatiers and picturesque cobblestone streets. Cultural excursions took the delegates to significant sites such as the Buchenwald concentration camp, Wartburg Castle (a UNESCO world heritage site where Luther translated the Bible into German), and the Point Alpha Memorial (a Cold War U.S. observation post situated on the East German border, adjacent to a section of the Iron Curtain). One of the highlights of the conference was the esteemed presence of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the Federal President of the Federal Republic of Germany, who not only delivered a compelling address to the delegations but also engaged with them during committee sessions. This distinguished visit added an extra layer of honor and significance to our experience (NMUN, 2019). This unforgettable experience has left an indelible mark on student lives.

### 3.2. NMUN New York 2021 (Virtual)

The UCU-NaUKMA delegation team had spent two years preparing for a global NMUN New York 2021, and it served as a significant test of their capabilities and readiness to represent Ukrainian academic community on a global stage. The experience they gained from participating in the conference was truly unparalleled. Due to the unprecedented circumstances brought about by the global COVID-19 pandemic, the NMUN•NY conference took place virtually for the first time in its history. During the four-day conference, university teams from 98 UN member states simulated sessions of 22 United Nations committees. The Ukrainian students of UCU-NaUKMA had the opportunity to represent the small Asian nation of Brunei Darussalam situated in southeastern Asia. This particular assignment proved to be both challenging and intriguing for the UCU-NaUKMA students due to several factors. These included Brunei's Islamic culture, its status as an absolute constitutional monarchy-sultanate, a population of approximately 465 thousand according to the CIA Factbook, and its remarkable high GDP per capita, which ranks among the highest in the world (Motruk D., 2021).

Despite the physical limitations, Ukrainian students were still able to experience a glimpse of the United Nations Headquarters. Through a virtual tour, the UN provided participants with an interactive exploration of significant areas such as the Security Council (SC) and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) chambers, as well as the General Assembly (GA) Hall. This digital initiative aimed to provide a sense of engagement and familiarity with the iconic UN premises, even in the absence of physical presence (NMUN, 2021).

The diligent efforts of the UCU-NaUKMA students in their respective committees resulted in the Brunei delegation being honored with the special designation of “the Honorable Mention Delegation” Furthermore, alongside the successful acceptance of the Ukrainian team's resolutions, Kateryna Podhorska, a fourth-year student in the Ethics-Politics-Economics Program at UCU's Social Sciences Faculty, received recognition for her exceptional research skills, earning an “Outstanding Position Paper”. The encouragement we received from these initial awards has energized us to eagerly prepare for forthcoming conferences with renewed dedication and passion.

### 3.3. NMUN New York 2022 and the Russian-Ukrainian war

On April 2, 2022, a joint team of six UCU-NaUKMA students arrived in New York to mark the first live and the most difficult participation of Ukrainian universities in the National Model United Nations. After three years of anticipation and preparation, our team never could have imagined that the long-awaited moment would be marred by the unjust and horrifying war in Ukraine, provoked by the Russian Federation. As we arrived, 47 days of heroic confrontation and resistance of the Ukrainian people against Russian full-scale aggression were underway. UCU-NaUKMA team encountered significant

obstacles to get to New York. Our unity and cohesion seemed to diminish due to various factors such as flight cancellations in Ukraine, the displacement of team members to different regions and countries, and the endless shelling and bombing in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Lviv where the team members were residing with their families. As a result, our plans to participate in the National Model United Nations in New York became increasingly impossible. However, inspired by the national resistance, we realized that it was our duty and mission to represent a resilient and courageous academic Ukraine during this challenging period. Our aim was to introduce Ukrainian universities to the global NMUN community and shed light on the brutal Russian invasion of our peaceful nation. Therefore, in addition to our traditional and long-awaited vocation to represent the assigned country Slovenia, our team obtained another mission: to convey the truth to the global community about the horrors of Russia's war against Ukraine and to call for global solidarity against the violation of the fundamental principles of the UN Charter. It is worth underlying that our physical presence in New York became feasible solely through the unwavering support of our MacEwan and URDC partners. Despite the circumstances, they provided their full support and organized our team in Warsaw (Poland), from where we embarked on a journey via Istanbul to reach New York. It took us 52 hours to get to the venue from war-torn Ukraine.

**Figure 3**

*UCU-NaUKMA joint team accompanied by URDC Director Larysa Hayduk at NMUN New York 2022. Source: NMUN Facebook page*



Throughout the week-long world conference, our joint delegation actively participated in six UN committees, engaged with the Permanent Mission of Ukraine to the UN (notably before the UN General Assembly voted to suspend Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council), explored the UN headquarters in New York, and conducted numerous meetings and discussions with delegations from universities worldwide. We shared evidence of the war in Ukraine and thanks to the support of the NMUN board, particularly Mr. Michael Eaton, the Executive Director, we organized two panel discussions on the Ukrainian conflict that garnered attendance from almost a thousand of students and teachers. A crucial message we conveyed to the global audience was the recognition of the

propagandistic activities of Russian and Eurasian studies centers within universities worldwide. Another significant milestone during the conference was the keynote speech by Ms. Natalia Mudrenko, Adviser to the Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the United Nations, marking the first Ukrainian keynote address in NMUN history. Ms. Mudrenko raised awareness about Ukraine, encouraging participants to approach the session with fresh perspectives, a commitment to reforms, and a drive to bring positive changes to the world. She called for discussions on ways to halt Russia's abuses against Ukraine, international law, and the UN Charter, and to find solutions that enhance the effectiveness of the UN in maintaining peace and security while preventing future global conflicts (UCU, 2022).

The experience of engaging in diplomatic and multilateral negotiations, advocating for Ukraine's interests, and skillfully applying the UN rules of procedure to foster consensus has left us immensely proud of our team. Despite the challenging circumstances our country faced, we did our best to achieve an unprecedented outcome. We have successfully fulfilled our mission of integrating Ukraine and Ukrainian universities into the NMUN world community. Furthermore, our team has already received an invitation to participate in the upcoming NMUN regional conference taking place in November 2022 in Kobe, Japan.

#### 3.4. NMUN Japan 2022 and the first ever travel to Asia

In 2022, Russia's escalation of the aggression against Ukraine to a full-scale war inflicted devastating consequences on human lives, the economy, and social infrastructure. The widespread destruction and losses incurred by the country have had a profound and detrimental impact on higher education, exacerbating existing challenges and further hindering academic progress due to the massive fleeing, brain drain, and infrastructure losses. Despite the challenging conditions of war, Ukrainian Catholic University remained steadfast in fulfilling its primary mission. The university has adopted a multifaceted approach, combining educational courses with active participation in volunteering efforts and supporting the government. They extend assistance to students from universities that have been destroyed or relocated, offering them opportunities to continue their education and rebuild their lives. Remarkably, amidst these endeavors, UCU also managed to contribute through volunteering initiatives with refugees and the Armed Forces of Ukraine, lending a helping hand to those in need during this tumultuous period (UCU, 2022b). By actively engaging with international academic networks and forging partnerships, UCU worked diligently to garner support and solidarity, emphasizing the importance of their cause and the collective effort required to address the ongoing crisis. The UCU NMUN student club did not cease its efforts and persisted in its commitment to development and resilience. Therefore, the continued participation in NMUN conferences and Ukrainian delegation presence in NMUN Japan 2022 were of utmost importance for both our university and the country as a whole. The journey to Japan posed a series of formidable challenges from the start. These included the lack of funding, the temporary inability to form the traditional team with our partner institution

NaUKMA, logistical hurdles due to the absence of direct flights from Ukraine, and the hindered preparation process due to constant air alarms and blackouts caused by the attack on energy facilities, among other obstacles. However, through the support of MacEwan University, the NMUN board, as well as the Embassy of Ukraine in Japan and Ambassador Sergiy Korsunsky, these obstacles were overcome. The solidarity and cooperation with our partners and stakeholders provided the UCU team with the opportunity to participate in the NMUN conference in Kobe, where Dr. Halyna Protsyk together with three dedicated UCU students ventured into uncharted territory, establishing academic partnerships in Asia for the first time.

After an exhausting 48-hour journey from Ukraine through Poland and the United Arab Emirates, the Ukrainian delegation finally arrived in Kobe on November 20th. Before diving into the committee sessions, UCU team went on the remarkably impressive cultural and historical study tour organized by the Kobe University of Foreign Studies which brought a lot of insights about Japan. The tour and visiting these locations had a profound and inspiring impact on all of us. The team was amazed by the city of Kobe resilience, which had undergone remarkable reconstruction following the devastating earthquake in 1995. Another remarkable experience was linked with the opportunity to visit significant sites, including the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park (Genbaku Dome) and Museum, a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the first atomic bomb was dropped. UCU delegation also explored the ancient city of Kyoto, known for its numerous UNESCO temples and gardens. Highlights of the visit included the Kiyomizu-dera Temple Complex and the Fushimi Inari Taisha Shrine, famous for its 5,000 vermilion gates. We couldn't miss the opportunity to pray for Ukraine's victory and peace at the Fushimi Inari Shrine according to local traditions. These experiences provided a blend of cultural immersion, historical exploration, and appreciation for the city's resilience and creativity. In the end, this encountering these places and people who survived major human made tragedies gave us a great sense of hope that by cultivating our inner resilience and adaptability we can create a better future for Ukraine as well. That was a great sense of inspiration before the official start of the conference.

The conference focused on the topic of peace. Ukraine and its courageous struggle against Russian aggression were not overlooked during the solemn opening ceremony of the National Model United Nations (NMUN) in Kobe, Japan. It was a great honor for Dr. Halyna Protsyk to deliver a speech on behalf of the Ukrainian delegation and Ukrainian Catholic University (UCU) to 340 student participants from 11 countries worldwide. In her speech and conversations, it was important not only to recount the horrors of war and the suffering it brought to Ukrainian people but also to express gratitude for the firm solidarity and assistance provided to the Ukrainian army and the affected population. It was crucial to emphasize how the support of every nation that stands with us actively in establishing justice and accelerating the victory over imperialism was invaluable. Even more importantly, this message had to be conveyed to the global youth and leaders who need to understand that peace is not a gift or inheritance

but a moral achievement that requires the courage to denounce evil, the determination to uphold justice rather than being politically correct, responsibility for one's actions, and swift response to aggression against the innocent.

The UCU NMUN team had the privilege of representing Latvia in three committees during NMUN Japan: the General Assembly, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Committee, and the Economic and Social Council. During the ECOSOC committee session held in the session hall of the Kobe City Administration, Khrystyna Dmytryshyn, a student of Ethics-Politics-Economics, delivered five remarkable speeches in support of Latvia's position. Our efforts were awarded with two awards – Distinguished Delegation and Outstanding Position Paper at ECOSOC committee. Inspired by their experience at NMUN Japan and Kobe University of Foreign Studies, the UCU NMUN team returned to Ukraine with a mission to share their story of success and strengthen hope for a better future of their war-torn country.

### 3.5. NMUN New York 2023: strengthening Ukrainian identity

In December 2022, the UCU-NaUKMA joint team reconvened and began their preparation for NMUN New York 2023. This marked the fifth conference they participated in since 2019. As the Russian war was still going on in Ukraine, the joint delegation continued to withstand numerous adversities. This time, our resilience and determination were much stronger as we continued the NMUN Canada-Ukraine project, which remained unwavering in its solidarity with Ukrainian academic community. In 2023, the Ukrainian team was representing the Principality of Liechtenstein. Thanks to Liechtenstein's initiative, on April 26th, the United Nations General Assembly decided to approve the initiative regarding the right to veto in the UN Security Council. According to the resolution, the UN General Assembly must automatically convene within 10 days if one of its five permanent members exercises the veto power in the Security Council. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian war, this had significant importance, making it a matter of honor to represent this country. The delegates team worked in five committees, namely General Assembly First, Second and Third Committees, UNEA and IAEA.

An important experience during the conference in New York was the close dialogue and creating bonds with Manhattan College (New York), whose 16 students represented Ukraine at NMUN. At the outset, Prof. Pamela Chasek, Chair of the Political Science Department and advisor for the Manhattan College Model UN team, initiated several online meetings where Ukrainian students could share their experiences of life during the war and discuss the current events that characterized the war from economic, political, and legal perspectives. In this way, the Ukrainian delegation sought to assist their American friends in gaining a deeper understanding of the topic in order to achieve success at the conference. Upon reaching New York City, the delegates from both nations had the privilege of convening face-to-face at a gathering hosted by Manhattan College (Kranich, 2023).

During the first day of the conference, the Ukrainian and US delegations had the opportunity to have a joint meeting with Ukraine's Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Serhiy Kyslytsya, who shared insights into the Ukraine's UN Policy, UN assistance programs for Ukraine during the war and the efforts of Ukrainian diplomacy in countering Russian aggression. His excellency Kyslytsya welcomed both delegations at the special international exhibition "Ukraine. Crucifixion. Tribunal" opened in New York, 100 meters from the United Nations. The exhibition was focused on the crimes committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine. Organized by the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War, with the support of the Office of the President of Ukraine, the exhibition shed light on the atrocities committed against civilians, children, and prisoners of war, while emphasizing the importance of international humanitarian law and Ukraine's territorial integrity. Spanning an area of approximately 2,000 square meters, the exhibition showcased over 1,000 artifacts collected during field expeditions in recently liberated territories, where the Russian Federation inflicted terror upon the civilian population (Office of the President of Ukraine, 2023).

**Figure 4**

*NMUN faculty advisors at the exhibition Ukraine Crucifixion. The Tribunal (UN Plaza, New York). Source: Andrzej Markiewicz*



Having gained invaluable experience and impressions from their visit, the Ukrainian delegation took the initiative to extend an invitation to faculty advisors from two NMUN conferences who teach courses on international organizations, global governance, international relations, negotiation processes, and various aspects related to the Russian-Ukrainian war. With the support and assistance of the NMUN Board, a closed exhibition was made accessible to 95 professors representing over 70 universities from the United States, Canada, Germany, Belgium, Italy, Japan, and Switzerland. In addition to them, the event was attended by the Executive Director and board members of the National Model United Nations (NMUN), the UN Society Nuremberg, and the German United Nations Association. One of the most memorable moments occurred when a faculty advisor of NMUN posed a question: "What should I say to my students when they inquire about the unwavering bravery of Ukrainians?" In response, Yuriy

Savchuk, the director of the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War and coordinator of the exhibition, expressed, “Our desire for freedom is the simple answer.”

After a week of engaging conference sessions and diligent work by the Ukrainian delegation, two UCU students were honored with awards for their exceptional position papers in the second and third committees of the General Assembly. This recognition holds great significance for our academic community and the universities in Ukraine. Our aim is for our students to not only acquire practical experience during their education but also to prepare them to become the next generation of skilled and dedicated Ukrainian diplomats, who can effectively serve their country and contribute to the collective welfare. This instance is just one among many that exemplifies how our UCU community is fulfilling its mission.

#### 4. Gained insights and optimistic prospects for Ukrainian universities as a part of NMUN community

Participation in the National Model United Nations has had a transformative impact on Ukrainian universities and their students. First of all, it greatly contributed to fulfilling the UCU primary mission outlined in this article, to grow a leader with a sense of responsible *global citizenship*. Participation in NMUN nurtured a deeper appreciation for the importance of international cooperation, diplomacy, and addressing global challenges collectively. This understanding motivated Ukrainian students to actively engage in UN activities and global affairs, advocate for positive change, and contribute to the betterment of their communities and the world at large. Secondly, NMUN *enhanced skill development* as it provided Ukrainian students with a unique opportunity to develop a wide range of skills essential for their academic and professional growth. Through research, public speaking, negotiation, and diplomacy exercises, students acquired critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills. These skills are invaluable for their future careers, whether in politics, international relations, or other fields. Thirdly, NMUN framed *the knowledge enhancement* by requiring Ukrainian students to research and understand complex global issues, international law, and the workings of the United Nations. This deepened their understanding of global affairs and equipped them with comprehensive knowledge in areas such as human rights, sustainable development, disarmament, and peacekeeping. In general, the enhanced knowledge contributed to their academic success and prepared them for engagement in global problem-solving. Fourthly, NMUN brought together students from diverse backgrounds and nationalities, fostering *cross-cultural understanding, and promoting tolerance and empathy*. Ukrainian students interacted with their international peers, gaining insights into different perspectives, traditions, and cultures. This exposure helped to break down stereotypes and prejudices, encouraging a more inclusive and open-minded approach to global issues. These skills empower Ukrainian students to become enthusiastic ambassadors, showcasing Ukrainian identity, culture, history, and traditions on a global platform. Last but not least, NMUN offered Ukrainian institutions *a unique networking platform* where

they could connect with American, Asian, and European higher educational institutions, faculty advisors, and professionals. These connections led to continuous and brand-new international collaborative projects and initiatives, research partnerships, and exchange programs:

1. The NMUN Canada-Ukraine partnership was presented by UCU-MacEwan tandem at two international education conferences in Canada, hosted by the Canadian Bureau for International Education in 2020 and 2022. These conferences provided opportunities to amplify the influence of UCU-MacEwan academic initiatives and facilitate the exchange of best practices in teaching, research, and global engagement with a broader academic community.
2. Through the NMUN Canada-Ukraine partnership, UCU has become actively involved in the "Practising Transnational Politics" (PATRAPO) project, initiated by researchers from Fulda University of Applied Sciences (Germany), Autonomous University Madrid (Spain), and Zagreb University (Croatia), with MacEwan University as an associate partner. The project aims to create accessible transnational teaching materials and an online blended learning seminar handbook, preparing students for participation in United Nations Model Games (PATRAPO, 2023). As a result of this collaboration, 9 UCU students had the opportunity to travel to Germany and take part in MUN Summer Programs organized by Fulda University of Applied Sciences in 2022. They formed four country delegations representing the UK, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. Their outstanding performance resulted in five awards: Lithuania received the best Position Paper, UK received outstanding delegation, Latvia received distinguished delegation, and Poland and Lithuania both received honourable mention. Another cohort of ten UCU students are expected to participate in Fulda MUN summer program in July 2023.
3. The participation of UCU in the NMUN regional conference in Japan facilitated the development of academic collaboration with Prof. Thomas Fast and Notre Dame Seishin University (Okayama). As a result, Japanese students were engaged in training sessions within UCU course on International Organizations and Global Governance during the spring semester of 2023. Japanese students were paired with UCU students and had the opportunity to work on joint assignments, fostering intercultural understanding.
4. The UCU-NaUKMA NMUN team has already started their preparation for the upcoming round of NMUN regional conferences in 2023, which will take place in Erfurt, Germany. This time, Ukrainian students be honored to form a first ever international joint delegation with students from the German United Nations Association (DGVN NRW), under the initiative of Prof. Thomas Weiler, Chair of the DGVN NRW, and Ronny Heintze, Deputy Director for International Development at the University of Bonn. The joint delegation will represent two countries - the Czech Republic and Luxembourg.

Building a global network of like-minded academic communities strengthens not only professional prospects but also expands the spirit of global academic solidarity and uniting academic efforts to raise the generation of global citizens who are committed to protect the basic principles of the UN Charter: peace and security; human rights; the rule of law; and development. Despite the ongoing challenges faced by Ukrainian universities due to the brutal Russian armed aggression, their active participation and success in the global NMUN community, their unwavering dedication to education, international cooperation, and societal progress, indicate a promising future. These universities are shaping a path where Ukraine's role in the family of United Nations will continue to remain beneficial and inspiring.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Ukraine's commitment to the United Nations and its mission remains unwavering despite ongoing challenges posed by the war. Academia, exemplified by the Ukrainian Catholic University, plays a vital role in fostering global engagement and cultivating future leaders. UCU integrates UN-related topics into its curriculum, organizes Model UN programs, establishes international partnerships, engages with local communities, and facilitates international exchange programs. By leveraging these academic tools, Ukraine can effectively raise awareness about the UN, promote global citizenship, and contribute to a more globally engaged society. The partnership between UCU, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, and MacEwan University (Canada) along with their involvement in the National Model United Nations community, has further strengthened Ukraine's engagement with the UN and positioned UCU-NaUKMA tandem as Ukrainian pioneer in integrating the NMUN methodology into curriculum. Through collaborative efforts, these institutions have enhanced institutional capacity, trained students, and promoted constructive discussions on Ukraine's UN policy. In conclusion, the NMUN Canada-Ukraine partnership, facilitated by the Ukrainian Resource and Development Center, has led to significant progress in integrating the National Model United Nations framework into the Ukrainian academic community and bringing Ukraine on NMUN stage. Despite the challenges posed by the Russian aggression and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Canada-Ukraine NMUN partnership has demonstrated resilience and a commitment to promoting awareness of the United Nations and empowering students to become active global citizens. The journey continues, with a focus on further expanding the NMUN community in Ukraine and showcasing Ukraine's unique identity on the global stage.

Overall, the transformative impact of NMUN participation on Ukrainian universities and their students is evident in the acquisition of valuable skills, enhanced knowledge, cultural understanding, networking opportunities, and the development of a strong global mindset. These outcomes contribute to the personal, academic, and professional growth of Ukrainian students and prepare them to be active contributors to the international community. In this hopeful outlook, Ukrainian universities will continue to produce graduates who are not only well-versed in their academic disciplines but also

possess a deep understanding of global challenges and a commitment to effect positive change driven by the spirit of the United Nations. Their contributions to diplomacy, sustainable development, and peacebuilding will be instrumental in shaping a more inclusive, peaceful, and prosperous world. With their growing presence and active involvement in NMUN, Ukrainian universities are shaping a brighter future for Ukraine. Their continued participation will strengthen their position as key contributors to global discussions and actions, amplifying Ukraine's voice on the international stage.

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### Abstract

This article explores the inspiring story of Ukrainian universities' resilience, namely Ukrainian Catholic University (Lviv) and National University Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (Kyiv), and their journey to become part of the National Model United Nations (NMUN) global community. Despite facing numerous challenges, including full-scale war and geopolitical instability, Ukrainian universities embarked on a quest for active international engagement and stance. Through curriculum enhancements and global academic partnerships (particularly with MacEwan University (Canada)), they sought to improve their global standing. The article traces their discovery of the NMUN as a platform for international collaboration and highlights the challenges they overcame to participate. It showcases the unwavering determination of Ukrainian university teams in their first NMUN conferences, demonstrating resilience, adaptability, and a thirst for success. The achievements and acknowledgment received by Ukrainian universities within the NMUN highlight the transformative influence of their participation. This involvement creates a vibrant and engaging learning atmosphere that promotes cross-cultural communication, nurtures intercultural understanding, and fosters

global awareness and understanding of Ukraine and its commitment to United Nations activities. It also contributes to an improved international reputation and opens doors to increased collaboration opportunities between academic institutions, governmental organizations, and countries. This article reflects on the lessons learned from this journey of resilience and concludes with a hopeful outlook for the future of Ukrainian universities within the NMUN global community, as they continue to thrive and contribute to the betterment of the world. The academic communities from other countries aspiring to become a part of the NMUN community, can draw inspiration from this experience, seeing their integration as equally valuable as Ukrainian educational institutions have found it to be.

*Keywords:* National Model United Nations, Ukrainian Catholic University, Ukraine-Canada MUN partnership, UCU-NaUKMA team, global engagement.

