

The Model UN Club

Written by Dylan Kissane

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DYLAN KISSANE, SEP 17 2013

As part of my new role managing the faculty here at CEFAM I am invited to sit in on the monthly Student Council meetings, the first of which was held yesterday evening. The Student Council at CEFAM is a small group of 10 to 12 students who form a link between the various student associations, the wider student body and the school's administration. Their discussions and feedback help to improve the educational experience for the students they represent as well as help the school receive early warnings if and when things aren't running exactly how they should.

The meeting passed without any problems and then, towards the end, the students discussed the associations and clubs that exist on campus and pitched ideas for new clubs to be formed for the coming academic year. Along with the usual suggestions (basketball, dance, and cheerleading as we remain, at heart, an American school in France) came one that for a business school seemed a little out of the blue: Model UN.

As the business school's international politics professor, I can tell you I was secretly happy, but also a little restrained in my enthusiasm.

Of course, I was pleased that international politics is something that students are interested enough in to put forward at a Student Council meeting. Often students at a business school get caught up in international economics, shifting markets and advertising trends that they don't stop to consider the large and very real impact that international politics has on the world of business. A Model UN club would allow students to better understand some of these issues, learn more about the states around them, explore some of the countries that don't make the evening news every night, and debate and discuss issues of significance with their peers. The opportunities for local, regional and international exchange are also very real as Model UN is well developed in both France and Europe more generally, to say nothing of the possibility that students will arrive in my POL 210 course more open and better prepared to study international relations than they otherwise might be.

Yet I was also hesitant as I straight away determined that it would likely fall to me, the politics professor, to drive and organise this new club. The management, sponsorship, budgeting, organisation and control of the club, particularly in the start-up period, would require a strong faculty hand to guide a group of enthusiastic students, and being Model UN that hand would probably have to be mine. In a year that is already fairly packed on the work front and where I am trying as best as I can to strike a work-life balance that allows me to enjoy my new responsibilities and not become overwhelmed, I can see how working with a new club like the Model UN proposed would – whatever the benefits to the students, the school and my course here at CEFAM – negatively impact on me personally, too.

Such a situation brings home one of the realities of working in a small school. We sell the students on a personal educational experience and encourage them to participate in extracurricular activities to build their CV. We reward students with the 'get up and go' to start an association or found a student club. We encourage them to see how their studies relate to the real world and, for sure, a Model UN at CEFAM would drive home the importance of international relations to business students and the real ways in which their world is impacted by politics.

Yet at the same time there is only a small pool of faculty to draw on in supporting these activities: the Math professor coaches the football team, the Art History professor is also the coordinator of the photography club, the Economics professor has doubled down as coach of the basketball team and student events for Halloween, Thanksgiving and

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Christmas are planned in conjunction with the school's pedagogical assistants, the Director of Studies and even the Associate Dean. The small school culture and tight economic times means that none of these people are paid for their commitment of time and energy and all contribute solely out of goodwill, the necessary volunteer to help the non-academic side of the school prosper.

Professors in all institutions suffer the competing pressures to teach, research, provide community service and be involved in the life of their school and the lives of their students, but it is perhaps in smaller institutions where such pressures are most evident and weigh heaviest on the outside lives and time of the faculty. A basketball team, a football team, a cheerleading squad and, yes, a Model UN club are all positive for a small school and its students, but whether they are similarly positive for the faculty who donate their time and energy is not always given.

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Read more from Dylan Kissane in his e-IR blog Political Business

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