Students converge on Model UN

Anthony Lake, international relations expert and veteran of two presidential administrations, may have been the keynote speaker, but surely the highlight of the Five Colleges Model United Nations conference was the nearly 200 students from a dozen institutions who showed up to debate, collaborate and fictionally represent their nations at the April event.

Attendees had the opportunity to participate in plenary sessions that mirrored the workings of the real UN or to delve into fantasy meetings in which students took on the personae of historical figures dealing with fictional crises.

Lake, a former Five College professor of international relations, who served as National Security Advisor in the Clinton Administration, congratulated the delegates on taking such a keen interest in international relations. “It is imperative for us as citizens to act in ways that make it easier for our leaders to work with other nations for the common good,” he told the delegates. “That is what I hope this conference will be all about.”

Mount Holyoke hosted the two-day event, which was led by MHC junior Tia Brueggeman, a veteran of other model UN events and secretary general. She maintains that students become more engaged with a topic when they can actually participate in it. “Instead of just researching or reading a book on a topic, if you know that you have to get up and speak to represent your country, you become engrossed in the subject and it becomes so much more interesting,” she said.
Students submerge themselves in science at Woods Hole

When swapping stories with his friends last fall about how they spent their summer vacation, Julian Damashek was probably the only one who was able to say that he videotaped sharks on aquatic treadmills chasing squid bits. Or, as he puts it, “I worked on a project studying the structure and function of neuromasts associated with the lateral line in smooth dogfish sharks.”

While his friends were flipping burgers or hanging out at the beach, the Amherst College junior was working at the Marine Biological Laboratory in Woods Hole, Massachusetts, on an internship he received through the Five College Coastal and Marine Sciences program (CMS).

CMS is one of a dozen certificate programs offered through Five Colleges in which students choose from a select number of courses and complete a capstone project to receive a certificate—akin to a degree minor. A Five College certificate program pulls together individual campus offerings into a single course of study in a field in which any single institution lacks the resources to offer a major.

As with all other Five College certificate programs, students may take advantage of CMS offerings without being required to enroll in the program. Such is the case with Julian, who won’t be able to earn a certificate in Coastal and Marine Sciences because Amherst has not ratified the CMS certificate. But that fact didn’t prevent him arranging an internship through CMS in the Woods Hole Marine Science Consortium, of which Five Colleges is a member.

Working at Woods Hole with researchers from Boston University and the University of South Florida, Julian collected data on how sharks use the sensory organs called neuromasts to detect and pursue food. “I learned a lot about what it is like to work day to day in an animal behavior lab,” he says. “I did a lot of feeding, moving animals around—learning how to reach into a tank and snatch sharks out—and designing the experimental apparatus we used.

“I was exposed to so, so much great science by working for a summer in Woods Hole,” Julian says. “The internship was a truly life-changing experience, and one that I may not have been able to get anywhere else.”

UMass Amherst junior Jennifer Fill's laboratory was a hot, buggy swamp on Cape Cod. A biology major interested in the impact humans have on the environment, Jen received a Woods Hole internship through CMS to work with a graduate student studying a polluted salt marsh. Urbanization of the area had resulted in big increases in the nitrogen levels in the wetlands.

“My project was a preliminary investigation of the ability of the salt marsh to retain these increased nitrogen loads over a long period of time,” she explains. “I was intrigued by the fact that this project incorporated the effects of humans on the landscape, which would have important consequences for animal interactions and coastal management.

“Over the course of the internship, I was able to participate in all parts of the scientific process—design, data collection, analysis and presentation of results at a symposium for the entire scientific community,” says Jen. “I have to say that the fieldwork on the beautiful salt marsh was unforgettable, and the heat, dirt and bugs just made it all the more memorable.”

Neither Jen nor Julian is sure where these studies will take them, but the UMass and Amherst students credit their Coastal and Marine Sciences internships with broadening their understanding and appreciation of science as a whole.

“The Coastal and Marine Sciences program was a key factor in my decision to attend UMass Amherst,” says Jen. “It has provided me the opportunity to explore my interest in marine science at an intense level without actually specializing in that area at this time.”

—Kevin Kennedy

The whole is greater than the parts

Five College certificate programs bring together the resources of each member campus to offer students a focused course of study not available on any single campus. The following 12 programs are available to students.

| African Studies | International Relations |
| Asian/Pacific/American Studies | Latin American Studies |
| Buddhist Studies | Logic |
| Coastal and Marine Sciences* | Middle Eastern Studies* |
| Cognitive Neuroscience† | Native American Indian Studies |
| Culture, Health, and Science | Russian, East European, and Eurasian Studies (REEES) |

* pending approval at Amherst College
† pending approval at UMass Amherst

Inset: UMass junior Jennifer Fill at her salt-marsh research internship on Cape Cod. Both students received their internships through the Five College Coastal and Marine Sciences program.
Performances explore cultural issues surrounding women

Five Colleges saw two different approaches to improving women’s safety, health and self-esteem in February. In one, each of the five campuses created its own production of the Vagina Monologues, the episodic play in which women discuss their evolving understanding of self and gender from the perspective of their vaginas. The productions drew dozens of actors and hundreds of spectators, raising thousands of dollars for area women’s shelters. Most shows sold out and at UMass so many turned out for the role call that the university put on two productions with two sets of actors.

A perhaps more low-key but equally powerful message came from body-image activist and author Rosie Molinary in presentations at Mount Holyoke, UMass and Amherst. Sponsored by the Five College Eating Disorders Awareness Committee, the author of the book Hijas Americana: Beauty, Body Image and Growing Up Latina presented “10 Things That Will Make You Think, Speak & Act.”

Molinary’s talk, and the discussion that followed, centered on observations, opinions and statistics surrounding eating disorders among Latinas and all other women, the impact of health and sex education, the influence of the media on beauty perception and body image, and the resulting impact of marketing tactics on society.

—Mahlet Girma ’08

Students showcase their work in Five College productions

Three long-running annual Five College performances welcomed a new one this winter as the Five College Jazz Festival was initiated, joining the Five College Student Film and Video Festival, PoetryFest and WORD!

Some 200 student musicians from the five campuses were joined by their faculty at the UMass Amherst Campus Center for the Five College Jazz Festival, sponsored by the consortium and the Five College Music Chairs. Performers ranged from a capella vocalists to brass orchestras, and the show went on even during a brief power outage, which inspired an impromptu jam session by faculty members.

PoetryFest attracted 80 fans to Smith College for its sixth annual celebration of student writing. The brainstorm of Five Colleges Executive Director Lorna Peterson and Ellen Watson, director of Smith’s Poetry Center, PoetryFest celebrates the quality and range of student poetry in the valley with two writers representing each member campus. In addition to the opportunity to read to a large audience, poets see their work published in a PoetryFest collection, which is distributed to event attendees.

Inspired by playwright August Wilson’s idea that theater could be used to raise the consciousness of its audience, Five College Multicultural Theater presented Word! to an enthusiastic audience at UMass’ Curtin Theater. Participants had developed scripts examining issues of race and diversity in workshops last fall in preparation for the February event.

The granddaddy of consortium performances, the Five College Student Film and Video Festival enjoyed its 15th annual presentation of original films and videos at Smith College. Organized by a board of students from each campus, the event not only celebrates student work but also offers an important venue for film students to meet, collaborate and share their productions with their peers and the college film community. Submissions to the festival, which is sponsored by the Five College Film Council, are evaluated by a jury of students and film faculty from each of the five colleges.

Bringing centuries-old music to life

The Five College Early Music Program each year brings together students, faculty and community members for area performances of Baroque and Renaissance music. The program makes a point of using the instruments for which the centuries-old music was written, such as the viola da gamba and the lute. This year, the Five College Early Music Collegium performed a German Easter Mass at area churches, Voces Feminae presented Jewish- and Old- Testament-inspired music at Smith, and Euridice Ensembles performed Baroque music at Smith.
Students who presented senior independent projects at the Five College classics symposium (l-r): Alison Nicole Smith (Smith), Alla Babushkina (Smith), Eleanor Jefferson (Smith), Andrew Carroll (UMass), Cassandra Finger (Smith), Lauren Vollono (Smith) and Emily Jane Kennedy (Hampshire).

“S”cholarship isn’t about passing a test or getting a good mark on a paper; it’s about building a community of knowledge. Symposia are part of that.”

The sentiments of Academic Programs Director Nate Therien are one of the main reasons Five College programs sponsor undergraduate symposia. Recognizing that undergraduates can benefit from sharing research and ideas just as faculty and graduate students do, several Five College programs each year sponsor symposia and poster sessions in which students research a topic and, working with faculty, develop their findings into papers and posters to share with peers at other campuses.

“They work very hard in the course of a year to define and research a subject, usually working in isolation,” says Therien. “In the end, they may have more expertise on their subjects than their faculty do. It’s therefore good for them to move their work into a more public arena.”

He recalls receiving a call from a researcher whose googling of a subject led him to a description of a student’s symposium paper on the Five College Web site. In arranging for the researcher to interview the student, Therien found that the student was soon to publish a book on the subject of her symposium presentation.

Presenting papers with titles like “Mysterious Meandering Microbial Mats,” “Chanting Pujas in Boston,” “Resistance, Subjugation and Science” and “Kingship, Priesthood, and the Paradox of Power,” students in Five College programs in geology, Crossroads in the Study of the Americas (CISA), anthropology and classics (respectively) met at symposia in April.

Each program picks symposium students differently, according to Therien. Students might submit a proposal to a jury of fellow students or might be nominated by a faculty member. Regardless of how they get there, students get a lot out of the experience, he says. “Symposia are such a great way for students to draw on all they have done in their work at school.”

—Kevin Kennedy

Showcasing student work

The following Five College symposia and performances give students an opportunity to share their work with members of the campus community and beyond.

- Anthropology Symposium
- Classics Symposium
- Coastal and Marine Sciences Research Symposium
- Crossroads in the Study of the Americas (CISA) Symposium
- Culture, Health & Science Undergraduate Science Research Symposium
- Early Music Collegium
- Ethnomusicology Symposium
- Five College Choral Festival
- Geology Poster Session
- Multicultural Theater’s WORD!
- Festival of One-Act Plays
- Philosophy Students Symposium
- Physics Symposium
- PoetryFest
- Student Film and Video Festival