

# Organizing Model United Nations Simulations

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## Introduction

Blooms Taxonomy, Kolb's theory of experiential learning, and more contemporary practical guides to teaching at the university level by authors such as Morrison, Ross and Kemp, endorse the need for students to experience active learning and active thinking. Organizing a Model United Nations (MUN) is one example of how educators can tie in their class objectives with an unforgettable active learning opportunity outside of the class. While Model UN is a course of study in many undergraduate institutions around the world, in Japan it is usually organized by clubs and managed by students. Most Model UN simulations at universities in Japan are conducted in Japanese or use a combination of Japanese and English. In 2010, Lori Zenuk-Nishide (Kobe City University of Foreign Studies), Craig Smith (Kyoto University of Foreign Studies) and the author (Kinki University) co-designed and organized an all-English inter-university Model UN simulation for university students called the Japan University English Model United Nations (JUEMUN) Conference. After three years

of building on this simulation, the event has grown and is receiving more attention from students and educators both nationally and internationally. This attention is leading to a growth in student participation and is also resulting in more interest from educators hoping to organize their own Model UN simulations at their own universities. The organization of a Model United Nations Conference for EFL students takes months of planning and commitment from teachers and student volunteers and it is this planning and commitment that is key to ensuring that student delegates leave with a memorable active learning experience and an accurate glimpse into the workings of the United Nations system. This paper will outline the history of JUEMUN and offer suggestions to educators interested in organizing an ESL/EFL Model United Nations Conference to promote experiential learning at their institution.

## **The History of JUEMUN**

Approximately ten years ago I was hired as a homeroom teacher at a high school in Kyoto, Japan. One of the strengths of this school was its content-based English program, which saw enormous success in grooming globally minded students who became proficient English speakers and creative thinkers. In their third and final year of the course, students were required to participate in an all-English high school Model United Nations as delegates of an assigned country. With the assistance of veteran colleagues at the high school and information obtained from books and on the Internet, my interest and knowledge of preparing EFL students for UN simulations grew larger and eventually I found myself sharing this gained knowledge with students at the post secondary level. In my second year of full-time university teaching, I joined two colleagues with similar MUN experience and we formed the first and still the only all-English Model UN conference for university students in Japan. After some

deliberation, we decided to call the yearly simulation the Japan University English Model United Nations or JUEMUN for short. This is when my experience of preparing students for conferences grew into organizing and hosting them. Three years of JUEMUN has brought us various successes as well as a full awareness that the organization of events such as this require constant modifications in order to provide the best possible educational opportunities for the student participants. The development process of JUEMUN has been far from smooth, but through yearly mistakes and modifications, we feel we have developed a unique, meaningful and sustainable educational event.

### **JUEMUN 2010: If We Build it, Will They Come?**

In the initial stages of organizing the first JUEMUN conference in 2010, there were concerns of whether the advisors would be able to attract enough participants, especially considering the steep MUN learning curve for both faculty advisors and their students. As it was our first attempt at this event, we decided to hold it in November to coincide with the 2010 Japan Association of Language Teaching (JALT) Conference in Nagoya. For the inaugural two-day JUEMUN event, we managed to attract 50 students and five advisors from five different universities within Japan. Having the event in Nagoya during the JALT conference proved to be a smart move as it gave us a stage to advertise JUEMUN to thousands of educators within Japan and throughout the world. We received an enormous amount of positive feedback and interest and as a result of this opportunity, the Model UN seed was planted in the back of many educators' minds, leaving them wondering, could they also do this with their students in the future? While students and advisors praised the 2010 simulation, we realized that many decisions would have to be made before we could begin with the planning of JUEMUN 2011.

Would we continue to showcase our event at the JALT national conferences? Could our students consistently afford to travel to the JALT national conference venue each year? What were our venue options for the next JUEMUN if we broke away from the JALT conference?

In an advisors meeting following JUEMUN 2010, we all acknowledged the benefits of having the first event at the JALT conference, but realized that alternating the venue each year among our three universities (Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, Kinki University and Kyoto University of Foreign Studies) would reduce travel costs for our students and simplify the planning process. We opted to hold JUEMUN 2011 at Kobe City University of Foreign Studies, JUEMUN 2012 at Kinki University and JUEMUN 2013 at Kyoto University of Foreign Studies. This decision not only provided us with a guaranteed and free venue, but it also enabled our universities to use the event as an advertising tool for student recruitment. With all of our decisions made, we pushed forward with much anticipation, wondering how JUEMUN 2011, our first year of MUN independence, would turn out.

### **JUEMUN 2011: Independence**

JUEMUN 2011 had its share of accomplishments and setbacks, but as it was a year of transition toward independence, we had expected to run into some hiccups along the way. Unfortunately, the delegate participation number had taken a considerable hit from 50 in JUEMUN 2010 to 39 in JUEMUN 2011. Two of the participating universities from Nagoya, that added a big part to the inaugural JUEMUN in 2010, decided not to participate in 2011 because of the travel expenses and conference dates. This left us with only 4 participating universities in JUEMUN 2011, resulting in a decrease in the number of participants. By looking solely at the number of participants, it seemed like we had taken a step back, but

with one year under our belt, the academic level and organization of JUEMUN 2011 seemed to be higher and the meetings proceeded much smoother than JUEMUN 2010 in Nagoya. We recognized these positives, but looking ahead to 2012, we realized that some modifications were needed,

During a meeting at the end of JUEMUN 2011, the advisors agreed that we'd try to attract more students from different universities and also work on increasing the presence of international students. For JUEMUN 2010 and 2011, all of the publicity and correspondence was done through e-mail and face-to-face meetings. We wanted to gradually move away from this semi-archaic method of recruiting and in order to do this, we agreed to develop a website that would help us to attract more international attention and provide us with a space to upload important information such as the rules of procedure and background guides. We also elected to contact some of the Japanese Model UN groups in our region and encourage them to add JUEMUN to their list of yearly events. The desire to cultivate a relationship between the Japanese MUN groups and our JUEMUN conference was unanimous among our advisors as most of these students already had experience with the workings of similar UN simulations. They would definitely be a positive addition to our group and provide us with additional avenues to promote our event to students interested in MUN outside of our own universities.

Another issue that needed to be addressed was the timing of JUEMUN. November proved to be a very inconvenient month to hold our event because for universities in Japan, it is traditionally the time of year when juniors are starting their job searches and seniors are finishing off their graduation projects. Due to this period of educational turbulence, we elected to hold JUEMUN 2012 in June instead of November, hoping that this would also work in our favor for future recruitment and interest.

To oil the wheels of our recruitment even further, all three of the advisors decided to offer a full-semester MUN preparation course at our universities. The inclusion of this course would guarantee the participation of at least 25 fully prepared delegates each year.

Another suggestion for change was to include a few social events into our conference. We were in favor of this suggestion, but found it difficult to fit it into our two-day schedule. The original plan of having the conference over two days, expanded to two and a half days to accommodate this suggestion. This extra half of a day would not only provide us with more freedom to incorporate parties and a guest speaker into our schedule, but it would also give the delegates more time to discuss the topics deeply.

### **JUEMUN 2012: Making Some Progress?**

JUEMUN 2012 was held at Kinki University and with the support of many people we managed to incorporate all of our proposed changes we had made in the short seven months we had to prepare.

In past JUEMUN events, we had scrambled to prepare country delegates and dais members in our free time, but by offering a semester-long preparation course, we were able to thoroughly prepare them for the event without rushing and missing important details. Changing the time of the conference from November to June was also a positive modification and proved to facilitate our recruitment.

Our website was built and fully operational within three months, leaving us with four months before JUEMUN 2012. The site quickly attracted visitors averaging approximately 50 hits per day and on some days closer to the JUEMUN conference, more than 200 accessed the site. In less than 2 months, we had received 27 inquires from students and teachers inside and outside of Japan. Some of these inquires were asking

us how they could apply, while others were questions related to financial assistance and visa support. As a small teacher-led group, we decided to make JUEMUN affordable and open it up to Japanese students and international students who were either studying in Japan or from countries not requiring a travel visa to enter Japan.

Our modifications seemed to pay off. In total, 63 delegates participated in JUEMUN 2012. Of these delegates, 18 were international students and 45 were Japanese. Of these 45 delegates, 6 were from the Japanese Model UN groups we approached. The advisors were happy with the improvements that were made and after three years of hard work, JUEMUN was finally starting to show progress.

### **2010 to 2012: An Illustrative Comparison**

The development and transformation of JUEMUN over the past three years has been a great learning experience that has recently started to bear more educational fruit for its participants. The illustrative comparisons of all three events clearly show that JUEMUN has faced its stumbling blocks along the way, but now seems to be gaining popularity among Japanese and international students from various universities.

◆ Total # of Delegates    ▣ Japanese Delegates    ■ International Delegates

*JUEMUN 2010 to 2012: Delegate Information*

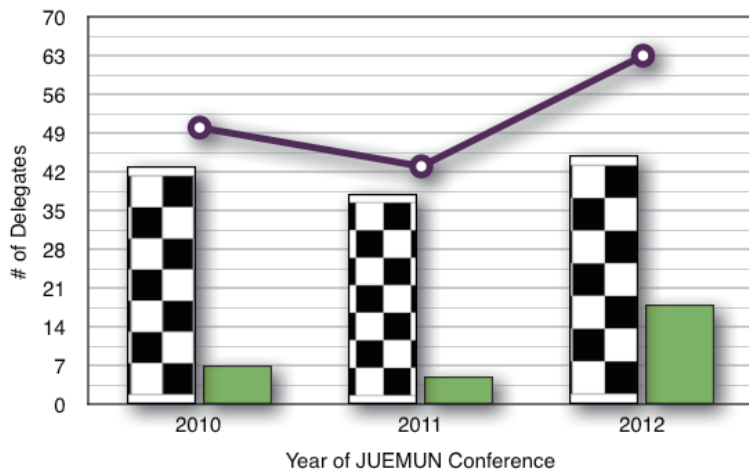


Fig. 1: JUEMUN Delegate Demographics

*The Number of Universities Participating in JUEMUN*

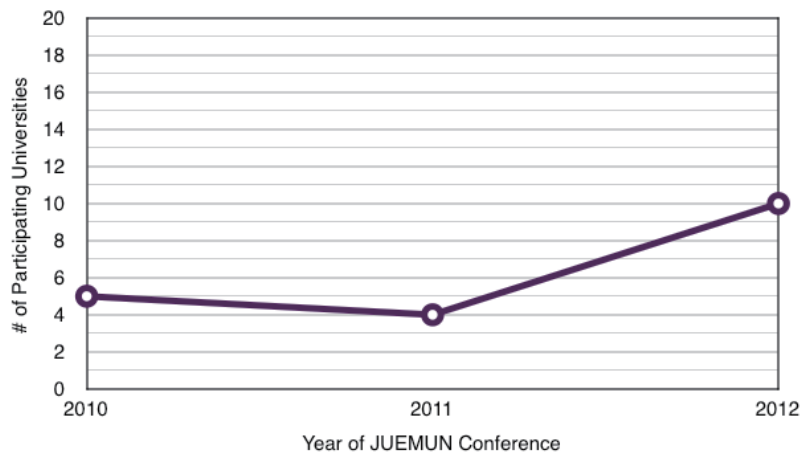


Fig. 2: University Participation at JUEMUN



2010 JUEMUN University Participation

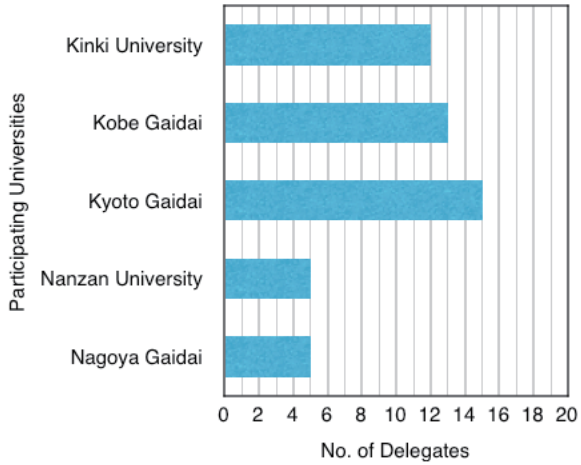


Fig. 3: JUEMUN 2010 Participation According to University

2011 JUEMUN University Participation

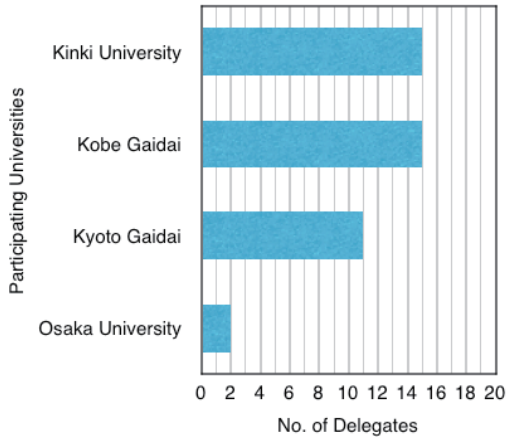


Fig. 4: JUEMUN 2011 Participation According to University

*2012 JUEMUN University Participation*

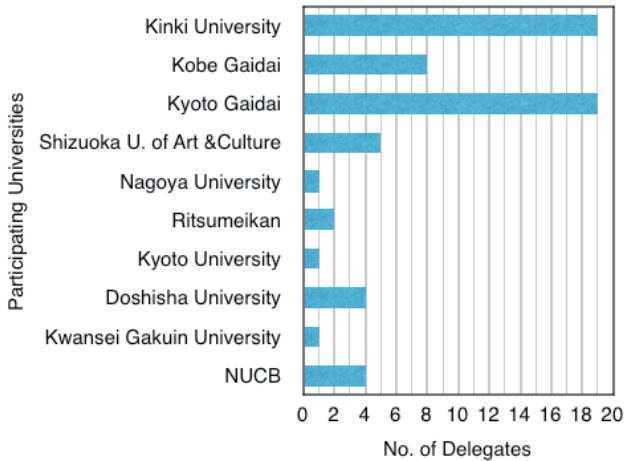


Fig. 5: JUEMUN 2012 Participation According to University

The illustrative comparison of the history of JUEMUN serves as a visual explanation of the progress JUEMUN has made in terms of participation from 2010 to 2012, but an equally important factor in determining our success is how the participants evaluate the event. The next section will reveal the results of a post-conference questionnaire distributed to participants at JUEMUN 2012.

### **JUEMUN 2012: Questionnaire Method and Results**

At the end of the 2012 JUEMUN, a post-conference questionnaire was distributed to 58 of the 63 delegates. The purpose of the survey was to find out if the delegates were happy with the modifications that the advisors had made to the JUEMUN 2011 conference and to what extent they were satisfied with their JUEMUN 2012 experience. As some delegates felt more comfortable with Japanese, both English and Japanese

versions of the questionnaire were made available. The results of the questionnaire are illustrated below.

*Question #1:*

The number of participants at JUEMUN 2012 was 63. This was....

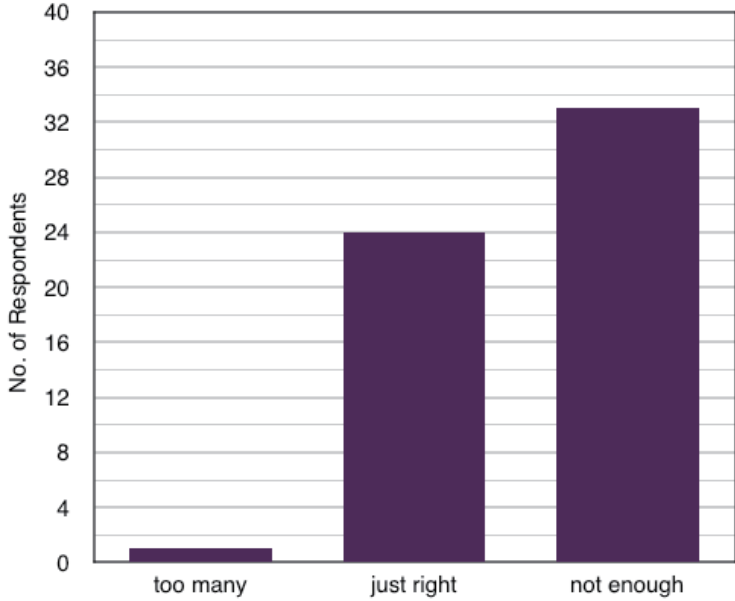


Fig. 6: JUEMUN 2012 Participation

Question #2:

The theme of JUEMUN 2012, “A World of Seven Billion People: Challenges, Opportunities and Actions” was...

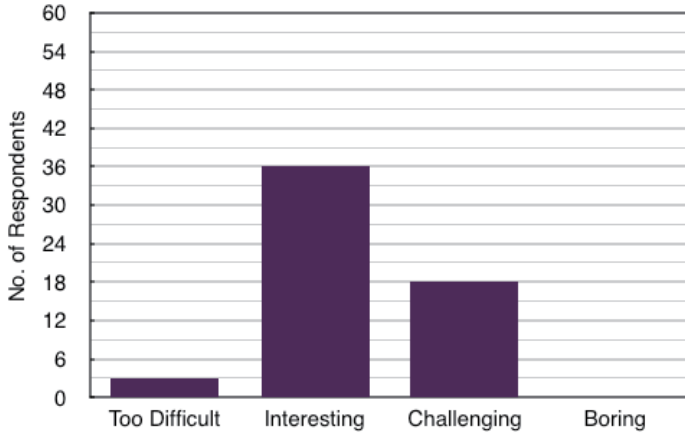


Fig. 7: Impressions of JUEMUN 2012

Question #3:

The length of JUEMUN was 2.5 days. The length of the conference was...

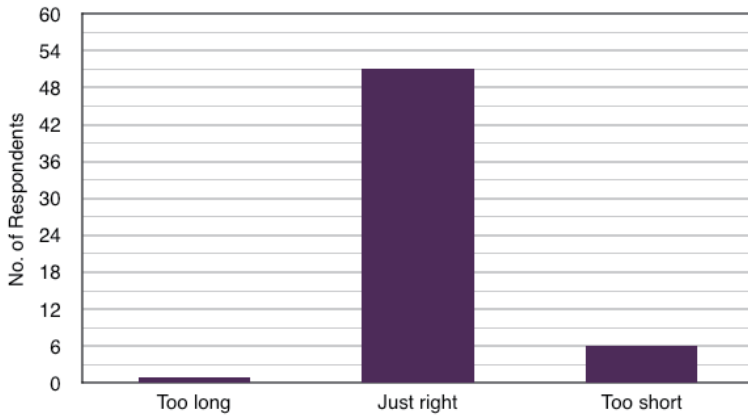


Fig. 8: The length of JUEMUN 2012

Question #4:

JUEMUN 2012 was held in JUNE instead of November.

The timing of the conference was...

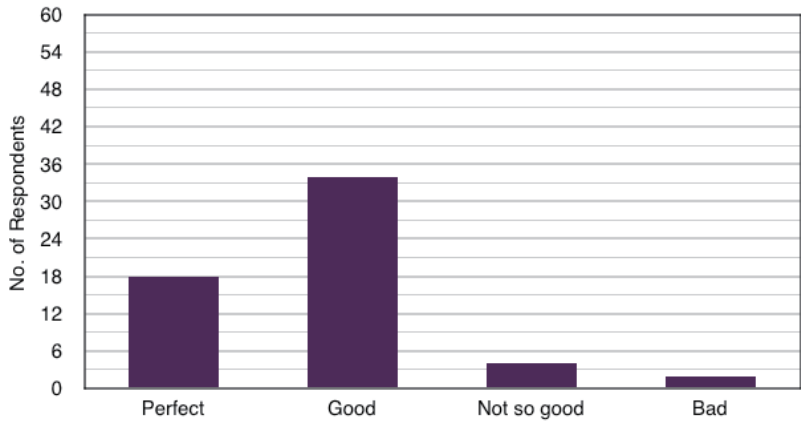


Fig. 9: The timing of JUEMUN 2012

Question #5:

The JUEMUN website was...

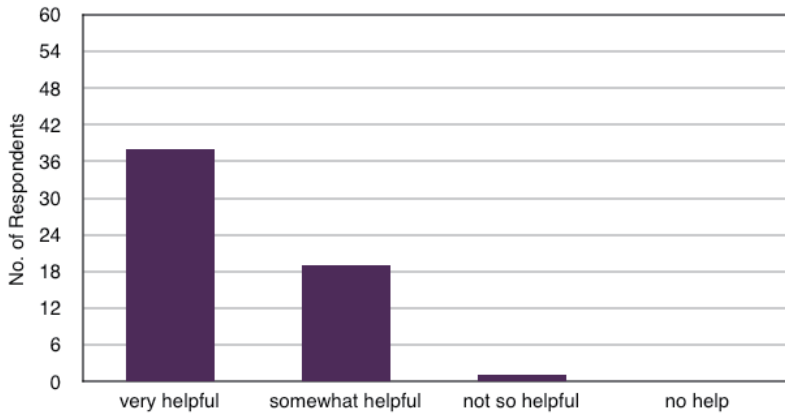


Fig. 10: JUEMUN Website

Question #6:

The social events...

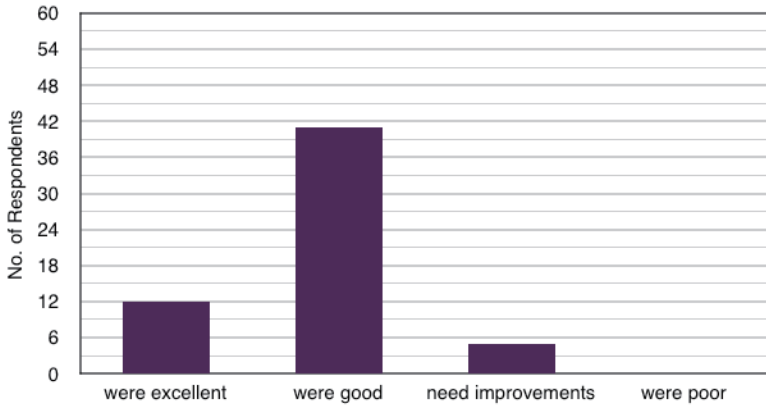


Fig. 11: JUEMUN 2012 Social Events

Question #7:

The atmosphere of JUEMUN 2012...

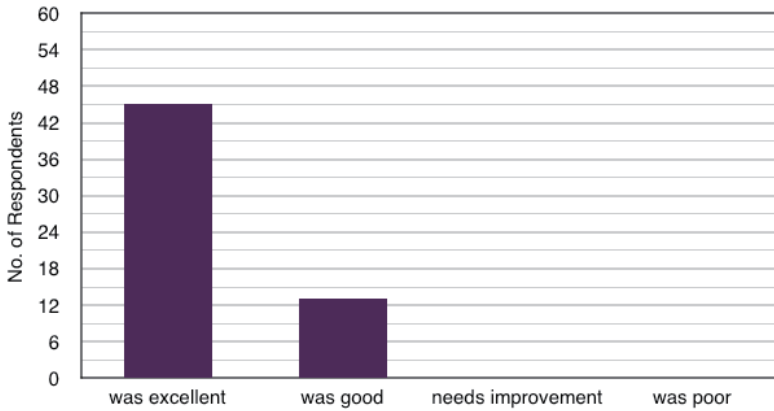


Fig. 12: JUEMUN 2012 Atmosphere

## Interpreting the Results and Moving Forward

Based on the results of the post-conference questionnaire, JUEMUN seems to be developing into a worthwhile educational experience for its participants. The modifications that were made for the 2012 event were clearly viewed as positive changes and as a result, the overall JUEMUN experience was evaluated highly by the 2012 student delegates. The advisors of JUEMUN are fully aware that the event is never static and as it continues to evolve, more adjustments will be required.

Looking forward to the 2013 conference, we hope to increase the number of participants from 63 to 100, but at the same time retain the ratio of international presence we had in the 2012 JUEMUN. In addition to increasing our participation number, setting a conference agenda that many students can relate to is unquestionably an equally important objective. The 2013 conference will be a simulation of ECOSOC focusing on the coordination of humanitarian relief, concentrating on children, displacement and food security during natural disasters. The poster below summarizes the 2013 JUEMUN conference dates as well as the finalized agenda.

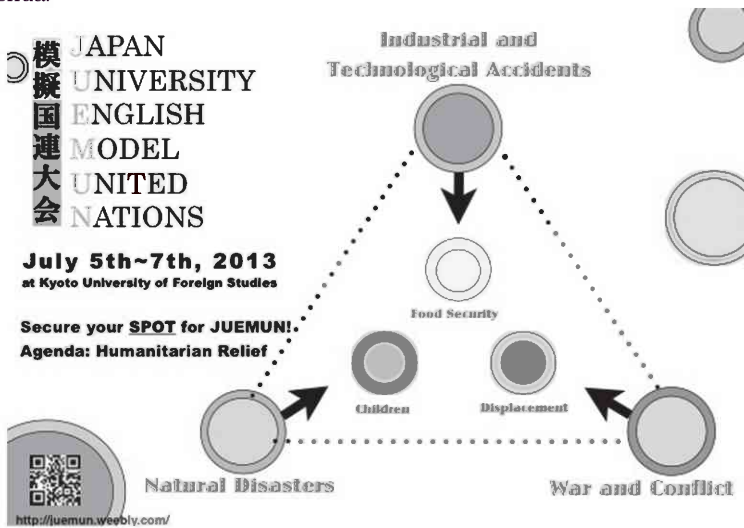


Fig. 13: JUEMUN 2013 Poster

## Organizing JUEMUN Conferences

With an understanding of how JUEMUN was established and how it has grown into its current state, the process of organizing the event will seem much clearer for educators interested in organizing a similar conference at their own university. Since the inaugural conference in 2010, the process of planning the event has changed quite drastically due to various modifications the advisors have made to the conference dates, venues and recruitment process along the way. As we get ready for our fourth annual conference, our current preparation process starts approximately nine months before the event. Using the manageable timeline below, advisors are able to break down the preparation process into monthly duties and set appropriate deadlines, making it easier to digest and at the same time stay organized. While this timeline is our current roadmap to prepare for the yearly JUEMUN, it should be noted that this is by no means the only way to prepare for an MUN conference such as JUEMUN.

### JUEMUN Preparation Timeline

Months Before the Event	Required Duties
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Set the conference agenda</li><li>- Set the conference dates</li><li>- Decide on the conference venue &amp; reserve rooms</li></ul>
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Find discounted accommodations for delegates</li><li>- Make a media pack (posters and video)</li><li>- Make conference agenda background guides</li><li>- Set application deadlines</li></ul>



7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Add information about the conference to the website (agenda, dates, venue, hotel, fees, media pack, background guides, application forms)</li> </ul>
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Send an e-mail message to former participants announcing the conference &amp; updated website</li> <li>- Decide on Dais members and begin their training</li> <li>- Arrange for one or more guest speakers</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Update and upload preparation materials to the website (Rules of Procedure and ESP: MUN language guides)</li> <li>- Set up an online message board for each committee</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Start preparing delegates for the event</li> <li>- Finalize detailed schedule and upload it to the website.</li> <li>- Announce country and committee assignments</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Finalize the number of participants and hotel reservations</li> <li>- Send a formal letter of invitation to each participant</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Find student volunteers to help with pre-conference and conference duties</li> </ul>
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Prepare required materials (placards, country flags, gavel, computer(s), printer, projector, paper, name tags, participation certificates, laminated language guides)</li> </ul>

Table 1: JUEMUN Preparation Timeline

## Conclusion

After three years, JUEMUN has developed into a hands-on learning experience that reinforces the advisors' curricula goals and continues to satisfy its participants. The JUEMUN conference is a great example of experiential learning, which Boud et al. (1993) describe as a holistic process that has experience as its foundation and stimulus, and within the socio-cultural context students actively are involved in constructing their experiences. The JUEMUN advisors are proud to be assisting participants with this construction, but we realize that we are also in the process of constructing our own experiences at the same time. As we move ahead with the yearly participants, we will use our gained experiences as organizers to build on our new experiences. I'm sure we will face more obstacles and they may impede or hinder JUEMUN's progress, but then again, we will never fully understand the obstacles unless we live through them. What a wonderful active learning and thinking opportunity!

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