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Student Reflections on COP21 Simulation



On December 2, with the COP21 climate negotiations ongoing in Paris, the Sustainable Cities Club and Change Forum held a student simulation of the UN Climate Conference, supported by the Tishman Environment and Design Center. Students played the part of delegates representing specific nations and groups of nations as they engaged in their own negotiations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support sustainable development using the interactive C-ROADS computer simulation to see in real-time how

their decisions would impact the global climate system.

HERE ARE A FEW STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON THE SIMULATION ACTIVITY.

Tyler Burton

I wanted to take part in the COP 21 simulation because it felt like an opportunity to share a great resource with fellow students (the C-ROADS climate simulation). Change Forum, the student group that I was a member of, was looking for another facilitator, so I volunteered. The event was very timely and I wanted to also learn from the expertise of the participants. I saw a pattern emerge during the negotiations of big countries setting the tone for the rest of the delegates. The 2 biggest players in the room, USA and China, were looking for the other to make the first move. This kept the process paralyzed, and ultimately contributed to why the delegates

were not successful after 2 rounds of negotiations. My biggest takeaway is that students will participate in something interesting and relevant, even if it's during a busy time of the semester!

Orlando Hawkins

First and foremost I very much enjoyed the event. It was very informative and everyone that was present had great things to say and was really involved in the simulations. Although there are many horrors to the world, I personally believe that global climate change is the biggest existential threat to humanity, given that who we are and much of what we do is dependent upon the beauty, integrity, well-being and stability of the global ecosystem. The COP21 event allowed me to understand how difficult of a task global leaders have on their hands due to issues ranging from the history of colonialism/imperialism to just deciding if one's country should value economic interest over ecological sustainability. Given that the negative effects of climate change are global, I think the responsibility falls on every individual to be assertive when it comes to environmental

sustainability and I'm hopeful that this can be accomplished.

Anna Marandi

Chelsea, Tyler, Taylor and myself organized this event with two things in mind - to engage the students in something new, different, and challenging - a unique activity that would enhance their leadership skills while creating the space for students who might not know each other to collaborate. But we also wanted, obviously, for students to experience the negotiations on a small scale and feel for just a moment what it might be like to undertake such a massive task. What I didn't expect was the level of role play and engagement - we even had hecklers! It was amazing to observe the level of ownership that everyone took over their respective roles. I was also impressed at how quickly everyone bought into the idea after just a few minutes. We all played our roles as well, and we even set up the room so that the developing countries were seated at the very back with no table for their documents or their refreshments. At the end, most people seemed reluctant to leave the event, as we had only scratched the surface of this issue, and there was so much more to talk about. I could feel the energy of the room - we were

all a bit overwhelmed thinking about the magnitude of what is at stake at the real climate negotiations. There was a nearly tangible sense that things on this planet are starting to get real, that finally, after many decades full of scientific warnings, leaders are finally beginning to take action. While we felt oddly united by what we had just gone through, I think we also were internalizing it all - observers and participants alike - feeling very close in our common goals but alone in our personal thoughts as well.

Philip Pittrof

My interest in participating in the COP21 simulation was based on the desire to learn more about the internal mechanics of the climate change negotiation taking place in Paris. As a passionate advocate for Environmental Protection and Social Justice, the event offered a fantastic opportunity for debate and reflection on the complex political, environmental, economical and social issues surrounding the United Nation Climate Change Conference. To get into the correct mindset of the country (in my case an representative the United States of America) I drew upon my understanding of the country's history and stated priorities.

Moreover, I found it useful to utilizing my knowledge of international relation (in particular drawing upon the theories of realism, idealism and constructivism). I noticed the importance of history (impact and interpretation previous events) and the political context on the dynamics of the negotiations. Moreover, the simulation highlighted that rather than just one dominate factor (e.g. the country's desire to protect their own interest), there was multiples factors (how they are perceived, to gain a moral high ground and address previous injustice) which contribute to how a country would act. Finally, the negotiations proved the interconnectivity nature climate politics as the actions of the one country were influenced by the actions of other. The major take-away from this event was that agreement is possible but that it faces in significant challenges (mainly in the form of distrust, power struggles and lack of information and certainty). Due to the nature of international politics being tied to the nation states and power politics overcoming these challenges will require knowledge, political courage and determination. In conclusion, I found the event to be fun and educational. I appreciate all the hard work that Milano Sustainability Club, Change

Forum and Tishman Environmental and Design Center invested in hosting it. I thoroughly enjoyed being part of this simulation and look forward to future events.



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