

Students Wage Peace for Cyprus Solution

The Scenario

In February, students from UCF, Rollins College and Stetson University participated in a two-day crisis-negotiation exercise. The exercise was organized by the UCF Global Perspectives Office and the U.S. Army War College. The partnership developed from a series of conversations between John C. Bersia, Special Assistant to the President for Global Perspectives at UCF, and Col. Martin Clausen, the College's director for its Strategic Leader Experiential Education Division. Clausen began the exercise by telling students, "We are no longer at UCF. We are now at the United Nations in New York City. You are no longer students, but delegates from your respective countries."



Over the course of two days, Feb. 6-7, seven teams of students – each assisted by an experienced mentor – worked together to create negotiation strategies in order to ease tensions between Greek and Turkish Cypriots at a simulated U.N. peace conference. Teams represented the European Union, U.S., U.K., Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and the unrecognized Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

A week before the exercise, participants received voluminous historical briefs on the regional stalemate, as well as objectives specific to their assigned countries. Retired Ambassador Harriet Elam-Thomas, who directs UCF's Diplomacy Program, served as the exercise's U.N. Special Representative. Referencing her own experience working with Greece, Turkey and Cyprus, she encouraged students to pursue compromise without overlooking the positions and goals of their countries.

As rounds of structured meetings gave way to student-initiated negotiations, delegates learned that many countries had competing goals, though they were still charged with improving relations in the region and with participating countries. While the results of the exercise did not "solve" the situation in Cyprus, students experienced firsthand the interplay among issues of diplomacy, military, economy and social welfare. The aim of the exercise was to help emerging leaders develop skills in teamwork, communication, and strategy formulation and execution.



The Participants

Students participating in the exercise from UCF included Victoria Augspurger, Mary Beth Bensey, Ismael Charrouf, Alanna Fulk, Layne Garrett, Kelsey Gilbert, Nicholas Grandchamps, Richard Haddock, Taylor Haywood (a recent graduate), Thomas Huang, Christian Madonna, Eric Moskowitz, Shannon Payne, Sam Peacock, Christen Ram, Veronica Rios, Kellan Ritter,

Taylor Scimeca, Kevin Sopko, Mia Warshofsky and Rachel Wilder (who served as a special assistant to the U.N. Special Representative). From Rollins College, Kevin Ball, Mitchell Branly, Sehar Noor, Gil Ramos and John White served on exercise teams. Two additional Rollins students with substantial work experience – Adam Brown of Lockheed Martin and Kurtis Lee, a military veteran – acted as advisors. Justin Snyder, Daniel Urena and Michael Van Oppen joined the exercise from Stetson University.

Others in a mentoring role for the exercise were Ted Reynolds, Senior Fellow in Terrorism Studies at UCF; Jessica Gagnon, Public Affairs Coordinator for the Global Perspectives Office; Amal Khan, Program Coordinator for the Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research and Studies at UCF; Tracy St. Benoit of UCF's College of Education and Human Performance and Institute for Training and Simulation; and Ken Klosé, a former UCF employee and military veteran.

The exercise was run by a team from the Army War College, including Clausen, Ritchie L. Dion, (Clausen's Strategic Communication Operations Specialist), Major Dennis C. Davis and Major Joseph C. Chretien.

The Results



At the end of the exercise, a final debriefing allowed students and facilitators to comment on the process and results. Amb. Elam-Thomas said the students “grasped the decades-old crisis, incorporating the massive instructions with critical thinking that I was not expecting. They worked around rejected meeting requests and strict time constraints, and kept the dialogue active. They demonstrated what all of us hope will be the case, that a younger generation of leadership on both sides with fresh new approaches may facilitate future negotiations and allow for the resolution of the four-decade crisis.”

Reynolds, a mentor, observed that “the high quality of the exercise was matched by the engagement and interaction of the students with the material, the established communication system, and each other within and without their respective country teams.” His conclusion was that the exercise was a truly valuable experience for all involved. Gagnon, another mentor, said she “expected the simulation to expand students’ understanding of the real-world challenges of trying to resolve prolonged conflicts,” and concluded that “the goal was accomplished.” What Gagnon did not foresee, though, was “the level of autonomy that student teams would be granted in requesting meetings and negotiating deals.” She added that the structure of the simulation allowed student groups to chart their country’s own path in the process.

Fulk, a student participant from UCF, indicated that, going into the exercise, she was not certain about what might happen because she “had never participated in such a complex simulation before.” After completing the exercise, she said she felt as if she had learned more about the process of international diplomacy and negotiation. “It was interesting to see how everyone

represented their respective countries and tried to achieve their goals through bargaining and discussion during the ad hoc sessions,” she added.

Brown, a Rollins student and mentor, praised the format and said he especially enjoyed watching his group go from being strangers to a high-functioning team that played off of each other's strengths. “It was one of the most positive experiences I've had in the past few years,” he added.

Dion, the Army War College developer of the exercise and its content, said his expectations and those of Clausen, Davis and Chretien going in were about the same as with any simulation that they conduct at a university for the first time. “It’s routine to be concerned about the level the students are at in terms of their studies and their familiarity with the region and the 'art of negotiation,’” as well as “their overall buy-in to this type of educational event,” he said. But Dion went on to indicate that what he and the Army War College team found at UCF was “a group of well-motivated individuals who were more than ready to excel in this type of event.” He added that the choice of the U.N. Special Representative, Elam-Thomas, “could not have been better, considering the scenario and her experience with this particular problem.” He also pointed out that the students clearly drew a number of important lessons from the exercise, as shown in the post-event survey.

Bersia’s overall assessment was: “For two days, our students stepped from the academic world into the work world. They took on complicated, enduring challenges with seriousness and purpose – and came up with insightful and creative solutions. After observing their performance, I was more confident than ever about passing the baton to the next generation.”

The Sponsors

In addition to the UCF Global Perspectives Office and the Army War College, sponsors and partners included the UCF Political Science Department, UCF Intelligence Community Center for Academic Excellence, UCF Global Peace and Security Studies Program, UCF Terrorism Studies Program, UCF Diplomacy Program, Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd Program for Strategic Research and Studies and the Global Connections Foundation.