

QUNO has special status at the UN allowing it to attend meetings, make statements and even suggest agenda items for the UN Economic and Social Council. Aside from its more formal UN functions, QUNO engages in research, provides liaison with NGOs, and facilitates confidential meetings between parties involved in issues of Quaker concern.

The QUNO International Summer School is held every July in Geneva. The program hosts twenty-five youths (under 25) from around the world. It is designed to give young Friends and non-Friends insight into the UN and international organizations. Participants attend various seminars from NGOs, UN agencies, and other international organizations.

Although I had taken some international relations courses as part of my Political Science degree, I knew little about the UN going into QUNO. While many of the UN's complexities still allude me, the Summer School program provided me with a crash course in international governance that was both interesting, and most importantly challenging.

The seminars covered a wide variety of subjects. From fair trade certification, international property rights, to the relocation of refugees, the QUNO program managed to pack numerous subjects into a very small amount of time. Although the schedule was at times overwhelming, the quality of the seminars was high. Many of the seminars touched on issues of significant importance which are not widely known (e.g. statelessness and small-arms management) making them all the more interesting.

However, the best feature of these seminars lay not so much in their content but in the diversity of the presenters themselves. Although we attended talks by UN officials, a majority of the presenters were from outside of the UN (e.g. NGO officials and government officials). The wide variety of organizations meant a wide variety of opinions were represented. Through this diversity of opinion, many of my previously held assumptions were challenged.

To my surprise, my biggest intellectual challenge came from the WTO. I had come into the QUNO program with a naïve view of

WTO viewing it as an 'evil' organization serving corporate interests. Yet, I was surprised with how candidly WTO officials spoke about their own organization. While defending free trade, many WTO officials spoke scathingly of previous WTO rulings (e.g. Generic AIDS drugs). For these officials, the problem lay not in the WTO, but the agendas of its member states. While I did not agree with everything the WTO officials said, their speakers certainly taught me that issues surrounding globalization are much more complicated than I had previously believed. Through this lesson in critical thinking I returned home a much stronger thinker.

While the QUNO Summer School has a remarkable curriculum, its true strength lies in the people who attend it. The majority of participants were from the UK, but there were also participants from the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Yemen, Kenya, Nepal and Bosnia-Herzegovina. While all of the participants were wonderful and enriched the program themselves, this diversity of backgrounds also added to the program's quality. The ideas discussed during seminars took on new meanings when viewed through other people's cultural lenses. The program was also enhanced by the presence of programmed Quakers.

The QUNO program certainly was a formative experience in my intellectual development. I have made lifelong friendships through it and highly recommend it to Canadian Friends and non Friends alike. If you know anyone under twenty-five with an interest in social justice issues, tell them about QUNO. Applications are usually due in March.

*Francis recently graduated from the University of Guelph with a Political Science degree. He is currently working in a group-home for cognitively disabled adults. He has applied to several Masters in Public Administration programs for the fall of 2009, and is in the process of deciding which school to attend. Although his schedule makes it difficult to regularly attend the Guelph Worship Group, Francis cherishes his involvement with Friends through YAF gatherings and Camp NeeKauNis.*