

EDUCATING YOUNG CONSUMERS THROUGH DEBATE ON GLOBAL ISSUES:  
A SUMMER EXPERIENCE WITH THE UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

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**Summer 2008 Internship Report**  
**Marjorie J. & Richard L.D. Morse Family and Community Public Policy Scholarship**  
Submitted by Molly Hamm

The People Speak, a program within the Public Affairs division of the United Nations Foundation, is an initiative to educate youth across the world on global issues. The People Speak achieves its mission through educational campaigns which combine social media and grassroots organizing to engage students in raising awareness and taking action on important social issues. In the fall of 2007, I coordinated a grant proposal to bring a climate change campaign to Kansas State University in order to form the Greeks Going Green initiative. As one of ten finalists nationwide in the Climate Crews grant competition sponsored by The People Speak and Americans for Informed Democracy, I visited the United Nations Foundation for the first time at the finalist retreat. During this retreat, I was able to secure an internship with The People Speak for the summer of 2008. Section 1 of the portfolio details the process of applying for the Morse Scholarship in order to help support my internship experience.

The People Speak's foremost initiative in 2007-2008 was the Global Debates competition. In a partnership with the National Forensic League (NFL) and the International Debate Education Association (IDEA), the Global Debates competition provided two debate topics (one in October, the other in March) centered around climate change. High school students and debate teams from domestic and international schools had the opportunity to create public debates using the provided debate topics. In addition to hosting a public debate, schools were challenged to win a trip to the United Nations for the Youth Leadership Summit on climate change by completing a variety of activities including sending photos from the event, writing blog entries about the debate topic, receiving press, and inviting elected officials to the debate.

The top ten domestic and top six international schools who received the most points were invited to attend the Youth Leadership Summit in New York.

The Global Debates initiative was promoted online, via the NFL and IDEA networks, through press releases, magazine articles, and more. Victoria Baxter, Director of The People Speak, completed several articles for the *Rostrum*, the National Forensic League's national member magazine. Teams were able to use the online website to gather information, resources, tips, and to check their point totals as they competed in the Global Debates. This year's debate topics were *Resolved: Market mechanisms are preferable to regulatory approaches in reducing carbon emissions* and *Resolved: Water should be considered national property*. Around 800 high schools from 48 states and 88 countries participated in the Global Debates competition. This year's winning schools represented students from the states of Mississippi, Texas, New Mexico, Ohio, Nebraska, Michigan, Iowa, California, and Minnesota with additional winning schools representing the countries of Moldova, Slovakia, South Africa, Bulgaria, Chile, Australia, Peru, and Mongolia. Section 2 of the portfolio details the Global Debates competition.

Aside from the Global Debates, The People Speak sponsored another contest which could qualify student teams to attend the Youth Leadership Summit. The Think Globally, Report Locally contest was a media contest where students planned and produced video news stories on global issues based on four provided topics. This year's topics were Kick the Habit (de-carbonizing our lifestyles and economies), World Heritage (local sites and international interests), Growing Up Girl (challenges facing girls everywhere), and World Water (access to clean water). Three winning teams from the United States attended the summit. Section 3 of the portfolio details the Think Globally, Report Locally competition.

One of the most exciting parts about these competitions was watching high schools students from across the world engaging in global issues and constructing knowledge that was applicable to their lives and their future. As receiving press coverage was a large part of the points-based competition in the Global Debates, students submitted many press clippings and press releases which were published in local media. Letters to the Editor, event coverage, photos, and more verified the great work that students from various parts of the globe were doing in their own communities. Section 4 of the portfolio provides examples of submitted press coverage from both domestic and international schools, submitted in their native language.

The Youth Leadership Summit was the culminating event of all the hard work that these high school students had put in throughout the 2007-2008 year. The summit was held July 17-19 in New York City with over 180 students from 9 countries in attendance. Planning and execution of the Youth Leadership Summit was the main focus of my summer internship with The People Speak. Students heard keynote speakers and panel discussions, received a tour of the United Nations Headquarters, attended special receptions, participated in a collaborative Youth Climate Pledge session, learned about social media, executed service projects, and celebrated with a Circle Line boat tour of Manhattan. The panel discussions brought in outside experts and young student activists to discuss action on climate change. As a student panelist myself, I discussed important lessons I have learned throughout the time that I have worked organizing students on campus around environmental issues.

Adobe Youth Voices and Campus Camp Wellstone provided interactive sessions discussing power, social media, creating messages, and telling your story. These sessions provided students with the opportunity to use their creativity to make plans for organizing around

the issue of climate change. They were also able to learn hard skills and valuable lessons they could bring back to their communities in order to implement their plans.

My areas of accomplishment for the pre-planning of the Youth Leadership Summit included collecting liability waivers and appearance release forms, organizing the participant agenda, creating a follow-up informational email with conference details, and compiling biographies for speakers/trainers/partners. I also put together a tip sheet for the panelists and prepared briefing sheets for the students who would be introducing guest speakers.

In order to capture the great memories and social activism of the youth at the summit, The People Speak put together a media plan which included outlines for collecting video and photos throughout the summit. These materials would be used to promote future summits, keep summit “alumni” connected with the network, and relay the success of the summit to future partners. As a recap of the summit experience, I composed an article for NFL’s magazine the *Rostrum* and also detailed inspiring moments from the summit (“Green Space Vital for Communities”, “Sharing Stories Provides Common Ground”) for future marketing use. We then put together an outreach plan that would focus on engagement of participants to keep them connected to The People Speak and the issue of climate change. Section 5 of the portfolio details information about the Youth Leadership Summit.

As a major takeaway of the Youth Leadership Summit, we provided all of the participants with a flash drive that was filled with an informational toolkit that could be used in order to bring real change to their communities surrounding environmental issues. I assisted in the compilation of the resources for the toolkit. Website resources included environmental agencies and organizations, technical tips and guides for organizing and activism, and activism resources and blogs. I revamped old toolkits from The People Speak to provide information

about creating a press strategy, developing a press kit, and hosting discussions on climate change. We also provided them with relevant templates (invitation letters, petitions, press releases, etc.) as well as an example of how to create a campaign from Texas A&M University. Section 6 of the portfolio details all of the resources included on the flash drive toolkit.

My main planning focus for the summit was the collaborative Youth Climate Pledge. Before the summit, students had the opportunity to go online and use a collaborative wiki to upload their favorite ideas of ways that individuals can address climate change within their homes, schools, communities, and countries. I planned and implemented a facilitation process for the students to narrow down the top five ideas within each category while at the summit. I assisted in the training and preparation of facilitators by creating a facilitator's guide complete with information about their role, the discussion goals, and the facilitation process. I also personally served as a facilitator for one of the groups. At the end of the summit, I compiled all of the facilitation notes to create the final version of the Youth Climate Pledge. In addition, I created a Youth Climate Pledge Worksheet and Youth Climate Pledge Action Plan one-pager which allowed students to make the pledge personal and actionable. The action plan sheet will serve as a model for the students to use in the 2008-2009 Global Debates with a topic of *Resolved: The world should adopt our plan to significantly combat climate change.* Section 7 of the portfolio details the Youth Climate Pledge.

At the end of the summit, we created an evaluation mechanism to see how students responded to the content and activities presented at the inaugural Youth Leadership Summit. I put together evaluation questions which were then changed into an online format and distributed via email to all conference participants. The evaluation proved extremely helpful in understanding the success of the Youth Leadership Summit and will prove immeasurably useful

in the planning for next year's summit. Section 8 of the portfolio details the results of the evaluation.

My internship with The People Speak during the summer of 2008 was irreplaceable and life-changing. Although my project goal as originally proposed changed throughout the summer, I feel strongly that the information and practical skills I gained during this internship will assist in my future success. While I did not directly interview or evaluate students based on their understanding of consumerism and consumption, their participation in the Global Debates and Youth Leadership Summit proved that they understood this concept. Students from across the world realize that they are consumers of the world, and as consumers they must be responsible, educated, and engaged in the issues which allow them to engage and "consume" their world. Students also realize that they have the personal and collective power to make real change in the issues that matter to them. Environmental issues can be largely attributed to man-made problems, especially the tendency to consume without thought as to the negative effects and impacts of that consumption. The People Speak, Global Debates, and Youth Leadership Summit teach youth that they must be conscious in the decisions and actions that they take each and every day in order to be effective leaders and citizens of the world.