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First International Student World Assembly Conference  
Teaches Lessons, Forms Friendships

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- For Huseng Vefali of Turkey, the first international Student World Assembly convention at Cal Poly July 16-23 was an eye-opener.

As chair of a convention subcommittee, he watched as student delegates from around the world debated and tackled their differences in the university's Kennedy Library, eventually coming to a solution.

"I've learned that if you have an opinion, you should let people know -- and that your opinion really does matter," he said at the close of the weeklong convention July 23.

Vefali was among some 20 international students and 20 U.S. students who participated in the convention, part of the newly created Student World Assembly, an Internet project sponsored by the nonprofit Raynault Foundation. The foundation aims to create a nongovernmental student organization with ties to universities from around the world.

delegates debate

Student delegates debate issues during a session in Cal Poly's Kennedy Library July 23.

"The goal," said Raynault Foundation President and Canadian entrepreneur Paul Raynault, "is to build a nongovernmental representative world assembly to represent people in much the same manner as the United Nations represents governments."

Student World Assembly was launched at Cal Poly in September 2003 and is now jointly headquartered at Cal Poly and La Guardia College in New York.

SWA currently includes more than 1,000 students at 142 universities and colleges in 68 countries who communicate via the Internet.
Cal Poly students in political Science Professor Bud Evans’ Global Political Issues have been coordinating events and publicity for the organization and summer convention.

**Cal Poly Political Science Professor Bud Evans listens as student delegates debate an issue during a final committee session during the Student World Assembly convention.**

The event brought to Cal Poly students across the United States as well as from Bulgaria, Cameroon, Canada, China, Ecuador, Guyana, India, Iran, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, St. Vincent, Turkey, and Venezuela.

Raynault also attended and watched students grapple with topics including global environmental sustainability and war, after briefings on those issues from Cal Poly professors and other experts.

"It's really fascinating to watch the students and what they're doing," Raynault said on the closing day of the conference July 23. Noting that many students came from countries without a strong tradition of national democracy, Raynault observed that "they've learned the process here. They've learned that on some things, there is merit to all sides, and they didn't all agree on a course of action. So they have learned about writing a majority report and a minority report.

"They've learned about getting votes. When they didn't have enough votes to do something, they broke down into caucuses, and talked to each other, managed to change a few minds, and took a second vote. It was a natural process. And it's something that they will all take home with them."

For Joel Simpson, Luann DeCosta and Kadri Parris of the University of Guyana, joining SWA and attending the convention were important. "It was a fruitful convention," said Simpson, a law major at the South American university. "The fact that this organization is in its infancy gives us a great opportunity to influence what it becomes."

"It was important to us to be here, because we represent the views of students in Third World nations," said DeCosta, also a law major.

swa kids

**SWA student delegates (l-r) Anthony Navatto of Palermo, Italy, a student at LaGuardia College in New York City, and Joel Simpson, Luann DeCosta, and Kadri Parris of the University of Guyana in Georgetown, Guyana.**

"It is also important we are here to make a representation (for Third World countries) in these global issues, as we seem to bear the brunt of the side effects" of environmental and military decisions made by "First World" nations, she stressed.

Though the convention had social activities during evenings and lighter moments, "I wouldn't call it just fun," said Parris, a civil engineering major. "It was very business-oriented. Not all of us agreed on issues. But at the end of the day we tried to observe the principals of democracy. Some feel that democracy is an ideal that humanity is chasing after, and I have to say I may have to agree, but the convention was directed toward that (democratic) process."

Anthony Navatto, a student at LaGuardia College in New York City who holds dual U.S. and Italian citizenship, agreed. The convention, he said, "shows you how hard it is for 30 people to agree on one idea. It shows you how hard it really must be to run a country, or a government."

For more information on the Student World Assembly, visit the non-profit group's Web site at: