

A Reflection of Service Learning with the United Nations Association of Greater Boston

Colin McAndrew

College of the Social Sciences and Humanities, Northeastern University

Globalization and International Affairs

Dr. Diamanti-Karanou

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The UNAGB's Mission, Its Role in the Greater Boston Community, and My Personal Experience and Reflection as a Service-Learning Intern:

The United Nations Association of Greater Boston (UNAGB) is a non-profit organization which is committed to building a strong multi-generational network of global citizens. The organization itself inspires and engages members of the mentioned community on global issues which are central to the work and mission of the United Nations. Through creating learning materials, hosting conferences, and educating students the association envisions a future where people of all ages may engage as citizens, which are global, working towards a more sustainable, just, and peaceful future. The following paragraph will highlight the significant role the United Nations Association of Greater Boston plays in its education of the community.

In order to educate younger students of the Greater Boston community on issues pertaining to global issues and affairs, the UNAGB takes the form of Model United Nations, or Model UN for short. Model UN is a program in which students pretend to play the part of delegates, which represent member states of the United Nations, and debate current and relevant international topics. Through taking part in Model UN, the UNAGB provides students with first: skills such as public speaking, negotiation, and advanced critical thinking; which they either will not be exhibited to through public schooling or will likely not develop until much later. Next, the United Nations Association of Greater Boston, through the Model UN program, provides students of this community with a much more global view of the world, they will likely not be able to connect with otherwise. As a former public-school student, I can attest said schooling at younger ages does not provide opportunities, in terms of worldview, at the same level of the UNAGB. In addition, when taking into account socio-economic status of members of the Greater Boston community, and how this relates to associated school systems and education of younger students, it can be said that there is an even greater divide in level of knowledge of international

relations. Overall, by providing students of the mentioned community first, with advanced skills in public speaking, negotiation, and critical thinking unable to be gained in the classroom; and second, with a knowledge of the world and international interactions unable to be seen in the community; the United Nations Association of Greater Boston gives them power to make a true difference in the world as they develop their minds through this process and grow older.

Through this past semester, I have gained both a deeper understanding of international affairs and great respect for what the UNAGB does for the community of Boston; the following paragraph will highlight my role as a service-learning intern, what tasks I performed in order to fulfill it, and a personal reflection of my time working for the organization. First, in terms of ordinary day-to-day structure, I was responsible for completing tasks such as country research links and country profiles for various nations. These materials, after created and submitted, are then used by younger students of the Greater Boston area in preparation for their Model UN conferences. Next, in terms of a more weekly schedule, I was required to attend two meetings a week, one with my intern advisor and another with the UNAGB Board, to discuss upcoming assignments needed to be completed. Finally, in terms of in person events, once every two weeks I had the opportunity to visit the UNAGB office located in the heart of Boston right across the street from TD Garden. While in the office I completed standard paperwork, but also viewed and was able to give input on topics which would be discussed at future Model UN events. In addition, I also had the opportunity to help run a Model UN conference which took place at Northeastern University; here I had a first-hand look at what a conference entails and got to view the work I completed before come to life in this aspect. I felt my experience as a service-learning intern at the UNAGB was nothing short of excellent. I was able to have a direct effect, through the daily work I completed, which all culminated in the Model UN conference I was able to view in person. It was also rewarding to see how I made a true difference in the education of students

in the Greater Boston area and helped them develop skills, and a true understanding of international affairs, which they can use for the rest of their lives. In summary, I am so appreciative for the opportunity to work for such an important organization and the experience I gained from this endeavor.

Connections to Broader Themes, Recommendations, and Policy Ideas While Working for the UNAGB:

During my time at the United Nations Association of Greater Boston, I was able to deepen my understanding of various topics exhibited in the Globalization and International Affairs Class; the two most apparent examples were disparities between the Global North and South causing poor maternal healthcare and mass food waste in developed nations leading to hunger in less developed nations.

Maternal health is at the forefront of discussion in current domestic politics, but even more so in the realm of those internationally. Over the course of the semester in Globalization and International Affairs, I learned just how great the difference of proper healthcare is between the Global North and Global South. In addition, during my time at UNAGB, I completed various country profiles pertaining to the same issue, and more specifically maternal health. As the Council on Foreign Relations states (2017) “while actors in the Global North exhibit mainly universal coverage on healthcare, such as the nations of France, Germany, and Japan, the Global South in great majority holds no certain national health care infrastructure” (paras. 9-12); thus, severely effecting maternal health in the region in many aspects, like proper access to affordable contraceptives preventing the need for further reproductive health costs. In the global health lecture of the class, I learned that the global target point currently is reducing all nations’ “maternal deaths to less than 140 per 100,000 live births”. However, in my research for the UNAGB on this topic, I learned that many regions of the world, such as Sub-Saharan Africa

located in the Global South with 545 deaths per 100,000 live births, exhibit rates far exceeding those trying to be met. This current issue, as submitted by the World Health Organization (2021), that “more than half a billion people, a majority of them women, are being pushed into extreme poverty because they have to pay for health services out of their own pockets” (para. 1) will not be able to be corrected unless developed actors of the Global North provide proper aid and services to the Global South. The differentiation in proper maternal healthcare services between these regions can mainly be correlated to the issue of economic disparity; so as the UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated (2021): “more investments in the foundations of health systems [of] marginalized populations” (para. 6) in these regions is required.

The major cause of hunger due to mass global food waste can be simplified to a phrase taken from Sernau (2022): “food flows in great abundance to centers of wealth, while the poor and peripheral areas are left extremely vulnerable” (pg. 431). This fact holds true to everything I have learned in terms of international affairs this semester, both through information taken from class and during my service-learning; specifically when creating research links on this topic for students of the Greater Boston area. As the class lecture on hunger and famines states: there is “enough food in the world to feed everyone, but 820 million people experience hunger.” The excess food continues to be transferred to developed nations, such as the United States, as this is where the greatest monetary gains may be achieved through its selling by the producers. In order to address this issue, programs such as the IGNITE Food Systems Challenge are being created. The mentioned program was formed, according to the United Nations (2022), in order to “help start-ups, cooperatives, and small and medium enterprises, to scale-up locally driven solutions that contribute to the economy and address different gaps in supplying nutritious food” (para. 3). Solutions such as the aforementioned IGNITE Food Systems Challenge, address the problem of famine cause by food waste by increased operations domestically, which in turn decrease

reliance on developed nations of the world. A possible additional benefit as a result may not only mean lessening of world hunger before attributed to food waste, but the ability to rely on local commerce and thus boost domestic economies of actors which are currently underdeveloped.

In terms of recommendations for the United Nations Association of Greater Boston as an organization, I simply have none. Especially as a service-learning intern, I could not have asked for a better experience or to be more trusted in my work and involved. I recommend for anyone with an option to work for this organization to do so, it was a great experience.

Finally, in terms of recommendations about policies, I was a part of a few during my time at the UNAGB. Due to being involved in international discourse, when I attended the office, I was asked to take part in deciding which policies would be the best fit for younger students to grasp intellectually and research. We decided collectively that the best were those that could be researched well by the students online, specifically on the United Nations website itself. So, this may be a differing response than expected, but that was the influence I had on policy ideas pertaining to international affairs during my time at the organization.

References:

Readings:

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UNAGB Mission Information:

United Nations Association of Greater Boston |. (n.d.). Retrieved April 7, 2023, from <https://www.unagb.org/>