

Running Simulations without Ruining Your Life: Simple Ways to Incorporate Active Learning into Your Teaching

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Despite the growing availability and popularity of simulations and other active teaching techniques, many instructors may be deterred from using simulations because of the potentially high costs involved. Instructors could spend a preponderance of their time and resources developing and executing simulations, but such an approach is not necessary. Instead of investing a great deal of time and effort into running a complex simulation, I recommend developing low-intensity simulations, using three possible strategies: (1) using one's own scholarly research to develop simulations, (2) using current events as the basis for simulations, and (3) using student research to create simulations. These strategies provide a starting place for the professor who has held off on trying simulations before and practical information for the professor who is accomplished in using active learning techniques and wants to take the next step by designing his or her own simulation.

Keywords active learning, current events, low-intensity simulations

Teaching is a challenge—particularly in the face of potentially high course loads and research requirements for tenure that can seem daunting (Rothgeb and Burger 2009). But political science professors can incorporate innovative and engaging teaching techniques without a burdensome investment of time and resources. I recommend the development of low-intensity role-playing simulations using resources that are readily available to most instructors, and using processes that help achieve important additional objectives in the classroom and beyond. This approach provides students with many of the benefits of active learning while not burdening the professor with the high costs of preparing and executing traditional simulations.

The Benefits and Challenges of Classroom Simulations

In recent years, scholars of pedagogy in political science and other disciplines have extolled the virtues of classroom simulations and other active learning techniques. There have been a number of pedagogical articles published on the topic (for a few examples, see: Woodworth and Gump 1994; Sutro 1985; Smith and Boyer 1996; Raymond and Sorensen 2008; Mariani 2007; Ambrosio 2004; Thomas 2002;

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Shellman and Turan 2006), and the American Political Science Association's Teaching and Learning Conference currently hosts multiple simulation tracks.

Professors who are interested in active learning have many sources to turn to for guidance, including extensive reviews of the literature on simulations (Wheeler 2006; Shellman and Turan 2006; see also the recent International Studies Association [ISA] Compendium). Even without conducting an exhaustive review of the literature here, there is readily available and ample evidence to indicate that active learning techniques can improve student learning (Pace et al. 1990; Sutro 1985; Perry 1968; Washbush and Gosen 2001; Kolb 1984; Krain and Shadle 2006), engagement (Hess 1999; Wolfe and Crooktall 1998; Ruben 1999; Brown and King 2000), and interest (Smith and Boyer 1996; Hess 1999). Although there continues to be debate over the specific benefits of classroom simulations and the opportunity costs of investing in them (e.g., Christopher 1999; Ellington, Gordon, and Fowlie 1998), many agree that the occasional and/or supplemental use of simulations, games, and other active learning techniques can be beneficial (Krain and Shadle 2006; Powner and Allendoerfer 2008).¹

At the core of the debate over the value of simulations has been the question of whether or not they increase student learning (Shellman and Turan 2006). There is growing evidence in support of increased learning through simulations, particularly when it comes to long-term simulations that extend over multiple class periods or over multiple weeks in a semester (Prince 2004; Fox and Ronkowski 1997; Washbush and Gosen 2001; Brown and King 2000). Evidence in support of shorter simulations remains mixed. Baranowski (2006) finds statistically significant differences in knowledge levels and exam scores between students who did and did not participate in a single session Congress simulation, but Bernstein and Meizlish (2003) find that, in terms of short-term learning, students who participated in their Congress simulation were indistinguishable from those who did not. But scholars of teaching and learning are still grappling with the best ways to measure student learning; Bernstein and Meizlish (2003) also found that after 3 years, students who participated in their simulation retained more knowledge about the material covered in the course. Their results indicate that the benefits of simulations may not be captured by measurements taken in the short term.

Although short-term fact retention is often the measurement of choice when evaluating the benefits of simulations, it is not the only benefit simulations may be able to provide. Whereas much of the available data focuses on fact-based knowledge outcomes, research is just beginning to measure other benefits of classroom simulations. For instance, research has shown that short-term simulations often increase *subjective* evaluations of learning by students (i.e., students self-report that they are learning; see Obach 2003; Shaw 2004), even in cases where evidence for improvements in *objective* student learning (i.e., exam scores; see Powner and Allendoerfer 2008) is lacking. In the face of concerns about how to measure objective student learning and whether current measurements accurately reflect the skills students gain through participating in simulations, we should not dismiss what we *do* know: Students believe that simulations help them learn.² This belief itself makes simulations worth a second look as a teaching tool, but they also hold many other benefits that have not received as much attention in the literature.³

For instance, the very fact that students believe simulations increase their learning is likely to lead to increased student enjoyment and engagement with the material (Brocato and Potocki 1996; Shellman and Turan 2006; Dedeke 1999). Simply put, students are happier and more engaged learners when the monotony of

lecture is broken up by active learning exercises like simulations (Shaw 2004; Fox and Ronkowski 1997). In my own experience, student-reported enjoyment of classroom simulations has been nearly unanimous (19 of 20 students in one upper division International Relations [IR] class responded “yes” to the survey question “Did you enjoy the active learning activities?”).

And, although the pedagogical literature has (appropriately) focused on the benefits simulations hold for students, using classroom simulations can also benefit professors. Professors are less likely to burn out or disengage from the courses they are teaching when they get an occasional “break” from preparing and delivering lectures. Although the effort to prepare and successfully carry out a simulation can be significant, the fact that running the simulation is a departure from the normal classroom routine can be refreshing for the professor as well as the students. Thus, the increase in student enthusiasm (Dougherty 2003) and enjoyment of the course described above is likely to improve the teaching and learning experience all around and is almost certain to result in another overlooked benefit: better teaching evaluations. Although positive teaching evaluations are certainly not the main goal of our efforts in the classroom, they also do not hurt when it comes time for a merit pay evaluation or tenure review.

With both students and professors enjoying the teaching and learning experience more, political science departments can potentially reap yet another neglected benefit of simulations: increases in enrollment. Shellman and Turan (2006) found that 22% of students who participated in their IR simulation in Introduction to International Politics indicated that they would change their majors to International Relations. Departments that would like to boost their major enrollment numbers may find that the numbers easily follow happy students and happy faculty members. These benefits, together with the time-saving strategies provided in the following pages, makes classroom simulations an easy instructional choice to make.

With simulations growing in popularity, and with increasingly sophisticated research to support their benefits, the typical professor may be contemplating running a simulation or perhaps has ventured to run one already. In fact, given the growing emphasis on active learning in the discipline, it may be tempting to throw a simulation into a course in order to bulk up a teaching portfolio, or to satisfy a dean or department chair. This is not an approach I would recommend. Instead, professors should begin with a clear vision of their teaching and learning goals and an idea of how active learning tools might help accomplish them.

A more in-depth discussion of how the low-intensity simulations I recommend can meet learning goals is provided in the next section. Unfortunately, many instructors never get that far. Some are intimidated away from using simulations because of the seemingly high start-up costs, requirements of classroom time, and complexity of simulations. Scholarly articles on classroom simulations often summarize the authors’ own experiences conducting simulations, which frequently include elaborate replications of historical decision-making processes, extensive work for both the professor and the students outside the classroom, and/or complex Internet-based communication systems to facilitate the simulation (Sutro 1985; Pace et al. 1990; Starkey and Blake 2001; Gibler 2004; Newmann and Twigg 2000). Such descriptions may portray simulations as necessarily time intensive and daunting teaching tools. Most professors, busy with research, mentoring, and service requirements, may think that they do not have the time and resources to invest in implementing simulations in their classrooms. It was this reality that led me to pose the following question: How can I run simulations without ruining my life (or my career, for that matter)?

The solution I found is to develop simulations that are less complex, while still providing many of the benefits of traditional simulations. By developing my own low-intensity simulations—uniquely able to meet the teaching and learning goals of my courses—I have found that I am able to accomplish multiple goals with a single simulation. This low-intensity approach requires less of an investment of time and resources on the part of the professor and requires less of a sacrifice in the form of opportunity costs in order to run the simulation. While intensive simulations can be beneficial, instructors should not be deceived into thinking that active learning is an all or nothing endeavor. Instead, I recommend that professors use the knowledge they already have, together with the capabilities and interests of their students, to develop topical and engaging simulations for the classroom—without turning their lives over to the process. In the sections that follow, I first describe the low-intensity approach I am advocating and briefly recount the pedagogy behind it before detailing in three sections each of the three major strategies I suggest for developing low-intensity simulations.

Low-Intensity Simulations

The following pages introduce low- to medium-cost strategies for incorporating simulations in the political science classroom. Before I present my three strategies for developing low-intensity simulations, I should be clear that often the easiest way to run simulations is to borrow ideas and techniques from other scholars and teachers. Back issues of *International Studies Perspectives*, *The Journal of Political Science Education*, and *PS: Political Science and Politics* are filled with active learning ideas.⁴ Many of these articles describe intensive simulations,⁵ which often require a significant effort to implement (i.e., complex student roles, intricate background set-up, specific technologies, multiple class days, and so on). Some articles, on the other hand, do provide simpler or ready-to-use activities, which are easily employed and may take as little as 10 minutes to execute in class. Asal's Classical Realism game (2005), Obach's (2003) collective action exercise, or Powner and Croco's (2005) Prisoner's Dilemma reenactments are excellent examples of quick active learning exercises that are applicable to a range of political science courses.

Additionally, there are a few databases and resources available that specifically provide readymade simulations and role-playing games; although even these ready-to-use resources often require a lot of work to implement. The U.S. Institute for Peace provides information for running nearly a dozen distinct simulations, including background information and role descriptions. Another excellent resource is the International Communications and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS) project at the University of Maryland.⁶ For a small fee, ICONS simulations can be run either in a single classroom or across classrooms connected to one another through the Internet. Another fee-based service is provided by the Choices program at Brown University's Watson Institute for International Studies, which supplies background readings and simulations for use in the political science classroom.⁷ These start-up resources remove a part of the research burden on instructors and can make executing even complex simulations easier.⁸

Despite the breadth of information provided by these resources, the use of simulations is currently limited by the availability of techniques that are applicable to specific course material (Smith and Boyer 1996). When instructors attempt to wedge into a course available simulations that may not fit the curriculum or learning goals,

the potential benefits of these activities diminish. As an alternative to this potentially disjunctive teaching technique (or the complete redesign of a course), I advocate the development of simulations that are tailored to the goals of a particular course. With complete control over the design of the simulation, professors can be sure that it is structured to meet their specific teaching and learning goals. These goals will obviously vary, but the low-intensity simulations I recommend are particularly well suited to illustrating the unique perspectives of multiple actors attempting to reach a political solution, to introducing complex ideas that will be further explicated throughout the course, and to increasing retention of major concepts. More detail on the teaching and learning goals each of the strategies is designed to fulfill will be provided, along with sample simulations, in the following three sections.

Designing simulations from scratch may sound time intensive, but preparing low-intensity simulations requires only about as much time as preparing a traditional lecture—and sometimes less. The point is not necessarily that simulations are time savers, although I believe they can cut down on prep time for harried professors, but that low-intensity simulations can be a great, low-cost starting point for those interested in introducing active learning into their teaching repertoire. Generally speaking, low-intensity simulations use very little or no technology and require less rigorous preparations than other classroom simulations. In most low-intensity simulations, students participate in a reality-based activity by taking on the role of political actors—a technique known as role-playing (Shaw 2004).

Whereas more complex simulations often involve every student in the course participating by playing small roles in what can become an unwieldy negotiation, low-intensity role-playing simulations cast every student in a significant role, while still keeping the negotiations simple. In order to allow every student to participate in a meaningful way, I recommend that the students work in small groups of four to six, so that there are actually multiple simulations of the same problem taking place in the classroom at the same time. An example of this classroom layout, with 15 students playing five roles in three different groups, is illustrated in Figure 1.

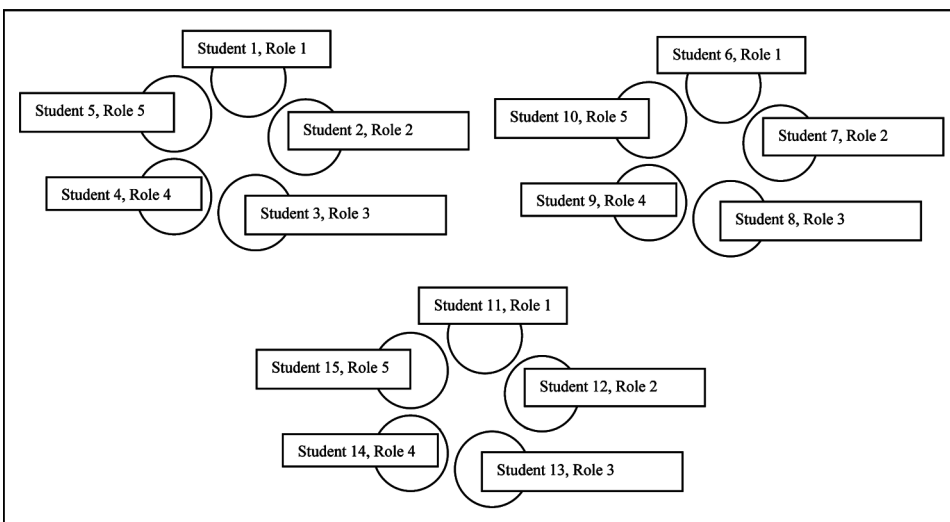


Figure 1. Mini-simulation setup.

This format is particularly useful because it can be employed in both large and small classes (Starkey and Blake 2001; Jenkins 1992; Huerta 2007). Having the students work in this “mini-simulation” format also avoids some of the problems associated with traditional classroom simulations, such as students with strong personalities dominating the activity (Raymond and Sorensen 2008).⁹ Additionally, by using the mini-simulation format, each group is able to come up with its own solution and the class is able to comparatively evaluate the various resolutions reached. In fact, it is during the final stage of a simulation, the debriefing and discussion period, that we see one of the most important advantages of low-intensity simulations. Less complex simulations require less time to explain the simulation format, to discuss background details, and to execute the simulation. This allows for more time to discuss the results of the simulation, a critical step that research suggests is particularly valuable for student learning (Jones 1995; Merryfield and Remy 1995; Lederman 1984). More complex simulations may take multiple class periods to carry out and often result in debriefing sessions that are either truncated or pushed to the next class meeting when the simulation dynamics are no longer fresh in students’ minds. With low-intensity simulations, the simulation itself and the debriefing session can be conducted in a single-class period. The benefits of simulations are maximized when learning is identified and discussed immediately and the tradeoff with the breadth of material covered is reduced when only one class period is used for the simulation (Huerta 2007).

Preparing and conducting a low-intensity simulation is fairly simple.¹⁰ The first step is to identify an ongoing or historical political issue with multiple actors. Instructors may choose to simulate actual or hypothetical negotiations. In the latter case, instructors can either bring together key actors in a conflict that otherwise might not be in communication with each other or they can create a conflict between actors that might otherwise be at relative peace.

The second step is to prepare the resources for the simulation. In addition to a background lecture and a reading assignment or two, the major resource needed to execute this type of simulation is a “role assignment” for each of the actors involved in the negotiation. The role assignment document briefly informs the student of the goals and preferences of the actor they are assigned to represent. In these brief documents, the instructor sets up which actors are going to come into conflict with one another and which issues are going to be intractable. Examples of role assignments from each of the three simulations that will be discussed are provided in the appendix.

Preparing these role assignments is fairly easy, and the examples provided can serve as models from which to develop role assignments for original simulations. In order to keep the negotiations simple, instructors should identify one or two sticking points that will feature prominently in the negotiation and describe each actor’s position on these issues. Each role assignment will only be seen by the student representing that specific actor, so incentives to misrepresent can be a part of the simulation. Keep in mind that these role assignments are meant to be simplifications of reality and therefore should be kept simple. As the sample role assignments illustrate, these documents can be as short as a few sentences. All you really need in order to write the role assignments is knowledge of a specific problem or conflict. Gaining this knowledge, however, *is* potentially time intensive. The three strategies outlined below focus on different potential sources of knowledge, which can be used to develop simulations.

Strategy 1: Use Your Own Research

Producing good research, while also teaching effectively, is often a fine balance for professors. By utilizing the first strategy I advocate here, professors are able to kill two birds with one stone: Their own research becomes the raw material for the classroom simulations. Political science is fundamentally about who gets what when and how, so the field is full of conflicts and negotiations that can be simulated in the classroom; anyone with a political science PhD should have at least some substantive knowledge of a divisive political issue. Whether it is your ongoing research into the use of suicide terrorism, your dusty dissertation on the political engagement of indigenous tribes in Guatemala, or that interesting article you just finished reviewing about liberal and conservative groups in the United States coming together to fight pornography, your place as a scholar in political science and as an expert in your subfield qualifies you to design a simulation. It is easier than you think.

Comparative scholars are likely to have a great depth of knowledge regarding a particular region of the world or even a particular conflict, revolution, or regime transition. This information can easily be summarized in a handful of role assignments and thereby provide the raw material from which students can learn how the concepts of the course play out in actual negotiations between actors with divergent interests. Any course that includes a discussion of how government works could easily include a low-intensity simulation in which students decide how to allocate resources, to respond to an international crisis, or to make major policy revisions. The simple act of simulating these decision-making processes can solidify the concepts in the students' memory and lead to greater learning and retention (Bloom 1956; Martin 1993). As one of my students put it in a course evaluation, "I have a way better understanding of how things work and remember it better because I actually participated."

In-depth knowledge of a single issue area is likely to produce more than one potential simulation. Take, for instance, a research agenda focused on nuclear deterrence. There are a number of excellent readings on the theoretical and practical history of nuclear deterrence that students can read as background material. The instructor can then present the class with a simulation that allows them to act out the role of a state contemplating developing a nuclear weapons program, a rogue state that possesses nuclear weapons, or a state attempting to deter others with its own nuclear weapons. Thus, low-intensity simulations can be based on international negotiations, like the UN Security Council plus Germany holding discussions on how best to respond to the growing reality of Iran's nuclear program; or they can be based on domestic negotiations, like discussions within Iran on whether or not to weaponize their nuclear program.¹¹

By using this method, instructors can draw upon their own areas of expertise to assign preferences and even negotiating tactics to the actors involved. One benefit of designing your own simulations (which may or may not be based on actual, historical negotiations) is the flexibility that comes from being able to include in the negotiations whichever actors are appropriate. Thus, terrorists could literally have a seat at the table in negotiations over "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland or the current conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Although this may not be a likely scenario in many cases, it does give the students an opportunity to think through seemingly intractable issues from multiple viewpoints (Baylouny 2009).

In my own research, I have studied issues of justice in conflict and postconflict zones and, with the help of Melanie Greenberg of the Cypress Fund for Peace and

Security, developed a simulation based on the Juba round of negotiations over the conflict in Uganda. This simulation itself is designed to run in one class period, with one prior class dedicated to a background lecture on the specifics of the Ugandan conflict.¹² Although there are many actors who have a stake in the outcome of the negotiations, this low-intensity simulation includes only five major players, chosen to represent the key actors in the conflict as well as a diversity of interests: the Ugandan government, the United Nations, the Lord's Resistance Army, an international nongovernmental organization, and a local peace group. The classroom set up for this simulation is identical to the set up shown in Figure 1, but the specific roles are included in the example of the set up shown in Figure 2.

After the lecture on the Ugandan conflict, a particularly brutal conflict with rampant use of child soldiers and widespread war crimes, many students are predisposed to push for "justice" by bringing the perpetrators of these crimes before an international court. As the sample role assignments in the appendix illustrate, these predispositions are challenged in the simulation as the students either role-play or encounter people from Uganda who would rather have peace than justice. This simulation illustrates the difficulties of negotiations, the competing values of peace and justice, and how experiences look very different when viewed from the ground, as compared to the view from an international body. Whereas a semester-long Model United Nations simulation might do a better job of teaching students the intricacies of passing resolutions and parliamentary procedure (Adams and Adamski 2002; Brennan 2007), I doubt it would do a better job of illustrating the discrepancies between what international organizations want to achieve and what is possible in the field.

As I have run this simulation over the years, I have collected both qualitative and quantitative evidence in support of its usefulness as a teaching tool. I first ran this simulation in an upper division international relations theory course in the summer of 2008, a six-week course that included a total of six low-intensity simulations. At the end of the course, 14 of the 22 students responded in a survey that the Uganda simulation was very helpful in improving their understanding of the

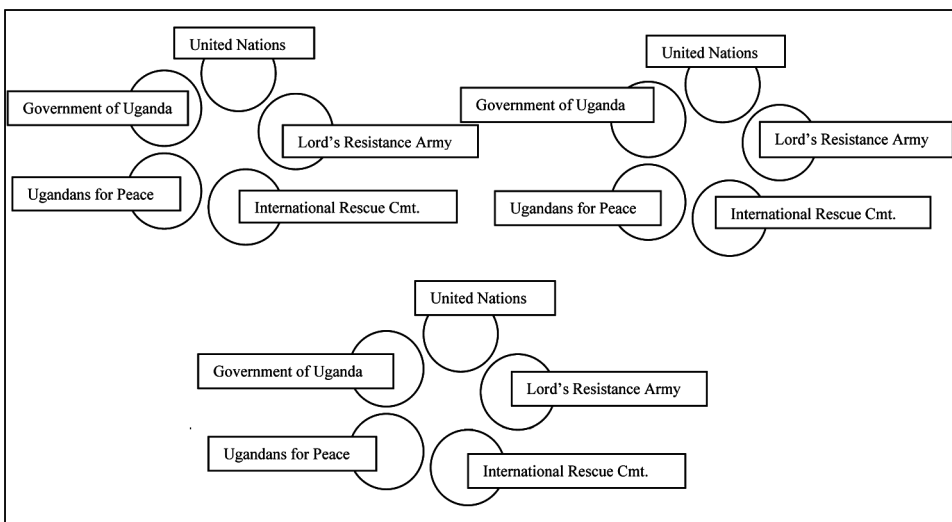


Figure 2. Mini-simulation setup for the Uganda simulation.

concepts in the course, 5 described the simulation as somewhat helpful, and 3 students responded that it made no difference. Additionally, 19 of the 22 students described the simulation as a good use of class time, and 19 of the 22 students recommended that the Uganda simulation be used the next time the course was taught. While not necessarily a sample from which to generalize, these results echo other scholars who find that students enjoy simulations and self-report that it improves their learning (Shaw 2004; Obach 2003). The excitement and engagement that simulations can generate can be a great benefit in any classroom (Newmann and Twigg 2000).

The qualitative feedback I have collected over the years reinforces both the learning and the enjoyment reported by students in the survey data. The following comments are representative of the open-ended survey responses across courses: “[The simulations were] helpful for understanding the concepts being presented.” “They were fun and I learned stuff at the same time.” “[Simulations] serve as an anchor for the concepts we learn in lecture, which at times seem a bit abstract. The games are examples which reach a level of efficacy that verbal explanations could not.” “The learning activities give me a break from everyday lecture to learn in a more hands-on, enjoyable way.” “Not only did I get to know my classmates, but I learned concepts through the games that I wouldn’t understand through lecture.”

I was also recently somewhat surprised when a handful of students from my fall semester international relations class brought up the Uganda simulation in my spring semester foreign policy class, explained the outcome of their group’s negotiation to the class and then related that outcome to the topic we were currently discussing: the difficulties of negotiating with the Taliban in Afghanistan. This experience and others indicate that students are not only retaining the information communicated through the simulations (Schachter 1996) but they are continuing to draw upon the knowledge they gained through participating.

The main benefit of Strategy 1 is that it allows professors to draw upon and even further their own research interests while also preparing teaching materials. Doing so will be helpful for any faculty member trying to balance the demands of teaching and research and may have the side benefit of engaging the instructor to a greater extent. Instead of teaching from a textbook, the professor is able to teach on a topic closer to his or her own interests, and that enthusiasm is likely to translate into better teaching and more learning.

Strategy 2: Use Current Events

Integrating current events in the learning process is a common technique used in political science courses. Current events can be valuable complements to other course materials; relating the course materials to ongoing events helps students see the importance of the concepts they are studying and provides them with the opportunity to see how the theories and processes they read about are manifest in practice (Kelley 1983; Reinertsen and DaCruz 1996; Brock and Cameron 1999).

Instructors can take the benefits of incorporating current events into the curriculum one step further by using them as the basis for a simulation. The strategy discussed in this section is very similar to that discussed above, but, instead of drawing upon your own research to develop the simulation, current events provide the raw material. Thus, student roles are drawn from ongoing or potential disputes in the news in order to combine current events with low-intensity simulations. There

are a few simulations currently available that apply this method, to an extent (for instance, Ambrosio 2004; Chasek 2005; Hobbs 2004; Raymond and Sorensen 2008).

Some professors may hesitate to use current events in part because the political world has been known to be somewhat unpredictable. Using simulations that are already established can provide a great opportunity for discussion and learning, while allowing the instructor more control and predictability. But using current events to develop your own simulations allows for greater continuity with teaching and learning goals as well as once again killing two birds with one stone: Students are required to keep up with current events in order to participate in the simulation. The unpredictable nature of current events can even be a good thing (Grillo, Ellington, and Shaw 2006). A major development in your simulated issue over a weekend can provoke an excited discussion come class time on Monday.

Finding appropriate current events to simulate is quite easy. The only criteria are that the simulated problem is ongoing (or perhaps on the horizon) and that there are multiple players with divergent interests attempting to solve it. In an international relations course, a professor could easily design a simulation around the six party talks in North Korea, with each student in a group of six representing a different country in the negotiations. Similarly, in an international relations or comparative politics course, a simulation based on the drug trade problems in Colombia could include actors representing the Colombian government, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the United States, Venezuela, a local citizens group, and an important drug dealer. Although such a meeting might seem far-fetched, simulating it will allow the students to learn the different perspectives and incentives of the players involved. Students could also learn a great deal about global problems and the place of nongovernmental organizations by simulating a response to the global food shortage, global warming, or an ongoing humanitarian crisis like that in Darfur.

There are a number of ongoing problems in the United States that students in American Politics courses could also simulate. Two potential points of conflict may be illegal immigration and health care reform. Additionally, simulating ongoing political issues in the local community can be an effective way of engaging students in the practice of political science. Local debates over building a new high school, allowing Wal-Mart to set up shop on Main Street, preserving the local wetlands, and so on, are likely to have an immediate impact on the students and thus maintain their interest. There may even be ongoing campus conflicts that students can simulate; for instance, there is intermittent debate on University of California campuses about the role the university plays in nuclear research. Engaging in local issues may allow for further active learning and the possibility of creative course assignments as students attend town hall meetings, meet with members of the city council or write letters to elected representatives (van Assendelft 2008).

In the spring of 2010, I developed a very simple simulation in which students, role playing as policymakers in the United States, discussed the U.S. response to a successful Iranian nuclear test. This simulation took only one class period to run and less than one hour to prepare. The students were not aware that a simulation would take place but they were assigned to read a short piece from *Foreign Policy* on nuclear bluffing (McManus 2009). In part because the role assignments were so simple (only a few sentences long) the students were divided into three groups of eight (a bit larger than I usually recommend), assigned their roles and given about 25 minutes to decide on their recommended response. This simulation was run in the first week of a course

on U.S. Foreign Policy and served as a common experience that could be referred to throughout the course. In fact, during a discussion on the foreign policy bureaucracy, it was the students who pointed out that the phrase “where you stand depends on where you sit” was a perfect description of what happened in the simulation weeks earlier. Similarly, during a discussion of Congressional weakness in the realm of foreign policy, the students again pointed out that no representative from Congress was even present in the simulation. Students in this foreign policy course repeatedly referred back to the simulation run in the first week of the semester as they continued to learn new information about the foreign policy-making process. They also kept a pretty close eye on Iran and brought up for discussion any developments they read about in the news. This simple simulation left enough of an impression that students continued to not only remember the things they learned but to apply them and use them to understand new information. As one student put it in a course evaluation, “[the simulation] was fun and put theory into action.”

The tactic of using current events as an element of a simulation has other benefits as well. In the spirit of carrying the current-events-based simulation throughout the course, instructors might consider an essay question for the final exam that asks the students what they think the outcome of the simulated conflict will be and why. By making the simulation an ongoing component of the course, low-intensity simulations may reap some benefits thought to be specific to traditional simulations (Fox and Ronkowski 1997; Prince 2004). The main benefit of the second strategy, however, is that the students are able to gain in-depth knowledge about a real problem in the world for which a solution has yet to be found. Hopefully, by role playing as actors dealing with this problem, the students will stay engaged with the issue and with political science.

Strategy 3: Use Student Research

The final strategy I propose is one that uses student research as the basis for a simulation. The student research approach is similar to the approaches described above, but it requires making the simulation a much more central part of the course and it is best used in upper division courses. In some cases, the level of involvement required to carry out this type of simulation may move from low intensity to medium intensity, but the student research approach still keeps the balance between teaching and research in mind. Thus, the heart of the third approach is utilizing the time you have in the classroom, as well as the skills of the students and the work required to complete course assignments, to research and design the simulation. This approach has the additional benefit of helping students develop research skills and it provides the continuity of carrying the discussion of a simulation throughout the course.

The instructor utilizing this strategy should introduce the topic as soon as possible, along with the research expectations. This way, the students can begin engaging with news reports and historical documents on the topic right away and can place new information they learn in the course in the context of the topic. It is also helpful to introduce the goals early on, so that when discussions of simulation logistics arise after the first week or two of the course, the students are mentally prepared to contribute. The students should be assigned background readings early on so that they are prepared to participate actively in determining simulation logistics.

There are a number of issue areas that students could research for this type of simulation, both ongoing and historical. If a major summit like the G-8 occurs

during the course of the class, students could prepare to simulate negotiations on a few issues that will be on the agenda. The problems in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Iran could also provide plenty of raw materials for a simulated negotiation, whether or not the pertinent parties are actually scheduled to meet. Historical events can also provide excellent simulation topics and require the students to conduct research that may actually take them to the library. For instance, students could research Truman's decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Cuban Missile Crisis, NATO's response to violence in the Balkans, or the division of the continent of Africa among the imperial powers in the nineteenth century. One topic that I have found to be particularly rewarding and challenging is the conflict in Iraq and in 2009 I developed a student research-based simulation on the conflict.¹³

A simulation based on the student research strategy requires student involvement in brainstorming which actors should be invited to the negotiations and which issues should be placed on the agenda. In the case of Iraq, after being informed that the class will be hosting a "Solve Iraq Summit," students decide who to invite to the summit, debating whether or not Moqtada al Sadr, former Bathists, the government of Iran, and other actors should be allowed to attend. The students also decide the agenda of the conference, perhaps debating whether federalism, oil sharing, provincial security, or a timeline for U.S. withdrawal should be on the table. After the brainstorming session, it is up to the instructor to winnow down the list of attendees and select three to five key issues to be discussed. Afterward, the students are given their research assignments: Identify and explain the position of your actor on each of the major issues. The research papers the students write will provide the raw materials for the role assignments used in the actual simulation.

At this point the efforts of the instructor are required to synthesize the information from the student research papers into short summaries for the students to use while negotiating at the summit. Creating these role assignments should not require much additional effort, as the research has already been done and the professor has a prior obligation to read the students' assignments. An example of a role assignment for an actor attending the hypothetical summit on Iraq is provided in the appendix. As an added twist, on the day of the simulation, students can be assigned to represent an actor they did not conduct research on. Studies have shown that forcing students to take on new and different perspectives stretches their cognitive abilities and can lead to greater learning (Perry 1968; Baylouny 2009).

The simulations developed using Strategy 3 will require more time to carry out. Thus, it might be beneficial to discuss one of the summit topics each Friday over a period of weeks. By covering only one topic per day, instructors can still utilize the critical debriefing time immediately following the negotiations. If the problem is ongoing, stretching out the simulation gives current events a chance to intervene. At the risk of sounding somewhat callous, it can make the simulation much more interesting if one of the actors attempts to assassinate another between summit meetings. If the relationships among actors are fairly peaceful at the time of the simulation or if the topic of the simulation is historical, the professor can always throw a wrench into the negotiations with a fake news report of a suicide bombing or a natural disaster.

Utilizing the student research approach helps students develop valuable research skills and, depending on the format of the papers, skills in presenting complex issues in an abbreviated format. Hopefully, the end result is that students will recognize the difficulties of resolving major political issues, gain valuable research and writing skills and become interested in seeing how political events develop.

Conclusion

Despite the growing availability and popularity of simulations and other innovative teaching techniques, many instructors may be deterred from using simulations in their classrooms because of the potentially high costs involved. Instructors could spend a preponderance of their time and resources on developing and executing simulations, but such an approach is not necessary. Intensive long-term simulations are valuable for a number of reasons, but the low-intensity simulations I propose have a comparative advantage in terms of time management and efficiency in accomplishing classroom goals. These simulations are intended both to help professors accomplish more with their limited time and to provide a jumping-off point for those professors who are ready to take the plunge into developing their own simulations. Depending on the approach adopted, the simulation strategies I advocate contribute to ongoing research projects, encourage students to keep up with current events and teach students valuable research skills. By adopting some of these strategies, instructors can reap the rewards of running simulations with a much smaller commitment in terms of time and effort. Simulations do not have to take over a course or an instructor's life—many of their benefits are available through a much smaller investment of resources.

Appendix: Sample Role Assignments

The following role assignments are meant to be used on the day of the simulation. Each student is given only one role assignment and should not be allowed to see the roles assigned to other students. Students usually have more information than what is presented in their role assignments, including information from lecture, readings, and their own research.

Peace and Justice in Uganda

Classroom Simulation
Professor Rebecca Glazier
Melanie Greenberg

Instructions for Government of Uganda (GOU) Isaac Mandami (Deputy of President Museveni)

As a top deputy of President Yoweri Museveni, you helped negotiate the August 2006 cease-fire that is allowing rebels to filter out of the bush, and that is letting nearly 1.7 million displaced people return to their homes.

President Museveni is troubled by the International Criminal Court (ICC) indictments against Kony and his deputies. Museveni is certainly not against justice, but he is a pragmatist. Although he requested the indictments, now that the violence has been reduced he feels that the only way to reach a peace agreement is to drop the ICC indictments. Out from under the shadow of the indictment, Kony and his troops would be ready to negotiate a peace agreement, which could include more traditional Ugandan justice processes. Specifically, Museveni feels that a “mato oput” ceremony (see attached sheet) would be appropriate. President Museveni's first allegiance is to his people, who are exhausted by the war, and who need a return to normalcy, even if this means forgiving Kony.

You are also concerned that a too-close examination of Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army's (LRA) war crimes would also reveal some of the crimes you

and your government have committed. You do not want negative international attention that might drive away foreign investors who are eager to do business with a peaceful Uganda.

In the negotiation, you push hard for a lifting of the ICC indictment, and the implementation of more grass-roots reconciliation and more traditional Ugandan means of justice. You realize that the Ugandan government had originally asked the ICC to bring the indictment, but now facts on the ground have changed.

Peace and Justice in Uganda

Classroom Simulation

Professor Rebecca Glazier

Melanie Greenberg

Instructions for United Nations Department of Political Affairs Sarah Valjean (Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs)

As the top official of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), you represent a number of arms of the United Nations: the International Criminal Court; the UN Development Programme; the Special Advisor for the Prevention of Genocide; UNICEF; and the Secretary General's Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict.

While you understand the needs of the local Ugandan people, who are exhausted by war and need to move on with their lives, you feel extremely strongly that a peace between the GOU and the LRA, without indictments of Joseph Kony and his crazed followers, would be a peace without justice.

You feel strongly that local reconciliation processes should not be subordinated to international justice and rule of law. International law requires accountability for serious crimes and fair prosecutions for crimes against humanity. By any standard, Kony's wide-scale recruitment of child soldiers and sex slaves and his terrorizing of the local population rise to the level of crimes against humanity. Local initiatives have a place, but the international judicial process—the International Criminal Court proceedings—must move forward. Not only would the ICC process ensure justice for the victims, but it would also ensure that Kony and his comrades receive fair trials under accepted international standards for defendants.

You are concerned about maintaining the reputation of the UN and the ICC as effective international institutions and you want to punish Kony and his followers in order to discourage future criminals from committing war crimes. You are willing to discuss local reconciliation processes, but you will ask the Security Council to act if the GOU and the LRA insist that the ICC indictments be dropped.

Iran Has the Bomb!

Classroom Simulation

Professor Rebecca Glazier

Role Assignments

Director of the CIA: You are nervous. You did not see this nuclear test coming and you are concerned that Iran's capabilities may be much greater than previously thought. Attacking Iran is a risky option given our uncertainty about their capabilities.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: This is a very disturbing development. You do not believe we can allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon. If they do, they will use it to manipulate the entire Middle East and extend their power in a way that is not acceptable to the United States. We must take whatever action necessary to eliminate Iran's nuclear program.

Ambassador to Israel: You are disturbed by Iran's nuclear test, but you are not so much worried about the United States as you are about Israel. You want to do whatever needs to be done to reassure Israel that we will not allow their country to be wiped off the map, as Iran's president has threatened.

Secretary of Defense: This is exactly the opportunity you have been waiting for. You have watched Iran menace U.S. interests in the Middle East for too long and you are eager to take them out. This nuclear test provides the perfect excuse to rid the United States of an enemy that has thwarted our national interest for decades.

Undersecretary for the Army: You are very interested in seeing a strong reaction to this nuclear test, but you fear that the American military has been stretched too thin. You think that Israel is the country with the most to lose from Iran having a nuclear weapon and you want to encourage them to take action.

Vice-President: You are very concerned about an American overreaction to this situation, but you know that your party has been criticized for being weak on national security issues. If you are going to win reelection, you have to consider taking a strong stance here. You especially don't want to be seen as bowing to the demands of any international organizations.

Secretary of State: You have spent a great deal of time in the Middle East and you know that it is a tinderbox. The last thing you want to do is start dropping bombs into it. You believe that we can live with a nuclear Iran but will need to respond in a meaningful way.

Ambassador to the UN: You are concerned that the United States is going to fly off the handle and respond unilaterally to this nuclear test. You want to encourage a united front of international cooperation as the response instead. You don't want to make any rash decisions without international consultation.

Solve Iraq Summit

Classroom Simulation

Professor Rebecca Glazier

Instructions for Radical Shi'a Salah Al-Obeidi (Deputy of Muqtada Al-Sadr)

As one of the top commanders in Muqtada al-Sadr's Mehdi Army, you represent many of the radicalized Shi'a in Iraq. You have thousands of supporters and you know that you also have champions within the current government. You were strongly opposed to Saddam Hussein and you are grateful that he is no longer in power in Iraq, but you're also strongly opposed to the presence of coalition forces. You believe the United States has been in Iraq for far too long and you want to see the troops leave as soon as possible.

Issue 1: The Presence of the United States. You represent a strongly nationalistic group and you are very unhappy with the presence of the United States in Iraq. Some of your friends and family members have been treated poorly by the troops and you view the occupation as humiliating. You are willing to do whatever it takes

to get the United States to leave, including violence. You really don't like the United States, but you are willing to work with the Iraqi government.

Issue 2: The Level of Violence. Although you would like to see the level of violence in Iraq decrease, you're not going to unilaterally do so. You have the Mehdi Army militia at your disposal and you are willing to increase the level of violence if you believe it will get you a better bargaining position. You are particularly concerned with radical Sunnis, who have oppressed you for years and are causing a lot of the violence. You see it as your absolute duty and right to avenge their abuses, even if it means organizing death squads. However, you have called cease-fires in the past, and you are willing to do so again if you think it will help get the United States out. But one thing you will never agree to is disbanding the Mehdi Army or handing over its weapons.

Issue 3: Religion and Government. You represent a religious individual and a religious organization. You believe that the people of Iraq want a country that is governed by *sharia* law, and you want to help accomplish this. You are willing to accept a government that is only moderately religious for the time being, because you believe that the people of Iraq will ultimately demand to be governed by the laws of Islam. You are particularly willing to make this concession if you believe it will help get the United States out of your country more quickly.

Notes

1. Despite some important differences across active learning techniques, they are often grouped together as a pedagogical approach to teaching. The remainder of this article will deal specifically with simulations—active learning tools wherein students adopt roles in order to address a reality-based problem (Asal 2005; Wheeler 2006; Ellington, Gordon, and Fowlie 1998).

2. In a 2008 survey of an upper division international relations course I taught utilizing one low-intensity simulation per week, students were asked if they learned more from the lectures, the simulations, or both. Fourteen of the 19 student respondents indicated that they learned more from the simulations, with three responding that they learned from both, and only two selecting traditional lecture.

3. For instance, Bernstein and Meizlish (2003) find that students who participated in their simulation demonstrated not only increased understanding of the concepts of the course but also decreased political cynicism.

4. Also, Wheeler (2006) provides a useful annotated bibliography that can cut down on time spent digging through journal archives. The recently released ISA Compendium is another valuable resource.

5. For instance, *The Journal of Political Science Education* has published 18 articles on specific simulations, through Volume 6, Issue 1. Of these 18 articles, only 3 would fall into the category of what I am calling “low-intensity” simulations.

6. A recent article by Asal and Blake (2006) describes in detail the process of using ICONS to create simulations. See also Vavrina (1992).

7. Choices also include on-line surveys where students can express their own views on international issues and compare their answers with other students from around the country.

8. Unfortunately, despite some efforts, political scientists and publishers have not yet developed an authoritative source for active learning simulations and games in political science. A central Web site where instructors could share resources and ideas is needed but not currently available.

9. Although dominant students can always find a way to make themselves heard, in a smaller group the remaining students have more of a responsibility to respond and participate themselves, and even normally quiet students are more likely to participate when the risks of doing so are lower (i.e., embarrassment in front of four classmates versus embarrassment in front of the whole class).

10. There are some valuable resources available for thinking through many of the important issues associated with designing a simulation, including group size, goals, timing, and structure (Asal and Blake 2006; Smith and Boyer 1996). But the point of low-intensity simulations is to keep it simple. I would suggest these materials for the interested reader, but I don't believe in-depth knowledge of simulation design is necessary to create and run low-intensity simulations.

11. Such discussions may or may not be ongoing in Iran, but an instructor with expertise in the area could put together a very interesting simulation based on the idea that they might be.

12. Depending on the course, instructors can provide this type of background in the form of readings that the students do on their own, in a series of lectures, or even by using supplemental materials like video clips of news reports or a documentary. For instance, *The Night Commuters* is an excellent documentary on the plight of children in Uganda that may help bring the reality of the conflict into the classroom.

13. Austin, McDowell, and Sacko (2006) similarly suggest a simulation based on governance in Iraq and recommend that students conduct research on the actors and issues involved.

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