

# Simulating International Relations: Team-Teaching Introduction to International Relations Courses

Thomas W. Mullen, Dalton College

*Over the past three decades, simulations of international processes, events, and international organizations' decision-making processes have become a significant method in both International Relations teaching and practice. By placing students in selected situations as international decision-makers in the class, both new insights and awareness of the international decision-making process of international actors is made much more immediate and relevant. Student responsiveness and enthusiasm have reflected our faith in the method as a valid and vital pedagogical device for learning in both short and long-term areas.*

For some time, scholars as well as practitioners of International Relations (in both the government and private sector) have argued that participation in a simulation enables the participant to become actively involved in an interactive process "which emulates selected basic features of international reality (Daugherty and Pfaltzgraff, p. 531)." The principal underlying idea is that "doing something" is a superior learning device to "hearing something." In theory, students can actively test and operationalize knowledge acquired from lectures, readings, discussions, and videos in a simulated possible international setting and environment.

Decision-making then occurs in a specific context(s), an abstraction of what real-life decision-makers do, so that students can grasp more readily the substance of the processes and options available to specific international decision-makers in selected issue-areas. The students pose as Secretaries or Ministers of State and Defense (or delegates to international and regional organizations). These simulated debates are then both for teaching and heuristic purposes. They imbue the students with a structured, "let's pretend" type situation; and hopefully, inculcate in them a long-term interest and hunger for learning about the international system as well as, perhaps, their place in it in the future and the possibilities and responsibilities of international citizenship.

For the past six years, my colleague in Speech, Professor John Hebestreet and I have utilized a variation of the simulation approach in our team-taught course, INTRODUCTION TO INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, at Dalton College. With my background and advanced degrees in International and Comparative Politics, I provide historical and contemporary diplomatic briefings for the major events since World War II as well as a systematic breakdown of the system into the international politics of regions. More specifically, within each region, the major regional organizations are covered (the European Union in western Europe, the Arab League in the Middle East, OAS in Latin American, ASEAN in Asia, COMECON in Eastern Europe, and the OAU in Africa). I also cover the major regional security organizations such as NATO, the Warsaw Pact (now defunct), and SEATO. A major section additionally covers the United Nations' General Assembly and Security Council.

Professor Hebestreet, with his background in Speech, deals more with process—lectures on parliamentary procedure, debate, and the drafting and composing of resolutions.

A selected list of some debate topics relevant to these international organizations, reflecting current issues and controversies is as follows:

1. Should NATO be enlarged? Should new nations be admitted? (NATO)
2. Should the U.S. embargo of Cuba be ended (OAS)?
3. Should the sanctions against Iraq be modified...ended? (Arab League)
4. Should an African Development Bank be established (OAU)?

We also try to impart to the students a sense of the significant changes in international politics since the late eighties and the collapse of the Soviet Union and its' eastern bloc and the new problems attendant with the end of the Cold War and the dawning of a "New World Order."

We impress upon students that much of their grade in these segments of the course shall depend upon the extent to which they remain in character and the degree to which they "fill the shoes" of the various international representatives they are portraying in debate. Independent research, endeavors including the use of the Internet, are all encouraged in order for them to learn the nuances as well as the substance of their nations's positions and policies. Position papers and written resolutions as well as actual performance in debate are graded. There are also two substantive examinations, one in class, and one take-home at the end of the quarter.

Major texts are *The World Since 1945* by McWilliams, a controversies book on current international issues, and the annual editions of the *Great Decisions* series, as published by the Foreign Policy Association in New York.

Often, at the conclusion of the ten-week course, selected outstanding students from the course are invited to participate in a Southeast Regional Model United Nations or Model Arab League simulation. During various competitions, Dalton College has represented Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Bahrain, and Kuwait.

For the future, technology (and funds) permitting, we would like to expand the course interactively into a type of system-wide simulation with other International Relations courses being taught simultaneously at other Georgia system colleges and universities. Something like this is now being done in the Maryland state system through the ICON program.

With our Chancellor's evident enthusiasm for internationalizing the curriculum, we feel that this is a significant early step.

References: Robert Daugherty and James Pfaltzgraff, *Contending Theories of International Relations*, New York: Harper and row, 1981. •