Teaching Globalization and Development through a Simulation

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ABSTRACT This article describes a simulation designed to teach students about the interests and interactions involved in the international political economy of development. The design and implementation of the simulation are discussed and sample simulation instructions for students are included.

Simulations have a long pedigree as one pedagogical technique in the "active-learning" toolbox. In political science, a growing inventory of simulations is available for instructors, encompassing such topics of international relations as responses to terrorism (Chasek 2005; Siegel and Young 2009), human rights treaty negotiations (Kille 2002), theory (Asal 2005), and cooperation and regimes (Thomas 2002), among many others.[1]

The purported benefits of simulations include increased student engagement, development of teamwork skills, and potentially improved student learning (see, e.g., Glazier 2011, 376). Because of the significant investment of time entailed in developing and preparing effective simulations, many instructors share their simulations with others to adopt in their own classrooms. Similarly, this article presents a simulation that I created to teach students in an introductory international relations course about the interests and interactions involved in the international political economy of development.

SIMULATION DESIGN

The student learning goals of the simulation were to acquire knowledge about the issues at stake in economic globalization and development; to reinforce earlier themes discussed in the course about the benefits and difficulties of achieving international cooperation (including concepts such as collective-action problems and power); and to develop negotiation and communication skills.

The simulation was conducted in a large (i.e., 90 students) introductory international relations class. Students were assigned to 1 of the following 15 teams (with about six members each): the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, China, India, Brazil, Bolivia, Bangladesh, Zambia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or media.

Instructions containing general simulation procedures (see Appendix 1) and individual team instructions (see Appendix 2 for an example[2]) were sent to students several days before the simulation was conducted in class. In addition to their team assignment,

each student assigned to a country team was also assigned to a specific role: diplomat, president or prime minister, member of Congress or Parliament, trade representative, or labor minister. This provided for subtle differences in interests within each country as well as the more obvious differences in interests across countries. Nametags were distributed in class, on which students wrote their country name and assigned role.

The task for students was to reach an international agreement on global economic rules that promote development of the world's poorest countries while protecting the interests of developed countries. Five issues were on the agenda, most of which had been previously discussed in lectures and readings, as follows: (1) agricultural subsidies in developed countries; (2) developing countries' ability to protect infant industries and subsidize export industries; (3) distribution of voting rights in the International Monetary Fund; (4) levels of foreign aid from developed to developing countries; and (5) establishment of universal minimum labor standards. How to address these issues was left open-ended; students were allowed to devise any negotiated agreement as they saw fit.

On the day of the simulation, each country sent its diplomat to an international conference (located at the front of the classroom), where the main negotiations took place. An undergraduate teaching assistant served as the UN Secretary General and chaired the conference. To reach an agreement, a two-thirds vote of diplomats at the conference was required. The agreement then would be voted on by each country; if two thirds of the states ratified the agreement, it would come into force.

While the diplomats were negotiating, other students could listen in (and speak with their diplomats) or they could conduct negotiations with their counterparts in other states outside of the conference. They also could speak with members of the NGOs and media teams, which were tasked with collecting information and—in the case of NGOs—advocating particular policies.

The simulation proceeded through several stages, beginning with a brief preparation period followed by an initial conference meeting, a caucus period during which diplomats consulted with their country teams, and two reports presented to the entire class—one a factual report from the media reviewing the proceedings, the other a "naming and shaming" report from NGOs. These stages were then repeated.

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CONDUCTING THE SIMULATION

Students began the simulation hesitantly, but it took only a few minutes (and some prodding from the Secretary General) for the conference negotiations to generate enthusiasm. Students who were not participating in the conference turned their attention from watching the conference to negotiating with other teams. Tasked with presenting an oral report on the events, members of

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the media team moved among teams to gather information, with one or two reporters stationed at the ongoing conference.

An interesting development during the simulation was the formation of informal negotiating blocs. During the caucus period, team members from both developed and underdeveloped countries tended to talk among themselves. As the simulation proceeded, these two blocs staked out their collective negotiating positions (though some countries were ultimately uncooperative within their bloc—and were criticized by other teams during the debriefing).

Although the simulation initially was planned for only one 75-minute class meeting, the complexity of negotiations and the active engagement of most students led me to extend it to a second class period. Ultimately, the students produced an agreement

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that was highly favorable to developing countries, similar to the New International Economic Order proposed in the 1970s. This resulted in an interesting discussion about why weaker countries were able to negotiate so successfully with more powerful states.

DEBRIEFING

The debriefing period is the most important part of a simulation, because it enables students to connect the conduct of the simulation to the course material and learning goals. Debriefings can be oral or written, and a simulation can use both types. I used only an oral debriefing for this simulation, during which the following discussion questions were posed to the class:

- How were you able to achieve consensus?
- What were the obstacles to creating a set of policies to which everyone could agree?
- Who "won" the negotiations? Who lost?
- In what ways did the simulation diverge from reality, and in what ways was it similar to the real world?
- To whom did you talk (or not talk) during negotiations? Why?
- What impact did the NGOs have on the negotiations?
- What did you find frustrating about this simulation? Why?[3]

The debriefing provided the opportunity to explore several important concepts and theoretical perspectives in international

relations. For instance, discussing the obstacles to achieving an agreement led to addressing the roles of tactics such as brinksmanship and hand-tying in international bargaining. Discussing how realistic the simulation was prompted a discussion of the role of power—such as how each country had one vote in the simulation but that, in reality, market power may be more important than formal voting rights. Asking students how the NGOs affected the negotiations raised the issue of "shaming" tactics used by transnational advocacy networks. The debriefing stage also can address issues such as the importance of domestic politics (i.e., "two-level games") and the distinction between absolute and relative gains.

CHALLENGES AND POSSIBLE VARIATIONS

The effectiveness of the simulation in achieving the learning goals can be evaluated only anecdotally. Several students wrote in end-of-semester evaluations that they enjoyed the simulation and identified it as the most interesting part of the course (there were no negative comments about the simulation). One student noted that "the information stuck" as a result of the simulation; another wrote that it "gave a first-hand experience in how the material relates to real life."

The simulation was not without challenges, however. Some students were unprepared on the first day of the simulation, despite the fact that instructions were distributed in advance. Although the level of engagement was impressive during the simulation, some students who did not participate directly in the conference were not engaged. Undoubtedly, the simulation would work better in a smaller class, in which engagement would be easier to encourage. Engagement also might be improved by awarding bonus points for the side(s) that "wins"; however, it is difficult to determine who wins in the simulation because of the complexity of the negotiations. The physical layout of the classroom—a tiered auditorium-style room with stationary seats and poor acoustics—also posed a challenge. A remedy for this would be to introduce the role of "runners"—that is, students who relay information between diplomats who are negotiating at the main conference and their home government (i.e., their team members).[4]

Other features of the simulation can be modified to suit different class characteristics and instructional needs. The agenda issues and the countries involved can vary (and/or be reduced); for smaller classes, the team sizes can be decreased; and, if each student is assigned a country role, the simulation could forgo the ratification stage. In addition, students could be required to prepare a background or position paper for their country and to write a reflection paper (i.e., a written debriefing) on the

simulation to facilitate and reinforce their learning beyond the oral debriefing.

NOTES

1. For more examples of international relations simulations, see the International Communication and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS) project at the University of Maryland (available at http://www.icons.umd.edu); the United States Institute for Peace simulations page (available at http://www.usip.org/simulations); and Wheeler 2006.

2. Other team assignments are available from the author on request.

3. Some of these debriefing questions are taken from those suggested by Smith and Boyer 1996.

4. I thank Rob Darst for suggesting this idea.

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Appendix 1: Simulation Procedures

AGENDA

The purpose of this simulation is to reach an international agreement on global economic rules that promote development of the world's poorest countries while protecting the interests of developed countries. In pursuit of this purpose, the goal of the simulation is to agree on a resolution reforming global rules on trade and finance.

There are five issues on the agenda:

1. Agricultural subsidies in developed countries
2. Developing countries' ability to protect infant industries and subsidize export industries
3. The distribution of voting rights in the IMF
4. Levels of foreign aid from developed countries to developing countries
5. Establishment of universal minimum labor standards (in terms of work hours, minimum wages, and so on)

There are countless ways in which these issues might be settled, and it will be up to you to come up with a workable agreement. Resolutions may include reforms to all five issues on the agenda, or only reforms related to a subset of issues. The content of reforms could take any form; for example, on agricultural subsidies, a resolution could make no change to current practices, or it could include a pledge from developed countries to reduce subsidies by 35% over 10 years, or a pledge to reduce subsidies by 70% over 8 years, etc.

Reaching agreement will no doubt be difficult, but remember that there may be mutual benefits to cooperation (even as countries bargain over the distribution of those benefits). It is thus in the interests of all states to reach an agreement, while also trying to drive a hard bargain to get the best deal for one's own state.

PROCEDURES

Each state will send one diplomat to an international conference. This conference will propose and vote on resolutions, and will be moderated by the UN Secretary General.

Other state leaders (those not attending the conference) can communicate with their diplomats at the conference at any time, conduct negotiations with their counterparts in other states, and interact with NGOs and the media while the conference is in session. They will also vote on ratification of any agreement that is reached at the conference.

For a resolution to be adopted, two-thirds of diplomats at the conference have to vote for it, and two-thirds of states must ratify it.

The simulation will proceed as follows:

1. **Conference prep:** [5 minutes]
   • Each state will meet to work out its position.
2. **Conference meeting:** [15 minutes]
   • Diplomats meet and negotiations begin.
   • The media and NGOs can send members to attend the conference meeting and also circulate among outside negotiations. States may agree to exclude the media and NGOs from their private negotiations if they wish.
3. **Caucus:** [8 minutes]
   • Diplomats return to consult with their states, and states may meet with each other informally and may cut side deals during this time.

4. **Media/NGO report**: [4 minutes]
   - The media provides an update on the status of negotiations.
   - NGOs voice their views on the negotiations and attempt to "name and shame" states that are not acting in accordance with the NGO's views.
5. **Conference meeting** resumes [10 minutes]
6. **Caucus** [5 minutes]
7. **Conference meeting** resumes [5 minutes]
8. **Media / NGO report** [4 minutes]
9. **Debriefing**

If a resolution is approved by the required majority of diplomats at the conference, diplomats will return to their states and the resolution will be put to a ratification vote. A simple majority is needed within a state for that state to ratify the agreement. In the case of a tie vote, the president's vote will be the tiebreaker. If a two-thirds majority of states ratify the resolution, it will come into effect.

RULES OF CONDUCT

- All participants are expected to take their roles seriously and remain "in character" throughout the simulation.
- All participants are expected to be engaged and active throughout the simulation.
- All diplomats must address the diplomats of other countries professionally. Rudeness and personal attacks are prohibited.

Appendix 2: Sample Team Role Assignments

Role: Burkina Faso

BACKGROUND

You represent an extremely poor African country, with a per capita GDP of $650. Your major exports are minerals (mainly gold) and agricultural products (especially cotton). Approximately 90 percent of your country's labor force works in agriculture. Your country receives significant foreign aid (amounting to 9.6% of GDP). You hold 0.05% of voting rights in the IMF.

POSITIONS

1. *Agricultural subsidies in developed countries*: As a producer of primary products like cotton, your country's farmers are hurt by agricultural subsidies in rich countries. This is an important issue for you, and you strongly favor the elimination of such subsidies in developed countries.
2. *Developing countries' ability to protect infant industries and subsidize export industries*: As a less developed country, you would like global trade rules to allow you to protect infant industries and subsidize exports to promote your country's economic development.
3. *The distribution of voting rights in the IMF*: No realistic increase in your country's voting rights in the IMF will give you significant control over IMF decisions, but you want increased voting rights for developing countries in general as a counterweight to the power of developed countries.
4. *Levels of foreign aid from developed countries to developing countries*: As a low-income country that depends on foreign aid, you strongly favor increased aid from developed countries.
5. *Establishment of universal minimum labor standards*: As a low-income country, cheap labor is a potential source of comparative advantage for you. You are opposed to setting international standards on labor that might deny you that advantage.

INDIVIDUAL ROLES

- Diplomat: (Student name)
- President: (Student name)
- Members of Congress: (Student names)
- Trade Representative: (Student name)
- Labor Minister: (Student name)

The diplomat and president are pursuing the "national interest." Members of Congress want trade protection and export subsidies (which they can award to domestic industries to curry political favor) and high levels of foreign aid. The trade representative wants market access for exporters. The labor minister represents workers' interests in the country.

NEGOTIATING TACTICS

You can use any reasonable negotiation tactics during the simulation. These include searching for consensus among different actors; persuading other actors with reasoned arguments; making concessions in exchange for reciprocal concessions from other actors; making or receiving "side payments" (concessions to/from other actors on unrelated issues); making credible threats; and walking out of the negotiations in protest (this would involve walking off to a corner of the room – not leaving the classroom).