

# Teaching International Relations Through Short Iterated Simulations

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## Teaching International Relations Through Short Iterated Simulations

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International Relations (IR) as a field has long traditions of employing simulations for both practitioners and educational audiences (Starkey and Blake 2001). Simulations help students deepen their understanding of relevant IR concepts and theories (Ellington et al. 1998; Asal 2005). For introductory IR classes, the primary challenge is that time and resources are limited. As a result, instructors need to carefully balance between lecture content and active learning components. As Wakelee (2008) points out, it is sometimes not feasible to spend substantial course time conducting elaborately constructed, in-depth simulations, such as Model United Nations (MUN) simulations. Drawing on Asal and Blake (2006), and as part of my IR signature pedagogy, I suggest that students in an introductory IR class can benefit from a sequenced approach of short simulations that requires little prior knowledge. Rather than treating simulations as stand-alone exercises, it is possible to create short-duration United Nations (UN) simulations and integrate them as a semester-long active learning sequence.

Prior to the simulations, the instructor can lecture on the differences between the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in terms of their decision-making structure, processes, and the nature of resolutions. No matter which simulation structure the instructor chooses, this allows the instructor to review these differences during debriefing and discuss potential alternative scenarios. Once the simulation structure is determined, students begin the simulation sequence with a mock simulation based on the hypothesized scenario of a zombie pandemic (Michelsen 2010; Horn et al. 2016; Fischer 2019). The goal is to involve students in a low-stakes preparation activity to get familiar with the basic structure and flow of the simulation. This ungraded mock simulation therefore helps students build foundational literacy in UN simulations and greatly reduces their anxiety when the graded simulations based on real-world scenarios occur later in the semester.

The graded simulations focus on each main subfield in IR, namely international security, international political economy, as well as transnational issues and global governance. To ensure student engagement and preparedness, the instructor creates a list of potential simulation topics at the beginning of the semester and asks students to vote on their favorite topics. Students are also introduced to two mobile apps, UNdata and MUN, which allow them to do basic research on their country positions and learn how to draft preambulatory and operative clauses and resolutions.

The quality of each simulation session depends on a few key factors. First, in order to help students quickly immerse themselves into the simulation environment, the instructor can adapt the idea of “immerse theater” developed by Dacombe and Morrow (2017) and create a sense of formality through use of diplomatic and formal language, rearrangement of the classroom space, and adding a short opening ceremony to each simulation. The instructor can provide more structured guidance in earlier iterations, and gradually allow students to operate the simulation without too much intervention. During the debriefing stage, the instructor can consider using some combinations of written and oral debriefing, a follow-up theory exercise, and self- and peer-evaluations to help students to connect the simulation experience with content learning, personal growth, and simulation design feedback. While the decision-making structure of the UN is fixed in reality and can be cumbersome and frustrating, rules can be more flexible in the

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simulation setting. Once students get familiar with the formal rules in earlier iterations and are exposed to real-world UN reform proposals, they are encouraged to experiment with rule and procedural changes through a voting process and then examine the significant differences in simulation outcomes.

The rest of the chapter is divided as follows. Following a brief review on the simulation literature in IR, I will discuss the deep and implicit structures behind the integrated and sequenced approach for simulations. To demonstrate how simulations as a signature pedagogy work, I will discuss the surface structure of simulations by outlining challenges and strategies in each stage of preparation, simulation in action, as well as debriefing, reflection, and assessment. The chapter will conclude with critical reflections on certain limitations and future directions for improvements of this teaching approach.

## Simulation as IR Signature Pedagogy

IR as a field increasingly emphasizes active, cooperative or collaborative, and problem-based learning (PBL) (Lamy 2007; Sharan 2010; Baker & Clark 2010; Burch 2000). As a popular pedagogy tool, simulations in IR take a variety of forms, ranging from formal, cross-institutional or semester-long Model United Nations (MUN), to computer-assisted simulations inside and outside of classroom, to embedded short simulations in introductory and upper-division IR courses (Engel et al. 2017; Hammond and Albert 2019; Horn et al. 2016; Leib and Ruppel 2020; McCarthy 2014; McIntosh 2001; Wheeler 2006; Boyer 2011).

Simulations have therefore become an integral part of signature pedagogies in IR. Lüdert (2020) argues that signature pedagogies share three key characteristics of surface structure, deep structure, and implicit structure. For simulations, the surface structure is often divided into distinctive stages of teaching and learning. The instructor takes a leading role in helping students prepare, observes and intervenes when students play in action, and finally helps students reflect on their simulation experience through oral and written debriefing (Asal and Blake 2006). Taylor (2013) identifies different styles of learning opportunities in simulations, including content learning, theoretical learning, and experiential learning. According to Taylor (2013, 148), there is “no one-size-fit-all prescription” and, when resources allow, the more diverse the simulation experience, the better.

Using simulations as a signature pedagogy involves prioritizing certain teaching and learning approaches. Simulations are often based on deep and implicit structures that highlight active, problem-based, and often student-centered learning to teach IR theories and subject matter. When incorporating simulations into their classes, instructors need to make hard choices between simulation content and lectures (McIntosh 2001). Asal and Kratoville (2013) underline the connections between two pedagogy theories, constructivist learning theory and PBL, and the use of simulations in IR classes. A few others have highlighted opportunities for student ownership, research-based learning, and deep learning through the usage of real-world scenarios, fictional stories, or both (Engel 2017; Obendorf and Randerson 2013; Fischer 2019). Applying this pedagogical tradition, the simulations I developed help create space for student-centered learning in an introductory IR class that used to be mainly lecture-based.

With proper design, simulations can help connect abstract theories with complex empirics on the ground. They also provide avenues for recursive processes that help students grasp threshold concepts, which are “conceptual gateways” or “portals” that must be negotiated to arrive at new, transformative knowledge (Meyer et al. 2008; Lüdert 2019). To convey the concepts of anarchy, cooperation, and conflict, Young (2006) and McCarthy (2014), for instance, created games and simulations based on Putnam’s “Two-Level Games.” Through a simulation in Middle Eastern politics, Sasley (2010, 67–68) demonstrates how simulations can teach students about “miscommunication, misunderstandings, misperceptions,” as well as failure and complexity in global politics.

This chapter proposes a similar strategy to integrate simulations into introductory IR classes. Drawing on Asal and Blake (2006), I suggest that students of introductory IR can benefit from a sequence of short simulations that allows scaffolding of both content knowledge and transferrable skills over the course of the semester. To achieve these goals, I argue it is essential to have a constant yet flexible structure for the simulations, with iterations across subject matter and varying rules. The following sections provide an overview of this approach, as well as concrete strategies to implement short, simplified UN simulations in an introductory or survey IR class.

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## Integrating UN Simulations into Introductory or Survey IR Courses

An introductory or survey IR class is an important steppingstone for students to learn about how politics work on the global stage, no matter if the student is a political science major or not. Introductory or survey IR classes can serve multiple purposes, including, but not limited to, preparing political science majors for upper-division IR electives, attracting potential students who are interested in becoming political science majors, and improving information literacy and critical thinking about global politics among non-major students. The question then is how we can level the playing field for students, create a sense of community, and facilitate active learning among a diverse student population across majors and non-majors.

Following Lamy (2007), I argue that using simulations as an active learning strategy can teach students about competing world views or theories in IR, while allowing students to follow through the “describe, explain, predict, and prescribe” sequence in PBL. Simulations often require students to work in groups, focusing on a problem, case or scenario, and create a sense of ownership and responsibility, which are essential features of PBL (Burch 2000). In addition, simulations can facilitate cooperative or collaborative learning on topics outside of students’ comfort zones, which in turn can help promote diversity, reciprocity, scaffolding, and friendships within the classroom (Sharan 2010; Baker and Clark 2010). Most importantly, integrating the simulations with regular lectures and discussions means no prior knowledge of students is required as long as the instructor provides students with opportunities to learn and prepare in class before the simulations start.

The simulations I used were based on the structure of MUN simulations, with several significant adaptations. First, the decision to implement a UNSC or UNGA structure of the simulation often depends on class size and students’ knowledge level. A UNGA simulation is ideal for a large lecture class with easily 50–100 students or even more, while the UNSC decision-making structure is clearly more appropriate for small to medium class of no more than 50 students. The size of student teams can also vary whether it is a lower-division introductory or upper-division survey course. A general rule of thumb is that the size of the team can decrease as the knowledge level of student increases. Prior to the first simulation, I go through a lecture on intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) as well as a case study of the UN in class, during which students are exposed to key differences in UNSC and UNGA decision-making structure and processes, as well as the nature of amending texts towards a vote and final resolution.

Second, simulations are not stand-alone techniques, but are rather understood to be part of an integrated active learning sequence. During the first few weeks of the semester, I use a few simple games to help students warm up to the idea of role-playing. The games that I most frequently use are Asal’s (2005) classical realist “Hobbes Game” and the Prisoners’ Dilemma game. These games are primarily used to illustrate theories of realism and neoliberal institutionalism, though students can also use constructivism to explain the game dynamics. Asking students to stand up and walk around in the classroom almost always immediately changes the classroom dynamic as they engage students in active interactions. These types of shorter, simpler games therefore help students with no prior experience get comfortable within the class dynamic and interact with others, and then extract from their roles and discuss the results during debriefing. For the actual simulation sequence, I first begin with a hypothesized scenario of zombie pandemic (Michelsen 2010; Horn et al. 2016; Fischer 2019) and an ungraded mock simulation. This immediately follows a lecture on IGOs and a case study of the UN with the dual purposes of helping students reinforce their content learning and reducing their anxieties about the upcoming simulation sequence.

Third, students in the later part of the course have the opportunity to choose simulation topics other than the first mock simulation. This strategy encourages students to take more ownership of the simulations as they become more comfortable with the simulation structure. The graded simulations focus on subfields of international security, international political economy, and transnational issues. To ensure student interest and preparedness, I create a list of potential simulation topics early in the semester and ask students to rank their favorite topic in each subfield through an online survey. Each simulation topic suggestion presents a real-world problem or case, and I regularly update the list as new issues are discussed and considered in the UN system. The benefit of doing so is that students apply their learning to current “hot topics” in the UN while taking part in choosing topics of their own interest, a technique sometimes referred to as dotmocracy. In addition, using real-world problems allows students to conduct in-depth research on the topic using UN databases and news articles. Conducting research allows students

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to gain skills and improve their understanding of competing preferences and official stances of each member state, along with making informed choices when drafting their simulation documents and responding to other groups.

Furthermore, the rules of the game can be more flexible than the real-world UN meetings. The first graded simulation follows the exact decision-making structure in the real world. From then on, I allow students to review, propose, and vote on potential changes to the decision-making structure in subsequent iterations. This serves a few purposes. First, students are priorly exposed to the debates on various UN decision-making reform proposals. This provides them an opportunity to think in the shoes of the countries they represent and identify the country's preferred choices from a list of real-world UN reform proposals. They can also propose something new, although it is often more difficult to garner sufficient support from other teams. Once all proposals are on the table, all teams have a chance to vote based on simple majority rule, then potentially implement the reform proposal, which is not possible in a real-world scenario. In addition, this helps students critically reflect on failures and frustrations in earlier iterations, which can frequently occur in the case of UNSC simulations. Given that the simulations are short, often lasting only one or two class sessions, it is very likely that students may not be able to achieve consensus with fixed rules in such a short time frame. By changing the rules and seeing an immediate effect, students become more engaged in critical reflections of the current UN decision-making structure.

## Simulation Preparation

Although no prior knowledge is assumed before the semester starts, the first few weeks of lectures, discussions, and case studies can provide students with a necessary knowledge base and skills for the simulations to succeed. Failures can happen without proper preparation of students. When I taught introductory IR for the first time, I rushed to run the simulations in the first few weeks. Not surprisingly, students were confused and stressed as they were not ready. Except for a few, most students did not know what to do in the simulation, and they were not engaged as a result. This also affected their ability to critically reflect on the simulation experience through theoretical lens. Reflecting on this failure, I redesigned the course structure in later semesters. The most significant changes I made were to begin with smaller, low-stakes warmup exercises, to add an ungraded mock simulation based on a hypothetical scenario, and to provide more preparation guidance and time for earlier simulations.

During the first week of class, I introduce to students the idea of active learning and the pedagogy tools that are used in this class. I also ask students to play the first iteration of the classical realist game or the Hobbes game adapted from Asal (2005). Then, in the week concerned with IR history, students read about the League of Nations and why it failed. Once this is complete, students participate in relevant in-class case study work and related discussion activities. In the following two weeks, I introduce main IR theories with a focus on various levels of analysis during lectures. During these two weeks, students are asked play another iteration of the classical realism game, as well as the large-N Prisoner's Dilemma game from Asal (2005). With these practice games, students become increasingly comfortable with role-playing in the classroom. As they leave or change their seats and interact with other students, the in-class dynamics change significantly as more students begin to talk, interact, and laugh with each other. Following each game, students are asked to collectively debrief on the game dynamics and then apply theories and levels of analysis to interpret the outcomes. This helps them prepare for the simulation debriefings later in the semester.

By now the class enrollment stabilizes and, as such, a good time to divide students into simulation teams. This is also when I ask students to sign up for states that they will represent in the first mock simulation. Students will have the opportunity to represent non-governmental organizations (NGO) later in the semester, but the first mock simulation includes only states. While it would be ideal to include all actors in the first mock simulation, adding NGOs as observers would significantly increase the complexity to the simulation structure. By now, students only have a vague idea about NGOs through lecture content, without understanding their concrete roles in specific issue arenas. Students can play the NGO roles more effectively as their comfort level with the simulations, their content knowledge on issue topics, and their understanding of NGOs' rules increase.

During the week prior to the simulation, the lectures focus on the role of states in the international system and various tools of statecraft. Students work together in their teams for the first time by working through a case study of foreign

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policy and diplomacy of the country they will represent in the first simulation. Although time does not allow for each team to present individually, I pair the teams so that they can present their case studies to each other to encourage facilitated interactions and collaborative learning between teams. In the lecture right before the simulation, I officially introduce the UN decision-making structure along with the processes thereof.

With sufficient knowledge on the country they are going to represent, the student teams are ready to participate in the first simulation on the zombie pandemic. This mock simulation was adapted from Horn et al. (2016) and an online simulation developed by the United Nations Association (UNA). The simulation begins with a news report on zombie attacks in Los Angeles International Airport with the potential of the next outbreak taking place anywhere, anytime within a matter of hours. As their countries' delegates to the UN, the student teams are charged with the task of coming up with a resolution to manage and contain future outbreaks. Since it is a hypothetical scenario, little prior research on the topic is required other than some general knowledge from popular culture. Nonetheless, students do need to learn how to write an effective position statement to present at the beginning of the simulation, and how to draft preambulatory and operative clauses that accurately represent their country's positions.

Each simulation comes with a prompt that offers some background, the mission of the student teams, preparation steps and guidance for document drafts, sample position statement with resolutions from past classes on a different topic, and links to additional resources. In addition to lecture slides and handouts that provide examples, I also introduce students to two mobile apps: UNdata and MUN. These apps provide background information about their own and other member countries, a short summary of rules or procedures, and examples of preambulatory and operative clauses. Students are encouraged to use both mobile apps to prepare their statements, and they are able to refer back to the apps whenever they need during the simulations.

For all the subsequent graded simulations, I do some preliminary research on the issue topics students have selected, and prepare prompts following the same structures of the first prompt on the zombie pandemic. This iterated structure allows students to become familiar with the process before midterm point, and then continue to practice to improve as they are entering the second part of the semester. Student teams are asked to submit the written position statements and attach draft preambulatory and operative clauses as an appendix. They are also encouraged to predict other countries' reactions to their proposals in a second appendix. While initial predictions are often less accurate or even completely wrong, students can improve their prediction accuracy for future iterations based on interactions with other teams during the simulation. Written submissions, therefore, provide important foundations for both their opening statement during the simulation and further negotiations during the simulation itself.

## Simulations in Action

With these preparatory steps of lecture and collaborative writing, students should ideally be ready to participate in the actual simulations. Still, it is important to recognize some unique challenges of an integrated approach to simulations. In a semester-long class that is dedicated to MUN, students can have more opportunities to practice and improve over time. In an introductory or survey IR class, however, the simulation iterations require no more than a few instances in the semester. Although I can help students get used to role-play exercises through smaller games, students may still be too distracted, nervous, or anxious to play their specific roles effectively. The key question, therefore, is how we can help students immerse themselves in the simulation environment, feel comfortable, and stay engaged throughout.

The first strategy I use is to reorganize the classroom and create a space that resemble the actual UN meetings as much as possible. When the classroom environment allows, I ask some student volunteers to arrive a little early and help reorganize the chairs. For the UNSC simulations, I reorganize the chairs to a roundtable, with the representatives sitting at the front, and the rest of the delegation sitting behind the representative. Each representative makes their statements or proposals at their seats, just as enacted in actual UNSC meetings. For the larger UNGA simulations which are often located in lecture halls, each country's delegation sits in a group and faces the podium. When called by the chairperson on the speakers' list, the member-states and NGOs send their representatives to the podium to make statements or proposals. In either case, some designated empty spaces

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remain on the periphery of the classroom that can be used as “lobbying area” where student teams negotiate informally when formal meetings are adjourned.

In addition, it is possible to create a sense of formality through language use and an opening ceremony. While I do not require students to dress up formally, they are asked to use formal and diplomatic language to the extent possible. Each student team should elect a representative before each simulation. For member-states, the person elected is called “Ambassador XX.” For observer states and NGOs, the person is called “Representative XX.” The rotating ambassadors and representatives need to stand up, come to the front of the class, and take a picture together shaking hands. Although this does not happen in actual UN simulations, I find this helpful for students to settle in their roles. These strategies were inspired by the “immersive theater approach” by Dacombe and Morrow (2017) and first implemented in my regional politics class where I ran simulations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Although it may cost a few minutes of the actual simulation, it provides students an efficient way to immerse themselves in their assigned roles and stay focused during the simulation.

Following the opening ceremony, the simulation begins with a formal announcement by the chair and a series of opening statements by the ambassadors and representatives. As the instructor, I always chair the first mock simulation on the zombie pandemic to set an example for students. I also prepare a written provisional agenda, a speakers’ list and a flow chart of the meeting that students can refer to when they need guidance. The simulations begin with the opening statements, followed by debates and possible motions. A motion can be made to adjourn the formal meeting to allow behind-the-door negotiations in “lobbying areas,” to discuss draft resolutions, make amendments, or make roll call votes on the resolutions. Interestingly, students quickly figure out ways to sabotage a draft resolution they do not like by making unfriendly amendments to a resolution, such as proposing strict conditions on lifting sanctions or providing humanitarian aid. As a result, even though there are a plethora of motions, sometimes the simulations would end without a resolution being passed.

As students iterate the simulations and become more comfortable during the semester, the instructor can take a back seat to observe during the simulation and facilitate learning. Starting from the second simulation, I ask student teams to volunteer to serve the chair role. Once they see me playing the chair for the first time, they often realize that this role is not as intimidating as they thought, and that the chair may enjoy some perks, such as agenda-setting and increased visibility. The smaller, non-permanent member-states that tend to be ignored in negotiations often quickly find out that this is an effective strategy for them to get their voice heard. Once selected as the chair, the student team need to prepare the written provisional agenda and a speakers’ list similar to the one I created for the mock simulation. I also provide written tips to the team to ensure the class as a whole follows the same rules and procedures. During the simulation, I minimize my direct intervention and only remind the chair team when rules are not followed.

Voting is an important part of the simulation as it determines the fate of proposed resolutions and therefore simulation outcomes. As the deadline or time limit approaches, student teams often rush to vote on one draft resolution after another, and usually the process become chaotic and disorderly. It is therefore important to specify the rules of voting before each simulation and make clear which rules can be changed and which cannot. First, I specify a set of rules that are fixed or constant for all simulation iterations. Specifically, I make a distinction between a procedural vote and a substantive vote. Only a substantive vote allows abstentions and excludes any observer states or NGOs represented. This is important when we begin to include observers and NGOs in later iterations. It helps us connect the rules to the concepts of sovereignty as well as state and non-state actors’ involvement during the debrief and assessment.

Additionally, I encourage students to debate the majority voting rules and the use of veto in the UNSC. The latter is clearly highly controversial, as other student teams become frequently frustrated by permanent five members (P5) of the UNSC. By reviewing these frustrations in debriefings sessions, students can easily connect them to core concepts of IR, such as anarchy, rationality, self-interest, and relative gains. As mentioned before, I allow students to change rules in later simulations if they can get it to pass through a motion using the existing decision-making structure. Students often find out that they cannot persuade P5 teams that act like realists, and the only times that a change of voting rule can occur is when they have very liberal P5 teams. The differences in simulation outcomes

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depending on the dominant culture or norms also provide an ideal opportunity to examine the theory of constructivism. Whether passed or not, rule change attempts provide an ideal opportunity for debriefing, connecting the IR theories, the UN reform debates, and simulation outcomes.

## Debriefing, Reflection, and Assessment

Debriefing, reflection, and assessment are integral parts to simulations as a signature pedagogy. Asal (2005) proposes several methods or stages of debriefing and reflection, including oral debriefing, written debriefing, and as cases to be referenced in examinations. Kollars and Rosen (2013) argue that simulations themselves can be used as active assessment in place of examinations. I adapt these two models to combine debriefing, reflection, and assessment strategies. To review the simulation interactions and outcomes, I begin with an online survey questionnaire or a short reflection paper, followed by group and whole-class oral debriefing. Exams or long essays or papers are effective tools to assess student knowledge of theories and concepts that can be applied to explain the simulation outcomes. Finally, a series of self- and peer-evaluation surveys are conducted following each simulation and at the end of the semester to complement instructor observation. Inspired by student feedback, I have implemented some changes in simulation design, including allowing students to rotate their country and team roles, creating a clearer division of labor within teams, and experimenting alternative voting structures.

Before students leave the classroom after a simulation, I give them a reflection prompt or a link to an online survey, with an identical list of questions. I frequently switch between these two methods because they provide valuable feedback in different ways. Students take the online survey anonymously and therefore are more candid about their personal feelings and opinions. The cost of this approach is that it cannot be graded, and students often do not elaborate on their thoughts. A written reflection paper can give students the flexibility to prioritize certain questions and more space for them to elaborate. However, it does not allow the same anonymity and comprehensiveness an online survey can offer. Students can complete the survey online or submit the reflection via the course management system (CMS) 24 hours before next class. Survey questions include:

- Were the rules and structures of the simulation clear to you?
- What were the simulation outcomes? Do they meet your expectations? Why or why not?
- If this is not the first simulation, what are some key similarities and differences between this simulation and previous ones?
- How do changes in the decision-making rules affect the simulation outcomes?
- Were you and your teammates in character? How about others?
- How do you feel during and after the simulation? Describe your emotions.
- If we are going to have another simulation, is there anything we can do to improve the simulation design?
- If we are going to have another simulation, is there anything you and your team can do to improve your performance?
- If this is the last simulation, what would be your suggestions to students taking this class next semester?

Once students submit their answers, I put together a few slides that highlight the survey results or quotes from reflection papers. The online survey or written reflection therefore allow me to collect student feedback and set the tone for oral debriefing, which occurs during the next class following the simulation. During oral briefing, I ask students to shuffle their seats and find people who are not in their team to form discussion groups. This helps students to more quickly extract from their roles. Student discussion groups then go through the questions one by one before coming back to a whole-class discussion. The open discussion focuses on three themes: how to effectively deal with emotions and feelings, possible confusions and clarifications about simulation design and rules, what improvements I can make in the next simulation experience and for my future classes.

While students frequently express their frustrations with the P5 states and failures to pass resolution within the time constraints, many of them also agree that it helps them learn how difficult it is in reality to achieve meaningful collective action under the current UN structure. This provides a good transition to our next discussion when I ask students to consider the theoretical question: *Which IR theory and level of analysis best explains this particular simulation outcome? How about previous iterations? Why?* To help students connect the theories to their analysis, I

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provide a review sheet of key assumptions and arguments of each IR theory. Student first work in groups to make a list of potential evidence for each IR theory, then complete a short, written individual reflection. This is part of the active learning sequence following each game and simulation played in the classroom. The recursive theory exercises help students prepare for relevant exam questions and final essay or written papers where they elaborate on their arguments.

Treating simulations as standalone assessments in addition to the exams and policy papers can incentivize active participation and reduce test anxiety. That said, assessing simulations can be difficult when they are team-based, not individual-based. To address issues of free-riding and unequal contribution, it is important to separate individual efforts from overall team performance. First, I ask students to mark individual authorship or contribution in the written position statements and draft clauses. Second, I make my own observations during each simulation session and take notes of in-class performance. Finally, I use student self-evaluation and peer assessment to complement my instructor observation. Each simulation is followed by a self-evaluation on a ten-point scale. For peer evaluations, I ask students to assign an average of ten points to their teammates, with some differentiation in the ratings. For example, students can give 12 points to teammate A who contributed more, and eight points to teammate B who contributed less. The highest score a person can receive is 15 points and the lowest score zero. The final grading rubric therefore integrates instructor observation, self-evaluation, and peer assessment, and creates a comprehensive score for each student's simulation performance. Both instructor and peer feedback comments are provided to each student to help them improve in future simulations.

## Conclusion

This chapter explores ways to use simulations as a signature pedagogy in an introductory or survey IR class. Rather than introducing students to formalized MUN as a standalone exercise, I developed a series of small, in-class simulations in combination with games, case studies, and discussion groups to create recursive and active learning sequences. This strategy helps reduce the potential time dedicated to standalone simulations and allows for a more balanced approach between lecture content and active learning components. In particular, simulations as a signature pedagogy help students grasp threshold concepts in IR, such as anarchy and sovereignty, empirically examine the interactions among states and non-state actors, and apply competing theoretical perspectives to explain patterns of conflict and cooperation.

When applying this approach to an IR class, several potential limitations or challenges should be considered. First, by prioritizing the UN simulation, students may develop some hidden assumptions about who are the primary actors in IR and the power dynamics among them. Non-state actors, for example, are not introduced until later iterations of the UN simulation to reduce the complexity of the first simulation. Depending on whether it is based on UNSC or UNGA, students may also develop competing interpretations of how the UN works without an in-depth understanding of the other institutions within the UN. Furthermore, while the P5 countries dominate the UNSC, the power dynamics can be slightly or significantly different in other IGOs and regional institutions. It is possible, though, to review and discuss these hidden assumptions during the debriefing stage and complement the UN simulations with case studies of other IGOs and NGOs across issue areas.

Even short simulations can be time-consuming. Although the actual simulations are timed, the time spent on preparation and debriefing can be less predictable. Typically, the first simulation requires more time for in-class preparation and debriefing in comparison with later iterations. Sometimes the instructor may have to let go of some lecture content to allow students to fully reflect on the simulation experience. In other words, there is a tradeoff between deep learning and breadth of knowledge. By integrating simulations into an introductory class, the instructor needs to carefully review their learning objectives and make sure that simulations complement, rather than compete with, lectures in meeting the objectives.

The instructor also needs to actively pay attention to potential issues of equity and inclusion in simulations. Not all students like simulations, and there are always students who would prefer to sit in the back and not participate. Some students prefer lectures over any type of active learning. Other students do not like work in teams or their teammates may not contribute fairly, which may undermine their team and individual performance. For those students, simulation



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experiences can be confusing and challenging rather than empowering. Instructors therefore need to diversify their pedagogy portfolios and assessment strategies to the extent possible, rather than solely relying on lectures or simulations. Furthermore, simulations themselves can create unequal power dynamics and feelings of exclusion at times. A UNSC simulation almost always makes student teams who represent non-P5 countries feel less important. Within each team, the ambassador or representative almost always has more visibility in comparison with their teammates. The instructors need to be conscious of these issues and make active adjustments in instructor observations and grading rubrics. They can also ask teams and students to rotate roles, despite the potential cost of giving up their in-depth knowledge about a specific country or expertise developed based on division of labor.

Building on the burgeoning literature of IR simulations and student feedback, I plan to incorporate or experiment with some potential changes in future replications of UN simulations. For example, for assessment purposes, it may be important to develop a pool of standardized questions for pre- and post-test on students' knowledge of the UN and IR theories. This set of questions can be used standalone or included as a subset of the general course assessment questions. Gasglow (2014) also discusses the importance of engaging students more actively in the design of simulations by asking them to help craft the rules early in the semester. Another potential strategy is to incorporate some experiment design, as discussed by Lohmann (2019), which allows students to discuss alternative issue scenarios and how they can respond under each circumstance. This may also apply to voting mechanisms, which allow students to compare simulation outcomes while controlling for issue-specific factors.

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