



Manual for Community Colleges Developing Programs in Peace and Conflict Studies

## **Case Study: Simulation Based Learning to Teach About Global Negotiations: The Experiences at Jamestown Community College**

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### **Introduction**

In the late 1980s, long before such concepts as active learning and student centered learning became ubiquitous, Jamestown Community College (JCC) became concerned that its students were not actively engaged in their learning. JCC was also troubled that many of the more traditional classroom assignments such as multiple choice tests and essay or short answer tests were not helping students to develop essential writing and critical thinking skills. Finally, many of its students were very similar to each other, having come from a predominantly white, rural county in southwestern New York State. The College felt that they were not being adequately prepared to live and work in an increasingly diverse world. As a means of rectifying these deficiencies, the political science department committed itself to infusing the present curriculum with experiential learning opportunities that would be engaging and lead to more meaningful learning outcomes.

The intention was to work with outsiders to create activities or simulations that would result in students interacting with students from other colleges nationwide. It was believed that outside expertise was needed in order to develop experiential learning experiences that were comprehensive, relevant, and of high quality. The benefits of these new approaches to students included allowing them to develop their reading, writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills. The activities would support independent learning and increase the students' abilities to negotiate with others. The students became more confident in their skills and abilities and developed knowledge essential to professional careers and good citizenship. This approach allows faculty to develop collaborations with other colleagues that in some cases can lead to a range of professional development opportunities such as educational opportunities from Fulbright and National Endowment for the Humanities, grants from global studies centers and fellowships from an array of entities. While the primary benefit is for

students there is an important secondary benefit for faculty as well. Simulation based learning requires faculty to take risks since simulations go in many unanticipated directions and require both students and teachers to develop a capacity for dealing with ambiguity. JCC started simulation based learning before the internet when doing research was more difficult and time consuming. The internet allows faculty and students to have more access to numerous materials. Conversely, the internet provides students with too much material.

While adventurous students and risk taking faculty are essential, a supportive administration is also required. It requires the appropriate mindset in the faculty member backed by an administration willing to try new things in the interest of student learning.

### **European Union Simulation**

In 1988, JCC along with five other colleges/universities in New York state, founded the oldest simulation of the then European Community (now European Union) in the United States. JCC was and continues to be the only community college participating in the simulation now called SUNYMEU-State University of New York Model European Union ([www.newpaltz.edu/polisci\\_intrela/meu.html](http://www.newpaltz.edu/polisci_intrela/meu.html)). JCC students often are not political science or international relations students. Many pursue careers as teachers or lawyers where learning to speak in front groups or negotiate are valuable assets. Therefore, the content knowledge and the skills acquired are applicable after graduation. Students from each participating school play the role of a nation-state in the European Union (EU) in face-to-face negotiations. SUNYMEU over the years has expanded to include both US and EU participating colleges/universities. Most of the students from the other colleges are political science/international relations students. The face-to-face simulation is done in English. Through the internet, documents and messages pertinent to the simulation can be easily distributed online prior to arrival. The simulation typically lasts three days and is held in odd years at a US campus and in even years at an EU campus. In 2009 the simulation was held in April at SUNY New Paltz near New York City. The 2010 simulation will be held in January in Ireland. In previous years the simulation was held in Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Czech Republic.

Students have participated in more than one simulation, the other being the International Negotiation Modules Project discussed below. Students have completed the simulation for credit as part of JCC's World Politics class or as part of JCC's EU class, an upper level class created and centered on the simulation. Students have also done the simulation for the experience without academic credit.

Obviously, there are expenses involved including both registration and travel with the US based simulation being significantly less expensive than the EU based simulation. JCC and the other partner schools have been somewhat successful with fund raising (including support from the schools themselves, foundations, private corporations, group rates, and negotiations on the part of the simulation treasurer). The simulation sponsors, governed by a council made up of the faculty advisors, have worked to keep expenses down.

In the last simulation JCC students played the role of Latvia-the smallest and poorest nation-state in the EU. Three students went this year with each student playing one of the following roles: Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Economics Minister. The simulation is student organized and run. Faculty can observe formal sessions and advise outside of formal sessions, but faculty do not actively get involved other than preparing students. This requires faculty who can let go and let students learn and make mistakes. The goal of the simulation is to give students an opportunity to learn while simulating the real world as much as possible. Learning is given priority over making the simulation as “real” as possible. This means that sometimes the simulation may not precisely follow the procedural rules of the EU if “bending” them a little results in better student learning given the time constraints of a several day simulation.

The simulation is presided over by which ever country in the real world currently holds the rotating Presidency. In the April 2009 simulation that was the Czech Republic. The EU presidency is responsible for distributing information as to priorities during the simulation but individual nation-states are invited to submit other items for discussion and negotiation. The face-to-face simulation concludes with a statement entitled “Conclusions of the Presidency” followed by a closing banquet.

JCC students this past year, playing Latvia, made a push for economic concerns as Latvia, once the fastest growing country in the EU, was now contracting economically or experiencing “negative growth.” They were successful in getting their concerns into the conclusions by convincing other likeminded nation-states to concur.

Preparing students for a simulation is challenging. It makes faculty learn to teach in new ways and allows faculty to develop into better teachers. The EU course starts out with overview lectures but as the semester progresses there is less lecturing and more of the work shifts to the students in anticipation of the simulation. The students research and present to their classmates information on an assigned nation-state (currently 27), EU procedures (inter-governmental v. supranational), and EU policies. These are discussed in class and eventually submitted in a short written format for distribution as well as grading. Questioning in class by both the instructors and the students gives students the opportunity to think on their feet in preparation for and anticipation of the simulation. The course uses a textbook (“The Emerging European Union” by Yesilada and Wood) supplemented by the internet and free publications available in bulk from the EU Commission office ([www.eurunion.org/eu](http://www.eurunion.org/eu)) in Washington, DC. Students have also contacted the embassy of the country they are role playing for additional help. Greece was the most helpful allowing students to call them during the simulation in the US to get advice on the Greek position. Spain was also very helpful when the simulation was in Prague. The deputy ambassador spent an hour with JCC students explaining the Spanish position on that year’s simulation issues.

The simulation requires students to be in coat and tie (for the men) and appropriate professional attire for the women. The students can dress down for social functions. For JCC students this is often the first time they interact with people from other countries and is often the thing they remember the most. There is no one

way to prepare students to interact appropriately with students and people from other cultures. Students adapt very quickly and enjoy the differences as well as the similarities. One way to help students prepare for this opportunity is by drawing on their own cultural experiences as well as those of the faculty member through anecdotes especially when these experiences may have resulted in humorous situations. It is also important to teach students to be open to different cultures, suspend judgment, and leave America behind since at the simulation they are “Europeans.” This can be done in class with the faculty member responding to their comments in class by saying that is what an American would say but, now, “what would a European say?” Also, playing the role of another country allows them to step out of the position of an “American.”

Spending several days with students traveling and at the simulation allows faculty and students to develop stronger relationships. Students also report that they learn as much, if not more, at the simulation than in class. Students who participate twice say they learn even more the second time around. Students have often participated a third time if they transfer to a participating school. This simulation has opened the door to students considering and participating in study abroad while enrolled at JCC. The simulation has also opened the door to careers that they would not have experienced without the simulation as well as considering transfer schools participating in the event. Their personal lives have been enriched with new friends.

While the simulation is course based, there are many benefits that would never come from a stand-alone course. The simulation allowed JCC to be awarded an EU Fulbright Scholar grant to bring an EU scholar from England to spend a semester working with its students to prepare for the simulation. The simulation also allowed JCC to get a Fulbright scholarship to allow the EU advisor to spend a summer of study in the Netherlands to learn more about the Dutch in order to help students prepare for playing the role of the Dutch at the simulation.

### **ICONS INMP Simulation**

The International Communication and Negotiation Simulation (ICONS) International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) simulation ([www.icons.umd.edu](http://www.icons.umd.edu)) is an online simulation available at the high school, university, community college, and professional levels. To quote the website

The ICONS project...is an experiential learning program that uses customized web based learning tools to support educational simulations and simulation based training. Our... programs cast students in the role of decision makers tasked with trying to resolve contentious political issues of the day. The ICONS project also uses its simulations to support training programs related to conflict resolution, decision making, negotiation, cross cultural communication, and crisis management.

The community college simulation started out as a California community college simulation originally funded under a US Department of Education FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grant. It was expanded to include community colleges outside of California in its third year, the year JCC joined. The community college online simulation is inter-disciplinary in that it is run in many different courses

at different colleges from Hawaii to New York. At JCC, the World Politics class was completely redesigned with the simulation at the heart of the course. At other institutions the simulation is based in many different classes: Anthropology, English, Geography, French, Economics, and others. There is a cost to the institution to participate.

The faculty advisors get together in the fall in person in Los Angeles or via email to plan the spring simulation. Academic coordination is provided by Dr. Joyce Kaufman at Whittier College. Kaufman prepares an annual simulation scenario each January distributed as an email attachment to participating schools. The scenario updates students on international situations as of January extensively footnoted with source information highlighting the nation-states and international organizations played by the different schools in the simulation. This year's spring simulation included a variety of nation-states and the World Health Organization as roles. The simulation scenario also explains the simulation and how to prepare. The scenario then presents the four issues that will be negotiated. The four issues are chosen by the faculty advisors. This year's four issues were health (reducing child mortality), human rights (child soldiers), economics (reforming the Breton Woods institutions), and the environment (biofuels).

The simulation is live twenty four hours a day, seven days a week for five weeks beginning at the end of March through the beginning of May. Near the end of the five weeks there are four real time summits (one each day, four days in a row) when all the participating schools are online for an hour and a half in a real time summit based on the discussions so far. Each summit is chaired by a participating school based on a proposal they prepared and put in the proposal center.

JCC has two campuses fifty miles apart. One campus plays the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the other campus plays the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK-North Korea). This began because the simulation allowed JCC to get an East Asian fellowship from Columbia University because of the college's work in simulation based learning. JCC uses a textbook ("Global Politics" by Ray and Kaarbo) supplemented by the simulation scenario and online resources. Internally in the classes the students playing the role of South Korea participate as a democracy with a student playing the President and four students playing the role of the Ministers responsible for their respective ministries. The students playing the role of North Korea are participate as an authoritarian, totalitarian, hereditary communist dictatorship with one student playing the role of the "Dear Leader" and four students playing the role of the Ministers responsible for their respective ministries.

The Head of Government must prepare a general opening statement and the Ministers must also prepare an opening statement for their respective issue and ministry. By the time of the summits each ministry must prepare a proposal for posting in the proposal center. For purposes of assessment and grading students at the end of the simulation prepare a paper comparing the simulation with the real world. This simulation, like the EU simulation previously discussed, has led students to participating in the EU simulation, studying abroad, and

exploring different career options. Because this simulation is all text based it has the side benefit of helping students to write better and write better quickly especially during the summits.

When JCC students are chosen to chair the summit it results in students learning how to chair meetings. Students need to be coached as to how to effectively chair meetings by helping them put together an agenda (with a time schedule) prior to the summit for all nation-states to see and add to if they wish. They also need to help keep the other nation-states on task by not permitting disputes that can't be settled in the summit or getting off topic. The agenda should list the items to be discussed and the procedures to be followed whether Roberts Rules of Order are being used or some other format at the prerogative of the chair. Faculty members with experience chairing meetings are particularly helpful when teaching students how to chair a meeting since the faculty member can draw on his/her own experiences.

Students can read messages at any time from any place but can only post messages in class after gaining approval from their respective governments. This is the only class where students remain after class is over, interrupt their spring break to participate in the summits, and typically ask if they can come and participate in the summits a year later when they are no longer in the class.

Students at JCC are asked to do a simple open ended pre and post simulation anonymous survey asking them five questions about international negotiations in general and the four issues in particular. The pre survey answers are vague and general. The post survey answers are specific and sophisticated. The most frequent general comment is "how does anything ever get done" in the real world with real nations when it was so hard to come to an agreement in the simulation. This is a valuable lesson about the difficulties inherent in international negotiations.

The surveys administered to students show that they have learned to think like the country they represent. These survey responses and the simulation postings were reviewed by the East Asian experts at Columbia University who reported that JCC students "got it." At one of our discussions and meetings at Columbia one of the East Asian faculty members briefly left the room and came back into a discussion of Korean affairs based on the simulation and JCC students messages. She thought the discussion was about the real world and was pleasantly surprised to find that we were discussing JCC students work as community college freshmen and sophomores. Over the years the advisors have found that an ideal simulation has anywhere from 10 to 15 participants. New schools are always welcome to participate.

### **Conclusion**

Both simulations have changed learning and teaching at Jamestown Community College for the better. Students have become better independent active learners because of the research requirements. They also learn to work collaboratively because of the nature of negotiations. Students become more involved, classes become more interesting. Faculty members become better teachers because they become open to experimenting with new ways of teaching and learning. Both simulations require extra work on part of the faculty advisor and the

students but the pay back, based on anecdotal information and formal evaluation and assessment, is overwhelmingly convincing. The opportunities for teaching and learning are well worth the effort. While they do require institutional support, the key is passionate, interested faculty willing to take chances and step outside their comfort zone for the benefit of themselves, their students, the college, and the community.

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