Designing and Using Simulations and Role-Play Exercises
Carolyn M. Shaw

Introduction

The use of simulations and role-play exercises in the university classroom is not new. Instructors have been employing these teaching techniques for decades in an effort to impart an understanding of the international system and its many complex issues to students. Role-play exercises and simulations are just part of a larger body of teaching strategies labeled as "active learning techniques" – techniques that ask students to participate in constructing their own knowledge. Other techniques include, but are not limited to, group discussions, the use of media and technology, collaborative work on group projects and problem solving, and experiential learning opportunities such as internships, Model UN programs, and service projects. Over the years, teacher-scholars have explored the value, use, and design of simulations and role-play exercises, producing a rich and expansive body of literature on these techniques. This essay reviews the scope of this literature over the past 50 years, highlighting the trends and innovations.

Although Model League of Nations and Model UN conferences date back to the 1930s, other international simulation exercises were not broadly introduced into the classroom until the late 1950s and early 1960s. Some of the earliest academic literature on simulations in the classroom dates back to 1959 (Bloomfield and Padelford; Goldhamer and Speier; Guetzkow). The next two decades witnessed a growing number of scholarly articles and books on simulations including work not only in political science, but also in business, sociology, communication, education, and psychology. In fact some of the more sophisticated studies have come from sociology rather than political science. Unfortunately, there has not been significant cross-disciplinary dialogue and many scholars are unaware of very useful studies on simulations and role-play exercises produced in other fields. Much of the early literature was focused on evaluating the effectiveness of this new teaching method (Robinson et al. 1966; Greenblat 1973; Shade and Paine 1975; Lester and Stoil 1979; Bredemeier and Greenblat 1981; Ruben and Lederman 1982). By the 1980s, the focus of the literature began to shift to examine best practices in the use of simulations with an emphasis on the nature of learning (Lederman 1984; Thatcher 1990; Petranek et al. 1992). During this
time, some of the first articles on specific simulation design considerations appeared (Orbach 1977; Greenblat 1980; Greenblat and Duke 1981). This emphasis on the design of simulations to address specific learning objectives and course content continued into the 1990s and remains very evident in the literature today.

Despite shifting emphases in the literature over the past 50 years, many of the considerations raised in the early literature are reflected in the most recent writings in the field. In order to explore the historic as well as the more recent literature on simulations and role-play exercises, this essay is divided into three sections. I begin with a brief discussion of terminology regarding simulations and role playing. In the second section, I review the literature on the pedagogical value of simulations and role-play exercises, and the improvement in assessment efforts in recent years. In the final section, I explore how simulations are used in the classroom. This section includes discussion of learning objectives, example exercises, custom designing simulations to meet specific course needs, and running simulations in class.

Definitions

When exploring the literature on role playing and simulations, one discovers that these terms have not been used very precisely in the past. The terminology has evolved over the years, with some scholars using the terms interchangeably in various contexts. In addition, in much of the early literature, the terms “game” and “gaming” are seen when referring to what are today understood as role–play exercises and simulations. There is a growing consensus on usage, but there is still considerable variance in the literature. Krain and Shadle, drawing on several other scholars (Smith and Boyer 1996; Sutcliffe 2002), specifically distinguish between simulations, games, and role–play exercises. Simulations “place students within a reasonable representation of a real environment within which political or social interactions occur” (Krain and Shadle 2006:53). In role–play exercises, the participants are usually given fewer prescribed roles in terms of preferences and objectives. Students must work to develop their character and think about how s/he would respond to the given set of circumstances. Interactions within role–playing exercises are more interpersonal (i.e., conducting interviews) than they are goal–oriented (i.e., negotiating a treaty). Role play allows students to “inhabit the issue (making it more real and immediate) and think beyond their own perspectives” (Scott 2001:347). Role–playing exercises typically involve fewer complex interactions (Wheeler 2006). Simulations and role–play exercises can take place in the classroom, or through a computer–assisted environment. (More on this topic can be found in the essay titled “Computer Simulations in the Classroom” in the Compendium series.) This essay focuses exclusively on face–to–face exercises.

Although not discussed specifically in this essay, games involve competitive play with clear rules about how players “win” the exercise. Examples include various board games, card games, and other active learning exercises. Some recent published examples include the use of Pit by Boyer et al. (2006), two–level negotiations with the Prisoner’s Dilemma by Young (2006), and “Realism” by Asal (2005). Many of the same benefits ascribed to the use of simulations and role–play exercises also apply to the use of games.

The Value of Using Simulations and Role–Play Exercises

From the earliest use of simulations in the classroom, instructors have sought to identify and characterize the benefits of these techniques for student learning. Many of these articles are somewhat defensive, trying to persuade critics of the value of simulations. Scholars note, in particular, the value of simulations in achieving specific learning objectives that are not easily conveyed through lecture format. “Simulations have the power to recreate complex, dynamic political processes in the classroom, allowing students to examine the motivations, behavioral constraints, resources and interactions among institutional actors” (Smith and Boyer 1996:690). Scholars also note a wide range of additional benefits to using simulations. (Many of these benefits hold true for active learning in general, not just simulations and role–play exercises.) Although initial evaluations of the effectiveness of simulations were methodologically weak and flawed by research design, sampling, or other methodological problems, newer studies have become more sophisticated. Rather than simply arguing that simulations are (or are not) a better teaching tool than traditional class formats, there is greater recognition that simulations are simply one technique of many that can promote student learning. Scholars are still seeking to understand under what conditions simulations and role–play exercises are especially beneficial in the classroom.

Claimed Benefits of Role Playing and Simulations

In 1959, Bloomfield and Padelford simply asserted that simulations could “produce tangible results over and above what [could] be taught and learned about politics by more usual methods of instruction” (1959:1112). Scholars soon, however, generated an extensive list of the potential benefits of simulations in the classroom. Greenblat (1973) placed these claims into six categories and examined the existing empirical evidence to support them. Since that time, scholars have continued to reiterate these claims and provide anecdotal and empirical evidence to support or refute them.
Greenblat's first category includes claims regarding how simulations can promote cognitive learning. There are a wide range of different benefits that fall into the category including substantive and procedural knowledge. Participants can gain factual information, concrete examples of abstract concepts, analytical skills, procedural experience, and decision making skills. In addition, simulations enable students to apply the content of courses in real life situations. This provides students with a much deeper understanding of differing perspectives. Those engaged in these exercises may also learn "winning strategies" as they seek to achieve their objectives. Inbar (1970:240) simulates an urban emergency response exercise in which he notes that abstract concepts such as organizations, cooperation, and preparedness take on new, concrete meaning. Early studies such as Boocock and Coleman (1966) suggest that students gain in awareness, but find it difficult to specify the content of what the learning is. One of the challenges of assessing this claim is the nature of the learning that is taking place. While it may be relatively easy to measure whether students have learned factual information, it is more difficult to design measures of analytical and negotiation skills that are gained through simulation experiences. This is true for some of the other claims as well.

When considering cognitive assessments, it is also important to consider the student demographics to determine if certain subgroups are affected in different ways. Shade and Paine (1975) note that increased participation in a simulation class versus a control group was greater on the part of the marginal students rather than the high-achieving students. Different learning styles can also lead to certain students gaining more from these exercises than aggregate numbers reveal. A study by Robinson et al. (1966) was one of the earliest works to try to include cognitive styles in the research design.

Decades of research comparing conventional instruction methods to the use of simulations has not conclusively revealed that one approach is inherently superior to the other for cognitive learning. As Krain and Lantis note in summarizing their own experiments, "while each technique produces positive significant effects on knowledge acquisition, neither produces greater knowledge gains than the other" (2006:404). Krain and Lantis further note that evidence suggests that different approaches yield different kinds of learning. These additional types of learning are captured by Greenblat's other categories.

Greenblat's second category includes claims that participation in simulations can lead to affective learning. Such learning could include changed perspectives and orientations (e.g., attitudes toward various public and world issues), increased empathy for others, and greater insights into challenges faced by others. It might also lead to increased civic engagement beyond the classroom. Pierfy (1977) examines attitude change in 11 different studies and notes that, in eight of them, simulations were more effective than conventional instruction in producing affective change. The change that is seen is toward greater empathy. Morgan (2003:367) states that "the most successful active learning may inspire students to take proactive measures in the real world to help bring into being the world as they would like to see it."

The third category includes claims regarding how simulations can enhance student motivation and interest in the issue area, the course, and learning in general. Much of the evidence supporting this claim is anecdotal, such as students agreeing to bring their lunches, instead of taking a break, in order to have more negotiation time (Boocock 1967 as cited in Greenblat 1973:74). A study by Shade and Paine (1975) measured motivation by comparing attendance, completion of assigned readings, and time spent outside class on the course materials for students in a simulation course and a control group. All of the measures were higher for the students who participated in the class with a simulation. Shellman and Turan (2006) conducted a survey in which students were asked if they would consider changing majors after participating in the simulation class. A total of 22 percent of the class indicated they wanted to change their major to International Relations (IR), indicating a definite increased interest in the study of IR (2006:29). Many studies indicate that students enjoy simulations and role-play exercises and that instructors should continue to use them in future classes (McKeachie 1994; Shellman and Turan 2006).

The fourth category includes claims that simulations can have longer-term learning benefits by making later course work more meaningful, and stimulating more sophisticated and relevant inquiries about the real world. Few studies seek to prove this claim empirically. There are, however, a number of studies on how simulations can promote greater retention of the learned materials (see for example Schacter 1996; Silberman 1996; Hertel and Mills 2002). According to theories of learning drawn from the fields of education and psychology, simulations tap into multiple senses and emotions that create "memorable events" and create more enduring and easily recalled memories (Clark and Paivio 1991; Martin 1993; Banikowski and Mehring 1999).

The fifth category includes claims that participants in simulations may gain increased self-awareness and a greater sense of personal efficacy. In her review from 1973, Greenblat noted that there was little evidence to support this claim, although Inbar (1970) claimed that students reported gains in a feeling of personal potency from participating in a community disaster simulation. This claim might be extended to apply to the field of international studies in terms of gaining a greater awareness of self in contrast to other peoples abroad, but this author is not aware of any studies that support such a claim.

Greenblat's sixth and final category includes claims that simulations may promote better student-teacher relations, where
students learn in a more relaxed environment and a natural exchange of ideas can take place. Students may also perceive the instructor in a more positive light. Although some studies in the 1970s discussed how simulations could promote better student–teacher relations (Shade and Paine 1975), this claim was not frequently repeated in the literature. Newmann and Twigg (2000) do note that their use of simulations in their large classes provided more student–teacher interactions and that the students seemed to appreciate these opportunities in their post–simulation surveys. Many of the studies cited throughout this essay document anecdotally the positive instructor and class evaluations for courses in which simulations are used.

Although the articles cited above focus almost exclusively on benefits to student learning, several articles note that there are also benefits to faculty members. The use of simulations can help instructors keep things fresh and exciting, especially if they teach the same courses regularly. Simulations can provide faculty with clear, timely feedback on how well students are understanding the material, allowing further instruction as necessary prior to examination (Wheeler 2006). Whereas the use of simulations might have been discouraged by some faculty historically, the effective use of cutting edge pedagogical techniques today can have the professional benefit of helping junior faculty obtain tenure, especially in institutions that value teaching (Grillo et al. 2006).

Improved Assessment Efforts

As noted at the beginning of this section, studies on the effectiveness of simulations and role–play exercises have gradually become more sophisticated based on a greater understanding of a number of factors. One factor is accurately determining the appropriateness of a particular simulation for a particular purpose. Not every learning objective is best achieved through the use of simulations, even though they are a viable and interesting instruction method. As Kaplan amusingly put it when describing initial experimentations with simulations in the classroom, “Give a small boy a hammer and he soon discovers that everything needs hammering” (as cited in Ruben and Lederman 1982:233). Simulations can be particularly useful if your learning objectives include a better understanding of certain processes, such as negotiation and mediation that take place within foreign policy making structures and international organizations. They also work well for skill building in these areas, through seeking compromise and consensus, and arguing logically and persuasively. Simulations can also be designed to incorporate more traditional learning objectives such as promoting research and writing skills by requiring students to make advanced preparations for the exercise, or to draft a written document as one of the outcomes of the exercise (more on this below).

Ruben and Lederman (1982) discuss the need for a framework for assessing the appropriateness of particular simulations for specific purposes. They argue that simulations should have validity, reliability, and utility. Validity should be based on an analogy between the simulation experience and the real world, with a clear articulation of the theoretical concepts and content, and specified roles, rules, and goals. The simulation should have predictable outcomes, either in terms of process (for discovery learning), or in product (for mastery learning). Finally, the utility should be assessed to determine if the same objectives could be accomplished better, more efficiently or less expensively in another way. They conclude that when “used properly, simulations and games constitute a viable instructional technology, one capable of enhancing discovery and mastery learning of processes, concepts and skills” (1982:243).

A second factor leading to more finessed understanding of simulation effectiveness is the recognition that all simulations are not the same. Lester and Stoil (1979) note that treating the evaluation of simulations in the same way erroneously implies that every simulation format is equally valid for all teaching purposes. Similarly, flawed results can result if one attributes too many benefits to one simulation. No simulation can "do it all" effectively, and simulations should not be measured with that expectation. Simulations can only be evaluated based on what they are designed and expected to accomplish. Orbach (1977) identifies three different types of objectives: acquisition and comprehension of knowledge, application of knowledge, and attitudinal change. Different simulation designs will produce different types of learning. Some of the early evaluations on simulations tried to draw conclusions too broadly. Cherryholmes (1966), for example, hypothesized that simulations could achieve five of the six goals identified by Greenblat above, and then drew on seven different simulations from several different disciplines to test these hypotheses and concluded that simulations did not have all of the benefits that enthusiasts claimed.

A third factor resulting in improved assessment of simulations and role–play exercises is increasing attention to methodological design (Pownier and Allendoerfer 2008). Scholars have sought to avoid some of the problems associated with self–selection of sample groups, single semester assessments, lack of a control group, and differences in student learning styles (Krain and Lantis 2006). In addition, studies recognize that what anyone learns from any experience depends on a host of circumstances, including the nature of the person, their expectations, and similarities to other experiences (Bredemeier and Greenblat 1981).

Although there is no overwhelming evidence that simulations are more effective than traditional lectures in every instance, there are a number of studies that illustrate their particular benefits under certain conditions. An experiment by Krain and
Lantis (2006) with a simulation group and a control group engaged in a Global Summit exercise revealed that both lecture and simulation enhanced the students’ knowledge acquisition, but that the simulation group gained a better understanding of actors’ preferences and the complexity of the processes involved. We have become increasingly aware of which type of learning objectives simulations are well suited to achieve. Just as Goldhamer and Speier noted in 1959, these exercises do not displace customary forms of intellectual collaboration: they provide an orderly framework in which a great deal of written analysis and discussion can take place; scholars today continue to emphasize that simulations and role-play exercises are not necessarily meant to supplant traditional lecture or seminar formats of teaching, but are one more set of tools for reaching out to students and the variety of learning styles they manifest (Boyer et al. 2006:68). (More on this topic can be found in the essay titled “Assessment of Active Learning” in the Compendium series.)

The Use of Simulations and Role-Play Exercises in the Classroom

Learning Objectives

Although some of the earliest writing on simulations described games as essentially scientific exercises – seeking predictive outcomes for real policy and theory making (Bloomfield and Padelford 1959; Goldhamer and Speier 1959; Guetzkow et al. 1963) – the pedagogical value of these exercises was soon noted and they were rapidly incorporated into the classroom across many disciplines (Boocock and Schild 1968). Faculty recognized that simulations and role-play exercises could be used to achieve a variety of different learning objectives, ranging from content and substantive knowledge to critical thinking and problem solving. These objectives may vary according to course level, with the core knowledge emphasized early on and the skill development coming later. Recognizing that content knowledge can quickly become outdated, and students will have to solve problems all of their lives in whatever profession they pursue, instructors seek to give students the tools they need for life. As learning objectives for a simulation are established, it is important that the course material is clearly linked to the role-play scenarios (Kille 2002). Some examples of learning objectives might be for students to be able to identify the different actors involved in a foreign policy decision making process, to identify their interests and conflicting goals. Students might be expected to creatively consider what strategies or tactics to adopt in order to achieve specific policy goals. Other objectives might be for students to gain a greater awareness of the wide range of solutions to a conflict situation, of the resources necessary to address a particular situation, of how international organizations work in practice, of different national perspectives on current events, or a recognition that parties may have equally valid claims that need to be acknowledged and respected. Exercises designed to achieve some of these different objectives are discussed below.

Example Simulations

Whereas some of the older literature on simulations sought to defend the use of this teaching method in comparison with more traditional methods, more recent writings have focused on what specific lessons can be conveyed through different types of exercises, and have included detailed descriptions or appendices so that others can use these exercises. The examples below illustrate Boyer’s assertion that simulations are particularly effective at teaching policy making, decision making processes, and bargaining and negotiation (Boyer 1999).

In order to teach students more about the challenges involved in the US foreign policy making process, Shaw (2004) has designed an exercise where students take on the roles of members of Congress, members of the Cabinet, and the US President. They are given an exaggerated crisis situation in Colombia dealing with the FARC. They must decide how the US should respond. The members of Congress are instructed to use the Rational Choice model in their decision making process. The Cabinet follows a Bureaucratic Politics model, with each Cabinet member receiving instructions to seek a particular solution based on his/her organizational interests. The President is free to follow whatever process s/he deems appropriate. Several situation updates throughout the exercise add to the crisis atmosphere of the decision making. In the end, students realize that foreign policy making is much harder than they thought. Lack of information, lack of time, and different personal and organizational agendas all get in the way of reaching an agreement effectively.

There are a number of simulations that help students learn more about the decisionmaking processes within international organizations. Chasek (2005) has created a UN Security Council simulation addressing a fictional terrorist attack. Students are assigned roles as Security Council members and non–Security Council member states with a particular interest in the crisis. Prior to the exercise in class, students research their country’s position on stopping the flow of funding to terrorists, whether governments should be held responsible for terrorists operating outside their country, and what the Security Council should do in response to terrorism. When the Security Council convenes in class, the students must work together to craft a resolution in response to the bombing of a theatre in Singapore during an Israeli troupe’s performance. Chasek concludes that the students gain a greater understanding of how international organizations work. Students also demonstrated a greater appreciation for the interactions and negotiations that go on between member states within the UN
Designing and Using Simulations

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Ambrosio (2006) engages his students in a mock trial of Saddam Hussein in order to give them a better understanding of
international law. Students are divided into three groups: the prosecution, defense, and judges. The prosecution and defense
groups are further divided to investigate four issue areas: violation of humanitarian law against the Kurds (pre–1991), the
invasions of Iran (1980) and Kuwait (1990), and the use of chemical weapons in the Iran–Iraq war. Students on the defense or
prosecution teams write briefs, present oral arguments, and respond to questions raised by the judges. The judges write
reports on their final decisions. Students learn about the sources of uncertainty in international law and why international law
is often difficult to apply. They also discuss whether the international legal process could be made more effective.

Simulations are also useful for helping students learn more about negotiations and bargaining. Shaw (2006) describes an
exercise in which the parties are engaged in a three–way civil war. Assigned roles include members of three different factions
in a civil war, and a mediator. Each faction has a specific set of interests that are contradictory with those of other factions,
but also has some issues on which there is room for compromise. It is up to the mediator to help the parties reach a
compromise settlement on issues such as power sharing, control of natural resources, and autonomy. Despite reading about
different negotiation strategies and techniques in their textbooks, students come to understand that there is no “right way” to
conduct negotiations that guarantees a settlement. Sometimes they are able to reach a settlement, but often they are not.

Although many simulations focus on current issues (fictional or real events), there are others that are designed to take
students back in history. Stover (2007) creates a simulation to help students experience the emotional affect of the Cold War,
developing a sense of empathy with the historical decision makers. Students are divided into three groups: the US, Soviet, and
Cuban decision makers. Students prepare reports from the perspective of their country on events from the Cuban Missile
Crisis. They receive additional country–specific briefings, engage in small group discussions regarding national responses to
the U–2 incident, and then proceed to make decisions regarding their response to the incident. At the end of the simulation,
students explain that the Cold War period was more fearful, risky, and dangerous than they previously believed.

Designing and Using Simulations

As simulations and role–play exercises have become more widely incorporated into the classroom, a growing body of
literature has emerged not only describing specific exercises, but also providing instructions on how to custom design
simulations to fit instructors’ specific needs. Even instructors who choose not to design their own simulations take issues of
preparation, management, and grading into consideration as they select the types of simulations that they will use in class.
Early “how to” articles and books discuss design specifications, format, implementation, educational effectiveness, and public
policy applications (Greenblat and Duke 1981; Smith and Boyer 1996). There are five basic steps to take in order to craft a
role–play exercise. First, select a topic and identify a set of clear learning objectives. Second, determine the duration of the
simulation. Simulations can range from a single 50–minute class to an entire semester depending on the design and desired
learning objectives. Third, design the exercise so that there is intragroup discussion as well as intergroup discussion on the
topic. Such an exercise can teach students about cooperation and collaboration. The next step is to prepare some
background information for the exercise. It is important for the students to have the information available to them prior to, or
at the beginning of, the exercise so that they may fully understand the context of the exercise. Specific instructions for each
group or each actor within a group must also be written in order to let them know more about the role that they are taking on.
These instructions should also include some specific questions or directions about what they are expected to accomplish
within their group, or as an individual actor. The final step is to establish a timeline, or specific phases for the exercise.

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exercise than simply “playing a game.” Students are more likely to take the simulation seriously if they understand what the
learning objectives are, what they are expected to do, and how they will be graded. Formal grading may be unnecessary for a
game lasting a single session, but longer simulations should have graded components based on the time that students commit to the exercise. Popular methods include reflection essays and evaluating the quality of role playing. Many simulations involve the production of documents such as briefs or proposals, which are readily evaluated for quality.

Many of the articles on using simulations and role-play exercises offer tips on the best practices for this method of teaching, specifically on how to run the simulation successfully in class. The one that is most common is the need for a debriefing period. The debriefing is a key component to the exercise, allowing the students to learn what was happening in the other groups, to debate the positions of different groups, and to link the exercise to reality and to various theoretical concepts (Jones 1995; Merryfield and Remy 1995). Debriefing involves “talking about the experiences, analyzing them, evaluating them, and integrating them into one's cognitive and conscious data base” (Lederman 1984:417). The debriefing allows the instructor to reiterate key points in the process and to point out the similarities between the exercise and the actual experiences of international actors. A certain expertise is required to conduct a skilled debriefing: the instructor needs to tolerate ambiguity, and have the ability to observe and interpret behavior, and to form questions and listen to answers (Lederman 1984). A debriefing might simply be a class discussion following the exercise, or might include written reflection papers by the students. Petranek writes extensively about debriefing journals (Petranek et al. 1992; Petranek 1994; 2000).

Another common theme discussed in the literature on using simulations in the classroom is the role of the instructor. Lederman (1984) advocates that teachers guide and encourage discovery. They are not responsible for providing learning, but for provoking it; they are helpers rather than leaders, resource people rather than judges, evaluators, or testers – they stimulate thinking by encouraging talking. Thatcher (1986) agrees with this description and notes that the role of the teacher should be as a facilitator and organizer, enabling resources to be used effectively by students.

Some final general advice includes recognizing that simulations involve giving up some control of the classroom to students, so instructors should be flexible. By their very nature, simulations are frequently unpredictable. This is a virtue. Unexpected events often hold a great deal of educational potential (Grillo et al. 2006).

**Conclusion**

This essay has explored the rich history of simulations and role-play exercises in the classroom – a history of over 50 years. This method of instruction offers a variety of benefits including: the promotion of cognitive and affective learning, enhanced student motivation and interest, greater retention and long-term learning, increased self-awareness and personal efficacy, and better student–teacher relations. Improved assessment methods have led to a better understanding of the way in which different simulation designs can produce different types of learning. There are many resources available for instructors to select simulations for use, design their own simulations, and engage in best practices to get the most out of simulations in the classroom. It seems likely that this teaching method will continue to be employed creatively in the future and that the literature on the use and design of simulations will continue to grow richer. This will be particularly true if there is more cross-disciplinary sharing of simulation design and assessment. As noted in the introduction, many other disciplines use role-play exercises effectively and we have a lot we can learn from each other.

There appear to be two broad areas on which scholars might focus their work in the future. One area that seems ripe for further exploration is more sophisticated assessment methods to clearly illustrate what gains can be achieved through simulations and how they can be used most effectively in the classroom. Powner and Allendoerfer (2008) do an excellent job in identifying where the discipline stands in terms of quality assessment of simulations. In their review they note several weaknesses in recent studies. In Daugherty (2003) they point out that the positive effect for simulations is based on subjective self-assessments rather than an objective measure of substantive knowledge. They also highlight the work of Baranowski (2006) who provides pre–test and post–test comparisons of his sample and control groups, but who does not provide any information about the demographics of the groups. In addition, many studies have small sample sizes, which do not allow for useful control variables to be applied. The discipline could benefit from more studies with large samples, control groups, and objective measures of learning to establish under what conditions simulations best contribute to student learning.

A second area for future work involves adding new exercises to the growing body of very creative simulations, so that instructors can choose exercises that meet their specific learning objectives. Not every instructor teaches in an environment where such rigorous methods can be employed for testing the effectiveness of simulations. Many institutions have smaller classes that are only offered with one section on an irregular basis. It is difficult to design a rigorous experiment on learning in these classes, but they are very suitable as venues for designing and adapting role-play exercises. In a complex and ever-changing world, there are an infinite number of possibilities for role-play scenarios. While we may never fully identify all of the factors that create an ideal role-play exercise and environment, we can be more reflective about what our learning
objectives are and how role-play exercises can enhance those objectives. By expanding the literature on both assessment and simulation design, we can contribute to enhanced learning for our students in the future.

References


**Online Resources**

APSA Teaching and Learning Conference. At www.apsanet.org/conferencepapers/, accessed Jul. 2009. Archived conference papers from the APSA Teaching and Learning conferences. Papers are posted on a variety of topics, including simulations and role–play exercises.


ALIAS. At http://sitemaker.umich.edu/alias.isa/home, accessed Jul. 2009. Homepage for the Active Learning in International Affairs Section of ISA. This page contains section newsletters, minutes, and a link to the web archive with syllabi, class activities, and other teaching resources.

**About the Author**

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