



Facilitating Experiential Learning and Professional Skills Attainment in the Classroom: The Value of the Model United Nations Experience

Background

Deep learning: Students' ability to self-direct their' own education, to adopt what is learned to a new situation, and to be lifelong learners (Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001)

Four levels of knowledge necessary for deep learning:

- *Factual:* Learning the elements needed to solve a problem
- *Conceptual:* Understanding the relationships between ideas
- *Procedural:* Knowing how to do things
- *Metacognitive:* Being aware of one's own learning

In-class simulations are considered to help students acquire and strengthen various **professional skills** such as *negotiation, public speaking, decision-making, research, and teamwork* (Asal, 2005; Baranowski and Weir, 2015). However, the SoTL in this field has either examined the pedagogical/disciplinary rationale for simulations or detailed the creation/application of simulations (Engel *et al.*, 2017). Our knowledge regarding the effects of international relations (IR) simulations on student learning is severely limited.

Research Question

To what extent do in-class Model UN simulations facilitate students' deep learning and professional skills attainment?

Methodology

Poli 387: International Simulation (15-week Model UN course)

Enrollment: 35 students (F: 6%, Sop: 23%, J: 31%; Sen: 40%)

“Experiential learning” designation → 10 different majors

Online lectures: 11 weeks (on UN and theories of IR)

In-class sessions: 11 weeks (discussion and tutorials)

UN Simulation: 4 weeks (formal and informal proceedings)

3 committees (each with 12 countries and 3 topics)

Mixed-method Approach

Quantitative Analyses (Wilcoxon signed-rank tests)

- Pre- and post-simulation surveys (in January and May)
- Instructor's assessment of student work (entire semester)

Qualitative Analyses

- Individual debriefing sessions (in May)

Example of *factual knowledge*:

“most efficient in helping me understand how IR operates” ... “I cannot wait to learn more”

Example of *conceptual knowledge*:

When debriefing, 34 students (97%) mentioned at least one IR theory when explaining the UN and 27 students (77%) used at least one appropriate example.

Abstract

What is the role of Model United Nations (UN) in facilitating professional skills attainment in the classroom? Using a 15-week Model UN course with an enrollment of 35 students, I gather data on student progress in four levels of knowledge: *factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive*. I use pre- and post-activity surveys with both closed- and open-ended questions designed to capture the students' initial levels of knowledge and measure the progress they achieve throughout the semester. In addition, I conduct one-on-one interviews with each student to gather additional data on their progress. The findings suggest that Model UN has a substantially positive impact on students' factual, conceptual, and procedural knowledge as well as their self-perceived skills of *negotiation, decision-making, public speaking, research, and teamwork*. These results are also confirmed by the instructor's evaluation of student progress. Importantly, the Model UN experience strengthens negotiation and public speaking more significantly than the other professional skills assessed.

Summary of Findings (Levels of Knowledge)

Knowledge Assessed	Definition	Change based on students' self-assessment	Change based on instructor's assessment
Factual	How does the UN work in theory?	24%***	31%***
Conceptual	How to use IR theories to explain how the UN works?	Not assessed	34%***
Procedural	How to use UN rules of procedure properly?	13.7%***	28%***

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and *** p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

Summary of Findings (Professional Skills)

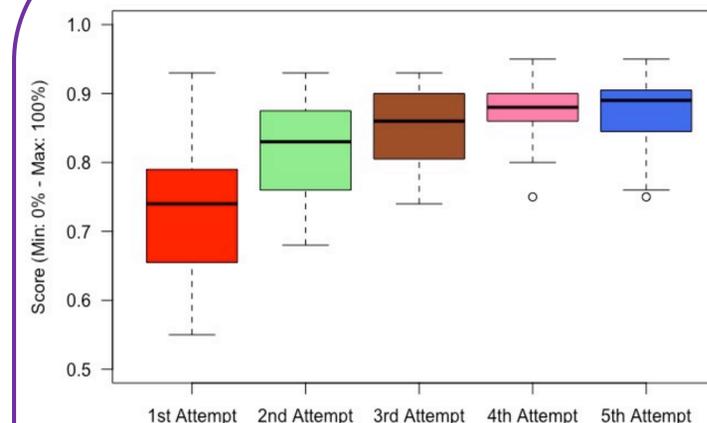
Professional Skill Assessed	Definition	Change based on students' self-assessment	Change based on instructor's assessment
Negotiation	Bargaining with peers, discovering a common ground, and reaching an agreement	13.7%***	28%***
Public speaking	Performing a formal, in-person speech in front of an audience	13.0%***	14%***
Decision-making	Choosing between two or more courses of action with available information	9.0%**	Not assessed
Research	Collecting systematic information to examine the validity of something	7.4%**	Not assessed
Teamwork	Collaborating with peers to achieve a common goal in the most efficient way	7.0%**	Not assessed

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and *** p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Provost's Office at the UW-Stevens Point, UW System's Office of Professional and Instructional Development (OPID) for their support of the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars (WTFS) Program; WTFS Co-Directors, Alison Staudinger & David Voelker, and OPID Director, Fay Akindes, for their guidance.

Public Speaking Skills (graded)



Public Speaking Skills

Public Speeches Compared	Change in graded performance
1 st vs. 2 nd	8.2%***
2 nd vs. 3 rd	3.5%***
3 rd vs. 4 th	2.1%*
4 th vs. 5 th	-0.01%
1 st vs. 3 rd	11.6%***
1 st vs. 4 th	13.8%***
1 st vs. 5 th	13.5%***

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, and *** p < 0.001 (based on the Wilcoxon signed-rank test)

Implications

In-class Model UN has a substantial impact on:

I. Deep learning:

- 6-letter grade increase in **factual** knowledge
- 3.5-letter grade increase in **conceptual** knowledge
- 4-letter grade increase in **procedural** knowledge

II. Professional skills

- 4-letter grade increase in **negotiation** skills
- 3-letter grade increase in **public speaking** skills
 - 85% occurs during the initial three rounds

References

- Anderson, L.W., and Krathwohl, D.R. (eds.). 2001. *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Longman.
- Asal, V. 2005. “Playing Games with International Relations.” *International Studies Perspectives* 6:359-373.
- Baranowski, M.K., and Weir, K.A. 2015. “Political Simulations: What We Know, What We Think We Know, and What We Still Need to Know.” *Journal of Political Science Education* 11 (4): 391-403.
- Engel, S., Pallas, J., and Lambert, S. 2017. “Model United Nations and Deep Learning: Theoretical and Professional Learning.” *Journal of Political Science Education* 13 (2): 171-184.