

Negotiations and Model Diplomacy Simulations: A Case Study of Curricular Innovations in a Business School

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Many scholars have criticized business education for its lack of adequate awareness of global issues. To address this, we have designed a curricular innovation initiative to introduce a special topic course, called Business Negotiations and Model Diplomacy Simulations. The course is built around the Model Diplomacy program designed by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), and aims to enhance soft skills, global citizenship and critical thinking. In this paper, we present the rationale, relevance and a step-by-step approach to designing and incorporating this simulation to help business schools innovate their curricula to provide their students with a competitive edge.

INTRODUCTION

For a long time, business education has been criticized for its narrowness and heavy emphasis on technical skills at the cost of crucial soft skills, holistic perspectives, cultural diversity, and global awareness. Business schools, with their current practices and curricula, are finding it difficult to catch up with the changing needs of the fast paced global business environment. In their empirical study in the context of business education in Europe and the United States, Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010) identified eight “Unmet Needs” in the context of business education: (a) the need for students to get a real global perspective; (b) the need for leadership development, improved emotional intelligence, and the ability to motivate, delegate, and lead ethically; (c) the need to integrate concepts through a multidisciplinary approach that permits students to solve problems; (d) power and politics-students must understand how organizational processes work and develop a good sense of how the business world works, as well; (e) the need to pursue creative and innovative thinking; (f) the need to develop both oral and written communication skills – students must be capable of expressing their ideas in a clear and convincing manner; (g) the need to understand risks and how those risks affect other people beyond oneself; and (h) the need to balance practice, theory, and experience. Meeting these “unmet needs” can be a significant opportunity for business schools to innovate and change their curricula to find a competitive edge for their academic programs and help their students stand out.

To grab the opportunity to meet these “unmet needs” and help our students stand out, with our commitment to continuous improvement and excellence in business education, we, at Larry L. Luing School of Business, Berkeley College, have incorporated and placed significant emphasis on much needed soft skills while developing our program learning objectives. In our journey toward continuous

improvement of program learning outcomes relating to extremely crucial soft skills and critical thinking skills, and better engaging and preparing students to effectively deal with critical issues in the global environment, we, Dr. Rahul Bedi and Dr. Darshan Desai, from Larry L. Luing School of Business, have developed a curricular innovation initiative for our BBA International Business program. As past research indicates that student outcomes and engagement are improved with simulations and experiential learning techniques (Wharton and Parry, 2012), as a part of our curricular innovation initiative, we decided to design and pilot a special topic course, Business Negotiations and Model Diplomacy Simulations, that featured a new interactive foreign policy simulation designed by the Council on Foreign Relations. In this paper, we first describe the rationale, relevance and step-by-step approach to adopt the simulations in business education, and then use a case study approach to explore how Model Diplomacy Simulations have been used to enhance student outcomes in the context of International Business Curricular Innovations.

The paper begins by building a conceptual foundation through reviewing relevant literature in the field, and constructing basic propositions. In the next section, we mention the rationale, relevance and step by step approach of the initiative. Following that, we used the case study methodology to explore the propositions further in terms of understanding how Model Diplomacy Simulations adopted in a special topic business courses lead to desired outcomes. The paper concludes with the discussions and potential applications of the proposed approach in similar educational settings.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION

In the context of Politics and American Government courses, Frederking (2005) provided quantitative support for wide-spread anecdotal evidence of the positive relationship between the use of simulations and student learning outcomes. However, in the context of business education, scarce attention has been paid to the link between the use of simulations and student outcomes. The majority of this research either focuses on method descriptions or practical guidelines (Doyle and Brown, 2000, Salas, Wildman, and Piccolo, 2009). More recently, Caza, Brower, & Wayne (2015) found that, compared to students who graduated from a traditional, functionally structured business curriculum, students graduating from a holistic, experiential curriculum had significantly better student outcomes related to satisfaction and career self-efficacy. Despite the clear evidence of the connection between the use of simulations and student outcomes, the way the simulations affect outcomes is still a black box. In addition, as Model Diplomacy Simulations is a new program, there is a complete vacuum of research on this topic. Therefore, this research is pioneering research conversations about Model Diplomacy Simulations, and aims to unpack how model diplomacy simulations affect student outcomes. This section briefly describes concepts of model diplomacy simulations and student outcomes in the context of this research.

Model Diplomacy Simulations

Model Diplomacy is a new interactive foreign policy simulation designed by the Council on Foreign Relations. The simulation uses hypothetical crises based on real-world global challenges, allowing students to explore and discuss these issues in the context of an emergency meeting called by the President of the United States (Saiya, 2017). In the simulation, students act as members of the National Security Council (NSC), who advise the president on decision making and policy implementation. Student and instructor accounts are free of charge, however, both instructor and student groups must register online before being able to participate in a simulation. Instead of using these simulations to teach political or foreign relations, we adopted a highly innovative action-learning pedagogy and for this simulation role play to teach the skills and concepts of Negotiations and Diplomacy.

Student Outcomes

In this research, we explored the effects of this particular curricular innovation initiative on three sets of student outcomes, i) student engagement assessed through student reflections, ii) course learning outcomes assessed over time through case assessments, and iii) program learning outcomes observed in

the areas of oral and written communication, negotiating abilities, advocacy and lobbying, the development of problem solving abilities, critical thinking skills developed through independent research ,and collaborative approaches to problem solving that are assessed through case assessments throughout the course.

METHOD

We have used a critical action-learning approach in teaching courses at Berkeley College, New York. Critical action learning was used to engage students in a process of drawing from critical perspectives to make connections between their learning and their own role-play actions, decisions, and experiences, to understand and change interpersonal practices (Rigg, and Trehan, 2004). To unpack the black box and to understand in-depth how this initiative affects student learning outcomes, and the key ingredients of effectively teaching such courses, we used case study research to explore the contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. For our data collection, we used multiple sources such as Student Instructional Reviews, faculty observations and reflections, students' reflections, and student learning outcomes assessments.

CAST-STUDY CONTEXT

Dr. Rahul Bedi and Dr. Darshan Desai, from Larry L. Luig School of Business, collaboratively designed, developed and piloted a curricular innovation initiative to launch a special topic course for the BBA International Business program at their Business School, with the aim of preparing students to effectively deal with critical issues in the global environment, and improving student engagement and program learning outcomes relating to extremely crucial soft-skills and critical thinking skills. As a part of this initiative, in the pilot phase, two sections of the special topic course were introduced in Fall 2016. The courses were built around the Model Diplomacy simulation designed by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). Each student had a role of either a cabinet member or general advisor to the President. As the National Security Council members, students needed to deliberate on hypothetical scenarios based on current and complex issues relating to international trade, homeland security, United States foreign policy, and international relations. CFR's Model Diplomacy simulation program provided a very useful and adaptable interactive resource that promoted independent research, critical thinking, effective communication, and collaborative approaches to problem solving. The very innovative critical reflection action-learning approach was adopted to cultivate extremely valuable life skills related to negotiations and diplomacy.

The overall process had three phases: i) design, ii) set-up, and iii) delivery. In the design phase, we developed course goals and a description, researched course material and assessments to incorporate the desired ingredients of negotiations, diplomacy skills, and a global mindset. In this stage, active collaborations were established with Student Development, Campus Life, and Advisement to promote the course. In the next phase of setting up the course, instructors registered for the Model Diplomacy Simulations on the CFR website and set up the course, and connected course concepts with the cases. In the last phase, which was the most crucial phase, the course was delivered. Based on SIRs, student and faculty reflections, and student performance on the course assessments, the courses were found to be a very successful experience in the pilot phase. The key elements that were found to be most valuable and made the course successful have been analyzed and presented in the next section.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The case analysis was conducted in two steps: descriptive and interpretive. The first step of the process was the systematic reconstruction of the different types of qualitative data. The next step was to code the categories of data and pattern matching. There were four key themes evident in the data that

explained the link between the curricular innovation initiative related to Model Diplomacy simulations and student learning outcomes.

Collaborative inquiry-based Approach that Ignited Curiosity

The most recurrent theme that emerged in the data was about the importance of a highly interactive and collaborative inquiry-based approach. Students found this approach to be extremely valuable in igniting their curiosity about the issue at hand. After students registered for a particular simulation, each student was assigned a specific role. Students were expected to research the topic and develop a position in line with their specific role and positions assigned. During these role-playing simulations, the students evaluated the role of particular individuals from their respective cabinet position perspective and distilled their research into memos for presentation to the President and advocated their core positions to persuade the President and other cabinet members to accept their opinion as the national policy. This simulation made them curious to explore the issue and required them to apply critical and analytical thinking through consideration of policy options and development of a position, and demonstrate excellent research skills through collaborative exploration, collection, and evaluation of a range of research sources. To enable this kind of exploration and critical evaluation, the Model Diplomacy program provided students with a lot of material from the Web on which to draw on. The simulation materials available on the Council of Foreign Relations website included videos, maps, timelines, glossaries, sample memos, and templates. These resources enabled students to understand the context of the crisis, and demonstrate high level critical thinking and research skills to thoroughly prepare for the role-play.

Highly Interactive and fun

Another recurrent theme that became evident was that the interactive, fun, and flexible elements deliberately infused in the course-design boosted very meaningful student-faculty interactions, better student-student relationships, a collaborative spirit, and resultant student engagement. Due to the intensely interactive nature of this simulation, students were highly motivated, engaged, and collaborative to find an optimum solution. The students were encouraged to discuss and vote on the policy recommendations of each other on online discussion forums and after-class events, and get involved in lobbying and negotiating online. Inviting guest speakers, celebrating events, and going on field trips created excellent bonding among the student groups.

Global Real World Connections and Interdisciplinary

Crisis Case studies related to important global real world problems like the global climate change crisis or Nuclear North Korea, , which are well discussed throughout the media. We have found that these type of real world crisis case studies stirred opinions, passions and deep seated emotions and engaged everyone into a new kinds of conversations. This crisis simulation created an acute awareness of the complexity of the foreign policy-making process, its interdisciplinary nature and the role of interagency conflicts and negotiations. This created an awareness that officials and stakeholders within the government may have conflicting views and turf wars thus hindering honest debate necessary to determine the optimum policy. Students realized that such obstacles can only be resolved by lobbying, advocating, and debating the core interests of each stakeholder and then inching towards a solution. Each crisis simulation contained four parts: an NSC guide (overview, interagency process, timeline, departments and agencies, and glossary), case background materials (the crisis at hand, context, recent history, timeline, root causes, role of the United States, other interested parties, and glossary), the role-play (roles, research and preparation, reading list, and memoranda guide), and wrap-up (reflection and assessment). We introduced the NSC ourselves to students to sharpen our focus on the crucial global real-world connections, role-play actions and decisions, and critical reflections.

Critical Reflection Action Learning

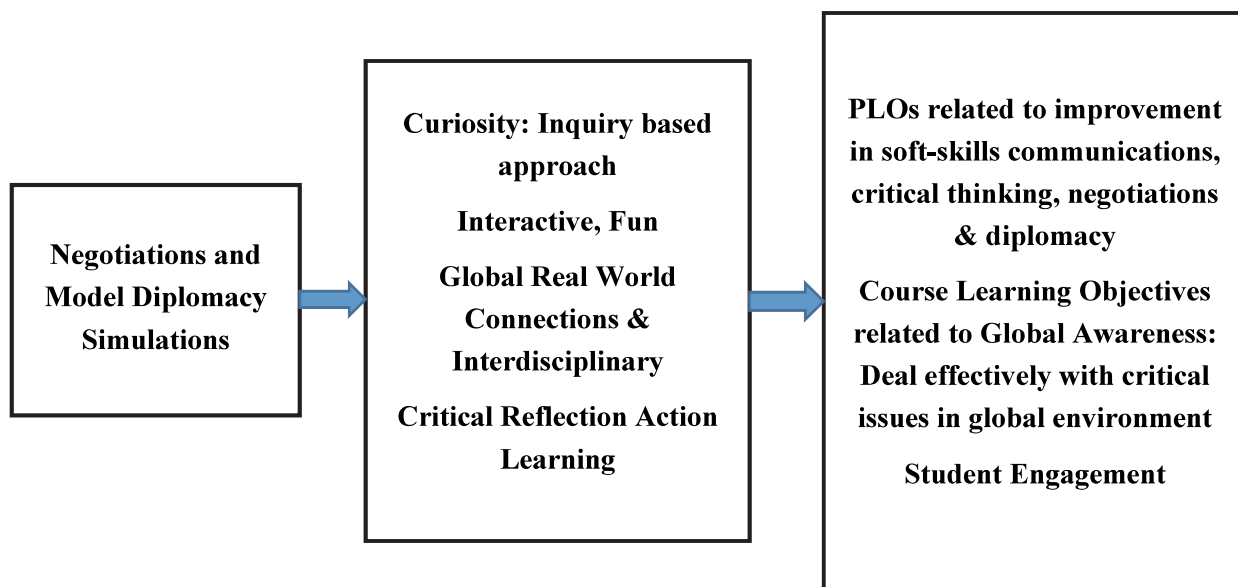
Among all the elements mentioned, this one, critical reflection action learning element, was found to be most crucial in enabling students gain extremely crucial life-skills. The class size was limited to only

sixteen students and throughout the simulation role-play, instructors reflected on each student’s actions, and after the role play students were asked to reflect on their individual actions, the presidents’ decision, and possible causes of their role of successfully or unsuccessfully influencing it. After the simulation role play is over, next couple of sessions are devoted to reflect and extract important skill enhancement lessons from the choices made and actions taken during the simulation. The students described this experience as “truly transformative Experience”, “changed the way I look at the world”, “Gained extremely valuable life-skills” and “Discovered Political Animal within me”. Very relevant beliefs, emotions, and actions that needed critical reflection were identified, shared, and candidly discussed in the feedback sessions, which created a very meaningful nature of interactions among instructors and students, which have been identified as a key reason for higher student engagement, efforts, and learning.

Overall Findings

Overall findings about how Model Diplomacy Simulations have been used to enhance student outcomes in the context of International Business Curricular Innovations are summarized in a conceptual framework presented in Figure-1.

**FIGURE 1
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**



CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

For long time, scholars have criticized business education for its narrowness and heavy emphasis on technical skills at the cost of crucial soft skills, holistic perspectives, cultural awareness and a global mindset. To catch up with the needs of a fast paced global business environment, where business schools are experimenting with different ways to innovate their curricula, our research is important in unpacking the key ingredients of successful curricular innovations that can help educators cultivate a global mindset and lead to improved student outcomes of the business programs. In addition, this research is very important as a pioneer in starting research conversations about a new simulation program designed by Council on Foreign Relations.

The three step process of designing the initiative, setting up simulations and actual course delivery discussed in the cast-study context provided some guidelines about how to adopt the Model Diplomacy program and simulations in the context of business education. The case-study research findings are

important in discovering the four key themes evident in the initiative that explained the link between the curricular innovation initiative related to Model Diplomacy simulations and student learning outcomes: i) a collaborative inquiry-based approach that genuinely ignited curiosity, ii) highly interactive and fun, iii) global and interdisciplinary real world connections, and iv) critical reflection action learning. Overall, the simulation program can play a very important role in enhancing global business education through providing business students with an immersive, hands on and real-life experience.

This research is qualitative in nature and future research is important in unpacking the key themes and core ingredients and developing a conceptual framework. In the future, more quantitative research to test the mediating links between the simulations and student outcomes described in the conceptual framework may provide further insights. In the context of Model Diplomacy, the comparison of different ways of adopting the same simulation program to meet different learning objectives of different programs across disciplines can help continuing this very interesting research conversation to achieve excellence in business education in fun and engaging ways.

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