

# **The International Negotiation Modules Project: Integrating International Simulation into the Geography Classroom in the Community College**

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## **Abstract**

This brief piece is designed to introduce the faculty member in geography to an innovative program which is designed to enhance the teaching of geography and other areas. The International Negotiation Modules Project relies on simulation as a means of engaging the students in learning about various aspects of geography. Furthermore, students work in groups to assist one another in the learning process, another one of the basic components of sound pedagogy. By focusing on contemporary international issues, the study of geography is built into a broader framework which makes the field especially timely and relevant.

## **Introduction**

The International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) was created in 1995 to adapt the ICONS networked computer simulation into the community college curriculum. Funded by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education of the United States Department of Education,<sup>1</sup> the program uses networked computers to simulate negotiations on a range of international issues. Over the course of the semester-long program, students are encouraged to create and test negotiating strategies, collect and analyze information from different perspectives, and make decisions based on their research. The approach used is an ICONS-type simulation,<sup>2</sup> which seems to work particularly well at the community college level where the non-traditional nature of the student body is an asset. These students, many of whom are older and already have work experience, are particularly receptive to an approach which encourages them to work together and take advantage of skills that they bring to the table from their own experiences. Further, one of the most interesting modifications of the program has been the implementation of the simulation across a range of disciplines, including geography classes.

ICONS (International Communication and Negotiation Simulation) was created at the University of Maryland in the early 1980s as a response to the confluence of a number of events, primarily the rapid developments in the areas of computer and network technology along

with the increasing availability of computers, and the movement in the area of higher education to more student-centered learning. The ICONS simulation was created initially for students at the university level, and was then adapted for middle- and high school students.

The INMP, the first time ICONS was implemented at the community college level, was piloted in the 1995–1996 academic year in nine community colleges throughout the state of California where the simulation was integrated into a range of classes across disciplines from International Relations, to Psychology, to basic English Composition and Economic Geography. California seemed to be an especially appropriate area in which to pilot the program, given the articulation between the community colleges and colleges in the California university system, the demographics of the student body in the California community colleges, and the emphasis in many of the colleges on internationalizing the curriculum. In 1996–1997, the second year of the grant period, seven schools were added to expand the program to 16 community colleges across the United States. Classes in French, World Civilizations and Cultural Geography are among those participating in the program. In the third year, the program has grown to 18 colleges, including one outside the United States. The results of the evaluation of the program to date indicate that the simulation can be used successfully to internationalize a range of classes across the curriculum, and to enhance computer literacy for students who participate.

## **Implementation**

In a typical simulation, each class represents a country or a non-governmental organization, such as Amnesty International or the World Health Organization. A scenario, which is drafted prior to each simulation, becomes the framework for the simulated world and lays out the issues for the negotiations. For the 1996–1997 program, for example, the issues included: international trade, drug trafficking and narco-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, human rights, and migration and immigration. The issues are selected by the faculty members based on the topics and issues that they would like to cover in their classes. Thus, although these issues do not perhaps seem to deal explicitly with Geography, all of them require that students understand geographic relationships, environment, topography, as well as the culture of the countries involved. Each of these topics is central to the understanding of the subject of “Geography.”

Within each class students work in teams to become “experts” on one of the issue areas that their country will be involved in during the simulation. This requires that each team of students must learn about a

single issue in depth, including the position of the country or actor that they are representing, their likely negotiating partners, allies, and potential adversaries. As much as possible, students are encouraged to use on-line resources for their research, and to take advantage of non-US sources in order to get a truly global picture of the issue. This phase of the program culminates in the drafting of a position paper, which outlines each country's policies and negotiating strategies for the simulation.

The simulation itself lasts for four weeks during which time the students negotiate on-line using telecommunications technology. This includes a combination of asynchronous (or e-mail) and synchronous real-time communication. The e-mail is the basis for the negotiations, and the students use it to develop their position on the issues, put forward proposals, and build support for their particular ideas. The climax of the negotiations are the on-line real-time summits, which bring together 10 or 12 teams to negotiate specific details on one of the issue areas. The agenda for each summit is sent out in advance, and grows from the e-mail negotiations that have taken place to that point. Each summit lasts 90 minutes, and allows the teams to try to reach agreement on a particular item and, if agreement is reached, to determine what the logical next steps will be.

The simulation concludes with a debriefing, at which point the students and faculty assess what was and was not accomplished and why, and to draw conclusions about lessons learned. In addition, there is a rather detailed evaluation component associated with the entire program.

## **Application in the Geography Classroom**

One of the most interesting aspects of the INMP has been the ways in which participating faculty use the simulation to internationalize a range of classes and to introduce computers as a tool for teaching and learning across the curriculum. In the four year institutions involved with the ICONS simulations<sup>3</sup> typically the program is implemented as part of Political Science classes, and often specialized classes such as upper division courses on international negotiation. However, as the program evolved in the community college setting, it seemed more appropriate to broaden the applications so that the simulation could be adapted successfully across the curriculum.

One of the ways in which this was done most successfully was in Geography classes in colleges in California. Three different classes in that discipline participated in the program during its first two years. Dr. Ray Sumner, initially in Los Angeles Valley College and at Pasadena City

College, then at Long Beach City College, and Professor Richard Raskoff, also of Los Angeles Valley College, both integrated the simulation into various Geography classes that they were teaching. What each of them found most effective about the program was the way in which it motivated students while enabling them to integrate culture, environmental issues and other relevant topics into the teaching of geography.

The INMP program, of course, required these faculty members to teach their classes differently than they would have otherwise, and to arrive at alternative ways of evaluating their students as well. Both faculty members required students to keep comprehensive portfolios, which included map studies as well as detailed research about the country the students were representing. (One of Sumner's classes represented Malaysia, while a joint Sumner-Raskoff class represented Japan.) This approach also reinforced to the students the fact that the study of geography is more than just memorizing places on a map, but rather, it involves understanding the ways in which the physical location of a country affect its resources, its wealth and its international relations. It also reinforced the interaction of natural and man-made events and the ways in which countries prepare for, and must respond to, each of these. In short, it made the study of geography real and relevant for the community college students, many of whom are very conscious of the need for practical application of the materials they learn in classes. Students also appreciated the fact that they were developing skills in team work, independent research, and negotiation.

The program was integrated successfully in a range of classes across the curriculum in addition to Geography. For example, one faculty member used the simulation as part of English 21, a required Basic English class. This class learned reading, writing and research skills as well as about international negotiation while representing China in the simulation. While some of the students were disconcerted by the process, which clearly did not fit the mode of a traditional Basic English class, others were stimulated by it and by what the experience taught them. During debriefing, which I attended, one woman made a point of explaining that, since her goal is to become a health care professional, she felt better prepared to confront and interact with patients from different cultures because on what she learned in this class. Further, she reminded her colleagues, since much of what we do on a daily basis is negotiate, the training in negotiation will be a valuable resource regardless of what career an individual wants to pursue. These lessons can be generalized to the lessons learned in classes across the curriculum.

Studies have shown that participating in ICONS simulations in-

creases students' critical thinking skills; they show greater sensitivity to and appreciation of other countries and cultures and they better understand the process of international negotiation.<sup>4</sup> The students who were involved in the pilot program in 1995-1996 give perhaps the best testimony to the impact the program had on them. For example, following the simulation one student from the Malaysian team, one of the Geography classes, wrote: "I've enjoyed spending hours in different book stores reading about Malaysia and other Pacific Rim countries. I now own an encyclopedia and have read quite a bit about other countries." Another student from that same class wrote: "...in this exercise, I have learned some economic concepts and business details. It really helped me develop my knowledge, especially [since] my major is business." And another wrote: "This activity also opened my eyes to an 'economic' perspective that I had never paid attention to before. I was also introduced to the 'Asian' way of thinking that is valuable knowledge if one is to live in a truly global community."

The INMP is an effective teaching tool because it relies upon the soundest educational principles: it requires students to take an active part in their own learning, it relies heavily upon collaboration among students, and it sets high expectations.<sup>5</sup> Further, the integration of telecommunications technology increases students' computer literacy by making the technology an important educational tool.

To be successful means, however, that the faculty must change the ways in which they teach. Because this is student-centered learning, the teacher must be willing to step back and act as a facilitator, guiding the students through the process but with the understanding that the primary responsibility for learning falls upon the students themselves. As noted above, those faculty who participated in the INMP pilot program had to alter significantly the ways in which they taught their course. Further, it was important at the outset that they stated clearly their own expectations of the students participating in the program who, in all likelihood, were confronting a type of learning situation that was new to them. On the other hand, the faculty also agreed that the process was so valuable that it will be difficult to return to a more traditional way of teaching. As one faculty member noted in a letter to the Project Director: "Do you have a cure for ICONS withdrawal?...I'll have to create more opportunities [in other classes] for my students to use the Internet."

## **Conclusion**

This brief piece was designed to introduce the reader to an innovative technique applied in community college classes, including geography, designed to stimulate students interest in the subject by actively

engaging them in the learning process. The ICONS simulations has been used effectively at the high school through university level, but the INMP described here was the first application in geography classes.

The lessons of this pilot program have been that this approach is an effective way to teach the subject, and that, as a result of the experience, students are made more aware of the world around them while they are also learning the basic subject-matter of the course.

### **Footnotes**

<sup>1</sup> FIPSE PR/Award P116B50043, September 1, 1995 through August 31, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> ICONS is the International Negotiation and Communication Simulation, which is a product of the University of Maryland. ICONS was created in the early 1980s specifically to help teach university students about the complexities of international negotiation. It was then adapted for high school students as well. The INMP was the first time that this program has been implemented in the community college classroom and, specifically, in a range of disciplines.

<sup>3</sup> The University of Maryland runs a number of programs specifically for four-year institutions. Each semester there is a global simulation, which typically lasts five weeks and is broad in both the scope of the issues, and the range of countries included. In addition, there is a shorter (about 3-week) case-based simulation focusing on a particular international issue. For a more complete description of the ICONS simulations, see Jonathan Wilkenfeld and Joyce Kaufman, "Political Science: Network Simulations in International Politics," in *Social Science Computer Review* (1993) 11, 4:464-476, and Brigid Starkey and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, "Project ICONS: Computer Assisted Negotiations for the IR Classroom," in *International Studies Notes* (1996) 21, 1:25-29.

<sup>4</sup> Judith Torney-Purta has been the evaluator of the ICONS program virtually since its creation, and she serves as the project evaluator for this program as well. For examples of the results of her evaluations see: "Cognitive Representations of the Political System in Adolescents: The Continuum from Pre-novice to Expert," in *New Directions for Child Development* 56 (Summer): 1992, 11-24; and the "Evaluator's Report of the International Negotiation Modules Project, 1997 (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of some of the elements of sound pedagogy see: American Association of Higher Education, *Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation, 1987.