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Confronting pedagogy in “Confronting Globalization”: The use of role-play simulations to foster interdisciplinary/global learning

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing emphasis on global learning as part of the redesigned institutional mission of American higher education, there will arguably be a need for a variety of global learning experiences across the undergraduate curriculum. Efforts to incorporate global learning in course content at home by globalizing or internationalizing the curricula are already underway at many institutions of higher education. This article offers a set of recommendations for educators wishing to globalize their courses by adopting an interdisciplinary approach to global learning specifically through the use of role-play simulations. As a problem-based pedagogy, role-play simulations are uniquely equipped to deliver interdisciplinary and global learning outcomes since both fields are explicitly geared towards practical problem-solving. It will be argued that an interdisciplinary approach to global learning through the use of role-play simulations offers a number of pedagogical advantages to traditional teaching techniques.

Keywords: interdisciplinary, global learning, role-play simulations

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INTRODUCTION

The “Confronting Globalization” simulation created by University of Maryland Technology Accelerators Project, presents an excellent opportunity to advance global learning through the adoption of an interdisciplinary approach. This article will present a critical examination of global learning through the use of classroom simulations. The purpose of this paper is twofold: 1) It will discuss the merits of utilizing classroom simulations as a method of achieving global learning outcomes, and 2) It will discuss the potential that the “Confronting Globalization” simulation has to deliver an interdisciplinary approach to global learning and the benefits of such an approach. Though the simulation as it is presently configured does not explicitly adopt an interdisciplinary approach, there is sufficient flexibility that with deliberate pedagogical choices by the instructor, it can be fruitfully converted into an interdisciplinary learning experience. The first section will provide a theoretical overview of the fields of interdisciplinary and global studies followed by a discussion of the simulation method as a useful means of imparting interdisciplinary and global learning outcomes. A concluding section will follow with a critical examination of the “Confronting Globalization” design informed by my experience conducting the simulation in the Global Studies program at Sacred Heart University. The article will suggest ways to adapt the “Confronting Globalization” simulation to deliver an interdisciplinary approach to global learning.

HIGH IMPACT PRACTICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The paradigm shift in higher education from teacher-centered to student-centered learning has been well underway since Barr and Tagg’s (1995) clarion call for the use of learning outcomes to drive curricular design. Twenty years later, the student-centered approach to learning has given rise to explicit practices aimed at deepening engagement both inside and outside the classroom extending beyond curriculum to embrace all facets of university life. This has fostered a wide range of instructional modalities designed to promote the active participation of students as co-creators of their own educational experiences.

A pioneering effort to further delineate student-centered learning was Kuh’s (2008) paper outlining specific high-impact practices such as first year seminars, learning communities, service learning, collaborative projects, and global learning. Such pedagogies seek to provide opportunities to promote deep learning through students’ active engagement, considerable effort expended on tasks, use of collaboration and team work, and the opportunity to reflect on knowledge. Moreover, these are viewed as diverse methods to achieve the learning outcomes articulated by the *National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP)*. Among their recommendations for 21st century learning in a “new global century” are 1) knowledge of human culture and the physical and natural worlds, 2) intellectual and practical skills, 3) personal and social responsibility, and 4) integrative and applied learning. (LEAP, 2007, p. 22) Education is approached not solely as a process restricted to the confines of the classroom. Rather through the adoption of high-impact practices, the goal is to permeate a student’s entire academic experience through heightened interactions with faculty and peers in a variety of settings. Beyond their intrinsic value in enriching student education through tangible gains in the form of higher grade point averages, high impact practices are also believed to be beneficial from an institutional standpoint by increasing student retention. (National Survey of Student Engagement, http://nsse.iub.edu/html/high_impact_practices.cfm). These practices have

begun to receive attention in empirical research with preliminary data demonstrating positive gains in student learning and retention.

Global Learning as High-Impact Practice

Global learning is one high-impact practice that is believed to confer a number of significant benefits on student learners. According to Kuh (2008) it allows students to “explore cultures, worldviews, and life experiences different from their own.” (<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>). In addition to developing empathy for and knowledge of differences, global learning also imparts other academic skills such as critical thinking, analysis, synthesis of ideas and other habits of mind deemed a valuable part of a well-rounded undergraduate education. Given the positive attributes associated with global learning it is not surprising that: “Many institutions are making global learning a signature component of liberal education and an example of a high-impact/high-effort educational practice.” (Hovland, 2010, p. 17)

Global learning can be defined as:

A critical analysis of and an engagement with complex, interdependent global systems and legacies (such as natural, physical, social, cultural, economic and political) and their implications for people’s lives and the earth’s sustainability. Through global learning students should: 1) become informed, open minded and responsible people who are attentive to diversity across the spectrum of differences, 2) seek to understand how their actions affect both local and global communities, and 3) address the world’s most pressing issues collaboratively and equitably. (<https://www.aacu.org/value/rubrics/global-learning>)

In addition, Hovland (2014), identifies a global learner as someone who:

Articulates their own values in the context of personal identities and recognizes potentially conflicting visions vis-a-vis complex social and civic problems; gains and applies deep knowledge of the differential effects of human organizations and actions on global systems; understands the interactions of multiple worldviews, experiences, histories, and power structures on an issue or set of issues; initiates meaningful interaction with people from other cultures in the context of a complex problem or opportunity; takes informed and responsible action to address ethical, social and environmental challenges; applies knowledge and skills gained through general education, the major and co-curricular experiences to address complex, contemporary global issues. (page 6)

With the increasing emphasis on global learning as part of the redesigned institutional mission of higher education, there will arguably be a need for a variety of global learning experiences across the curriculum. While study abroad is an obvious choice for fostering global learning outcomes, it is but one of several possible avenues to impart global learning. Efforts to incorporate global content in the curricula at home by globalizing or internationalizing the curricula are already underway at many institutions of higher education. (West, 2012) These

efforts revolve around revamping curricula to incorporate global content and providing professional development to educators as they undertake these new pedagogical approaches.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Learning

As a parallel development in higher education, interdisciplinary approaches have also been promoted as a method to prepare students for the 21st century. Klein and Newell (1997) offer the following definition:

Interdisciplinary studies is a process of answering a question, solving a problem, or addressing a topic that is too broad to be dealt with adequately by a single discipline or profession. ...It draws on disciplinary perspectives with the goal of integrating their insights through a more comprehensive perspective to construct a more comprehensive understanding. (p. 394)

Interdisciplinary and global studies were both begun with the intention of addressing complex problems such as global inequality, terrorism and global climate change among others. As Golding (2009) observes, these problems are more pliable when approached from the perspective of multiple disciplines.

There are various important but complex problems, phenomena, and concepts that resist understanding or resolution when approached from single disciplines. Climate change and world poverty are clear examples, but equally, a full understanding of identity, public health, human rights or knowledge can only be construed by applying multiple perspectives and ways of thinking.” (page 2)

Both fields cross disciplinary boundaries as they draw insights from history, politics, economics, international relations, anthropology, sociology and geography to address complex challenges. As a field of research and teaching, global studies emerged in the context of globalization during the 1990s when greater integration of economies, societies, and politics brought to the fore complex new problems. By leveraging insights from multiple disciplines through synthesis and integration of knowledge, global studies avoids the compartmentalization that has prevailed within the academy with its discrete academic disciplines focused on given problems. (Nissani, 1997, p. 203) Axford (2013) refers to as the “partitioning of social life” (p. 3). While discipline based approaches are important for focusing inquiry around a set methodologies and epistemologies that generate knowledge, the cautionary remark by Barrie reminds us that disciplinary knowledge can remain in silos if it is not in dialogue with other disciplines. Instead, he views it as an opportunity to “theorize globalization from across the social sciences.” (Axford, p. 2)

Integration of Knowledge

Interdisciplinary approaches both draw from and transcend disciplines through the work of integration. Scholars draw the distinction between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary by contending that it is not simply enough to utilize disciplines for their individual contributions but

rather to draw connections between the disciplines with the ultimate goal of creating new knowledge. Thus, Newell (2010) states:

The tasks of identifying connections among subsets, creating common ground, and integrating disciplinary insights into an understanding of the complex situation as a whole, however are left to interdisciplinary studies.
(<https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/educating-complex-world-integrative-learning-and-interdisciplinary>)

The integration piece is critical for bridging the gaps between disciplines and in the creation of new knowledge. In an earlier work, Newell (2003) describes this interdisciplinary dialogue as akin to shuttling back and forth between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches connoting a dynamic interplay between the two. Interdisciplinary approaches culminate in the work of integration which Repko (2008) has delineated into four techniques for finding commonalities between disciplines: redefinition, extension, organization and transformation.

Simulations as High Impact Learning Practice

Beyond their heightened ability to explore global challenges from multiple disciplines and modes of theoretical inquiry, Interdisciplinary and Global Studies share the overarching purpose of complex problem solving. This action orientation meshes well with the purpose of classroom simulations. As a problem-based pedagogy, simulations are an optimal way to deliver global learning and interdisciplinary outcomes. Experiential learning actively engages students in realistic situations in order to confront the complexities and choices involved in the real world.

Though not mentioned specifically in Kuh's typology of high impact learning practices, simulations incorporate nearly all of the same modalities such as team work and collaboration, active participation, and reflection. As such, they have the potential to be an effective classroom strategy for global and interdisciplinary learning. The beneficial impact on student learning outcomes through simulations has been amply documented in studies whose findings support the assertion that they promote greater awareness and insights into actual dilemmas and decisions faced by political leaders (Boyer and Smith), a greater appreciation of the complexity involved in global politics (Lantis, 1998) and an overall enhancement of student learning (Shellman and Kursad, 2006). In addition, "Simulations can provide motivation for students by offering competitive stakes beyond grades, such as peer recognitions and collaborative work environments as well as maximize outcomes by their full integration into the course." (Wedig, 2010)

The real world aspects of the dilemmas posed by simulations drive the learning process. The search for theoretical knowledge is in service to its application in resolving real world problems. By bridging theoretical knowledge to practical problem solving, simulations foster greater motivation for student centered learning. Students perceive the benefits as resulting in something that is actual and concrete. Beyond the practical problem solving skills they impart, simulations encompass many of the higher order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis and evaluation of knowledge for application to novel problems.

Simulations as a Means to Deliver Interdisciplinary and Global Learning

Classroom simulations provide a potentially useful vehicle to advance interdisciplinary and global learning that is potentially scalable across the curriculum. While classroom simulations have been used for nearly twenty years as part of International Relations courses, their inclusion in Global Studies curricula is a more recent development. Consequently, there is a paucity of literature that specifically addresses the impact of classroom simulations on global learning particularly the positive role they potentially play in modelling an interdisciplinary approach to learning.

“CONFRONTING GLOBALIZATION” SIMULATION

The International Communication and Negotiation Simulations or ICONS, based at the University of Maryland, has been in the forefront of developing classroom technology to foster student learning through the use of computer simulations. They offer an array of simulations on a range of topics in the areas of international relations and global studies. According to their website, the simulations are designed to “apply concepts and theories to real-world situations” and “build negotiation, critical thinking and collaboration skills”.

(ICONS, www.icons.umd.edu/education/what_we_do) The overarching purpose of the “*Confronting Globalization*” is to present students with specific challenges raised by globalization with the ultimate task of formulating an agenda of urgent issues for consideration by the international community in preparation for the United Nation’s sponsored “Year of Globalization” in 2017.

The simulation begins with an overview and a descriptive scenario that provides students with background on the economic, political, and environmental dimensions of globalization. Processes of globalization have brought to the fore many pressing global challenges. In the opening narrative on globalization, the economic dimension of globalization is framed as a worldwide economic process of integration that has engendered both immense wealth but also a highly uneven distribution of income. Part II of the scenario is headed “Politics” and addresses democracy and human rights around the world with a series of question prompts designed to probe student thinking and provide direction for further background research. Similarly, Part III examines global climate change with an overview of several dilemmas confronted by the global community such as sustainable development, depletion of the ozone layer and environmental degradation among others. This study will focus on the first two components of the simulation. Students are assigned to country teams and are given the task of developing a shared agenda of pressing global challenges to be addressed by the global community.

Redesigning the “Confronting Globalization” Simulation to Advance Interdisciplinary Learning

Though the simulation is not explicitly structured to advance interdisciplinary learning, with some deliberate pedagogical choices, it can be fruitfully converted into an opportunity to import insights from multiple disciplines towards addressing some of the globalization challenges presented in the scenario, namely global inequality and human rights. One recommendation is to reconfigure the scenario by leading with the question of global inequality/poverty as the overarching problem or issued to be addressed instead of placing

questions concerning global inequality under the heading of economics. An explicitly interdisciplinary approach would avoid the suggestion that the solution to global inequality lies solely from within the discipline of economics. Such a presentation of the issue may foreclose valuable insights that can be derived from other disciplinary perspectives. Economic models are undoubtedly important but a singular focus may discount the role of politics, geography, sociology, and culture as contributing factors to global inequality. These factors have been the subject of a lively scholarly debate between and within disciplines.

To aid instructors in this endeavor, there is an emerging scholarship that draws from multiple disciplines to tackle complex social phenomena. An excellent edited volume by Seligson and Passe-Smith, (2014) "Development and Underdevelopment: the Political Economy of Global Inequality" draws from leading scholars in the field of development which approach the problem of global inequality from an interdisciplinary perspective and could serve as a useful companion book to the simulation. In addition, the textbook would familiarize students with the general approach taken by various disciplines with their dominant theories in addressing phenomenon. One of the few textbooks to introduce student to the various disciplines as groundwork for interdisciplinary learning is the edited volume by Anderson, et al. (2013) "International Studies: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Global Studies." This text provides an overview of the dominant approaches to knowledge that each discipline takes as it confronts global issues and could serve as a primer.

Economic Globalization and Global Income Inequality

The starting point for student inquiry begins with a series of questions presented under the existing heading "economic development" to spur thinking and exploration on the topic of economic globalization such as:

Table 1**“Confronting Globalization” – Economic Development Questions**

Is there a global interest in ensuring that all nations reach at least some minimum level of economic development?” If so, what would that level be and what measures can be taken to reach this level?

Can the gap between the haves and have-nots be narrowed in the global economy?

Can the gap between Old and New be overcome by individual nations, or will the existing economy stratification continue to shape the world? Agency and individual nations, the two are not mutually exclusive, even if the economy is stratified they can take actions to overcome it?

If not, do rich nations have any direct responsibility to alleviate the most severe effects of poverty, or should poor nations attempt to solve their problems through market-based solutions?” (“Confronting Globalization” Scenario, p. 6)

Excerpt from: University of Maryland, Technology Accelerators Project, International Communication and Negotiation Simulations, “Confronting Globalization” simulation, <http://www.icons.umd.edu/education/simulations/catalog/confronting-globalization>

Embedded in these questions are a series of normative and empirical questions which serve as a starting point for student inquiry. The presentation of the issues as open ended questions in a dialectical manner absent explicit normative commitments, permits students to explore the questions by considering multiple viewpoints particularly important given the highly contentious debates that globalization has provoked among scholars and practitioners. As students conduct research, the intention is for them to develop a worldview on global challenges. Advancing beyond an individual viewpoint, they must then approach the questions from the vantage point of the countries they will represent in the role-playing exercise. Finally, the question prompts also foreshadows some of the inherent tensions between centralized and decentralized approaches to the resolution of these issues as global governance institutions attempt to address common challenges.

A Gap by Any Other Name: Global Inequality Versus Global Poverty

In the opening narrative and question prompts, the simulation employs the term “gap” to characterize global inequality. The subject of global inequality or the gap between the haves and the have-nots, is at the forefront of a scholarly debate that has received increasing attention particularly during the recent global recession whose far reaching impact underscored the urgency of addressing this complex challenge. Books such as Piketty’s “The History of Capitalism” (2014) has brought discussions to the mainstream as industrialized and developing countries alike grapple with the question of inequality. While global poverty between and within

nations has received prominent attention on the global agenda as seen in the United Nations Millenium Development Goals, global income inequality or the disparity in incomes between rich and poor nations, is part of the emerging debate. By choosing to focus on global inequality as opposed to global poverty, the simulation mirrors recent trends in the global community to reframe the question of economic development as one of global inequality. The income inequality debate focuses on wealth as a relative measure while global poverty views underdevelopment as an absolute measure (Passe-Smith, page 17). This distinction is consequential in terms of the resolutions sought to the problem. Presenting some of these distinctions to students would be useful as they contemplate what actions they will take collectively to ameliorate inequality.

It would be beneficial for students to provide background information on recent efforts by the United Nations to tackle the issue of global poverty. For instance, UN Millenium Development Goals targeted poverty reduction. While absolute poverty has declined worldwide, global income inequality has risen exponentially. Thus, the focus on the latter is an important distinction not only as an empirical question but also as a point of contention for debate as the global community grapples with whether the issue ought to be taken up by the UN and if so, to what extent is global income inequality amenable to resolution through international public policy. This section will present some recommendations for instructors to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach to the simulation drawing from economics, political science, geography, anthropology, and sociology in an attempt to explore the underlying causes of the global income gap.

Minding the Gap: Social Scientific Inquiry As Prelude to Action

Before attempting to forge solutions to the problem of global inequality, students would be well served by understanding the broader conceptual and methodological issues underlying the study of economic globalization. This would be a useful teaching moment to model the role of social scientific research in addressing pressing global challenges as well as an instance where there is scholarly disagreement over definitional and methodological issues surrounding causation of complex phenomena. Economists in particular have parried over how the gap is measured, whether to consider the absolute gap versus the relative gap (Passe-Smith, 2014 p. 17), whether to look at total population size or use each nation as a unit of comparison (Firebaugh, 1999, p. 41) and finally, when did the gap begin to appear historically and is it getting better or worse? (Maddison, 2001, p. 41) These distinctions will figure prominently in terms of how issues are framed for consideration and the role of social scientific data when the simulation culminates in a negotiation to resolve the global inequality/poverty dilemma.

What Causes the Global Income Equality Gap?

After laying the groundwork by broadly understanding the empirical questions involved in measuring the income gap, students would proceed to the core research question which is to understand the underlying causes of the gap. This is where the bulk of the interdisciplinary focus would come into play through an exploration of questions that have vexed a multitude of scholars: Why are some nations rich and others are poor? Is poverty a result of poor economic decisions, faulty political leadership and institutions, culture, geography, or some other factor?

Framing the question in terms of how each discipline contributes to an understanding of global inequality would advance the goal of interdisciplinary learning.

Global Inequality: A Political Economy Approach

Underlying the problem of global inequality are a series of empirical questions regarding the political economy of development which aim to address questions of underdevelopment. Since questions of global inequality are rooted in national economies, it would be critical to impart an understanding of the political economy of development and underdevelopment. A political economy approach is indispensable to this effort. The perceived shortcomings of a solitary focus on either economic or political approaches to the problems of development led to the emergence of this interdisciplinary field. This mode of inquiry seeks to better understand the causal factors that contribute to disparities in economic development among nations. Political economists consider the role of national political leaders in terms of collective action, how political institutions structure decisions, and political market imperfections (Keefer, 2004). As is often the case, political decision makers can be held captive by rent seeking interest groups and make decisions that are not in the best interests of advancing the nation's economic development but rather instead serve the narrow interests of elites.

Invariably debates about the impact of globalization lead to discussions about the differential impact it has on individual nations with some poised to do well while others fare poorly.

How individual countries fare in terms of globalization varies and is contingent upon a number of factors and attributes of states such as independence, authority and capacity (Badie and Birnbaum, 2013, p. 134). Scholars who approach globalization from a neoliberal paradigm have reached the conclusion that whether states fare well in a new globalized economy depends on a number of factors including the extent to which a state invests in technology, infrastructure and education in order to be poised to reap the benefits of economic globalization. Marxist and dependency approaches would counter with the assertion that the industrialized nations have set up the international system to the disadvantage of poorer countries (Gunder Frank, 1963). This theory holds that inequalities are rooted in the structure of international economic relations. Students can explore these divergent approaches rooted in political economy to apply them to the countries they represent in the simulation.

The Institutional Gap

Like their political economy counterparts, the institutionalism school within economics, also considers political institutions central in terms of affecting development outcomes particularly economic growth. According to Douglas North (1990) domestic institutions matter because they structure political decisions that affect distribution of incomes in a given country. Some scholars trace the inequality gap back to colonial times when colonial powers utilized their colonies for wealth extraction instead of establishing property rights. The primary difference between developed and underdeveloped nations according to institutionalism is the extent to which colonial institutions fostered individual property rights, local development and created checks on governmental power (Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson, 2001). In many instances, power in contemporary developing societies is held by political elites who deny basic political

and economic rights (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2012). According to this theory, the key to economic growth is the expansion of political rights.

Culture Gap

An important dimension for students to explore is the relationship between culture and economic development. Cultural anthropologists have entered the debate on global poverty by raising questions concerning how attitudes and values prevalent in given cultures influence the prospects for economic development and growth. For these scholars certain attitudes and values are inimical to economic development while others stimulate growth. For a certain time period cultural explanations fell into disfavor due to the perceived Western-centric framework for analysis and for imposing a model of economic development. Exemplified by modernization theory which was largely drawn from the Western experience, this approach posited that all countries would follow the same path to economic development by passing through sequential stages from traditional to modern societies (Rostow, 1960). Since then, there has been a resurgence of scholarship in this area which is now underpinned by empirical data that demonstrates the relationship of values in contributing to economic development. (Harrison and Huntington, 2000) While modernization theory presupposed that countries must shed traditional values in order to achieve economic development this view has been supplanted by a more nuanced approach that which acknowledges some traditional values can coexist with other values beneficial to development such as entrepreneurialism and the achievement motivation (McClelland).

Geography

For geographers, a country's position in a given region of the world (North versus South, tropical versus temperate zone, etc.) is the major factor in determining the extent to which it will achieve a favorable state of economic development. One of the most vigorous debates pitted scholars in the institutional camp against scholars who attribute geography as the key factor in economic development. According to this view, even if institutions are well designed and cultural values are conducive to growth, a poor climate is difficult to surmount. Jared Diamond author of "Collapse: How Societies Choose to Succeed or Fail" (2011) is a prime example of scholarship explaining the geographical basis for development. Students would consider how geographic location and climate affect a country's prospects for growth.

After students have gained an interdisciplinary understanding of the causal factors that contribute to global poverty/inequality, they would proceed to explore potential solutions to addressing the problem. At this juncture, it should be apparent to students that each discipline has a dominant mode of inquiry and preferred theories for explaining economic underdevelopment and that the extent to which each factor comes into play will depend on the country in question. While each discipline asserts the primacy of its own theories, an interdisciplinary approach acknowledges the multi-causal nature of most social phenomena. Thus an emergent picture of the problem begins to take shape in which each several disciplines contributes a piece to the scholarly puzzle.

Closing the Gap: Approaches to Economic Development

After students have researched the causes of economic underdevelopment from a variety of disciplines, they would then proceed to discuss concrete measures to ameliorate the disparities in economic development. Since the simulation is ultimately about taking action, students would forge a consensus around common approaches to problem solving. These would stem from an informed understanding of the various theories and models of economic development. For instance, the first question prompt in the “Confronting Globalization” scenario which asks whether global inequality should be addressed by some minimum level of economic development hints at redistributive policies which are rooted in notions of justice and fairness while the reference to market-based approaches is suggestive of neoliberal approaches rooted in classical liberalism which give primacy to individual rights.

Developing a nation’s economy and fostering material well-being is the focal point of development policy. At this juncture, students should attain a basic understanding of the contending approaches to economic development. First and foremost, an appreciation of how development economics is situated in the broader historical context of post-World War II and the reconstruction efforts which eventually gave way to a focus on the developing world would provide important contextual background information. The debate pits those who envision a robust role for the state to guide development and offset disparities wrought by capitalism versus those who view market economies as self-regulating. Neoliberal economics has been the reigning orthodoxy during globalization however other viewpoints have emerged to question the ability of the model to deliver benefits more widely. Foremost in their inquiry are questions that have enlivened debates concerning which approach is best in fostering economic development, the extent to which foreign aid is effective, and the historical role that international institutions played in contributing to social and economic development.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

The next section of the simulation considers political questions which are further divided into three subsections that include 1) human rights 2) women, children and indigenous peoples and 3) intervention and democracy.

Table 2**“Confronting Globalization” Negotiation Simulation – Human Rights Questions**

Is there a single definition of human rights that encompasses all people yet respects the range of cultural, religious, and social variations among the nations of the earth?

Are some human rights so important that they should be enforced by the international community even if nations object?

Can cultural and religious limits related to the role of women be reconciled with an international standard on women’s rights?

Excerpt from: University of Maryland, Technology Accelerators Project, International Communication and Negotiation Simulations, “Confronting Globalization” simulation, <http://www.icons.umd.edu/education/simulations/catalog/confronting-globalization>,

Much like the preceding discussion which argues in favor of an interdisciplinary approach, relegating human rights solely to the political sphere presupposes that they occupy an autonomous space unrelated to economic development. The placement of human rights in a separate category neglects the rich insights that could be drawn from an interdisciplinary focus. When viewed from an interdisciplinary perspective, human rights can contribute to a fuller understanding of economic development. Amaryta Sen’s Nobel-prize winning book “Development as Freedom” (2000) underscores the pivotal role that freedom plays in a nation’s economy. Sen posits that when human beings are afforded the full panoply of human rights, including economic freedom, economies tend to grow. The two are inextricably bound together in theory and in practice. Thus a possible policy solution to global inequality might be one that considers that state of political development and the extent to which human rights are enjoyed in given societies. The exploration of cultural values in developing countries may further elucidate for students the linkage particularly in the area of women, human rights and economic development.

An example of this interdependent relationship is captured by Mingst and Arreguin-Toft (2014): “Economic conditions also influence a country’s adherence to human rights standards. Poor states or states experiencing deteriorating economic conditions are apt to repress political-civil rights, in an effort by the elite to maintain authority and divert attention from economic disintegration.” (p. 362). An interdisciplinary approach to global inequality would further shed light on these relationships and inform policy choices that take a multifaceted approach to the question of global inequality.

CLOSING THE POVERTY/INEQUALITY GAP THROUGH GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Ultimately, all of this background research culminates in concrete choices made during the negotiation simulation which includes the following countries: UK, Mexico, Russia, Nigeria, Iran, and China. From my experience conducting the simulation in my Global Studies course, as students attempted to reach an agreement on a global agenda for the “Year of Globalization

2017”, most country teams resorted to bilateral agreements with individual nations based on trade and economic development agreements. Despite numerous promptings from the instructor to think in more global and collective terms, students reverted to approaching the issues from the vantage point of their individual nation-states. This behavior is well anticipated by the International Relations simulation literature (Salen and Zimmerman, 2004) which posits that students role-playing behavior mirrors that of actual nation-states as self-interested rational actors that seek to maximize their nation’s interest. This view runs counter to the globalization literature which holds that nations can transcend national interests in favor of collective action to deal with common worldwide challenges. The students’ embrace of realism would provide a teaching moment to advance discussions of collective action dilemmas. Efforts to overcome collective action dilemmas present some of the most difficult roadblocks to the resolution of global challenges. Theories that attempt to address collective action dilemmas therefore present a potentially fruitful overarching approach and potential way to bridge the disciplines providing the foundation for a pedagogy of integration in the “Confronting Globalization” simulation. The point of integration comes at the level of institutions and their efforts to address social dilemmas through collective action.

Transcending the State: The Role of International Governmental Organizations

The main objective of the simulation is to develop an agenda of pressing issues for consideration and action by the global community under the auspices of the UN. Here a discussion of global governance arrangements would provide useful background information for students to understand the role of international organizations, the reason for their emergence and their potential efficacy as arenas for global decision making. Thakur and Weiss (2015) define global governance as:

Collective problem solving arrangements for challenges and threats that are beyond the capacity of a single state to address. Both formal and informal such arrangements provide more order and stability for the world than would occur naturally.”(p. 29)

International governmental organizations provide an arena for global decision making to address common challenges. Since membership is comprised of individual national states who face myriad constraints in forging international agreements, these organizations can assist nations by facilitating agreements on the one hand but also serve as constraints as well.

But IGOs also constrain member states by setting international and hence national agendas and forcing governments to make decisions; by encouraging states to develop specialized decision making and implementing processes to facilitate and coordinate IGO participation; and by creating principles, norms, and rules of behavior with which states must align their policies if they wish to benefit from their membership. Both large and small states are subject to such constraints. (Mingst and Arreguin-Toft, p. 207).

International organizations such as the United Nations are in a position for providing member nations with a forum for resolving challenges but the extent to which they avail themselves of this mechanism will depend on a host of other factors that emanate from their

individual nation-states and domestic political actors that may run counter to collective approaches. Overcoming these dilemmas poses a special problem in the resolution of global challenges. The next section will discuss two possible ways that collective action dilemmas be overcome: the role of international non-governmental or transnational actors in advocating global causes and the structuring of incentives within international government organizations to break the stalemate that often results in attempts to forge global agreements. Both of these aspects could be applied to the “Confronting Globalization” simulation as students explore some of the stumbling blocks to cooperation.

Transcending the State: The Role of International Non-governmental Actors

Another highly salient feature of the current international environment is the proliferation of non-governmental organizations particularly transnational actors whose advocacy of various issues plays an increasingly important role in setting the global agenda. (Keck and Sikkink, 1998) NGO's through their advocacy efforts raise awareness of issues and press for their placement on the government agenda. Oftentimes, nation-states themselves may overlook an issue until it is brought to their attention by these groups as they frame issues for consideration. The emergence of civil society has challenged the primacy of the nation-state as international actor and through their advocacy have moved some issues onto the global agenda that had previously been neglected. (Joachim, 2007)

As noted earlier, despite efforts to create a distinctly global politics in theory and practice, nation-states continue to be the touchstones of international relations. One way to overcome collective action dilemmas faced by students in the negotiation portion of the simulation would be to give non-governmental and other transnational groups a prominent role in setting the global agenda. The inclusion of this transnational component would be another way to maximize the simulation to advance interdisciplinary learning since non-governmental organizations arose within civil society to offset some of the power asymmetries in international relations.

Agenda Setting and International Public Policy

The agenda setting literature in public policy is highly relevant to international organizations in setting global public policy. Kingdon's (1997) seminal work in agenda setting revealed the political nature of how agendas are formulated and which issues are deemed worthy of public attention. Agenda setting is characterized as a political struggle as issues vie for recognition and a place on the agenda. Instrumental to this process is the role of issue framing and problem definition. The ability of some issues to emerge as problems to be dealt with by government officials while others languish is due to the pivotal role of policy entrepreneurs who successfully advocate for their causes. For instance, in the wake of the United Nations Millenium Goal agenda which was developed by member nations for achievement by 2015, the UN is in the process of developing a successor agenda for the “Year of Globalization 2017”. Several transnational organizations are in the process of advocating for the inclusion of global inequality on the agenda. The extent to which they are successful will depend on the effectiveness of issue advocacy and lobbying of member-nations.

Towards A Pedagogy of Integration:

A leading scholar of Interdisciplinary Studies, Elinor Ostrom (2007) observed that answers to global challenges may find their convergence in theories of collective action which lay at the intersection of the disciplines of economics, politics and sociology. Collective action holds that individuals and groups work together to achieve some common goal or objective. Public goods such as economic development and the environment are examples of public goods. Oftentimes, attempts to collectively solve a common problem fail and hinder the provision of public goods. The problem is further compounded when the social dilemma is of global proportions. Nevertheless there are instances when collective action dilemmas can be overcome by the assistance of transnational organizations and the design of institutions that structure how decisions are made and the incentives for political actors to cooperate. (Sandler, 2010)

Collective action dilemmas frequently arise over the provision of public goods. Solution to global challenges require coordinated approaches yet it is the very nature of collective decision making that contributes to its failure. Mancur Olsen's book *The Logic of Collective Action* (1971) elucidates the core problem by advancing the concept of the free rider problem. When a large number of actors face a collective decision to solve a given problem such as providing a clean environment or economic aid to developing countries to ameliorate global inequality, they can benefit from the given action whether or not they have contributed to its provision. Overcoming the free rider problem can be achieved by structuring the incentives for cooperation. Oftentimes political actors fail to reach agreements without resorting to side bargains and concessions to break through the logjam and the dilemmas of collective action. Some scholars have discussed the creation of institutional incentives that anticipate these dilemmas by institutionalizing and incentivizing international agreements. Other have suggested a reform of institutions to offset the disproportionate weight enjoyed by industrialized nations in terms of voting.

Pedagogical Insights

Instructors face myriad pedagogical choices instructors when conducting simulations in their classrooms. Chief among these are the timing for introduction of issues, deciding which issues should be assigned to the background, the foreground or to the debriefing portion of the simulation. These questions underlie the inherent difficulty in deciding whether to proactively guide students in a given direction or to allow the simulation to unfold in a more organic fashion. To what extent should the instructor foreshadow problems related to collective decision making? How much awareness of the inherent difficulties in forging international agreements due to problems of collective action as anticipated in the political economy literature should be done in the background research as opposed to the debriefing portion of the simulation? If we foreground too many issues the students run the risk of information overload. On the other hand, if the instructor is too emphatic that an agreement be reached, this forecloses some of the hard lessons that occur when negotiations may result in a stalemate as they oftentimes do in the real world of international negotiation.

CONCLUSION

The growing interdependence and integration of politics, markets, and society through processes of globalization has given rise to complex global challenges. Global inequality, climate change, human rights among others are arguably too complex to resolve either by singular disciplinary efforts or from state-centric approaches. This article has argued that an interdisciplinary approach to complex global problems can yield greater insights into global challenges and point the way towards possible solutions. Moreover, an interdisciplinary approach would draw out the connections between issue areas such as economic development and human rights.

The adoption of an interdisciplinary approach to the “Confronting Globalization” simulation has a number of distinct pedagogical advantages. Students will gain deeper insights from each of the various disciplines as they contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the problems. This mirrors well with the complexity faced by decision makers in international settings and the weighing and evaluating of social scientific data. Beyond the theoretical benefits of interdisciplinary approaches, students gain practical skills by simulating the complexity of real world decision making that is rife with competing interests of nations with their varying interests, economic development levels and divergent goals.

Though this article has vigorously argued for an interdisciplinary approach, for candor’s sake it bears mentioning that there are some drawbacks. The main shortcoming of an interdisciplinary approach is the amount of time and research it entails as students approach complex questions from the vantage point of several disciplines with their divergent theoretical approaches. If such theoretical inquiry is not carefully tailored and targeted to the questions at hand, it may lead to information overload and defeat the purpose of interdisciplinary inquiry. However, if the simulation is embedded in a larger course on global challenges, this can be more easily accommodated as the instructor can broach these theoretical modes of inquiry early in the semester.

Despite advancement in theory building among globalization scholars in their efforts to transcend disciplinary and national boundaries, there is a strong centripetal pull back to nation-states as the touchstones for understanding inequality and human rights. The tendency for students to revert back to national interests may truly reflect reality. Both theory and practice seem to suggest these inertial tendencies to revert back to a state-centric approach is a powerful counterweight that has proven resistant to the centralizing efforts of global governance institutions.

For those wishing to heed the call of global learning for the 21st century, this article lays out a possible pathway for pedagogy using the existing “Confronting Globalization” simulation to foster interdisciplinary and global learning. Despite the obstacles, the real take away from the simulation may not be solely measured in terms of achieving agreements at the outcome of the negotiation but rather a more nuanced understanding of complex global problems. As for the concrete take away, students will learn that social science and global politics are both messy and complicated but well worth the effort.

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