TEACHING AND TRAINING

evaluating the model united nations: diplomatic simulation as assessed undergraduate coursework

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Abstract

Increasingly, simulation-based teaching and learning is finding a place within politics and international relations (IR) programmes. The majority of literature on this style of teaching and learning has positioned it as both an aid to content delivery and as a response to the many challenges facing contemporary higher education. Little guidance is given, however, to the practical considerations of using simulations as a component of assessment or as informing assessed tasks. This article draws upon the experience of the authors in adapting the well-established Model United Nations (MUN) simulation programme for delivery as an assessed module at a British university. This has involved balancing institutional teaching, assessment and validation requirements with the successful simulation of diplomatic practice. The article introduces the MUN simulation and explores the extant pedagogic literature encouraging the use of simulation-based learning in IR curricula, before moving on to provide an overview of the rationale for the various decisions the authors have made in adapting the simulation for delivery as an assessed curriculum component. The article asserts the value of introducing assessed simulations within IR coursework and provides guidance on how student performance in pedagogic simulations might best be assessed.

Keywords Model United Nations; simulation; pedagogy; assessment; higher education

Educative simulation of the work of intergovernmental organisations has a long pedigree. In the United States (perhaps the first nation to embrace such forms of experiential student learning), this can be traced back as far as the 1920s. Buoyed by a spirit of cooperative internationalism, intercollegiate simulations of the work of the Council and Assembly of the League of Nations emerged as popular and successful ways of developing student awareness and knowledge about international politics and issues (Kuehl and Dunn, 1997: 70–71).

The history of the Model United Nations (MUN) programme can be said to parallel that of the United Nations (UN) organisation itself. The first recorded instance of a MUN simulation (as distinct from a Model League of Nations) was in March 1947, less than 18 months after the UN itself came into existence in 24 October 1945 (Muldoon, 1995: 28). The liberal institutionalist spirit of the post-World War II years, the growth in the membership and global relevance of the UN after the widespread decolonisation of the 1960s and the shifts in global power accompanying the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union all provided motivation for educators and students to embrace the MUN simulation as a way of teaching and learning about transnational issues, global governance and diplomacy (Muldoon, 1995: 28).

Building on this historical legacy, the MUN simulation today is a global phenomenon, delivered at almost all levels of teaching and learning, from primary and secondary schools and colleges through to undergraduate and postgraduate university settings. According to the UN Association of the United States, over 400,000 students worldwide participate in a MUN simulation each year, and over half a million Americans have participated in the MUN programme at some point during their lives (United Nations

Association of the United States of America, 2012a,b).

MUN blends case-based instruction and investigation with role play-based identification and exploration of contemporary transnational issues (McIntosh, 2001: 270–271). It is best understood as an operational simulation. MUN seeks to simulate the work of an actually existing body and uses role descriptions and expectations for participants derived from those of the UN itself. It further encourages participants to engage with contemporary or historical events or issues of importance to the UN system (Muldoon, 1995: 28). At the university level, international relations (IR) programmes and academics often play key roles in facilitating or providing academic context and support for such conferences; however, these are most often *not* part of the formal curriculum.

Conference participants are allocated specific roles as representatives of the UN member states or UN observer states/bodies. After researching their allocated countries, identifying key transnational and diplomatic issues of concern for that country and preparing policy documents and draft resolutions, students are taught the rules of parliamentary-style debating procedure and familiarised with the practices of diplomacy and public speaking. They then participate in a (necessarily and strategically condensed) simulation of the work of existing UN bodies such as the Security Council, the General Assembly or the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) (Phillips and Muldoon, 1996: 142). The simulation event itself is usually referred to as a ‘conference’, due to the concurrent or iterated nature of the many sessions that comprise the event, as well as the extensive preparation required on the part of both event organisers and participants. Significant guidance is available on the practical mechanics of organising a successful conference simulation and in supporting

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student learning activity in the lead up to that conference (Endless and Wolfe, 2003). National UN associations provide a wealth of resources to support MUN programmes within their countries (United Nations Association of the United Kingdom, 2012; United Nations Association of the United States of America, 2002, 2012c), and the UN itself offers a range of MUN resources through its CyberSchoolbus website and other publications (Barrs and Juffkins, 1995).

MUN simulations variously take place in teacher-led classrooms and courses, in faculty-facilitated co-curricular contexts, as well as in student-run extra-curricular activities. The range of MUN simulations on offer worldwide encompasses short duration in-class events, semester- and year-long programmes, and even major residential conferences bringing together hundreds (in some cases thousands) of participants from across nations, regions or the world. This is testament to the flexibility of the MUN simulation framework and its suitability for delivery in a

variety of contexts and at a wide range of learning levels.

The MUN simulation has grown in popularity in Europe, especially since the end of the Cold War (Deutsche Gesellschaft für die Vereinten Nationen, 2001). The oldest university-based simulation in Europe is The European International Model United Nations, which was established in the Hague in 1987 by American exchange students (Lycée Franco-Hellénique Eugène Delacroix, 2010). However, the available scholarly literature on the organisation, running and pedagogic benefits of the MUN predominantly reflects American experiences and American educational settings (McIntosh, 2001; Muldoon, 1995; Phillips and Muldoon, 1996). This is despite the strong research into student-centred pedagogy and student ownership of the learning process that has emerged from European academe in the last few decades (Craig and Hale, 2008; Hale, 2005; Kaunert, 2009). As a result, there is a need to supplement the extant literature on the MUN simulation with

analysis and discussion of the specific delivery contexts of European higher education. One key area in which additional research and analysis is required is that of evaluating student performance in an equitable manner and in accordance with institutional, national and European policies and expectations. As Bengtson and Sifferd (2010: 71) have stated: 'little has been written about how to properly assess students when learning is based upon simulation'. More significantly, where guidance does exist, it primarily addresses the requirements and nature of North American higher education settings, which can be less applicable in European or Commonwealth environments.

This article seeks to contribute to the discussion on assessing simulation work by drawing upon the experience of the authors in adapting the MUN simulation programme as a formally assessed, core module for students on the IR and Politics degrees at the University of Lincoln, the United Kingdom. This experience has involved balancing teaching, assessment and institutional validation requirements while drawing upon (and in some cases modifying) aspects of an existing, well-established, educative simulation programme. The decision to develop a version of the MUN as an assessed module is a highly distinctive feature of Lincoln's IR programme and a departure from the usual delivery of MUN as a co-curricular or extra-curricular activity at other institutions worldwide.

SIMULATION IN IR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Considerable research exists on the desirability of broadening the range of teaching, learning and assessment methods in politics and IR (Hale, 2005; Ralph *et al*, 2010; Simpson and Kaussler, 2009). Driving this concern is an awareness that students acquire skills and

knowledge in various ways and that curricula and teaching practice should be designed to reflect this (Kolb, 1984, 1985). Fox and Ronkowski (1997) draw on these insights to examine the learning styles of political science students. They conclude that political science students learn in a diverse range of ways, yet social science disciplines continue to largely rely on traditional teaching methods such as lectures and seminars. Their conclusions highlight a consequent need for teaching methods to more fully reflect the diversity of learning styles among political science students, positing that 'matching instruction to learning styles of students in at least a portion of classes can increase student sense of belonging within a particular course, discipline and institution' (1997: 736) with potentially significant implications for knowledge and skills development, confidence building and student retention.

Recognition of the value of utilising more diverse teaching methods alongside the more orthodox lecture/seminar style delivery also reflects, at least in part, the increasing emphasis in European higher education on the need to develop vocational skills among the student body and generate additional income (Hale, 2006). As Simon Rofo (2010: 114) notes, 'the context of learning has changed; its purpose in society, its funding and support have shifted, while student profiles are increasingly diverse across HE [higher education]'.

Sarah Hale (2005) has surveyed the use of case- or problem-based learning and its applicability to the teaching of politics. She highlights the relatively more extensive adoption of this approach within US institutions and the desirability of embedding such practices in European universities. Hale defines case- or problem-based learning as entailing the provision of a written scenario or case, the allocation of particular roles to students and requiring their collaborative

efforts to approach the problem and recommend a decision (Hale, 2006). Previously used more widely in vocational areas outside the social sciences (in particular within medicine and business), the applicability of this approach to teaching and learning within politics, with its traditional emphasis on active debate and discussion is now clearly recognised:

case based learning is an innovative teaching method that has a great deal to offer tutors and students in the social sciences, including increased inclusivity, deep learning, better retention of knowledge, development of critical and analytical skills, greater student interest and the development of key employability skills. (Hale, 2006: 85)

Christian Kaunert (2009) recounts using problem-based learning (PBL) to stimulate student enthusiasm and interest in learning about the European Union in an 'EU simulation' module. He maintains that 'the main focus of PBL is to generate students who are independent, enterprising problem solvers' (Kaunert, 2009: 255) highlighting that, rather than just 'surface learning' in students, PBL encourages 'deep learning' (Biggs and Tang, 2007; Williams, 1992). Kaunert's experience with PBL was applied to the design of the EU simulation module, with the result that students' experience of decision making and negotiation on this module produced strong levels of student enthusiasm, good levels of preparation and engagement with some aspects of the literature. Kaunert's discussion also mentions some of the more challenging aspects of PBL for teaching staff, highlighting the labour-intensive nature of organising and delivering PBL and the need for continuous monitoring of student activity.

Writing specifically on IR courses, Weir and Baranowski (2011) emphasise the importance of simulations in promoting active learning and as a means of

'... it is a compulsory module for IR students'.

facilitating students' ability to consider international politics from non-western perspectives. Newmann and Twigg further argue that simulations enable students to experience and more fully understand theories, issues and concepts within IR. The authors assert that 'the simulation format provides students a better framework than do lecture notes for long term retention of important IR concepts' (Newmann and Twigg, 2000: 835). There appears to be broad consensus among the pedagogic literature about the *value* of the MUN in scaffolding student awareness of global affairs and the politics of international organisation and about the key *skills* students develop from participation (negotiation, debating, public speaking, parliamentary procedure etc.) (Hazleton and Jacob, 1983; Karns, 1980; Phillips and Muldoon, 1996). Simpson and Kaussler (2009) highlight the role of simulations in the development of key communication and analytical skills among students and the conveyance of empirical, issue-based knowledge and theoretical understanding. They suggest that:

the interdisciplinary nature of IR means that it can be a complex and difficult subject to study By using simulations, role play scenarios and film, many aspects of IR including theory can be conveyed in a manner that students can more readily assimilate. (Simpson and Kaussler, 2009: 427)

ADAPTING THE MUN SIMULATION FOR A BRITISH IR CLASSROOM

The literature encouraging adoption of the simulation model in IR teaching and learning, alongside institutional and national priorities regarding the fostering

of research, knowledge production and problem-solving skills among British undergraduates (Healey and Jenkins, 2009; Neary and Winn, 2009) informed the authors' 2008 choice to introduce a version of the MUN simulation to the School of Social and Political Sciences' undergraduate programmes at the University of Lincoln. Since this time, MUN has formed a compulsory part of the second-year assessed programme of the BA (Hons) IR degree. It is also open to enrolment by second-year students studying other degrees within the school (sizeable enrolments come from Politics, Criminology and Social Policy) and to international exchange and ERASMUS students studying at Lincoln.

The MUN simulation, as it has been conceived and delivered at the University of Lincoln, is distinctive for several reasons. Most obviously, this is because MUN at Lincoln forms a core component of degree-level assessment. As a second-year module, students' assessed performance contributes to their overall degree classification. The Lincoln MUN is also distinctive for the fact that it is a compulsory module for IR students. This indicates the seriousness with which the teaching staff, the school and the institution regard the simulation as a vehicle for active learning, problem-solving and research-engaged teaching. Approaching the MUN in this way – as a central part of assessed student work rather than as an extra-curricular and non-assessed activity – has necessitated a balancing of the teaching, assessment and validation requirements of a British undergraduate degree with the successful simulation of diplomatic practice. Importantly, it also requires attention to that question posed by Bengtson and Sifferd (2010: 71): 'How can instructors be fair to individual students in the assessment process when the entire course is simulation based?' Accordingly, the module development process for the Lincoln MUN has placed a higher

'... culminating in a day-long simulation of the General Assembly and two of its committees'.

emphasis on the nature and timing of assessment tasks than is usual in more conventional modules. The module is structured around assessment tasks at key stages that are designed to signpost individual students' learning progression as well as culminate in a successful simulation event.

The Lincoln MUN comprises a single-semester programme culminating in a day-long simulation of the General Assembly and two of its committees (the committees simulated vary from year to year depending on the issues under debate). Preference has been given to simulating the General Assembly due to its one-country, one-vote nature and the range of issues and viewpoints available for discussion. Given relatively small and fluctuating class sizes, not all 193 member states of the UN are represented; students are allocated their countries by teaching staff in a way that maintains the proportional voting balance of the UN's regional blocs. To ameliorate any unfair advantage in preparation and performance, students are not permitted to represent a country of which they are a citizen, and the United Kingdom is not represented within the simulation (although the flexibility exists for the United Kingdom to be represented by an instructor should this be necessary). Students represent a country singly and not in teams. While this places a high onus of responsibility on students in terms of their participation, engagement and attendance, it has the advantage of ensuring that students are assessed and recognised for their own work rather than for that of broader delegate teams.

Students meet weekly in 2-hour faculty-led sessions, providing teaching

staff with the opportunity to introduce needed materials. In the early stages of the module, this involves delivery of essential briefings on the history and structure of the UN, the functioning of the UN regional bloc system, instruction in resolution writing, rules of procedure and so on. Later in the module, the flexible nature of the 2-hour teaching block (timetabled for a large, open, teaching space) facilitates a greater level of inter-activity among students and staff and allows students to work in small groups on allocated tasks or skills development. These encompass the areas of public speaking, caucusing, negotiation, using the rules of procedure and giving in-class presentations on their country/issues. Having familiarised themselves with their country and with UN structure and procedure, each student produces a proposed draft resolution on a topic of relevance to their country. Students then caucus among their fellow delegates in an attempt to reach a defined threshold of support for the inclusion of their resolution on the draft agenda. After this process is complete, a formatively assessed practice simulation of the General Committee of the General Assembly is held in which delegates debate and revise the ordering of resolutions on this draft agenda. This is in contrast to many MUN simulations where issues and/or draft resolutions are predetermined by conference staff with minimal input from delegations. The authors' approach has the advantage of allowing students to familiarise themselves with the operation of the rules of procedure in a non-graded simulation environment. Time constraints and the need for substantive debate mean that not all resolutions proposed by delegates can be discussed at the final simulation. Usually those draft resolutions that emerge at the top of the draft agenda following the simulation of the General Committee are those that will ultimately be debated. The formative nature of this process also enhances

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student ownership of the simulation and allows delegates to determine the topics addressed at the formally assessed final simulation.

Once the issues to be debated have been finalised, teaching staff offer detailed briefings on the specific subjects to be discussed. While challenging for staff – not least because of the short time frame available in which to prepare these briefings – this gives all students a baseline of knowledge from which to research and write about their countries' positions on the chosen issues and to prepare for debate. Members of teaching staff work closely with those delegations sponsoring proposed draft resolutions on the final agenda, to ensure that resolutions are worded correctly.

Integrated with the weekly teaching programme is a fortnightly session, held in a computer laboratory. This session is used to facilitate student research on their countries, the issues under debate and for Library staff to provide orientation and guidance on the sprawling and complex UN website, research databases and treaty collections. Students are allocated into these sessions along the lines of their allocated countries' UN regional bloc memberships (i.e. blocs are kept together) in order to facilitate information sharing, collaboration and caucusing.

A vital support to face-to-face teaching and student activity is a virtual learning environment hosted on the Blackboard platform. A dedicated Blackboard site serves as a central repository of information provided by teaching staff, a forum for students to upload materials they

have produced, and as a space for interaction, caucusing and negotiation (both between delegations and between teaching staff and students). Teaching staff design the Blackboard site in order to encourage student participation. Thus, as the semester progresses, the contents of the site grow to include official documents, country profiles, draft resolutions, position papers, agenda items, threaded discussions, lecture notes and assigned readings. Blackboard also acts as an evidence base of student engagement and activity levels that can be taken into consideration in assessment. While virtual learning environments are a central complement to the simulation proceedings, they are not permitted to replace face-to-face contact, negotiation or debate. As with the real UN, human interaction is vital (Matthys and Klabbers, 2004).

The culmination of the module, a formal conference simulation is held over an entire day (from 8am to 5pm) using the debating chamber of the local government authority. The use of a formal horseshoe styled debating chamber (unavailable on campus or in local conference venues) adds immeasurably to the student experience (see Lincolnshire County Council, 2010). Convening in such a venue contributes to the seriousness with which students approach the proceedings. Students are required to dress in formal business attire or in the formal national dress of their allocated country, adding to the sense of occasion. The purpose-built debating chamber, equipped with microphones and large-screen closed circuit video projection of delegates as they address the chamber facilitates discussion, negotiation and the efficient management of debate. Audio and video of proceedings is recorded to a digital versatile disc for later playback and for use in formal assessment and external examination procedures.

In a departure from many extra-curricular conferences, the position of conference chair is occupied by a member

'Several days after the simulation, students are invited to a reflective debriefing session with teaching staff'.

of the teaching team rather than by a student delegation. This is necessary to maintain equity of opportunity in assessment (given this is a formally assessed activity) and to ensure adherence to the rules of procedure. Another staff member coordinates the activities of the Secretariat (maintaining speakers' lists, receiving amendments to resolutions, updating resolutions as they are amended and timing speeches). Other staff members observe student performance for assessment purposes and facilitate the smooth running of proceedings. Several days after the simulation, students are invited to a reflective debriefing session with teaching staff.

ASSESSMENT AND THE MUN SIMULATION

Assessment in this module has been designed to evaluate and encourage the development of a range of skills and knowledge. The authors' approach reflects that suggested by Simon Usherwood (2012) who has identified the need for those using simulations to have a clear notion of desired pedagogic outcomes and to design assessment and feedback regimes accordingly. The module's purpose within the degree programme is to both teach specific content on the functioning of the UN and the nature of international diplomacy as well as to embed core disciplinary and vocational skills. Lowry (1999: 123) has identified three key areas of student participation and involvement in simulation-based learning: effort, preparation and participation. The authors have utilised this framework

when designing assessment tasks but have additionally sought to assess students' acquisition of subject-specific knowledge and skills relevant to the requirements of an undergraduate IR module.

As such, the assessment matrix for the module comprises both formative and formally assessed components. Students produce documents (including written country profiles, draft resolutions and amendments to resolutions), give speeches, debate, negotiate and caucus throughout the semester and are provided with feedback in both group and one-on-one tutorial sessions. There are four components of formal assessment. These are: evaluation and grading of the candidate's performance in a formal written and researched country position paper (worth 25 per cent of the overall grade); simulation participation (worth 35 per cent); a collated, annotated and indexed binder of research sources (worth 25 per cent); and finally a reflective essay in which the candidate is asked to link their experiences in the simulation to the theories and approaches studied in their degree programme (worth 15 per cent).

The nature of the module necessitates consistently high levels of student attendance and participation in comparison with many, more conventional, undergraduate modules. As a consequence, the authors have sought to ensure that assessment rewards and encourages continuous engagement and performance and completion of key tasks and stages throughout the module. At the same time, however, there is need to ensure the assessment load is proportionate to that of other modules on the degree.

Given differences in student learning styles and confidence (particularly in areas such as public speaking and interpersonal communication), a decision was taken to balance the relative significance of performance at the simulation against written and research-based assessment

tasks. However, the decision to attach relatively greater weighting to the final simulation performance was driven by a desire to incentivise and ensure student attendance and participation at this integral event. Assessment criteria for the simulation are communicated to students in advance and were developed to clearly communicate to students how they are able to meet assessment requirements. At the final conference, students are assessed against these criteria, which encompass their adherence to the rules of procedure, participation in formal debate and unmoderated caucusing, their delivery of a formal address, their role-play and effective representation of their country and its foreign policy. The teaching team adapt the simulation process as the day progresses to ensure that all students have an opportunity to meet key assessment requirements; in some cases, this requires influencing the flow of debate and conduct of proceedings. While this has the potential to compromise the realism of the simulation, it is a necessary consequence of the assessed nature of the module.

Written work and research skills are assessed via the position paper, where a student outlines their country's foreign policy, position and strategy *vis-à-vis* the agenda issues under debate and through the presentation of a binder of research sources identified and utilised throughout the module. The binder is presented with an annotated index allowing teaching staff to assess the extent to which the student has drawn upon, critiqued or evaluated the presented sources. The binder also serves as a way for teaching staff to examine the range and depth of research conducted by the student over the semester. Beyond research sources, the document binders are also required to include documents produced by the student throughout the semester, including country profiles, press releases, reports to capital, speeches, draft resolutions

and negotiating documents. This allows teaching staff to evaluate (and where appropriate reward) behind-the-scenes activity and coursework production. Students bring their document binders to the final simulation where they are both a useful and a well-used resource.

The reflective essay provides students with the opportunity to step out of character for the only time in their assessed work. They are encouraged to reflect on how their MUN experience has illuminated or informed other materials they have studied in their degree and are encouraged to reflect on the skills they have acquired through participation. Finally, participants are led to consider the extent to which the simulation and its outcomes reflect the 'reality' of diplomatic practice and UN procedure.

CHALLENGES AND COMPROMISES

Adapting the MUN for delivery as a taught module in line with the assessment, external quality assurance and validation requirements of a British undergraduate assessed module has been both challenging and rewarding. Delivery as an assessed module has necessitated a number of modifications and compromises with the activity as it conventionally runs in non-assessed settings. As we have found (and others have identified), this involves balancing a number of competing priorities throughout the module and a degree of staff intervention into the operation of the simulation (Bengtson and Sifferd, 2010; Usherwood, 2009).

As previously discussed, allowing student delegations to determine the agenda of the day-long conference through their own research, negotiation and caucusing facilitates student ownership of the module; however, on occasion, the teaching team may need to reorder the agreed-upon agenda items. This is to ensure that

the proposed topics contain material sufficient to engage debate between the range of countries represented and provoke international controversy. This contributes to effective assessment of the module overall. The decision to debate two substantive topics at the General Assembly conference is also guided by the need to ensure that all countries have positions identifiable through detailed research, and a clear stake in at least one of the resolutions to be discussed. The teaching team thus needs to strike a balance between often conflicting objectives. These include the desire for the agenda and conference debate to evolve naturally as a result of the participation of individual students, an aspiration towards a sense of 'realism' in the simulation of international diplomacy and the need to ensure that all students have equitable opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and skills for assessment purposes. These considerations are particularly apparent in the day-long conference itself, where discreet staff intervention or direction from the chair (occupied by a staff member) is often required to ensure that all delegations meet one of the key assessment requirements of making a formal speech to the General Assembly on one of the agenda items. Staff are thus required to closely monitor the flow of debate, students' use of the rules of procedure and the possibility of stronger personalities dominating proceedings. While these interventions can and do detract from a more 'realistic' simulation of international diplomacy (especially with regard to the difficulties experienced by some states and diplomats in projecting their voice on the international stage), it is a necessary compromise in an assessed module.

Of the four components of assessment, the day-long conference is clearly the centrepiece, in terms of student perception and anticipation, but also assessment weighting. The relative weighting of this

module's assessment components was subject to considerable debate among the teaching team, and the decision to allocate an assessment weighting of 35 per cent to the conference was deemed necessary in an attempt to ensure full attendance by students on the day itself. One continual concern of the teaching team is that of student absences at key points of this module, in particular the simulation. The absence of a particular country has the clear potential to detract from the experience and performance of other delegates, in terms of denying them vital allies and opponents and in limiting the range of voices and positions aired. In addition, student absence from the conference raises the problematic issue of reassessment. The clear impossibility of replicating the simulation for the purposes of reassessment requires that attendance be maximised as far as possible. While it is not possible under existing university regulations to make simulation attendance a compulsory hurdle requirement for module progression, the importance of the simulation has, through necessity, been reinforced via the weighting of assessment.

The greater weight attached to simulation participation has however resulted in the allocation of only 15 per cent of the total assessment for the module being allocated to the reflective essay. The reflective essay plays a significant role at the end of the module in requiring students to consider the connections between the rest of their degree and their experience of MUN. The essay encourages students to reflect on the 'reality' of their experiences and to use theory and their knowledge of diplomatic history and current affairs to illuminate or challenge developments at the simulation.

However, the relative weakness of student reflection in this assessment has been a cause for concern among the teaching team, prompting staff observations that MUN should not occur 'in

a vacuum', divorced from theoretical content embedded in the rest of the degree programme. Staff have also been aware that while MUN does provide valuable, transferable and vocationally relevant skills (a preoccupation of the contemporary higher education sector), the attempt to foster these among students should not detract from the simulation's potential as a vehicle for delivering important, subject-relevant content. To some extent, this has been heightened by the module's position as an option for students from non-IR degree programmes in the School of Social and Political Sciences. It is possible that while weak student reflection reflects the relatively low weighting of this particular assessment, it may also stem from the perception (and relief) that the module had 'finished' with the highpoint of the day-long conference and the onset of the next semester's modules.

In the light of the need to strengthen student reflection in this module, the debrief session, held several days after the simulation itself, has significantly increased in importance over the years the Lincoln MUN has been running. Following the example of other academics involved in running simulations, the teaching team has utilised the debrief session to 'reiterate key concepts and reinforce the connections between the abstract and concrete ideas' (Weir and Baranowski, 2011: 453) and to emphasise the significance of the reflective essay as the final piece of assessment.

Finally, while delivering an assessed MUN has been a valuable addition to the IR programme and has been consistently well received by students, staff and external examiners involved in the module, as a module it places considerable demands on both staff and student time, particularly at the University of Lincoln where it is delivered to students without a supporting student MUN society and where the vast majority of students on

the module have had no experience of participating in larger, regional or national MUNs. While a hugely satisfying experience for staff and students, the dedicated time required for a module such as this should not be underestimated.

While this module is currently delivered as a one-semester, 15 Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme (CATS) points module with individual country delegations, alternative modes of delivery are clearly possible. Group country delegations are one option that has been considered by the teaching team. Throughout the module, there is a heavy research workload placed on each delegate. Although these demands are often mitigated by individual students' enthusiasm, group delegations might enable the research and assessment load to be shared and different learning styles to be accommodated within these groups. Group delegations would also allow larger numbers of students to participate in the module, while keeping the total number of delegations manageable for the teaching team. Finally, group delegations could mitigate the detrimental effects of any student absences at key stages, to the benefit of the smooth running of the module and final conference. However, group work is not always welcomed by students or staff and raises the issue of division of workloads, group management and rewarding group work versus individual efforts. It is for these reasons, as well as the desire to ensure the fact a range of countries are represented within the simulation, that the Lincoln MUN currently adopts a single-delegate approach.

Another modification could be 'stretching' the module and delivering it over two semesters rather than one. This would have the advantage of permitting students more time to further their research and develop familiarity with their country, chosen issues and the role-playing required. However, these advantages would need to be balanced against concerns

about maintaining the existing high levels of student engagement with the module over such an extended period.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that the MUN – in any of its forms – provides students with valuable experience, knowledge and proficiencies. For IR educators, an *assessed* version of the MUN simulation provides an innovative way of both delivering disciplinary content and entrenching key student competencies. As such, it reflects contemporary developments in student-centred and research-engaged higher education teaching and learning. Embedding simulation work within a degree programme sends clear messages to students about the value educators place upon experiential learning, wider skills development and the linkages between academic disciplines and professional practise. It is vital that careful consideration is given to how assessment tasks might best reflect these priorities.

Student feedback on the Lincoln MUN simulation detailed in this article has been uniformly positive. In their feedback and evaluations, students have praised the module for developing their awareness of other cultures and countries, for facilitating knowledge of the operation of international diplomacy and the work of the UN and for providing them with key vocational skills. In this, the experience of both teaching staff and students bears out the conclusions drawn from academic studies of the value of simulations in higher education teaching and learning (and IR studies more specifically).

The Lincoln MUN has become a keenly anticipated part of many students' time in the School of Social and Political Sciences. As a curriculum component, it plays a key part in course promotion literature and

student recruitment exercises, differentiating Lincoln's IR and social sciences offerings from those of its competitors. The centrality of MUN to the IR programme has also helped inform and shape other co-curricular activities such as student trips to the headquarters of intergovernmental institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and the UN itself. Knowledge and skills gained through participation in the simulation enrich students' engagement with other aspects of the curriculum. Students draw upon their MUN experiences in modules addressing IR theory, comparative regionalism, human rights and transnational justice. Many students go on to complete dissertations on international institutions, in part as a result of their MUN studies. Feedback also indicates that MUN, and the skill set it has fostered, features

strongly in students' applications for graduate employment or postgraduate course enrolment.

As explored here, introducing the MUN simulation as an assessed module within a degree programme has required teaching staff to thoughtfully adapt existing practice. In some areas, this has required certain compromises to be made to meet assessment and university regulatory requirements – most obviously in the areas of realistic simulation. Obviously, the process of refining and adaptation is ongoing; however, it is the firm belief of the authors that the benefits offered by the simulation more than outweigh any compromises involved in its adaptation for assessment. An assessed version of the MUN programme has key pedagogic, disciplinary and vocational value.

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