



# UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

## **Guide to Using Simulations**

### **Introduction**

This guide introduces instructors to United States Institute of Peace (USIP) simulations, as well as acts as a 'how to' guide to using USIP simulations in the classroom. The simulations are designed for university and high school students and may be modified to adjust for complexity and time. A characteristic of USIP simulations is that they focus upon the dynamics of conflict and its management. The emphasis is upon methods of more effectively handling conflict, and it is our intention that participants be introduced to the wide range of influences that affect conflict management. All the simulations have been run with students and have received positive feedback.

Simulations are useful instructional tools supplementing other pedagogical approaches. In environments that are complex and dynamic, such as the international political environment, simulations help capture what might otherwise be lost. Simulations also help make real a distant or unfamiliar environment. They are particularly well suited to discussion of international conflict management and resolution. For example, students may not have an appreciation of what it is like to negotiate over international conflict, but a simulation will provide some insight into those complexities.

### **What are Simulations?**

Simulations are scenarios used to demonstrate a behavior or process. They have been used in a wide range of educational contexts ranging from high schools to graduate education. The decision-making process involved in the Cuban Missile Crisis has been the subject of simulations, for example.

Simulations are a kind of role-play. In role-plays participants imagine they are someone else or themselves in a given situation. Roles are taken on by people (I play the role of teacher, friend, parent) and ascribed by others (I am seen by others to be a student, friend, learner). Unlike acting, role players do not take on a role in order to influence an audience, but rather take on a role to gain insight into a process or to experience some event.



The role a student plays may be an imaginary person, a real person, or even him or herself. Thus, role-players may extend and expand their experience of the world, by taking on a role in a unique situation.

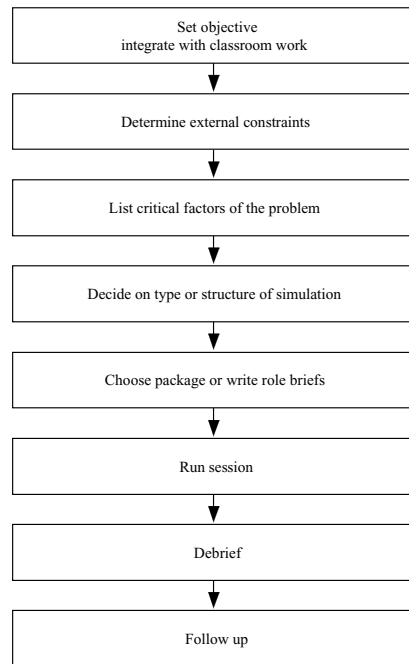
Situations found in simulations may be simple. That is they may involve few role-players and may take only five minutes. Or, simulations may be complex, involving many players and lasting a long time. Simulations may involve familiar situations, where players have ample experience. These are particularly useful when instructors wish students to reflect upon alternative behaviors to those typically chosen. Simulations may also vary with regard to their detail. Role-players may be provided extensive briefing documents on the situation, or they may be left to make up detail as needed.

Most of the simulations found on the USIP website are relatively complex and ask participants to play roles other than themselves.

Like any other teaching technique, role-plays have their pluses and minuses. On the positive side, role-plays help students test assumptions and new ideas about behaviors and practices. Role-plays are also good ways for students to observe a wide range of behaviors that may not have been available before. Of course, another key value of role-plays is that they are often fun. The very behaviors that students find fun may also cloud their ability to observe important dynamics. Role-plays can also be confusing because so much is happening. They may not help identify intellectual debates or issues. Finally, role-plays often favor the verbally talented and outgoing students. This last negative can be managed to some extent by appropriate selection of roles and reminding students of the benefits of simply observing.

## The Simulation Process

Morry van Ments in his book *The Effective Use of Role-Play* outlines the process of simulations, his diagram appears below. This diagram may assist you in preparing for running a simulation.



Notice that the simulation includes more than simply the role-play. There is some detailed preparation work that is required. In addition, sufficient time must be allowed for debriefing, which is a crucial part of the learning process in simulations and role-plays.

## Preparing a Simulation

In many ways preparing a simulation is no different than preparing for other classroom activities. The simulation objectives should maximize the learning outcomes you wish to obtain. Using a simulation demands advanced planning in order that students benefit. Happily, simulations provide many learning opportunities.

Simulations often present learning opportunities where students can conduct research on the role-play. This research creates an easy way of integrating the simulation into existing curriculum. You may wish to:

- Encourage students to research the role scenario before the role-play begins.
- Provide students with opportunities to conduct research during the course of the simulation. For example, students may wish to know more about



the world oil market while negotiating over disputed territory that has significant oil deposits.

- Incorporate simulation preparation into assigned reading or other relevant work.

### Space

Simulations have physical constraints for which instructors need to prepare. Most simulations require a fair amount of space. Role-players may move about as they interact and talk with others. In some simulations more than one room may be required to give privacy or a sense of separateness to smaller groups. Therefore, be prepared for simulations to be active, with participants moving around and making noise.

### Roles

Often simulations will make use of public information, accessible to all players, and private information accessible to only one role-player. It is important to explain to role-players the distinction between the two. Other key points to keep in mind include:

- Ensure role-players have ample time to read their roles and background material. You may wish to distribute material a day or two in advance.
- Prepare name tags or table tents for the simulation indicating the role play names.
- Establish clear beginning and ending times.
- Create guidelines for behavior if role-players are to take a break (i.e. should players stay in role through the break?).

### Additional Materials

Other materials that are useful in simulations include:

- Provide breakout rooms, or space where teams of students can meet.
- An overhead projector or data projector with computer may be useful should students wish to make presentations during the simulation.
- Flip charts allow students to capture thoughts or discussions as they work together in the simulation.
- Access to computers with printers and Internet access is also useful.

None of this material is required to run the simulation, though access to these items will enhance the experience for the students.



### Allocating Roles

Ensure that you have a matching number of roles and students. If you have an inadequate number of roles for students, you might consider assigning the role of observer to students without roles, or creating new supplementary roles. You should be careful in allocating roles. Some students are naturally more adept at simulations than others. Verbally strong and confident students in some roles may dominate the simulation. Equally, students who struggle with verbal expression in key roles may not adequately energize the simulation.

Furthermore, role-players will often ask how roles were allocated. Answering this should be handled carefully, as one does not wish to create doubts or concerns among players.

USIP simulations are written with private role information as well as public information. Each student will be given a role, which should be regarded as private. There may be specific instructions in the role information that should not be made public, until enacted by the student. It is a good idea to distribute roles close to the start of the simulation, avoid passing out role information days in advance as others might discover private details.

### **Running a Simulation**

Running a simulation requires that instructors orient participants to the learning exercise. This includes distributing all necessary background and role information, but it also includes linking the simulation to broader learning objectives. Learning from simulations may be first-hand through experience in role, it may come through observation, and it may come through reflection. Role-players may become sensitized to behaviors and issues, may experience attitude change and of course may learn new skills.

Urge role-players to take notes during the simulation, provided it does not detract from their experience. Such note taking ensures that key behaviors or events are not lost in the midst of the simulation action. Role-players should focus on what happened, recording their observations and feelings.

While running the simulation instructors should feel free to roam around and act as 'flies on the wall'. This provides an opportunity for instructors to gather impressions on what is happening and how events are unfolding. In addition, participants may have questions about both the content of the simulation or other matters that may arise in the course of the simulation. By walking around, instructors provide participants an opportunity to ask questions. Instructors should use their judgment in answering questions. Factual questions should be handled as best as possible. For example, participants may wish to know the



size and make-up of the U.S. military. If you are unsure, provide an answer that does not adversely affect the conduct of the simulation, or direct them to other resources.

## Debriefing a Simulation

Upon completion of the simulation, it is useful to engage role-players in a debriefing. The objective of the debriefing is to find out what happened and to encourage role-players to extract insights and lessons. Thus, the role-play is a reflective process, requiring participants to feedback their impressions and thoughts.

Debriefing should be facilitated. Instructors should avoid the temptation to tell others what happened. Rather, instructors should facilitate discussions by asking open ended questions, such as 'what happened in today's simulation?' Using such open ended questions will encourage students to think freely and broadly about their experiences.

The debriefing should be structured to help participants reflect both upon the details of their simulation as well as reflect upon any general insights.

- Begin with the events of the day – what happened. Good questions to use are 'what happened in the simulation?' 'What was the outcome?' 'Tell us what happened to you?' Participants will often want to know about others roles. You may wish to encourage selected participants to divulge their role information.
- Do not be afraid of asking participants both what happened and how they felt. Emotional responses in experiential learning are important, as emotions reflect the impact of behavior and color the way events are seen. Be careful, however, in going overboard. Just as one does not wish to ignore emotional responses in simulations, one does not want to focus on these responses to the exclusion of other behaviors.
- As the debriefing progresses encourage students to link events in the simulation to ideas, concepts and behaviors studied elsewhere. In this way the debriefing moves from the specific case to those points that are more easily generalized. For example, you may ask 'did you observe good negotiating behavior in the simulation, give an example' or 'what strategies of conflict management were being employed in the simulation?'
- Remind students that it is important that they disengage from the role-play at its conclusion. Occasionally, some students have trouble getting out of



role and carry on disputes or disagreements from the simulation into day-to-day life. Encourage students to talk openly and freely about their roles.

Instructors may also wish to give written assignments from the simulation. For example, instructors may wish students to compare and contrast their simulation with an historical case study. This will deepen the role-players' learning experience.

### **Additional Resources on Simulations**

Simulation & Gaming: An Interdisciplinary Journal Of Theory, Practice and Research

Hare, A. Paul, *Social Interaction as Drama*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA, 1985

International Communication and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS),  
[www.icons.umd.edu](http://www.icons.umd.edu)

Van Ments, Morry, *The Effective Use of Role-Play*, Kogan Page, London, 1989