Middle East Politics Simulation

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Al-Jazeera   Robert Fisk   FOX News   New York Times

ABSTRACT

The "Simulation" began as a technique of teaching Middle East Politics through the internet. In essence, it is an extended role-playing game conducted by e-mail and web site whereby students, divided into teams of two or three playing a Middle Eastern role, will respond to a likely scenario in order to further their interests.

KEYWORDS

Middle East Politics; Diplomacy; Negotiation; International Relations; Political Science; Graduate Attributes; Educational Technology; Internet; E-mail; Simulation

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The work of Dr. Andrew Vincent as author of this role play is gratefully acknowledged

Description

MEPS utilises the Internet and the World Wide Web to add a new dimension to the teaching of Middle East Politics. Students carry out extended role play simulations, via the mechanisms of e-mail and chat-rooms, to conduct Middle East diplomacy. In the process, they learn about both the specifics of Middle East politics and international relations in general. Student evaluation of the simulations has indicated that they are a powerful learning tool, providing both motivation to study and "hands-on experience" in the practice of international relations. It was run successfully by Dr. Andrew Vincent and Dr. John Shepherd who continuously developed it for over fifteen years with overwhelmingly positive student feedback. Since Andrew's death in 2008 MEPS has continued as an interuniversity collaboration.

Audience/Group-size

Undergraduate or postgraduate students studying the Middle East, terrorism, International Relations, History, or Journalism. The simulation is played with teams of three students per character against a class at another, competing University. The number of characters is flexible, and can be adjusted to suit the number of students in the two competing classes. The simulation can accommodate up to 300 students in total.

Links

The Simulation homepage can be found at http://www.mq.edu.au/mec/sim/index.html.
From there explore links to other related sites, journal articles and player techniques.

Learning Opportunities

Participant students will have opportunities to:

- Learn about the complexities of decision-making and political relationships within the Middle East and between the Middle East and the West
- Gain insights into U.S. policies, the War on Terrorism, the Israel-Palestine dispute, and the politics of Iraq and the Gulf.
- Acquire a variety of generic skills generic skills such as decision-making, teamwork, public-speaking and stress-management.

Role Play Organisation

Timeframe & Setting

The simulation, which is set two or three weeks in the future, generally runs for three to four weeks and is played in the students' own time. It concludes with a real-time conference of three to four hours which addresses the issues that the students have been discussing in the preceding weeks.

Structure

Once students are assigned to a team, and before the simulation begins, with the release of a scenario, they write a short profile of their character which is placed on the web-site and is accessible to all. The main role play proceeds in response to the scenario (see below). Once the scenario has been released, the simulation is largely student driven, although all messages are monitored by controllers for grading purposes and to ensure that the students remain "in character".

A real-time conference provides a form of debriefing for the students, and is usually followed by an informal session during which the simulation can be re-visited in a non-threatening atmosphere. The students complete evaluation forms to provide feedback on the educational value of the simulation.

Resources

The simulation relies on a customised web-site (see link below), and can be set up in a matter of hours, provided that the roles have been selected and distributed between the competing classes. Action commences with the release of a scenario, which is developed by the lecturers in charge and which provides a starting point for all of the characters to respond to.

Assessment

Students are graded on the basis of their performance as a team. The grade is usually based on the role profile (20%), the quantity of messages sent (20%), the quality of messages sent, as assessed by the controllers (40%), and the performance in the concluding conference (20%). These percentages can be varied.

Designer's Reflection

With our fifteen year track record, we believe that the Middle East Politics simulations are an exemplar to online role-playing exercises in Australia, and, indeed, abroad. Over the years, we have adapted and modified the approach taking into account student feedback and changes in technology. We believe that our approach has broad applicability in a variety of disciplinary and cross-disciplinary areas, and is pedagogically sound.

Reusability

Although designed for Middle East Politics, the technique is applicable to courses in International Relations, Political Science, Journalism, and even History.