THE US SENTATE

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Abstract

This role-based e-learning design gives participants roles as senators sitting on several committees. Participants learn about the compromises and considerations necessary to create legislation as they consider, amend, and vote on a variety of bills at the committee level. Senators must decide which of the bills under consideration should be a top priority, what amendments they believe are necessary, and how they can succeed in ensuring that the bills they support are reported out to the full Senate for a deliberation and vote.

Learning Opportunities

Participants have an opportunity to learn about the operational conditions of the US Senate, as well as experiencing first hand the complexities of achieving agreement when there are widely differing starting points on important issues. Negotiation skills, analysis of personal beliefs and preferences occur alongside working out the same factors for others who may – or may not – be supporters of one's own position.

U.S. Senate is designed to involve students from just one school (single-class simulation). Other ICON simulations are designed to bring together teams of students from schools throughout the U.S. and the world (distributed simulation). In distributed mode, there is the potential for learners to be exposed to a very wide range of perspectives.

Resources

The online role play is delivered via the ICONS Project at the University of Maryland on their proprietary platform accessible at: www.icons.umd.edu/highered

The design includes pre-loaded draft bills which participants amend and debate. Biographical information is provided for each senator including:
- Personal Background
- Legislative Priorities
- Political Considerations
- Overview of the senator's positions on key issues related to each of the five committees in the simulation.
- List of the senator's top campaign contributors
- History of the senator's voting behaviour
- Information about the senator's state.

Learning Activities

Fifteen fictional senators are featured in the simulation. Participants, as senators, devise strategies for working with colleagues to ensure they are best able to advance their own legislative agenda. Each senator is a member of two or three committees, with each committee considering three draft bills. Committees in the simulation are:

- Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee
- Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee
- Environment and Public Works Committee
- Finance Committee
- Health, Education, Labour, and Pensions Committee.

Participants respond to the scenario via interactions with other stakeholders. Various interactive tasks are completed as the teams work to achieve desired outcomes.

Reusability

The ICONS Project provides a variety of online role play designs. The interactive online designs immerse participants in the roles of decision-makers tasked with resolving contentious issues. ICONS simulation exercises feature engaging content, peer collaboration tools, and active learning through the powerful online simulation interface, ICONSnet.