

Negotiating the Transatlantic Relationship: An International, Interdisciplinary Simulation of a Real-World Negotiation

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the effectiveness of an international, interdisciplinary simulation of an ongoing trade negotiation. It thoroughly describes the simulation, provides links to background information for public use, and offers suggestions on ways to further strengthen the learning outcomes achieved.

Recent research on public opinion and trade reveals that we understand little about the microfoundations of trade policy (Ehrlich and Maestes 2010; Mansfield and Mutz 2009; Ardanaz, Murillo and Pinto 2013). For example, in the midst of the major economic crisis that began in 2008 and only 10 years after the “Battle in Seattle,” how did the United States sign three free trade agreements—with Colombia, Panama, and South Korea—with hardly a whisper of public debate? Research suggests that it may be that the public no longer cares about trade politics (Cobb and Nance 2011). If one goal of political science education is to promote greater awareness and a more thorough engagement with policy questions, then trade is a prime candidate.

At the same time, trade is a tough sell. The lack of debate is an obstacle: silence begets silence. Trade quickly becomes technical, especially as negotiations switch from reducing tariffs to “deep trade” issues regarding regulatory cooperation (Young and Peterson 2006). Based on our experience of running the trade-negotiation simulation analyzed in this article, however, we contend that requiring students to simulate a trade negotiation—especially one in process—can be an effective way to educate students about a difficult subject.

SIMULATION DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

On topics ranging from trade (Switky and Avilés 2007) to interstate conflict (Newmann and Twigg 2000) to US Supreme Court confirmation (Auerbach 2013), teachers report benefits from games in which “the student becomes the lab rat and then gets to discuss the experiment” (Asal 2005, 360). For those who are new

to games, Wedig (2010) includes a useful schematic for deciding whether and how to integrate them. Lantis (1998) provides examples and compares them to other active-learning approaches.

Our simulation tasked students with negotiating the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the United States (US) and the European Union (EU). Announced in 2013, TTIP would create the world’s largest free trade agreement and deepen a globally significant economic relationship (Workman and Smith 2013). Because trade between the two is substantially liberalized, most gains would result from greater regulatory cooperation encompassing public procurement, geographical indications for food products, and worker benefits, to name but a few. These incongruences are potentially significant obstacles to greater economic integration; however, they also often are perceived as politically sensitive cultural institutions.

This simulation resulted from collaboration between a large research university in the southeastern United States (“the US university”) and a French business school (“the French university”) with a campus at the former. Most of the US university students were from the United States, and most of the French university students were from France, although other nationalities were represented in both groups. The US university students included undergraduates enrolled in a junior-level European politics course but had various majors, including design, engineering, and political science. Graduate students from the US university’s Master of International Studies program who were enrolled in a European politics course also participated. Most of the French university’s participants were part of the Master in Management or Master in International Business programs. In total, 76 students participated: 24 from the US university and 52 from the French university. There were 41 female and 35 male students.

We defined educational outcomes, assigned background materials to provide students with a clear understanding of the simulated situation, created specific ground rules, and held a debriefing session to evaluate outcomes (Lantis 1998; Smith and Boyer 1996). The most specific learning goal was to help students understand EU–US relations, especially the relevance and

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complexity of trade relations. We also aimed to help them become familiar with the process of negotiating a Free Trade Agreement, ascertain their specific sector's relevance in the national and global economy, recognize another country's or region's position and interests while gaining a better comprehension of those of their home country, and learn how to prepare for trade- or negotiations-related jobs. In designing an interdisciplinary and multicultural simulation, our goal was to help students understand how their cultural and intellectual background affected their own policy views. By simulating an ongoing negotiation, we hoped to help them understand more quickly the key issues, become better informed about an important political event, and find ways to remain engaged.

In designing an interdisciplinary and multicultural simulation, our goal was to help students understand how their cultural and intellectual background affected their own policy views.

We ran three simultaneous simulations with an identical design over the course of two three-hour class periods. This allowed us to include 76 students but also to group them into small teams, thereby mitigating the problem of large-group laggards. Each simulation was roughly equal in size and divided into equal US and EU delegations. We ignored gender in assigning groups and sought to balance teams based on students' performance in their respective classes to date. To highlight how cultural backgrounds influence our perceptions—and much to the surprise of students—we assigned those from the French university to represent the US and vice versa, when possible. We did not have access to nationality or citizenship data and therefore did not use it in assigning groups. Because most feedback was provided either by groups or anonymously (to encourage honesty), we did not use demographic data as a filter for learning outcomes.

We divided delegations into four sectors: agriculture, automobiles, culture, and environment. We chose the sectors for accessibility and the availability of information from scholarly and general media sources to facilitate the speed and depth of students' research. Each sector team had three or four members and most included students from both universities. The team members were to explore, debate, and negotiate an agreement on bilateral trade conditions in their sector. They also were required to document and communicate those agreements to the rest of the delegation.

A Chief Negotiator (CN) and a General Secretary (GS) led each delegation. We ensured that US

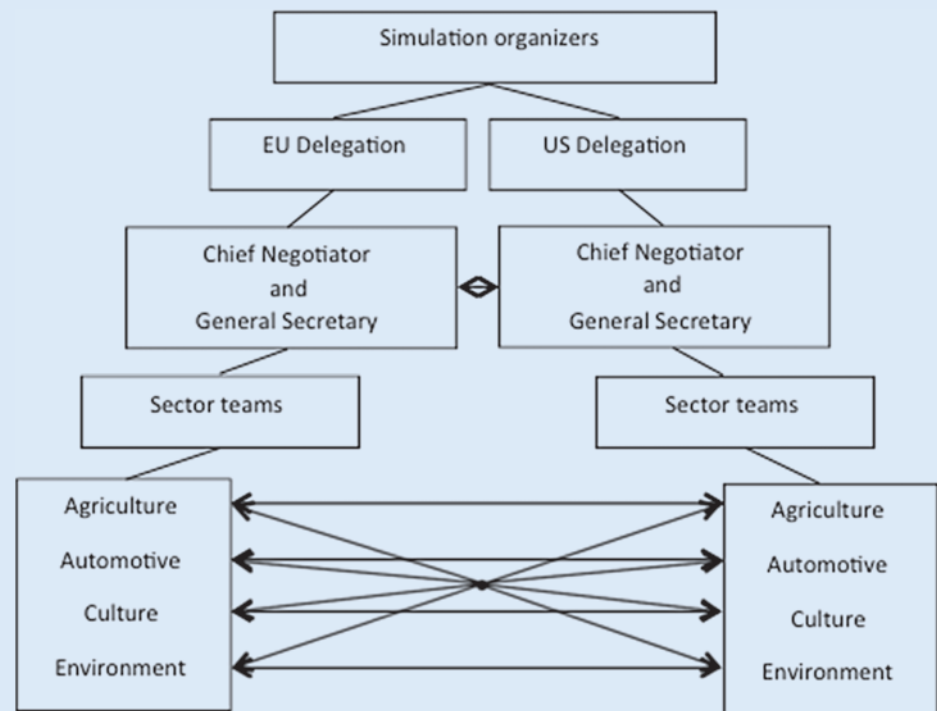
university students were CNs and GSs for the EU delegation and vice versa. The CN was responsible for leading and organizing the negotiation rounds and encouraging the sector teams to arrive at an agreement that met the interests of their delegation. The GS was responsible for assisting and supporting the CN and for drafting interim and final agreements. Given their important responsibilities, we selected the students for the CN and GS positions. Figure 1 shows the structure of a single simulation team.

Students prepared for the simulation through class, common background readings, and independent research. French university students were studying the business climate of the North American Free Trade Agreement region, with emphasis on the United States. US university students were studying the domestic

and regional politics of Europe. In-class preparation for the French university students included four sessions on EU and US trade and business relations, with one class specifically on TTIP. US university students spent two sessions on trade policy, politics, and processes in the EU and two sessions on the business climate in Europe, lobbying in the EU, and cultural differences between US and French students (Suder 2011).

All students received a briefing packet, which included press releases and articles about the ongoing TTIP negotiations, a sample free trade agreement, and articles by scholars and practitioners about how the agreements are negotiated. Copies of the

Figure 1
Structure of the Simulation Roles



instructions, publicly available readings, and a bibliography of copyrighted materials are available online.¹

Students also were required to conduct in-depth independent research on their sector. To ensure that they conducted this research and to better facilitate initial official negotiations, on the first day we assigned a position statement outlining what their sector hoped to accomplish during negotiations, how the negotiators would work to overcome barriers to free trade, and where their group was and was not willing to compromise. We did not provide students with a defined list of issues within their sector; rather, they were required to follow the real-world debate to discover their trade preferences.

We assigned roles, general background readings, and the position statement three weeks before the simulation began during an informal gathering in which all participating students

In the one week between the second and third rounds of negotiations, we encouraged students to continue negotiations outside of the classroom. During this interim, we e-mailed a mock press release describing widespread protests in Brussels against the TTIP. The text of that e-mail is also available online.²

On the second day of the simulation, students had one hour to finalize negotiations. In one delegation, sector negotiations took almost the entire hour. In the other two delegations, sectors worked diligently to record points of agreement and disagreement for the CN, who had asked that this be e-mailed by a specific time. Afterwards, the CNs and GSs were given 30 minutes to draft the final agreement, after which they debriefed the instructors on the outcome of the negotiations.

Finally, we held a one-hour debriefing session in which all participants convened in one classroom. Each simulation reported

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met one another and coordinated group meetings. We explained to students that they had leeway to break free of the designed simulation—for example, by meeting early, leaking their documents, or talking to another delegation or sector.

On the first day of formal negotiations, we gave each simulation the timetable of negotiation rounds shown in table 1. Each round had four steps. First, having exchanged position papers, sectors negotiate with one another. Second, each sector reports to their entire delegation and the delegation negotiates internally as necessary. Third, the CNs negotiate with one another. Finally, the CNs report back to the delegation and suggest directions for moving forward. A new round begins with a new set of sectoral negotiations. Students had two and a half hours—enough time for two full negotiation rounds—but we allowed the CNs to organize the time. All three simulations generally followed the timeline, although some took longer during the sector negotiations and were unable to complete two full rounds on the first day.

on the major agreements for each sector. To capture and better understand these variations, we asked students to write about their biggest accomplishment and biggest challenge during negotiations. We followed that with an open discussion about lessons learned from both business and political-science perspectives.

During most of the simulation, we acted as passive facilitators, leaving the leadership and operations of the simulation to the CNs. This allowed students to decide the direction of the negotiations based on their research and preparation and also gave us the opportunity to observe the negotiation process.

Students produced a culminating assignment that included a final sector and delegation report, which outlined, in detail, the agreements reached and the disagreements remaining. The French university students analyzed how lessons learned could be useful in the business world. US university undergraduates described the obstacles to freer trade, costs and benefits for both sides, strategies that were effective in overcoming disagreements, and important lessons about the politics of trade. US university masters students drew on the relevant academic literature to assess the role of markets, institutions, and individuals. All US university students kept a journal of their own participation and submitted it with their report.

ANALYSIS: LEARNING ABOUT AND THROUGH TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

The students' final reports and their own evaluations confirm the enthusiasm expressed in articles in this section of *PS* about simulations. Feedback suggests that students learned much about specific sectors and the challenges for trade cooperation. For example, automotive-sector teams identified differences in crash tests: the EU tests at a lower speed without seatbelts, whereas the US tests at a higher speed with seatbelts. Some sectors not only negotiated CO₂ emissions but also the fines to be paid if the industry standards were not changed in line with a schedule for reform, which also was negotiated.

That in-depth knowledge helped students realize that trade would not necessarily mean lowering tariffs but often instead

Table 1
Sample Timetable for One Three-Hour Meeting

Day 1

First Round	
9:20-9:50	Sector Negotiations
9:50-10:10	Delegation Report
10:10-10:30	Chiefs' Negotiation
10:30-10:45	Delegation Meeting
Second Round	
10:50-11:20	Sector Negotiations
11:20-11:40	Delegation Report
11:40-12:00	Chiefs' Negotiation
12:00-12:15	Delegation Meeting

meant deeper regulatory cooperation. In negotiating agriculture, for example, students came to understand the seemingly self-contradictory policy differences between the US and the EU on issues related to food safety (e.g., hormones versus air-cured meats and raw-milk cheeses). These sectors also recognized the challenge of even “objective” topics, such as setting a standard for the term “organic.”

Several negotiations specifically considered how TTIP would affect global trade. One group argued that automotive standards should consider incorporating China and Japan in the future. One group representing the US proposed using Kyoto Protocol

opposed it in others. This led naturally to the students reflecting on the sources of “national interests.” These questions also allowed us to discuss the winners and losers of trade and investment, our role as consumers and producers, and the importance of perceptions in international business and politics.

Finally, the simulation provided students with the opportunity to sharpen skills that will prove useful in almost any job. Many commented that they felt better equipped to negotiate. Students noted that those who were better prepared and had better information at their command generally were more successful. Others noted that being well prepared meant having a backup plan.

Interdisciplinarity highlighted for students how their education shapes their understanding of the world around them.

standards in environmental agreements, acknowledging that the US is not a member but noting that it served as a natural point of reference. A third group stated that one of its goals was to ensure that this agreement outlined the same basic standards as those included in the United States–South Korea agreement “so as not to create an advantage for other markets.” These examples highlight the success of the simulation in helping students to understand not only the immediate context of the TTIP but also how the TTIP fits into a broader context of global trade.

Students’ comments also showed that they were exposed to concepts that are common in political science. A common response to technical differences was to propose the establishment of a new institution or inter-institutional agreement. One simulation proposed sharing information to establish a new common standard on the safety of hormones in food. This allowed us in the debriefing to discuss the role of international institutions and the politics of their design and implementation.

Students also learned that neither side was a pure proponent of “free trade” but rather promoted free trade in some areas and

Moreover, some noted that making concessions in this complex environment does not necessarily mean failing. Their insights are fungible, fundamental lessons.

Table 2 considers these impacts in the context of Bloom’s classic typology (Krathwohl, Bloom, and Masia 1956) as revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). The table is neither exhaustive nor an objective measurement of outcomes. We show instead that the simulation has the capacity to require high-intensity use of nearly all of the typology’s dimensions of learning. We also show that using this (or another) typology in designing the simulation would help to achieve the goals most desired.³

IMPROVEMENTS AND ADAPTATIONS

There are ways to adapt or improve the simulation. A key question is duration. Students felt rushed; however, running the simulation much longer might require genuine sectoral expertise. Adaptations include focusing on one sector, building more of the class around the simulation, and providing students with more background sectoral knowledge. Another question is the final assignment.

Table 2

Overview of Potential Learning Outcomes

Based on Anderson et al. (2001)

	Potential intensity of use	Simulation-specific application	Broader context
Remembering - recalling information	Moderate	Process structured by instructors, but effective negotiators could recall sector-specific facts	Final exam tested knowledge of literature on trade politics
Understanding - explaining ideas, concepts	High	Sector reps forced to explain stances to teammates, counterparts, and chief negotiators	Post-simulation assignments required considering how simulation experience aligned with trade literature
Applying - using information in new way	Moderate	Position papers meant students had a position to defend or alter throughout negotiations	Assigning students to represent “other” side meant applying political strategies from a different perspective
Analyzing - distinguishing between different parts	High	Negotiations required analysis of global sector, domestic politics of global production; contrast policy stances in order to find compromise	Final assignment required students to consider how their cultural context affected preferences and ideas
Evaluating - justifying a stand, decision	High	Small groups mean all had to participate in developing, justifying positions	Final assignment required students to evaluate own performance, justify strategy, explain impact
Creating - creating new product, point of view	Varied	Some teams adopted no-budge strategies but reached no agreements; most teams able to accept legitimacy of other views, find compromise	Whether students had pre-existing preferences or not, were forced to see new points of view, compare them with alternatives

Although conflicting schedules between the programs prevented it, our original design included a joint writing assignment. We planned to “raise the curtain” and ask sectoral counterparts to write a joint assessment of their performance, including a discussion of which of their counterparts’ strategies they found most effective. This peer review of performance likely would be a valuable learning experience. A pretest and posttest also could be useful in helping organizers think through the alignment of the simulation with learning goals. If properly designed, the tests could provide insight into debates over the correlates of trade preferences, especially gender (Mansfield, Mutz, and Silver 2014).

We believe that a special strength of this simulation was its interdisciplinary and international composition. Interdisciplinarity highlighted for students how their education shapes their understanding of the world around them. A careful discussion would help them understand how to use those strengths in finding jobs or to use their time at the university to address any educational gaps that this interdisciplinary interaction had revealed. Most universities do not have an in-residence foreign university with which they can partner relatively easily. That said, we see no reason why many of the same advantages could not result from the use of information technology. In one sense, this would better reflect the day-to-day process of trade negotiations between major summits.

CONCLUSION

If they are to work, simulations require substantial work before, during, and after an actual simulation, but they can be worth the effort. We found the simulation described in this article to be effective in helping students to learn more about the particulars of EU–US trade negotiations, the formation of national preferences within those negotiations, and the challenges and opportunities of trade negotiations. Students learned the value of preparation; how to conduct targeted, in-depth research; and how the outcomes of these types of political events are far from predetermined. We do not have the ability to systematically compare the learning results from this simulation with other instructional methods. Having taught similar courses and topics for a number of years, however, we find the argument for these activities compelling. Students apparently learned more deeply about the topic but also placed that more detailed knowledge within a broader context: one that was specific to both the simulation (i.e., global trade) and the realities of how cultural context shapes and conditions our views of issues that may seem technical and “rational.” Whereas traditional forms of instruction

remain invaluable tools, simulations like those described in this article deserve to be part of the toolkit. ■

NOTES

1. Packet instructions were designed and compiled by the authors and are available for free use and/or adaptation at <http://mtnance.wordpress.com/teaching>.
2. *Supra* n. 1.
3. We thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this addition to the article.

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