Online Teaching Innovation Grant Proposal:
Synchronous Simulations in National Security Decision-Making
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Description of Proposed Teaching and Learning Strategy

I propose to teach a hybrid or fully online course that incorporates synchronous national security decision-making simulations. I would utilize the Model Diplomacy simulations built by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). It is a free resource which is extremely rich, adaptable, user-friendly and timely. The simulations offer extensive primary, secondary and multimedia sources. CFR is one of our nation’s pre-eminent independent, nonpartisan think tanks and the publisher of numerous materials, including Foreign Affairs. An important and growing part of its mission is to provide educational materials to promote interest in and develop expertise in the next generation of foreign policy leaders.

The simulations can be found here: https://modeldiplomacy.cfr.org/#/

More about CFR can be found here: https://www.cfr.org/who-we-are

Simulations are a very valuable way to engage students. They are based on proven pedagogical approaches.

• **Role-playing** allows for interactive, dynamic, and personality-driven interactions. It simulates the complexity of decision-making, requires students to reflect on the perspectives of others, and puts theoretical ideas in a real-world context. This skill – of understanding and empathizing with differing perspectives – is crucial in the field of international affairs. The impact of differing languages, cultures, histories and priorities plays a very important role in international negotiations and simulating that in the classroom will enhance our students’ preparation for such interactions in the real world.

• The **case study method** provides students with the opportunity to consider real-world scenarios with no simple solutions. The CFR simulations will compel students to grapple with Russian intentions in the Baltics, Chinese intentions in the East China Sea, and US treaty obligations, alliances, opportunities and limitations to influence each situation. Such experiential learning enhances students’ skills in analysis and decision-making.¹ It also enhances “deep learning” rather than “surface learning.” In other words, students interact, consider new material critically, apply concepts to real life, and make connections between old and new material and across situations, rather than just receiving and accepting information, without an appreciation for its connections.²

• The **“flipped classroom”** has gained prominence in traditional academic settings. The growing body of research into online learning demonstrates that such interactive, student-centered learning is even more important in an online setting. Leaders in the field of online education agree that learner

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¹ For more on the Harvard Business School Case Study method: http://www.hbs.edu/mba/academic-experience/Pages/the-hbs-case-method.aspx

interaction is the key to an effective online course. Kearsley points out that “the most important role of the instructor in online classes is to ensure a high degree of interactivity and participation. This means designing and conducting learning activities that result in engagement with the subject matter and with fellow students.”

**Purpose: Impact on student learning, engagement and retention**

I think this sort of collaborative, dynamic and fast-paced experience is really important in preparing our graduate students in International Affairs. This is the environment in which they will have to operate as professionals. In addition, these simulations will offset some of the drawbacks of online learning.

- Participating in a fast-paced, collaborative, synchronous simulation will decrease students’ feelings of isolation that they often experience in an online setting.
- The simulation will enhance understanding of one another and foster greater interpersonal relationships. Actually seeing each other and interacting in real time will build a rapport and understanding of one another that is often lacking in an online course.
- Having to inhabit a role as consequential as a Cabinet secretary or White House advisor encourages a level of engagement that is difficult to foster in a discussion forum. In my in-class simulations, I am always impressed with the level of seriousness and preparation such simulations invoke.
- Role playing has also been shown to be a very memorable experience for students, which enhances retention of key concepts.