

Student-Designed Simulation: Teaching Global Governance in Practice through a Student-Led Role-Play for Practitioners

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Abstract: Building on the growing interest in role-play in international relations pedagogy, this article suggests *student-designed simulation* as an active learning exercise defined to help students get a nuanced understanding of the way global governance works in practice. Based on a teaching experience for graduate students at the University of Lausanne (Switzerland), this article makes two contributions. First, it proposes a concrete roadmap for those who would like to supervise students in creating a simulation for and with practitioners. Second, it shows the benefits of *student-designed simulation* in terms of learning outcomes for students and participants involved in the role-play. It highlights how the conceptualization of a detailed scenario, on the one hand, leads students to uncover the daily practices through which global problems are (tentatively) governed within international organizations. The implementation, on the other hand, fosters dialogue between aid workers specialized in emergency situations and actors working in the field of (sustainable) development who are invited to swap roles during a two-hour student-led simulation. By promoting this reversed type of simulation, the article intends to further expand the active learning toolbox while proposing a pedagogical activity that builds a bridge between academics and students of international studies and practitioners.

Resumen: Partiendo de la base del creciente interés en los juegos de roles dentro de la pedagogía de las relaciones internacionales, este artículo sugiere la *simulación diseñada por el estudiante* como un ejercicio de aprendizaje activo definido para ayudar a los estudiantes a obtener una comprensión matizada de la forma en la que funciona en la práctica la gobernanza global. Este artículo realiza dos contribuciones, en base a una experiencia docente para estudiantes de posgrado en la Universidad de Lausana (Suiza). En primer lugar, propone una hoja de ruta concreta para aquellos profesionales que deseen supervisar a los estudiantes en su proceso de creación de una simulación tanto con los profesionales como para los profesionales. En segundo lugar, muestra los beneficios de la *simulación diseñada por los estudiantes* en términos de resultados de aprendizaje tanto para los estudiantes como para los participantes involucrados en el juego de roles. El artículo destaca cómo, por un lado, la conceptualización de un escenario detallado provoca que los estudiantes puedan descubrir las prácticas cotidianas que se usan para gobernar los problemas globales (de

manera experimental) dentro de las organizaciones internacionales. Por otro lado, su implementación fomenta el diálogo entre los trabajadores humanitarios especializados en situaciones de emergencia y los agentes que trabajan en el campo del desarrollo (sostenible). Se persigue que ambas partes intercambien roles durante una simulación de dos horas dirigida por estudiantes. El artículo, mediante la promoción de este tipo de simulación invertida, pretende ampliar aún más la caja de herramientas de aprendizaje activo al tiempo que propone una actividad pedagógica que pretende tender un puente entre los académicos y estudiantes de estudios internacionales y los profesionales de este campo.

Résumé: En se fondant sur l'intérêt croissant pour le jeu de rôle dans la pédagogie des relations internationales, cet article propose la *simulation conçue par des étudiants* comme un exercice d'apprentissage actif, défini pour permettre aux étudiants d'acquérir une compréhension nuancée du fonctionnement de la gouvernance mondiale en pratique. Basé sur une expérience d'enseignement pour des étudiants de troisième cycle à l'Université de Lausanne en Suisse, l'article offre deux contributions. D'abord, il propose une feuille de route concrète pour ceux qui souhaiteraient superviser des étudiants dans la création d'une simulation pour et avec des professionnels. Ensuite, il montre les avantages d'une *simulation conçue par des étudiants* en termes de résultats d'apprentissage pour les étudiants et les participants impliqués dans le jeu de rôle. Il met en évidence que la création d'un scénario détaillé, d'une part, permet aux étudiants de découvrir les pratiques quotidiennes par lesquelles les organisations internationales tentent de régir les problèmes mondiaux. D'autre part, son usage favorise le dialogue entre les travailleurs humanitaires spécialisés dans les situations d'urgence et les acteurs du domaine du développement (durable), qui sont invités à échanger leur rôle au cours d'une simulation de deux heures menée par des étudiants. Par la promotion de ce type de simulation inversée, l'article souhaite davantage élargir la boîte à outils de l'apprentissage actif tout en proposant une activité pédagogique qui rassemble les chercheurs et étudiants en relations internationales ainsi que les praticiens.

Keywords: Simulation pedagogy, Global governance, International organizations, Humanitarian-development nexus

Palabras clave: Pedagogía de la simulación, gobernanza global, organizaciones internacionales, nexo entre la ayuda humanitaria y el desarrollo

Mots clés: simulation pédagogique, gouvernance mondiale, organisations internationales, liens humanitaire-développement

Introduction

When international relations students share their professional projects, we often hear them claim that they want to work for an international organization (IO) like the United Nations (UN). Knowing the diversity of professional fields that make up these organizations, such an answer does not say much about their future. Will they be working in a refugee camp, participating in a fundraising campaign to promote environmental protection, or managing a development project implemented by local non-governmental organizations? Students also often idealize IOs, assuming their smooth collaboration for the common good and ignoring interorganizational rivalries. The diversity and complexity of the world of IOs are not easily taught. Relying on the literature gives a glimpse of their complex professional ecologies (Stone 2013) and their dysfunctional interactions (Kranke 2022), with studies often using

ethnographic methods to unpack these institutions. To go further, the present article introduces a pedagogical tool designed to teach about IOs and provide a nuanced understanding of the way global governance works in practice. Building on active learning pedagogy, it presents *student-designed simulation* as a reversed type of simulation where the students do not actually perform the simulation but design and lead the role-play for an external audience.

The rich literature on simulation exercises in international relations pedagogy has praised the value of active learning (Lantis 1998; Brynen 2010; Weir and Baranowski 2011; Hendrickson 2021). More precisely, role-play offers the opportunity for participants to “experience many of the same constraints and motivation for action (or inaction) experienced by the real players” (Boyer and Smith 2015, 316). Used in the classroom, simulations help students approach decision-making processes in crisis situations (Levin-Banchik 2018), complex institutions like the EU (Elias 2014), diplomatic practices at the UN (Chasek 2005), or environmental summits’ dynamics (Schnurr, De Santo, and Green 2014). Students’ performances as actors in these experiences constitute the basis from which they acquire knowledge about the situations they are instructed to play. We build on these proven methods while suggesting an important twist: students do not learn from experiencing the role-play but from creating a credible scenario for practitioners directly involved in the processes under study.

We used a *student-designed simulation* exercise as the core assignment in a graduate class entitled *Governing Globalization* taught at the University of Lausanne¹. During a full semester, students collectively created a role-play for eight practitioners with a focus on the distinction regularly made between aid workers whose objectives are long-term and those intervening on urgent matters. Assuredly, practitioners in development aid or environmental sustainability and professionals operating in humanitarian emergencies have very different temporalities (Verlin 2021). Yet, such contrasts should not be exaggerated, and overlaps often trump a clear division of labor (Kimber and Maertens 2021). By developing a fictional scenario based on real events, students got to learn about these critical divides and their blurriness. We accompanied them in the conception and implementation of the simulation, designed as a form of training for international civil servants, taking advantage of the close-by International Geneva ecosystem (Dairon and Badache 2021). For students, the aim was to learn about IOs and their activities by creating a role-play based on the literature and field research they conducted. For participants, the objective was to experience temporality, constraints, and tasks that contrast with their everyday activities. For about two hours, staff usually working on humanitarian emergencies role-played (sustainable) development workers and vice versa, completing assignments that mimicked the daily activities of their counterparts.

Based on this experience, this article intends to make two contributions. On the one hand, it proposes a concrete roadmap for those who would like to guide students in creating a simulation for practitioners. While our focus is mainly on IO personnel in the field of global governance, the outlined process could be applied in multiple other pedagogical contexts and in relation to instructors’ access to potential participants. *Student-designed simulation* constitutes an efficient tool for the international studies classroom: scenario building compels to cover significant content with the motivation to apply it for professionals at the end of the term while students get to experience how international relations are performed in practice in a setting that facilitates long-term knowledge retention. In other words, the time and energy invested in such exercise is worthwhile. On the other hand, the article shows the benefits of *student-designed simulation* not only for the students and teaching team but also for the practitioners involved in the role-play. It highlights the pedagogical

¹The present article has been approved for publication by the teaching commission of the university (equivalent to IRB) assessing the protection of the rights and welfare of the enrolled students involved in this simulation.

benefits of reversing simulation exercises in the classroom while hinting at how scenarios inviting participants to swap roles have great potential for interorganizational collaboration. To do so, the article first situates *simulation design* in the literature and then unpacks student-led simulations, building on our teaching experience. Four sections are structured as follows: “What?”—what it means to teach everyday practices through a *student-designed simulation*, “How?”—how to guide students to create a role-play, “Why?”—what learning outputs one can expect from such pedagogical activity, “What challenges?”—what resources are necessary for the implementation and what limits are inherent to this exercise. The conclusion expands on the qualitative data that can be generated if the experience is repeated.

Student-designed Simulation As a Pedagogical Tool

Teaching Through Simulations

Role-play simulations used in classrooms are embedded in an active learning pedagogy. Active learning refers to instructional approaches that actively engage students in their learning process through collaboration and discussions and includes methods such as case studies, teamwork, and problem-based tasks (Powner and Allendoerfer 2008; Børte, Nesje, and Lillejord 2020). Active learning is supported by constructivist learning theory, which posits that knowledge is constructed by learners when they create their understandings based on “an interaction between what they already know and believe and ideas and knowledge with which they come into contact” (Richardson 2003, 1624). Active learning methods, like simulation and problem-based learning, encourage theory application in a situation that resonates with learners’ personal experiences, therefore accommodating a wider range of learner types (Sierra and Rodríguez-Conde 2021) while promoting a better appropriation of knowledge (Prosser and Trigwell 1999).

Drawing on active learning pedagogy, role-play simulation has been used in higher education across disciplines. It consists of simulations designed to replicate a (real) situation in which participants take on a specific role and follow a pre-determined scenario involving interactions among them (Lean et al. 2006; Wheeler 2006). More specifically, in international relations education, role-play simulations have gained in popularity over recent years² (Brynen 2015, 19). They are particularly suited to overcome obstacles associated with teaching abstract concepts (Shellman and Turan 2006): simulations allow to “enliven the international relations classroom” (Lantis 1998, 39) by giving students the opportunity to apply abstract concepts, such as power or global governance, directly or to experience them personally (Shaw 2004, 2). Given their credited learning advantages (Smith and Boyer 1996; Shaw 2004; Asal and Blake 2006; Krain and Lantis 2006), role-play simulations represent an effective approach that suits the interdisciplinary nature of international studies and complement lecture-based teaching.

Reversing simulations: Learning by Designing a Simulation

Building on the acknowledged value of role-play simulations, we propose to add an innovative simulation-based exercise to the active learning toolbox for international studies pedagogy: *student-designed simulation*. *Student-designed simulation* requires students to conceive a credible scenario, based on literature review and field research, and guide its implementation with external participants. Such activity builds on

²The most well-known international relations simulations include the Model United Nations (MUN) replicating a UN conference where students role-play delegates from different countries, or the Inter-nation simulation (INS) that introduces students to the foreign policy decision-making by immersing them in a fictitious world (Starkey and Blake 2001).

existing methods to help instructors navigate the construction of role-play simulations and the few studies dedicated to the development of simulations by students.

Scholars have provided designing methods to render simulations more accessible to instructors and adaptable to their needs. Recognizing nevertheless that there is “no singular best way to design simulations” (Shaw and Switky 2018, 524), we identify two cross-cutting elements. First, a simulation’s learning goals should be aligned with the ones of the course in which it is implemented (Raymond and Usherwood 2013; Baranowski and Weir 2015; Boyer and Smith 2015). According to Asal and Blake (2006), the learning objectives of a simulation can focus either on content (i.e., the elements constituting the context of the simulation) or on processes (i.e., “how and why,” the procedures and dynamics of a scenario) (Shaw and Switky 2018, 526). Even though it is possible to be effective on both, a content-oriented simulation will comprise more preparation on the subject matter, whereas a process-oriented simulation will emphasize the interaction between participants. Shortly put, learning objectives determine the design of the gameplay. Secondly, assessment methods should also be coherent with the learning objectives (Baranowski and Weir 2015). Once informed of the learning objectives, participants can actively seek to reach them through the assessment regime, which provides a guiding frame to advance in the simulation exercise (Raymond and Usherwood 2013). We build on these central points while also drawing on practical suggestions on how to create a role-play simulation (Usherwood 2014; Shaw and Switky 2018) to design a pedagogical activity in which students are to construct and lead the simulation.

While most of the literature on simulations focuses on the pedagogical benefits resulting from students’ participation in the role-play, Gamson rightly stresses that “playing a game may be a more active experience than listening to a lecture, but developing a game is more active still” (1972, cited by Druckman and Ebner 2008, 468). *Student-designed simulations* could thus enhance students’ learning experience by reversing the pedagogical strategy: students do not take part in the simulations, but rather conceive them and guide their implementation for an external audience. Such an approach supplements the existing literature, which is rather sparse when it comes to *student-designed simulation* as a teaching tool.

Reflecting on the advantages of role-play design activity over sole participation, Druckman and Ebner (2008) conducted an experiment to compare the benefits of *designing a simulation* with those of participating in a role-play or listening to a lecture to learn about negotiation concepts. With 86 assessment measures of learning and motivation, the experience showed the most beneficial results for students designing the simulation, in comparison with those playing it and the control group. Druckman (2019, 172) later explains such findings by the fact that establishing relations between concepts is key to design learning. The experience introduced in the present article echoes the pedagogical experiment led by Druckman and Ebner (2008) but relies on *student-designed simulation* as a core assignment running through the entire term. In the next sections, we trace the inception and outcomes of this experience, guiding readers willing to implement such a valuable pedagogical tool in their curriculum.

What? Teaching Global Governance Through *Student-Designed Simulation*

Pedagogical Objectives

Approaching global governance through the lens of IOs, the course was designed to shed light on the complex entanglements of actors, institutions, and practices through which global problems are (tentatively) governed at the multilateral level. In the study of global governance, scholarship has identified recurring practices, or “established ways of doing things” (Pouliot and Thérien 2018, 164), such as “hosting a global conference” (Pouliot and Thérien 2018), “making documents”

Table 1. Student-designed simulation on international organizations: Learning objectives

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:	
(1)	Describe and analyze IOs' functioning and their key roles in global governance
(2)	Demonstrate an informed understanding of a specific field of international intervention (humanitarian or development policy areas), its main actors and their logic of action
(3)	Identify the concrete tasks performed by IOs
(4)	Be familiar with the diversity of profiles among IO personnel and the challenges of interorganizational cooperation
(5)	Critically assess the political nature of IOs
(6)	Employ a range of research skills to gather information on specific organizations and their daily work
(7)	Work individually and in team to design a scenario and prepare the material necessary for the role-play
(8)	Develop oral and written communication competencies to present and synthesize research outputs and reproduce IOs' templates
(9)	Use specific jargon and diplomatic skills to interact with IO staff

(Bueger 2015), “gaining time” (Louis and Maertens 2021), “saving face” (Nair 2019), or “self-censorship and mirroring” (Sondarjee 2021). These practices are composed of different tasks executed daily by practitioners. In this context, *student-designed simulation* is a tool guiding students through the discovery of recurring practices and the everyday tasks through which they are performed. Indeed, a role-play scenario presents a sequential outline of the actions participants are required to take to reach the defined goal. To design a credible simulation, students then must learn about real-world tasks and the order through which they are usually completed. In a role-play, “specific tasks [are to] be assigned to specific players” (Boyer and Smith 2015, 319); in other words, the creators must identify the specific practices of each character. Designing a simulation requires an in-depth understanding of the processes being played, the assigned roles, and the expected tasks. For that reason, it has great potential when the learning objective is to understand everyday practices. The simulation project also focused on one peculiar dimension of the complex world of IOs: the contrasting ways of working that distinguish actors whose main mandate is to deal with short-term problems from those involved in long-term activities. Through this angle, the course addressed issues around individual agency, hierarchy, organizational cultures, professional habits, temporal dynamics of international interventions, and interorganizational cooperation, among others. The pedagogical objectives defined for this course are listed in table 1. These objectives were introduced to the students in the syllabus and in class, along with a mandatory reading on the benefits and challenges of role-play simulations (Clapper 2010) and a presentation of the pedagogical rationale behind the simulation project based on a constructivist learning approach. While active learning pedagogy is much developed in our curriculum and therefore well-known by our students, such an introduction is critical to clarify the students' required involvement and the expected learning outputs.

While the simulation was a medium for students to learn about the realities of global governance, it also had the ambition to have an impact on the participants. Inspired by a role-play designed to help politicians and scientists better understand each other and reflect on their own practices (Alejandro et al. 2023), the simulation is intended to bring together actors who often collaborate even if they do not share the same priorities, methods, and capacities. After consultation with IO staff on the current status of the humanitarian-development divide (Moore 1999), we decided to focus on these two fields. Indeed, despite numerous efforts and much progress to bring these fields closer to work in a coherent manner, often labeled

under the umbrella term “humanitarian-development nexus” (Lie 2020), there are still important distinctions when it comes to everyday practices and organizational cultures that may affect collaboration and mutual understanding (Lie 2020; Kimber and Maertens 2021; Kranke 2022). The simulation therefore served as a framework for students to learn about interorganizational competition and cooperation by designing the role-play and directly interacting with practitioners. For the latter, it acted as a platform to engage in interorganizational dialogue but also to experience the academic reading of their professional activities.

Scope Conditions and Practicalities

The simulation project was the core assignment for a course of nine European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits,³ translating into six periods (45 minutes each) of class per week and allowing for sufficient time to sequence the various stages of the simulation development while providing periods for coaching.⁴ Sessions dedicated to the preparation, implementation, and debriefing of the exercise counted for about a third of the program. The other two-thirds included lectures, reading discussions, students’ presentations, and group activities on the politics of IOs. The simulation was embedded in the course design to become increasingly central towards the end of the term with the actual event. Twenty students enrolled in the master’s class, which facilitated a balanced distribution of work among them but also increased coordination challenges. Student-designed simulation projects are ideal for small classes ranging from fifteen to twenty-five students but can be adapted to smaller/bigger groups by adjusting the exercise and the number of expected participants (in our case twenty students prepared a role-play for eight practitioners). On the institutional level, we counted on the freedom granted by the university to implement an innovative pedagogical project, its financial support to employ two teaching assistants (equated to one 40 percent position for six months), and to cover the students’ travel to Geneva, where the simulation took place (the venue was free of charge). More generally, such a simulation project could be included in an undergraduate course if students are familiar with active learning pedagogy and/or have prerequisite knowledge on the course’s subject. For graduate classes, *student-designed simulations* not only deepen their autonomy but also show the value of simulation as a pedagogical tool for future teaching activities.

In the spirit of inclusive pedagogy,⁵ students were given much creative freedom to stimulate their engagement: they chose the role they would play during the simulation as well as the professional field they unpacked (development/humanitarian intervention). In addition, the course was evaluated on a variety of assignments, both individual and group-based. Collaborative work proved to be another central element: while peer learning was critical, the students also benefited from the invaluable insights of guest lecturers, IO specialists, and practitioners. We took advantage of the proximity between the University of Lausanne and International Geneva, home to many IOs, as well as from the main teacher’s network within these institutions. Resources and access to the professional fields explored in the role-play are important conditions to ensure the feasibility of the project. Instructors should therefore select a scenario and characters coherent with their connections to practitioners. Overall, the simulation’s audience needs to be chosen in relation to the course’s topic and feasible access to the targeted individuals. Participants may include civil servants, policymakers (at any level of the executive or legislative

³European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits are the European Union’s standard means to measure the volume of learning and associated workload, one ECTS equals 25–30-hour workload.

⁴A year-long class could hence easily accommodate a *student-designed simulation* project.

⁵We refer to inclusive pedagogy as an umbrella term that includes practices such as universal design learning and pays close attention to the accessibility of the pedagogical material and the limits of “one-size-fits-all” instruction.

branch), targeted-specific professions like journalists or experts, professional and non-professional activists, or even citizens. The nature and degree of complexity of the documents provided to the participants, as well as the duration of the simulation, need to be adjusted to the selected audience.

Student-designed simulation can be applied to numerous topics and policy fields. In our case, we invited students to create a simulation to uncover practices in the fields of humanitarian emergency interventions and sustainable development. While having two different fields was necessary for our role-play, one can imagine having two distinct groups from the same policy area (e.g., two departments from the same organization and two types of actors working in the same domain). To create a scenario where both development workers and humanitarian organizations would be involved, we had to select a location to situate the actions of the fictional characters. Simulations can be based on entirely fictional settings, fictional episodes but inspired by real events, or real situations. We chose the second option for two reasons: the fictional dimension offers the necessary creativity for students to “establish ownership of their own “histories”” (Asal, Raymond, and Usherwood 2015, 304), while the embeddedness in a real case had a pedagogical purpose since students would acquire knowledge about the country, past events, and international interventions. We chose the case of Haiti on which the main instructor had prior knowledge—she conducted fieldwork in the country and still had contact with practitioners working on sustainability-oriented projects. The case was introduced through a documentary directed by Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck, *Fatal Assistance* (2013), and studied through a variety of mediums, including IO publications and Haitian newspapers, as well as testimonies from international staff who worked in Haiti and a former student whose MA thesis explored the Haitian permanent representation to the UN in Geneva (Dorsainville 2022).

How? Developing a Student-Designed Simulation Exercise: A Step-By-Step Guide

In the following pages, we introduce a series of steps to set up a *student-designed simulation* exercise in a course, summarized in [table 2](#).

Setting the Stage: Conducting Preliminary Research and Defining Pedagogical Objectives

The first step is to ensure the pedagogical alignment between the chosen activity and the learning objectives; in other words, instructors should make sure a *student-designed simulation* is a valid option to reach the objectives of their course. Well-defined learning objectives guarantee not only that the simulation has pedagogical value but also that students will commit and stay committed to the project. And for that, like for any kind of simulation activity, “learning objectives must be clear to all participants” (Asal, Raymond, and Usherwood 2015, 310) and, thus, thoroughly introduced to the students.

Preliminary research is then central to selecting the core elements of the scenario from which students can elaborate. A literature review on the case and exploration of primary sources produced by the actors involved in the scenario should be supplemented by exploratory interviews with professionals of the field(s). Indeed, these individuals can help define the general storyline and check the relevance of the topic and planned scenario (Is this situation really a daily challenge for them? Are these supposedly distinctions between different groups important enough to have concrete effects on their practices?), its credibility (Could this be happening in the real world?) and feasibility (Can we expect to convince practitioners to participate? How long should we expect them to be available?).

Based on the generated information, instructors should prepare a detailed roadmap with a progressive timeline to guide students step-by-step. The guidance note should include the following elements: an outline for the scenario, a detailed

Table 2. Instructors' steps to develop a *student-designed simulation* exercise

Before the beginning of the term	Conduct preliminary research	Connect the learning objectives with the simulation's expected outputs Identify the topic and general storyline Conduct exploratory interviews with professionals of the field(s) to check the role-play's relevance, credibility, and feasibility Identify key readings on the case to include in the syllabus
	Prepare a detailed roadmap for the students	Define an outline for the scenario with sequential events from which students can elaborate Divide students' assignments into different phases and prepare a detailed timeline with intermediary goals (see table 3) Write a guidance note to describe the process and the students' responsibilities (see online supplementary file p. 1–8)
	Set up collaborative tools	Prepare and organize a shared storage drive Define communication tools to facilitate collaborative work
During the term	Supervise students' progress	Present the pedagogical rationale of the project at the beginning of the term Include mentoring sessions to supervise students' research Review students' progress and comment submitted material Organize a mid-term feedback session with professionals from the field(s) Distribute roles among students
	Rehearse and improve	Organize a rehearsal of the simulation with students from other programs (ask students to invite acquaintances) Debrief after the rehearsal and identify necessary improvements Supervise the revision of the scenario and material
	Organize the event	Invite participants Secure a convenient location with necessary equipment Print all the documents and prepare folders for each character Prepare a small present to thank the participants
At the end and after the term	Debrief	Ask students to write a one-page reflexive note on their participation Debrief in class about the experience: learning outputs, challenges, possible improvements, future projects
	Follow-up with participants	Send a thank you note to the participants Ask for voluntary feedback from the participants Share the outputs with the participants (video of the event, online article, future projects, etc.)
	Publicize the outputs	Review and finalize the outputs created by the students Request participants' approval before sharing productions where they appear/are quoted Identify the best medium to publicize the outputs (social medias university's website, etc.) Share the outputs publicly

timeline, and descriptions of students' assignments divided into different phases that represent intermediary goals in the design of the simulation (see online supplementary file p. 1–7). The outline for the scenario is the main storyline from which students can elaborate; in our case, a fictional disaster would affect Haiti, urging a humanitarian team to develop a funding application to answer immediate needs while a group of development organizations has to revise their project according to the new situation.⁶ Additionally, the roadmap can include a preliminary frame with a series of potential sequential events to help students get started. In our

⁶A class of twenty students prepared a two-hour simulation scenario for two teams of four characters to allocate enough speaking time among participants.

case, we provided them with a basic set of events and interactions: a first phase of documentation for both groups of participants, a time of collective work for each group, consultations with stakeholders, and shared presentations of the results of both groups at the end. Based on these storylines and preliminary frames, students were asked to complete assignments to progressively elaborate the simulation kits. Table 3 presents how to define students' assignments sequentially. When the role-play simulation involves different groups of participants (e.g., group 1: development and group 2: humanitarian), we suggest dividing the class along the same lines so that separate student groups work on the scenario, characters, and documents intended for each team.

These steps are presented at the beginning of the term and are punctually reminded to help students sequence their work and progressively build the simulation. Intermediary objectives and deadlines are essential to verify progress and adapt if necessary. Collaborative tools to share documents and facilitate communication should also be set up. An organized shared storage drive is necessary to share documents and assess progress.

The timeline and the roles' distribution must be adapted to one's university calendar and students' enrollment, but this preliminary work is essential to build the foundation for the successful implementation of the exercise.

Keeping the Ball Rolling: Checking Progress and Rehearsing

Once the framework for the exercise is set up and students' work is initiated, the pivotal task is to maintain the momentum. During regular check-in sessions, students receive feedback to progress through the three phases of the *simulation design* ((1) research; (2) outline; and (3) simulation kit). These meetings are also helpful to reassure the students that the project is on track, ensure coordination between groups, and enable the instructors to make adjustments if necessary (e.g., help finalize documents and adjust schedule). Ideally, a session to discuss the students' draft characters and outline of the scenario can be organized in the presence of specialists from the professional field(s) who can evaluate the credibility of the role-play's broad contours.

A rehearsal ensures that the scenario runs smoothly; if time allows, we suggest organizing it one or two weeks before the main event to leave time for revisions. During the rehearsal, students perform the scenario as they planned it, using the prepared material needed to support the running of the simulation (character cards, forms participants have to fill, etc.). This rehearsal can be conducted with volunteer students not enrolled in the class who will play the intended characters while the students will each take on the role they will play in the actual simulation. An observation protocol also needs to be implemented to provide useful feedback for adjustments and anticipate the observation phase as it will be implemented during the simulation. A short session of debriefing is organized after the rehearsal to agree on the necessary revisions and distribute the remaining work for the following days.

The logistical management of the event is another essential task for the teaching team, especially the preparation of the simulation venue and the recruitment of participants. Recruitment should start early, especially if the professional fields targeted are subject to tight schedules. In this regard, professional and academic networks proved very helpful. Depending on the characteristics of the participants, students could also be in charge of recruiting them as part of their assignments.

Finally, time must be set aside for the practical setup of the simulation kit, such as proofreading the documents prepared by the students, printing them, and sorting them out for D-Day. On that day, instructors welcome participants, introduce and conclude the event while assessing students' performance by discreetly observing the simulation rooms.

Table 3. Defining sequential students' assignments

Tasks and description	Learning objectives
Week 1: Select research policy areas	
<i>In-class:</i> Students choose among the four pre-defined groups:	1
Emergency humanitarian action	Development programs
Group 1: Food assistance Suggested organizations: OCHA, UNICEF, and WFP	Group 3: Sustainable agriculture Suggested organizations: FAO and ILO
Group 2: Assistance in case of forced displacement Suggested organizations: IOM and UNHCR	Group 4: Environmental rehabilitation Suggested organizations: UNDP and UNEP
Week 5: Write and present a synthesis document on the defined professional field	
Phase 1: To launch the research, we suggested typical organizations in this field from which students could start to select relevant literature and explore real-world activities.	1, 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9
<i>In-class:</i> 1 period on week 3 to allow students to organize their collaboration; 1 period on week 4 for Q&A.	
<u>Documentation supplied by instructors:</u>	
- A few key references for each group	
- A contact information to conduct an exploratory interview with a professional from the field	
- Readings on interviewing methods	
- Guidelines to write the synthesis document in four parts (suggested sources):	
■ Part 1: Factual elements about key organizations in the field (official websites)	
■ Part 2: Summary of the main activities conducted in this field (official websites, interview, and literature)	
■ Part 3: Information on the profile of the professionals of the field (interview, social media like LinkedIn, and literature)	
■ Part 4: Challenges and criticism (literature and medias)	
Week 7: Prepare an outline of the scenario and the characters	
Phase 2: Students elaborate the pre-defined scenario into a more detailed outline with different steps, intermediary objectives, and events (such as external interventions). They compile information for each character and prepare a list of documents that will be included in the characters' folders.	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9
<i>In-class:</i> 1 period on week 6 for tutoring if requested; 4 periods on week 7 to present the material to the class and external experts from the field	
<u>Documentation supplied by instructors:</u>	
- Examples of character cards	
- List of potential intermediary objectives	
- Examples of documents to integrate in the characters' folders	
Week 10: Distribute roles	
<i>In-class:</i> Students distribute the roles to be taken on during the simulation:	7
- Coordination: one student to coordinate the unfolding of the scenario between the two groups	
- Moderation: one student per group	
- Fictional interventions: interventions are defined in the detailed scenario; students may play two different roles, one in each room	
- Observation: one to two students per room to collect qualitative data on how the simulation unfolds	
- Journalists: students document the simulation and produce outputs of their choice (article, interview, video, podcast, etc.) to publicize the event It is recommended to select understudies for the first three types of roles in case students cannot make it on the day of the simulation	

Table 3. Continued

Tasks and description	Learning objectives
Week 11: Elaborate a draft version of the complete simulation kit	
Phase 3: Students hand in a complete draft version of the simulation kit. The kit includes: - A detailed scenario with the documentation necessary for each step (forms to complete in group, shared documents not specific to a character, an introductory video, etc.) - Documentation for each character: character cards and specific documents depending on their profile and tasks - Actors' planned interventions: to make the scenario lively, students may add external interventions played by themselves to inject new information (e.g., intervention by a donor or a government representative, flash information brought by a journalist, etc.) <i>In-class:</i> 1 period to share the instructors' feedback on the material (the material must be reviewed by the instructors shortly after being submitted)	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8
Week 12: Rehearsal	
<i>In-class:</i> Students rehearse the scenario and documentation with voluntary peers and acquaintances. After debriefing the test, the simulation kit is revised. <u>Documentation supplied by instructors:</u> - Observation grid prepared with the observation group - Printed version of the simulation kit handed by the students on week 11 - Questionnaire to debrief participants and collect suggested modifications to revise the kit	7 and 8
Week 13: Simulation	
<i>In-class:</i> Students lead the simulation with the external participants. <u>Material supplied by instructors:</u> - Printed version of the final version of the simulation kit - Presents and thank you notes prepared for the participants	4, 5, 8, and 9
Week 14: Debriefing	
Students hand in: - A reflexive note on their personal experience to prepare for the debriefing - The productions associated with their role (observation notes and journalistic outputs) <i>In-class:</i> 2 periods to discuss students' experiences and their productions; 2 periods to connect their observations to the study of IOs	1, 2, 5, 7, and 8

Going the Extra Mile: Debriefing and Making the Most Out of the Experience

For the pedagogical experience, the post-simulation time is as significant as the simulation itself. We therefore advise reserving at least one session afterward and some work time to supervise follow-up activities that help publicize the event and “go the extra mile.”

We suggest two phases of debriefing. In the first one, practitioners collectively reflect on their experience while sharing with the students their impressions on the simulation. In the second one, a post-simulation class session is dedicated to reviewing the whole exercise in the larger context of the course. The debriefing process is widely recognized as an indispensable feature in the simulation literature: if “some learning often occurs while a game is being played, (...) deeper lessons are drawn and drawn out in a debriefing session” (Crookall 2010, 908). Students can operate connections with theory, solidifying the learning experience. It can be done through whole-class discussions or group talks, during which students share their insights, or, as suggested by Petranek (2000), through written productions, which require more time and allow examination of behaviors, emotions, and events. Regarding *student-designed simulations*, both methods are valuable: the collaborative

nature of the experience calls for a shared discussion, whereas the written production best serves students' reflections on the aim of the exercise and their learning outcomes. Building on their notes, we invited students to collectively elaborate on (1) their impressions of the simulation, (2) the term-long experience of designing the role-play, and (3) their perceived learning outcomes. Finally, the debriefing allows students to make suggestions for improvements, upon which the teaching team can draw adjustments to repeat the experience in subsequent years or to perform the simulation again with other participants since the material is ready-to-use.

Considering the highly diverse activities in which students engage while designing the simulation, assessment methods can be rather diversified. The final grade can therefore be based on individual and collective assignments, with some of them being evaluated during the term to ensure regularity in the learning process and progress in the simulation conceptualization.

Aside from their personal written debrief, students in the “journalist team” produce content such as articles, videos, or podcasts. These not only help assess student work but also constitute material to communicate about the experience, which can be broadcasted through different channels. In our case, we published a video, short articles, a podcast, and a Twitter thread, which were eventually compiled on a page dedicated to the project on the university website.⁷ Knowing that their outputs can be publicized constitutes a good incentive for the students to stay involved during the entire term.

Once available online, outputs should be shared with the participants, as they value the time practitioners dedicate to their participation. To thank them for their involvement and inform them of the results, we also suggest sending a thank-you e-mail in which their feedback about the experience can be solicited and then shared with the students, helping improve future editions.

Why? The Added Value of *Student-Designed Simulation* in Teaching Global Governance

To assess the added value of the exercise, we collected qualitative data from three sources. First, students and participants were asked to reflect on their experience by providing written feedback by email for participants and by writing a one-page essay for students. Secondly, one week after the event, we organized an in-class debriefing session during which students were able to connect their individual and collective experiences and intersubjectively assess their learning outcomes.⁸ Thirdly, the teaching team also reflected on their shared experience to self-assess our learning benefits. Based on these data, we identify three main benefits to *student-designed simulation*: It helps students acquire a nuanced understanding of a professional ecosystem—here the one of IOs; creating an entire role-play simulation for an external audience trains numerous transversal skills; it constitutes a unique (pedagogical) experience for all the parties involved. All these reasons justify the time and energy dedicated to such a project in the international studies classroom. Future replications of the experience will strengthen these preliminary findings.

Acquiring a Nuanced Understanding of a Professional Ecosystem

To create a credible scenario, students had to capture the details that are specific to the everyday work within IOs. They identified routinized ways of doing things

⁷See: <https://www.unil.ch/centre-durabilite/fr/home/menuinst/recherche/catalyse/humanitaire-developpement.html>

⁸Such a technique echoes focus group research (Stanley 2016).

as well as typical positions participants would play designing characters distinctive enough but not stereotypical. Students performed a balancing act between disparate sources of information, including semi-structured interviews, IOs' own publications, their staff's social media profiles, and the literature that critically assesses their practices. According to [Harvey \(2022, 276\)](#), "a well-designed game can create the opportunity for students to critically deconstruct the information they learn in class" with the objective for students to "actively process information in a nuanced way, challenge it, and selectively incorporate it into what they know." By setting up a "well-designed game" for practitioners by themselves, students precisely developed a nuanced take on their professional ecosystem and learned about IOs' daily work, which has been rather overlooked in the mainstream literature in international relations. They further acquired thematic knowledge not only on the Haitian case but also on specific professional practices (e.g., fundraising during a humanitarian crisis) and sectoral activities (e.g., agroforestry). As one student put it, "this experience made almost all participants realize how complicated it is to discuss and set achievable goals in both the short and long term" (Students' feedback, observation role).⁹ The focus on the tensions between development and humanitarian actions also heightened the learning experience by unpacking global governance, which is composed of different professional fields with their own habits and sometimes conflicting objectives. Students had to uncover hierarchical dynamics specific to IOs ([Nair 2019](#); [Kimber and Maertens 2021](#); [Louis and Maertens 2021](#)), which they incorporated in the design of the role-play characters (see online supplementary file, p. 17–18). The experience also showed where the apparent lines of fracture merge, contributing to another layer of nuance, as stressed by this student "I realized how short-term and long-term perspectives, which we tend to separate, are actually more than linked, especially during natural disasters" (Students' feedback, journalist role).

In designing the simulation for IO practitioners, students had the "great opportunity to learn more about international organizations, to move from theory to practice" (Students' feedback, fictional intervention) in what a student called "a more pragmatic and "down to earth" understanding of the world of international organizations" (Students' feedback, fictional intervention). Concretely, they got to interact with professionals from IOs during the preparation process (interviews, guest lectures, feedback sessions) and during the simulation, organized in the heart of International Geneva. Not only did the experience facilitate networking for students' future professional endeavors and aid them in building confidence, but it also helped them "get a real foot in the door of the environment [they] have been talking about all semester and meet people with careers [they] aspire to pursue" (Students' feedback, observation role). While the readings and lectures of the course were rather critical of IO action, including their apolitical claims and their ability to impose a technocratic neoliberal rationality ([Sondarjee 2021](#)), designing the simulation allowed students to construct a nuanced understanding of global governance in practice, realizing that humanitarian and development workers do not "wake up every morning with a clear objective to depoliticize IO action or global problems" ([Louis and Maertens 2021, 16](#)). Creating a role-play for an external audience is an effective tool to better capture the nuances of the (professional) ecosystem in which the targeted audience daily interacts.

Gaining Transversal Skills

Like other project-based learning activities, designing a simulation intends to promote "students' autonomy, constructive investigations, goal setting, collaboration,

⁹Students' feedback is anonymized except for the role they played during the simulation.

communication and reflection within real-world practices” (Kokotsaki, Menzies, and Wiggins 2016, 1). Our experience suggests that by creating a role-play, students gain transversal skills when it comes to research and synthesis, creativity and confidence building, project management and autonomy, teamwork, and communication competencies.

By building the simulation kit, students sought to acquire a general overview of the humanitarian and development fields while conducting research on very specific dimensions such as the consequences of a tropical storm on malnutrition or the agricultural traditions in the Southern part of Haiti, fine-tuning their ability to study the big picture *and* to examine clear-cut, often more technical, topics. Then collected and analyzed information had to be synthesized in the support documents to be read by the participants in only a few minutes. This part was a major challenge for students used to hand in long papers, but highly useful for their training, as writing brief documents is a commonplace task in many professional settings.

Designing a simulation further promotes students’ “curiosity and creativity, learning and retention of material by just having fun” (Shaw 2004, 13), already enhanced in role-playing. Indeed, by having to create characters, take on the role of officials or journalists, and write the simulation material (including fictional tweets, text messages, and news articles), students could train their creativity and related skills (e.g., layout competencies and video editing skills). Students all praised the ludic dimension of the exercise while also emphasizing that it valued autonomy in knowledge construction in a way that fosters long-term retention (e.g., one student asserted they “build knowledge that is more sustainable in the long run than the exam type of academia”).

As a three-month-long project, designing a simulation also builds students’ project management skills. When self-assessing their experience, one wrote: “Preparing for this project took a lot of dedication over the course of the semester (...). The simulation, therefore, allowed us to realize the work we were able to do and to understand with more finesse its dual pedagogical stakes (for the students as preparers and for the participants as workers in a particular field). I feel that I have acquired knowledge and skills and that I am able to work in a group to organize a project for professionals” (Students’ feedback, observation role). This quote highlights different skills related to project management—time management, organizational competencies—while also hinting at the accountability dimension: students had to prepare the simulation for eight practitioners who agreed to participate. This necessity to deliver may have put pressure on students in a constructive way since it gave meaning to their efforts.

Related to these project management competencies, students were encouraged to collaborate with their peers while practicing their communication skills. Students began working on the simulation in groups of five for the preliminary research, then in groups of ten for the creation of the kit, and eventually in a group of twenty for the organization and implementation of the role-play. Collaboration was therefore central: “The simulation required a lot of group work, which demanded discipline and collaboration. (...) Admittedly, we do not often have the opportunity to develop our listening, dialogue, and teamwork skills, and this semester, it seems to me that we succeeded in putting together a project that lived up to academic expectations” (Students’ feedback, observation role). Interestingly, students did not only refer to their ability to communicate but also the way they had to “listen” to each other and mobilize “skills that [they] had long considered secondary, or even taken for granted (...) [but] that would be of great importance in our professional careers” (Students’ feedback, fictional intervention). The process of designing a simulation and overseeing its execution is a promising learning tool for the development of students’ cross-cutting competencies.

A Unique (Pedagogical) Experience

As a term-long project, *student-designed simulation* creates the setting for a special pedagogical experience for all parties involved. For students, it is engaging, like other role-play activities (Kille 2002), and enhances motivation (Druckman and Ebner 2008), as suggested in this student's quote: "I noticed that I was much more attentive to the overall course because of my participation in a common and transversal project. So I think that the simulation is a good way to unite the class and connect the students more deeply to the interest of the course material" (Students' feedback, journalist role). Motivation for the students and teaching team may have also been sustained by the stakes: real-life practitioners would be participating in the role-play, giving us some of their time, and the experience would be shared on the university website through different outputs elaborated by students and revised by us.

For the teaching team, *student-designed simulation* constitutes a stimulating pedagogical project. First, like other role-play exercises (Wheeler 2006), it facilitates innovations in the way we assess students' learning and performances. In our case, we allowed ourselves to be surprised by the students' creativity by suggesting different roles and outputs in an inclusive pedagogical approach. The experience was also unique in the way it sought to create a team spirit among the students as well as between the students and the instructors. Secondly, by preparing the guidelines for the students, including the outline for the scenario, we acquired detailed knowledge on the case study, deepened by students' choices. Thirdly, such a pedagogical project calls for organizational skills' development and improvement, especially with the high number of third parties involved, stress management and improvisation strategies, as well as the ability to delegate.

The practitioners who participated in the simulation also shared positive feedback from this experience. While the event was in part designed to facilitate networking among participants, it was also intended to present a credible scenario with data based on real-life situations so that it would be a learning experience for the participants unfamiliar with the case of Haiti. One participant from the humanitarian sector shared this overall conclusion: "The main insight for me during this simulation was about the fact that we live in a world of imperfect information and that we need to be capable of operating in a world of imperfect information" (Participants' feedback, humanitarian role-playing development). As mentioned earlier, the project is also intended to foster dialogue between the humanitarian emergency relief sector and the development field by inviting practitioners to exchange roles to better understand their counterparts' constraints. This first experience is promising, as the two following quotes reveal:

"I enjoyed it very much and I must confess as a humanitarian I had to put myself into a different working modality and learn from it."
(Participants' feedback, humanitarian role-playing development)

"It was also for me a rich experience. It was so well simulated that I quickly forgot that it is just a simulation. Personally, working in trade-related technical assistance, it was interesting to see under which stress humanitarian workers have to take decisions. I thought our deadlines are sometimes tough, but this is far from humanitarian work, where lives are at stake."
(Participants' feedback, development role-playing humanitarian)

For students, instructors, and participants, *student-designed simulation* is an exercise that encourages observation and reflexivity. Students can observe a professional world they might intend to join while reflecting on their own learning experience through the design of the simulation; the teaching team observes students' learning

in the making and practitioners' participation in a student-led project while reflecting on the pedagogical value of the exercise and their engagement with the world of practitioners; practitioners learn about academic insights on their world and observe students' engagement with their daily work while reflecting on their everyday practices. In other words, it is a valuable yet demanding exercise.

What Challenges? A Demanding Teaching Tool

While the pedagogical experience of *student-designed simulation* is certainly enriching, a set of potential challenges inherent to its realization must be highlighted, the most obvious one being the substantial investment of time it represents (Lean et al. 2006; Glazier 2011). Time constraints concern both class time, which is necessary for students' collaborative work as well as for guidelines and content delivery, and preparation and follow-up time for the teaching team. In the case of a role-play designed for practitioners, additional time may also be required for the enrollment of participants. A key challenge hence lies in the instructors' motivation and the institutional support they receive. The possibility to share the experience in a pedagogical publication and/or to nourish one's network may be good incentives to sustain such motivation.

Another series of challenges and limits result from the nature of the exercise. First, by bridging the university classroom with the practitioners' world, the project is highly exposed to last-minute changes, unexpected events, and overall contextual dynamics. In our case, the war in Ukraine made the recruitment of participants, especially practitioners working in the field of humanitarian emergencies, harder than expected. Additionally, last-minute unforeseen events can occur, such as the absence of a participant or student on the day of the simulation. The ability to anticipate potential hurdles, identify backup plans, and improvise is key.

Secondly, the creation of the simulation kit and its successful implementation depends on the involved individuals. Starting the cooperative work with small groups was helpful in creating a productive climate in the classroom towards full collaboration among students. During the simulation, participants' personality traits also affected how the scenario progressed. Here, students in charge of moderating a group should be informed of the main obstacles they may face and how to cope with them, including techniques to secure a respectful climate and have strict time management.

Finally, since the role-play is designed by the students, instructors have less control over the output material and the overall performance during the simulation. The intermediate feedback provided by field professionals is critical to ensure the quality of the material that will be used with the practitioners. Time dedicated to reviewing and (potentially) revising the key documents of the simulation kit should not be underestimated, and practitioners should be made aware that the material was prepared by the students in a limited timeframe so that they do not expect a professional training program.

Conclusion

Student-designed simulation is an effective pedagogical tool as a term-long project embedded in a small-group course (ideally between 15 and 25 students) with the degree of complexity to be adapted to the students' level and background knowledge. To facilitate the implementation of such a productive yet demanding exercise, this article outlines a step-by-step method for incorporating a *student-designed simulation* into teaching modules. When intended for professional practitioners working in students' fields of interest for their future careers, these simulations offer students valuable insights into their daily practices and a professionalizing experience that will allow them to work on a wide range of skills. If originally imagined to teach

IOs and global governance in practice, this method could be extended to other subjects of international relations, or even to other disciplines, especially taking into account feasibility and access to potential participants. One could imagine a political science class in which students create a simulation for local policymakers or staff working in public administrations; a course on climate change in which students design a simulation for activists and/or journalists; or a class on international security bringing together security professionals from different institutions (e.g., police, military, and border control).

While this article was mainly focused on the pedagogical value of designing a simulation as a collective assignment for students, the intervention towards practitioners also has value. Indeed, the professionals who participated in our simulation got to experience a glimpse of what their day would look like if they were working in the humanitarian sector instead of the development one, and vice versa. Such an experience can help participants not only realize the constraints their counterparts are facing but also reflect on their own practices, especially when they interact with professionals from other domains. In other words, it can contribute to foster mutual understanding across professional fields and interorganizational cooperation by bringing closer two groups with contrasting professional habits. In the future, the replication of this role-play with an observation protocol and pre/post-experience questionnaires could assess the impact of these interventions, which build a bridge between academics and students of international studies and practitioners.

Supplementary Information

Supplementary information is available at the *International Studies Perspectives* data archive.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we owe special thanks to the students' genuine collaboration, continuous dedication, and communicative enthusiasm, and for agreeing to make some excerpts of their hard work available in the article supplementary material. We are greatly indebted to the participants who agreed to be part of this (unusual) experience and took on their role earnestly and with open-mindedness. For giving us the inspiration for the simulation project, we deeply thank the Catalyse team, who initiated a role-play involving politicians and scientists organized at the University of Lausanne (<https://www.unil.ch/centre-durabilite/fr/home/menuinst/recherche/catalyse.html>). We are very grateful to Alice Baillat and Damien Fresnel for their important insights into the work of IO practitioners, as well as to Émilie Dairon and Solenne Delga, who provided critical feedback during the inception of the project despite their (very) busy schedule. Many thanks to Fanny Badache, Frangela Dorsainville, Sara Hellmüller, and Luis Rivera-Vélez, who agreed to be our guest lecturers. For the time devoted to reviewing and commenting on students' work, our gratitude goes to Émilie Dairon and Lorenzo Guadagno. This simulation was also made possible thanks to the Centre of Competence on Humanitarian Negotiation (Geneva), particularly Eugenia Lacalle, who forwarded our invitation to members of their community. We deeply thank the Global Governance Centre (Geneva Graduate Institute) for hosting the simulation. For their precious feedback on earlier versions of this text, we thank Jonathan Luke Austin, Fanny Badache, Leah R. Kimber, Emmanuel Sylvestre, and the participants of EISA 2022 in Athens. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to the reviewers for their insightful suggestions that helped us improve our work.

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