The International Negotiation Modules Project: Using Computer-Assisted Simulation to Enhance Teaching and Learning Strategies in the Community College

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a case study of the International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP). The INMP utilized computer-assisted simulation is a tool to enhance teaching and learning strategies about international negotiations. Simulation in this context was more than merely playing a game or participating in a predefined exercise. Rather, it encompassed the entire class structure and affected all learning modalities. International topics that depicted real-life negotiation issues were incorporated into a simulation that was infused into a wide range of selected community college classes, including English, French Language, Math, and Psychology. The non-conventional pairing of disciplines, the non-traditional use of integrated technology, and the often diverse student bodies enhanced the overall quality of the simulation and the direct learning experience.

Moreover, the INMP demonstrated a direct relevance for the use of information technology in community colleges. In total, a cross-section of 30 community college classes participated in the three-year pilot project. They represented both rural and urban areas across California, Hawaii, Maryland, New York, and Texas. This case addresses critical issues such as methods involved in implementing alternative instruction and information technology, effects of its implementation on the faculty and students, and problems associated with Internet technology access.

CASE QUESTIONS
- How can the integration of technology across the curriculum be used as a tool for research and communication?

- Should students be expected to acquire computer literacy skills in a class that is not explicitly technology related?
- In what ways can computer-assisted communication be used to develop global perspectives?

CASE NARRATIVE

Background

The International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) grew from a collaboration between the University of Maryland ICONS Project, Whittier College, Immaculate Heart College Center, and the consortium, California Colleges for International Education (CCIE), whose membership currently includes more than 68 California community colleges. A $221,000 FIPSE Comprehensive Program Grant supported funding for the three-year pilot INMP project.

The International Negotiation Modules Project (INMP) adapted the International Communication and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS), a networked computer-assisted simulation of international negotiations, to the community college environment. ICONS was designed for application in political science and international relations classes at the University of Maryland. Over the past 20 years, it has expanded into high school social studies classes across the United States and in several countries around the world. ICONS is a proven pedagogical method that teaches students about international issues and the negotiation process, with computer technology as a tool to support the substantive issues.

ICONS software was developed at the University of Maryland and resides in an on-site host computer. This software was originally designed in the late 1970s as a text-based/DOS system, and was called POLNET (Political Network). In 1995, POLNET was radically updated to become a Wet-based Windows application usable on any computer. One factor that highlights the educational uniqueness of the ICONS software is that it allows the simulation coordinator to review all messages sent by all teams for content, accuracy, and language. This control center is called SIMCOM (from Simulation Control). During the course of a simulation, SIMCOM reviews and keeps a running record of all Internet interactions, and has the ability to communicate directly to each team. Even messages that are designated "private" in the context of the simulation can be viewed for educational purposes by SIMCOM.

ICONS's growth parallels the escalating use of technology and computer-assisted communication within post-secondary education. Its popularity also correlates with an increased recognition in education of the idea that the individual student constructs his or her own knowledge (Wilkenfeld and Kaufman, 1993; Torney-Purta, 1996; Vosniadou, 1996). An important aspect of the method of knowledge construction is that a student often enters a class with preconceived knowledge. It is only through active processing of new cognitive structures that this knowledge takes new meaning and becomes ingrained as part of the student's consciousness (Torney-Purta and Pavlov, 1998).

The connection of INMP to the community college environment was made because of the significant impact community colleges have on contemporary U.S. society. Within the United States, community colleges provide a wider range of educational choices and serve a greater proportion of youth than in any other nation (Raby and Tarrow, 1996). Indeed, in 1998, more than six million U.S. students enrolled in credit courses and four million in noncredit continuing education courses in more than 1,200 community colleges. This

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