

Strategy: Using Simulation Games to Increase Engagement

Students report higher levels of engagement when the content is considered “relevant” and the class format focuses more on their learning than on covering material. Developing simulation games can provide an opportunity for students to work collaboratively and meaningfully examine topics and issues related to course content.

Origin

Auman, C. (2011). Using simulation games to increase student and instructor engagement. *College Teaching*, 59: 4, 154-161.

Application

Overview for developing the game simulation:

- Instructor identifies a problem or an issue that provides a strong platform for engaging the course material; identifies a controversial issue related to the focus of the course material
- Instructor introduces the problem to students
- Students begin investigation, inquiry, and discussion
- Students become motivated to learn what is necessary to solve the problem

Considerations for topics for suitable simulations:

- Needs a central conflict that the participants can debate
- Needs sufficient detail to be challenging and engaging
- Needs to be realistic enough to draw students in and engage imaginations
- Needs to relate to learning outcomes of course
- Needs to provide multiple perspectives on a current issue

Format for simulations:

- Multiple simulations can occur each semester
- Students are given introductory information about the simulation
- Students are assigned a role for the simulation
- Course meetings are structured as games and students participate in their roles; students who are not “on” that day play a neutral role as observers
- Students decide on the format for game days (Q & A, roundtable discussion, group presentations, etc.)
- A typical day involves each faction/group presenting an opening statement, fielding questions from observers and other factions, and having a closing statement
- Instructors stay neutral while they listen and observe

Assignments related to simulations:

Position paper: Five-page paper (approximately) stating the student’s position in the debate and providing supporting evidence. This paper is written from the perspective of the student’s assigned role and can take any format they choose.

Peer review: Peers assigned the same role (group) reviewed each other's papers and provided a list of questions. Points are awarded based on completion of questions.

Media campaign: Each group presented a persuasive media campaign related to their position (video, pamphlet, brochure, PowerPoint, etc.).

Reflection paper: At the end of each game, students write a reflection paper about what they learned about the topic and how the simulation went.

Class engagement: Individuals are graded on their engagement during game sessions.

Quiz: At the end of each game, students take a short multiple-choice quiz over concepts addressed in the game.

Example: Moral Education vs. Discipline Policies in an Educational Psychology course

Students are provided a brief overview that includes:

- The scene
- Statistics
- Their role
- The main factions
 - Administrators for/against
 - Teachers for/against
 - Parents for/against
 - Educational psychologists for/against
- The board can vote 1 of 4 ways:
 - Implement both new discipline policies and moral education programs
 - Implement a moral education program without a new discipline policy
 - Implement a new discipline policy without a moral education program
 - Refrain from implementing any change

Reflection

- What topics/issues can you identify as possibilities for simulations in your course?

- How do you think simulations would impact student learning in your course?