Leadership Development: Congressional Simulation Exercise in the Introduction to American Government Course

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An interactive, multi-disciplinary simulation exercise (SIMEX) for my course in government which requires students to assume the roles of members of Congress, media, interest groups, and presidential advisors who work to pass a bill presents cadets with distinct leadership challenges and educational opportunities. During the exercise, students test not only their political knowledge, but also their negotiation, communication, leadership, and ethics skills (all of which are desired classroom, course, and institutional outcomes). This paper will explain the SIMEX process and how the assessment efforts inform not only change in my classroom specific to my methods of teaching American Politics course requirements, but also course, departmental, and institutional outcomes with clear focus on character and leader development.

A simulation exercise is a robust, multidisciplinary learning experience that connects several learning objectives into a single culminating learning experience (Bernstein, Scheerhorn, & Ritter, 2002; Maxwell, 2012). Simulations allow students to immerse themselves in a virtual scenario to help experience the content in a way that cannot be easily replicated in a traditional class lecture format (Zaino & Mulligan, 2009). As Promley (2013) explains, "simulations help students engage more deeply with course material, understand complexity, perform better on assignments, and better retain material over time" (p. 819).

At West Point, all cadets take SS202/American Politics as part of their core course requirements (half of them in the Fall, half of them in the Spring of their sophomore year). At the heart of the course is the understanding and appreciation of how a bill becomes law when they debate and ultimately vote on a bill. West Point borrowed the idea of a SIMEX from a similar exercise at Harvard University. The Fall 2015 SIMEX was the 11th iteration of a SIMEX; our goal is for our collective experience to inform and shape future iterations of the SIMEX.

SIMEX includes the assessment metrics and measures to assess its effectiveness in teaching students the political process and refining their other leader development outcomes. SIMEX supports the Academy's assessment efforts to inform not only curriculum change but also departmental and institutional outcomes.

Literature Review

Active learning techniques "promote engagement with both the discipline material and learning" (Van Amburgh, et al, 2007, p. 1). Active learning requires the student to interact with the content on many levels to inspire critical thinking and analysis (Michael, 2007; McKeachie, 1994). Active learning strategies can take many forms, including journals, debates, role playing, simulations, case studies, in-depth discussions, demonstrations, or in-class activities that require the students to actively participate in the learning as opposed to passive, stimulus-response learning.

The literature is rich with examples of how simulations can be used to improve content understanding and to encourage deeper learning. McKeachie (1994) suggests that "the chief advantage of games and simulations is that the students are active participants rather than passive observers" (p. 163). Sands and Shelton (2010) add that simulations pursue higher order cognitive and affective objectives, as a simulation can recreate complex and dynamic processes in the classroom.

This experience fits perfectly into the higher learning explained by Bloom's taxonomy. Most cadets are proficient in the lower levels of learning (knowledge and comprehension), as this is taught in the classroom experience. The SIMEX is designed to build on that foundation and help develop higher orders of thinking. As Suskie (2009) explains, application "is the capacity to use knowledge and understanding in a new context" and analysis "is the capacity to break a complex concept apart to understand the relationships of its components" (p. 120). Other higher order learning that is important to the college experience, according to Suskie (2009), includes evaluation, problem-solving, decision-making, synthesis and creativity, critical thinking, and information literacy.

Simulations seem to be particularly popular in teaching the political science concepts of civil engagement, political efficacy, and cultural awareness (Young, et al, 2012).This is probably due to the fact that making or passing a law, campaigning, running a state/local government, or navigating a bureaucracy, is process-intensive and can be somewhat replicated through role-playing. (Sands & Shelton, 2010; Bernstein, Scheerhorn, & Ritter, 2002). Simulations can run the gamut of a full-semester, to a few classes; to single sections or large, combined classes across several disciplines. This has gained traction among political science faculty and the literature is rich with articles on running simulations. For example, between 2005-2011, *PS: Political Science and Politics* alone published 73 articles devoted to simulations (Ishiyama, 2013).

Simulations also provide a rich scenario for course, departmental, and institutional assessment. It all begins with the learning objectives of the course. What are the expected outcomes and what can be included in the simulation and how can it be measured? Sands and Shelton (2010) suggest four primary learning outcomes from a Congressional simulation:

1. The student will develop a better appreciation for the complicated process by which a bill becomes law.
2. The student will gain insight into Congress as a deliberative institution, and will identify the parts of the legislative process where deliberation takes place.

3. The student will recognize that Congress is an institution that creates motivations of competing self-interest, yet its members, while pursuing their own interests, often end up advancing the common good.
4. The student will examine any initial skepticism and criticism regarding Congress by analyzing those attitudes through the lens of the simulation experience (p. 134).

In addition to course-level learning outcomes, there may be other broader, institutional outcomes that can be included. Kathlene and Choate (1999) would add communication, negotiation, and conflict resolution to the list of key outcomes.

But do they work to advance learning objectives? While it is widely accepted that they do, the evidence is not as clear. Most of the assessment data are anecdotal or results of self-reported efficacy surveys. As Wedig (2010) noted, "assessing the impact of simulation exercises on student learning is difficult, given that a proper research design for doing so does not merely assess learning within a course, but also compares courses with simulations to identical ones without simulations" (p. 555). Anecdotal assessment data makes it difficult to specifically determine the impact of the experience on course, program, or institutional goals.

However it is done, Mealy (2012) suggests that assessment "needs to move from describing to actually measuring our teaching and students' learning" (p. 526). Assessments for experiences like simulations do not have to be complicated or complex. Galatas (2006) examined the extent of extra-classroom contact between students, evaluated the effectiveness of the simulation in supporting the learning objectives, and overall perceptions of the experience. He accomplished this using a short survey and reflective writing assignments.

Sometimes, just a reflective essay can be used (Kaarbo & Lantis, 1997; Wallin, 2005) or some combination of an essay with pre/post test questions (Biziouras, 2013). Roper (2004) included short assessments periodically throughout the exercise, since his simulations ran for the entire semester. He also included questions on the final exam that related to the course content that should have been mastered in the simulation.

Sands and Shelton (2010) used a multiple measures assessment. Part of the grade (25%) counted toward the outcome of the simulation. Another 20% was based on an individual paper that included a brief summary of the bill and how well the bill addressed the policy issue from the perspective of the representative and the country. Reflection essay assessments accounted for another 20% and were used to measure pre and post-simulation opinions of Congress. The remaining 35% measured student conceptual achievement from cumulative exams.

Assessment is about process improvement and effective assessment incorporates tools that are capable of informing change. As noted by Wedig (2010), a simulation is very resource and time intensive. The simulation must have demonstrated evidence that it advances the learning and connects to the learning outcomes.

Much of the data used for assessment is qualitative, and that makes it difficult to build a theoretical framework for the research that measures the efficacy of the simulation with respect to course goals and outcomes. Traditional research is based on testing a hypothesis. Grounded theory goes beyond testing assumptions and seeks to explain the data's patterns, relationships, and themes holistically. Grounded theory therefore extends the analysis to "developing categories, themes, or other taxonomic classes that interpret the meaning of the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 193). Grounded theory therefore provides a process to look critically and intuitively at the data collected without the adverse effects of preconceived assumptions or conclusions that could color impartial analysis (Merriam, 2009; Willis, 2007; Creswell, 2007).

Developing an Interactive, Multidisciplinary Simulation Exercise

A simulation exercise can be quite robust, engaging, and multifaceted in ways that develop higher order thinking and learning. However, these experiences cannot be done or done well without a commitment of time, preparation, and resources.

As explained to the cadets in the SS202/American Politics core course, the purpose of the congressional simulation exercise (SIMEX) is to:

> "create an environment in which you can experiment and *apply* your knowledge and understanding of American Politics. It is for you to *experience* the tension, conflicting pressures, and the challenges that our political leaders face in governing our nation. The purpose is not to test your ability to accurately trace the steps of the law making process (we will assume you know this by the time we conduct the SIMEX), nor is it to test your ability to create a "good" policy (a topic we will discuss during the last block of the course). The SIMEX will demonstrate to you both the frailty and the resilience of our Republican form of government (USMA, 2014, p. 1).
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> While the SS202 SIMEX is an adaptation of other simulations used by Harvard and other institutions, I had the opportunity to completely redesign and remake the SIMEX to meet specific course-wide and individual classroom goals. I was able to pick my students to serve in leadership capacities in this exercise so I could determine how in class activity manifested outside of the classroom. Based on feedback from the cadets I selected for leadership positions, future iterations of the SIMEX allowed students to elect their leadership instead of the instructor simply identifying leaders through fiat. Further, the course director allowed me to be the officer in charge of the SIMEX and enabled me to use some of the best practices from my classroom in the classroom of other instructors to maximize feedback and experiment with the effectiveness of certain simulation techniques beyond my individual sections."

In my classroom, the central theme of the course material revolves around a single question posed to the cadets on lesson 1, reinforced throughout the semester and experimented through the SIMEX. The question I ask cadets is 'whether or not military personnel can be good officers without being good citizens?' While I tell them after 40 lessons there will still be no right answer, the classroom experience

is designed to help them learn *how* to answer that question, not teach them *what* the answer to this or any other question actually is or should be. I challenged my cadets to embrace the simulation exercise as an opportunity for them to experience citizenship and public service within the institutions of Congress, the executive branch, interest group lobbyists and media personnel. My contention is that through political conflict, competition, negotiation and compromise cadets in my class could experience the challenges of democratic government. Further, the moral-ethical decision-making environment present by role playing could help cadets in my class experience the transformative leadership aspects of conflict mediation. Finally, I ask cadets in my class before the beginning of the SIMEX for their qualitative impressions of Congress and the law-making process. Cadets match the public in their lack of faith or trust in Congress specifically and government in general. I then ask cadets if the reason why the legislature gets such negative reviews from them and the American public is because we keep sending bad people to Washington DC, or if the rules of our government as defined by electoral politics, the Constitution and over 230 years of practice require any player in our government to act the same way. Cadet participation in the SIMEX is comprehensive and challenging in order to meet these objectives.

Given our high level of expectation of cadets participating in the SIMEX, instructors use several lab periods to allow cadets adequate time to prepare. SS202 American Politics is a 3.5 credit class with a two hour lab every other week. The SIMEX uses four lab periods culminating in the actual exercise. The first lab is devoted to engaging in energy policy discussions and introducing cadets to the role they will play for the entirety of the exercise. The second lab is an overview of how the SIMEX works, what is expected and the election of the Speaker of the House and selection of other leadership positions to include committee chairs and ranking members. The third lab is devoted to committee meetings and party caucuses. The fourth lab is the actual simulation resulting in a vote and it is run over a three-hour period – cadet lunch time and two hours of class lab (from noon until 3 pm). There are four class groups each semester of about 100 cadets per class group. Therefore, the SIMEX is done in four separate iterations every semester. Because it does span lunch, a lunch break is provided for the cadets with pizza served. To maximize the time for the SIMEX, the lunch break is scheduled as networking time.

West Point has experimented with how to most effectively use the time productively. The first two years, the SIMEX was a full-day experience that had cadets assigned as members of House and the Senate, presidential advisors, media, and interest groups that were presented with the challenge of passing a bill on immigration reform. Later iterations were reduced to one two-hour lab period (with the lunch hour, for a three-hour SIMEX) plus one briefing lab. More recently, the SIMEX involved only the deliberations of House members and another lab was added for committee work. In order to better align with institutional sustainability goals, the current bill under consideration involves energy policy. During the initial briefing, a member of the physics faculty briefs the cadets on the implications of the energy choices along with a faculty member from the Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering. Additionally, cadets have access to robust reading resources that further explain the nuances of comprehensive energy reform.

The logistics of the SIMEX likewise poses some challenges. The exercise needed a space large enough to accommodate 100 active cadets; a podium/stage for debate, space for the media to craft and post their

articles (including space for printers and computers); break out space for the party caucuses and interest groups; and, available space for lunch/networking. When it was a full day, the early experiences happened in the fine arts building across the campus. More recent accommodations were in a building with a large multi-purpose room (with a stage) with break out rooms that required setting up and taking down the chairs and equipment with every iteration. The hall was large and ornate, but the acoustics were not conducive to 100 voices all at once. The most recent SIMEX was moved to a lecture hall with a spacious entry and nearby classrooms.

The "front end" work for the faculty can be daunting. In order to manage, operate, and assess the utility of this simulation, faculty collaborated on the political objectives, defining the roles to simulate real-world politics, and assigning students their individual roles for the duration of the exercise. Each student would end up with a specific and unique role with specific and unique outcomes that if achieved (the bill passed with the right set of amendments), would maximize the student's potential grade.

SIMEX Roles

Energy policy is the focus of the SIMEX because the United States Military Academy, in conjunction with the Army Chief of Staff, has made energy reform an institutional objective. From the political perspective, the bill focuses on four major policy areas including Environmental Impacts, Future Energy Investment, Cap and Trade System, and Budget/Funding mechanisms. Table 1 outlines the policy options offered to students in the comprehensive energy bill. Developing these policy objectives required instructors to research current policy, interview experts in the energy field, and find relevant political discourse on each alternative in an effort to provide context to students throughout the exercise.

Table 1
Policy Options

Environmental Impacts			**Investment Strategy**		
Eliminate the EPA; remove fracking bans ($2B)	Regulate commercial impacts of fossil fuel consumption ($1B)	Expand EPA jurisdiction; increase fines for violations ($1B)	Prioritize fossil fuel extraction and exports ($50B)	No exports; subsidize renewable sources ($15B)	Prioritize renewable energy, increase carbon tax ($5B)
Cap and Trade			**Funding**		
No cap and trade system ($6B)	Increase biofuel production; increase fuel economy standards ($10B)	Establish federal cap and trade; incentivize states ($16B)	Eliminate tax breaks on fossil fuel consumption (unlimited)	Fine employers for exceeding EPA standards (up to 15%)	Cut spending on welfare, govt agencies, foreign aid (unlimited)

With the completion of the over-arching policy opportunities for students to explore the next step is to create the roles. Breaking down the roles into members of the House of Representatives, interest groups, presidential advisors and the media help set the framework for the exercise, but without specific identities 100+ cadets could never accurately simulate the multiple actors involved in the law-making process. During this phase instructors must develop identity narratives that describe for students who they are, where they are from, and what their political and policy goals should be specific to energy. Additional research on members of Congress, the bureaucracy, think-tanks, and other news sources revealed a multi-dimensional political landscape. Roles for the media outlets include the Washington Post, New York Times, CNN, Huffington Post, and Fox News. Interest groups consisted of Greenpeace, George Soros, the Koch Brothers, Renewable Fuels Association, American Petroleum Institute, the American Energy Alliance and The Office of the Assistance Secretary of Defense for Operational Energy Plans and Programs (OEP&P), Department of Defense. Also participating are key presidential advisors from the Cabinet including the Secretaries of Energy, State, Defense and Interior.

Within Congress the two major parties are distributed among three committees (Natural Resources, Energy and Budget) and individual Congressman are regionally and politically distinct as outlined in Table 2.

Table 2
SIMEX Roles

Republican Roles	*Democrat Roles*
Ideologically Pure Conservative	Ideologically Pure Liberal
Conservative from a coastal area	Liberal from a Coastal Area
Conservative with strong business	Liberal with strong business
Conservative from a district rich in natural resources	Liberal from a district rich in natural resources
Moderate Conservative with heterogeneous district	Moderate Liberal with heterogeneous district
Moderate Conservative with Large Tea Party presence	Moderate Liberal from a coastal region
	Moderate Liberal from an area rich in natural resources

The preparation described is necessary before students are even introduced to the exercise. Instructors assign each of their cadets to specific roles and provide the students with the narratives on their identity during the first lab period. Students are then required to produce a one-page biography that brings to life their role in the SIMEX. This biography includes education and professional history and a brief statement on their energy goals. Individual biographies are returned to the instructors and made available to all SIMEX participants prior to the initial lab meeting so students have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with others in the SIMEX and perhaps begin to understand which characters will be allies and which will be adversaries in the political process.

Running the SIMEX

The SIMEX begins with an introduction brief to cadets that is designed to outline the main purpose, goals, rules, and grading for the exercise. This presentation to cadets is completely instructor run and occurs in a large auditorium with al 100+ students involved in the exercise. The brief also spends time introducing the graded requirements, the schedule of events, and the concept of political capital as a measure of success for the exercise. At the end of the introduction brief cadets are separated by their role and receive individual instructor points of contact to help them understand their assignment. The Republican caucus uses this time elect a Speaker. This student leader is then empowered to select (on his or her own criteria) a majority leader, whip and 5 committee chairs. The Democratic caucus elects a minority leader. He or she selects a whip and 5 committee ranking members. These cadets represent the primary leaders in the House for the duration of the exercise.

The most difficult challenge of any role-playing event is convincing the participants that this is not a 'one-time' iteration that has no future impacts. In reality the behavior of all players is affected by the knowledge that this 'game' is played over and over again on other policies, elections, and day-to-day routines. Students simulating a journalist may be incentivized to behave a certain way for this single graded assignment because they are not worried that they will ever have to interact with their classmates in the same roles again. To this end, a portion of the student grade is a reflective essay that forces them to explain their actions to their constituents as they seek re-election, renewed subscription to the news source, continued service in the President's administration or annual dues to the interest group.

Political capital vouchers are designed to enable participants to bargain for outcomes. Cadets' grades are directly affected by not only the policy outcomes, but also by the credibility or influence they generate for themselves throughout the process. It is important to note that part of running the SIMEX is introducing cadets to the rules and procedures of the political capital voucher.

Once the initial brief is complete the SIMEX truly becomes a student-driven exercise where instructors strive to limit their number of interjections into the simulation. The third lab meeting is a student leadership managed committee and party caucus gathering. Instructors do not attend these meetings;

instead they can follow developments of these meetings through the media (use of the Blackboard website for each media outlet) on the SIMEX website as the public would follow the news of events inside the Beltway.

During the fourth and final lab period, instructors supervise proceedings on the House floor. Instructors coordinate for the logistics of auditorium space, tables, chairs, music, and a guest speaker to provide a Presidential Address to Congress. The acting President is someone familiar to the students, the Academic Dean, the School President, or another senior administrator. Recently, the Head football coach, and a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Energy Policy have played the role of President of the United States for the SIMEX. At the conclusion of the President's address the student Speak of the House has the opportunity to provide the Republican response to the assembled House. One instructor plays the role of parliamentarian throughout this part of the SIMEX ensuring students adhere to simple rules of respect for others when it is their turn to speak and to ensure the exercise meets the time and other logistic constraints. The Speaker concludes remarks and releases the House from the floor to conduct informal caucus meetings and press conferences for about an hour.

During this time instructors make sure students eat lunch that is provided and coordinated by instructors prior to the event. At the end of the caucus the House reconvenes and the Speaker introduces the Bill (marked up by committees over the past 2 weeks) and opens debate on the floor. Instructors, acting as parliamentarians, ensure debate is done in a respectful manner and follows the strict rules for debate in the House specific to time allocations. Instructors also adjudicate votes for amendments during the floor debate including vote counting.

When the debate time expires, the Speaker requests to move to the previous question for an "up-down" vote on the Bill. Instructors afford members of Congress one last opportunity to decide if they are unhappy with the Bill the Speaker presents. Since the students may not be happy with the actions of their Speaker (constitutionally, the Speaker is actually selected by a simple majority of the members of Congress and is typically a ranking member of the majority party), students are given the opportunity to vote to remove the Speaker and install a new Speaker that may provide a better policy outcome. If a motion to remove the Speaker is offered and seconded, Instructors count votes. Once a Speaker is replaced or endorsed the final vote proceeds.

Instructors record House members vote on a public screen so news, interest groups, Presidential advisors, and other members of Congress can observe. At the conclusion of the vote, instructors collect political capital vouchers, announce the results of the vote and determine whether or not the President vetoes, then the exercise is concluded with a brief discussion or after-action review about the cadet experience during the SIMEX.

Students are released and asked to assist in any final clean-up requirements. Students have a reflective essay to complete within one week of the event and instructors must determine the validity of political capital vouchers and assign a grade for each participant based on the political outcome of the bill. Each iteration may have different policy options and some may result in no bill being passed at all. Instructors must individually assess each role-player based on these political and policy results.

Assessing the SIMEX

The mastery of the course concepts is assessed in other assignments (policy paper and exams). For the SIMEX, the goal of the experience was to

- Create an environment in which cadets could experiment and apply their knowledge and understanding of American politics;
- Experience the tension, conflicting pressures, and the challenges that political leaders face in governing the nation, and
- Demonstrate both the frailty and the resilience of our republican form of government.

The faculty felt that the SIMEX needed to engage students on a deeper level and focus on not just the process of passing a bill, but also the institutional outcomes of developing critical thinking, analysis, leadership, team building, ethical conduct, negotiation, and collaboration skills. The Department of Social Sciences, particularly the American Politics/SS202 course, used multiple methods to assess the effectiveness of the SIMEX. There were two graded assignments, an online assessment and a reflection paper. The assessment was graded strictly on participation, not on quality of contribution and the points were used from the instructor's participation grade.

The assessment questionnaire was designed to encourage self-reflection on the cadets' engagement with the components of the SIMEX process as well as offer insights for areas of improvement. There were 524 assessment entries to each of the four prompts. The responses from each prompt filled over 30 single spaced pages of text.

1. How did the simulation work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?
2. What could you have done differently to change the outcome of the SIMEX to be more favorable to you or your party?
3. What specifically did you do to prepare for the SIMEX? (Legislative websites, research, etc.) How much time did you invest in the preparation? What did you do that was most beneficial?
4. What do you recommend be done for next year to improve the experience?

The reflection paper, on the other hand, was worth 75 points of the SIMEX grade. This assignment was designed to encourage the cadets to reflect on the process of passing bills and to think about how their actions in the SIMEX aligned with their responsibilities to their constituents. In crafting their responses to the reflection paper, cadets needed to consider their leadership, communication, negotiation, team skills using their ethical compass to justify their actions. There were 573 responses to the reflection paper that when merged, filled over 463 pages of single spaced text.

The following prompt was used for the House members:
"Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion." - Edmund Burke, who was voted out of Britain's House of Commons in 1780 because of his support for unpopular causes

Energy policy is likely to be a major issue during the 2016 elections. Your local newspaper has provided you the opportunity to write a 600-800 word essay that explains your vote during the SIMEX. How will you justify your vote to your constituents? If you chose to vote against your constituents' preferences (as reflected on your role sheet), why did you do so?
Your instructor will base your grade primarily on how persuasive your essay would be to voters in your district during a general election. But, remember, actions speak louder than words. Even an extremely well-crafted essay is unlikely to persuade voters if your vote does not represent their interests.
There may, nevertheless, be good reasons for you to vote against your constituents. As a leader, you might hold policy positions or embrace ethical values that make it necessary to vote your conscience. If you deem it necessary to vote against your constituents' preferences, you should justify your vote based on your leadership philosophy or ethical values. Nevertheless, you also should realize that a conscience vote may cost you – just as it did for Edmund Burke – if you cannot persuade your constituents of the rightness of your cause."

Using Assessment to Inform Change

This iteration of the SIMEX provided some interesting challenges to the cadets. In one section, the cadets were able to pass a bill that was significantly favorable to one party that was assured a Presidential veto, and passed an override to the veto. In another section, cadets were virtually deadlocked on selecting funding amendments. In all cases, cadets had to find creative and innovative solutions to very complex problems.

The SIMEX is designed to model the tensions that are inherent in the legislative process. Cadets had to make some decisions to be true to their assigned roles and the constituents who elected them (and would reelect them), or be true to themselves and try to maximize their best opportunities for a good grade. While the honor code is never suspended, cadets are allowed to assume the roles of their political characters. The cadets get to decide what kind of "operator" that person will be. It is in this environment that cadets can experiment with different leadership strategies.

Assessing Leadership

The SIMEX assessment was designed to assess the SIMEX experience and the results of both the assessment and the reflection paper provided invaluable insights into ways to make the SIMEX more meaningful. However, as the results were being reviewed, certain themes emerged that proved just as enlightening.

When asked, "How did the SIMEX work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?" nearly one-fifth of the responses specifically mentioned "lead/leadership/leading." On closer examination, the cadets were clear that they observed leadership in all of its forms. Most cadets noted instances of strong, ethical leadership that forged alliances and worked to build consensus. This comment captured that posture of positive leadership.

I am happy with the way that the leadership reached out to all members to see how people felt about various proposals. I think that we managed to get the optimum compromise that was beneficial to our party but tolerable to the opposition party.

Although not as common, other cadets observed toxic leadership and selfish actions from their classmates, particularly those in a position of leadership.

The purpose of the SIMEX was to exercise moral leadership, understand ethical responsibilities, and develop teams throughout the law-making process. In reality everyone was worried about collecting the maximum amount of capital points.

More unsettling were the comments that reflected poor ethical behavior when the lure of improving individual grades overrode good judgment. While rare, this comment highlights a cadet's experience with questionable behavior of a classmate.

I had made agreements with several people to work together and not try and stab each other in the back. I expected people to act honorably and honor this agreement and other deals I made. This held true for most people. Throughout the SIMEX, I knew information and held power to hurt others for my own benefit but did not do so. However, some did not do the same…[One cadet] outright lied and cheated me. I was not expecting him to put his grade above a friendship, outright lie to my face over the course of weeks, and go against the honor code in such a blatant way. I was not prepared for the backhandedness of the SIMEX.

But there were lessons to be learned about observing the best and worst in leadership and character.

I learned that being in the majority is a big plus, sacrificing integrity for personal gain is not going to get you very far, and it's not always easy to balance what constituents want with what is being pushed down from higher.

I think what went wrong was the sort of atmosphere of the SIMEX. I thought it was interesting and I enjoyed working with the other classes yet some people were very hostile in the process, or were only trying to help out their friends, or looked down upon me because I was a plebe…. This and our lack of organization in our party were disheartening but eye opening in how quickly human interactions and sentiments can sway a Bill.

There were bits and pieces of cutthroatness going about, and there was a definite mix of both personal agendas and party agendas.

Leadership is also about communication, negotiation, teamwork, and use of power. In framing their answers, cadets referenced certain key themes related to leadership in their comments. The following themes were identified as well as how many of the comments contained these key terms.

- "lead/leader/leadership" 17%;
- "persuade/deal/negotiate/influence/barter/scheme" 22%;

- “team/teamwork/caucus/coalition/alliance/friend/meeting” 19%;
- “compromise” 7%;
- “communicate/talk/discuss/collaborate/meet/met with/inform/information” 18%;
- “power/powerful/powerless” 5%; and,
- “ethics, moral, value, character” 3%.

When “leadership” is cross-tabbed with other key terms, the true nature of the leader development process begins to emerge. These cadets offered insights about how they could have used their leadership skills to influence the outcome of the bill. These comments illustrate the complexity of the decision process and also the tensions that played out during the exercise.

The simulation worked out fairly well for me. My ideology did not completely align with the final bill that was passed, but I was able to cobble together a few points here and there within each topic of the bill. Gaining political capital points by working out a few last-minute deals with interest groups went right, netting me a little bit of political capital to offset my losses with the final bill. And everything else went wrong. My party leadership was in shambles, and Democrats were just trying to minimize their losses by selling their votes instead of grouping together and overtaking the Republican's very slim majority. I had to miss the second SIMEX lab for a competition, which definitely did not help me prepare for the final SIMEX, stay in touch with my party, or develop any sort of leadership role within the Energy Committee.

The simulation was an excellent experience in that it significantly improved my knowledge and outlook into how congress works to pass bills into law. The committee meeting went great for me. It was a lot easier to voice my opinions and fight for what I truly believed to be right, and by the end of the committee meeting I was confident in how the bill was looking.

I can say with a straight face that I was the most influential non-leadership congressman in the simulation, as far as the bill was concerned; I wrote the thing with the budget committee leader and majority whip. I also pushed very hard (and very successfully) to establish party unity on the bill proposed so the less organized and divided Democrats would be silenced.

It was clear that the SIMEX created an opportunity for cadets to practice their leadership skills. As a result of the preliminary assessment, some changes to the SIMEX were made to include purposeful leadership experiences. More presidential advisors were added and tasked with serving in various positions with divergent interests so the group of advisors faced challenges internally to the administration as well as towards congress. Additionally, more committees (which require increased numbers of committee chairs and ranking members) also expanded the numbers of cadets with formal leadership responsibilities in the simulated House of Representatives. Last, the assessment prompts themselves were changed to collect focused data on the leadership experience. The new prompts included:

- How did the simulation work out for you? What went right? What went wrong?
- What concepts from what we have studied so far in SS202 were solidified by the SIMEX experience? What is the single best lesson about American Politics that you learned?

- How did this experience help you grow as a leader? What lessons did you learn about leadership, ethics, team work, or decision making?
- What do you recommend be done next semester to improve the experience?

These reflection papers can now be used to assess the West Point Leader Development strategic goals. Using the AAC&U Value Rubrics, the reflection papers have been used to assess critical and creative thinking, and ethical reasoning. By leveraging the artifacts of learning, the ability to assess authentic learning ensures a truer understanding of cadet development.

In future iterations of the SIMEX, the prompts will be changed to specifically ask how the SIMEX improved their understanding of the legislative process and how the experience helped them grow as leaders. As more data are collected, a clearer understanding of how the SIMEX can be better leveraged for leader development will be expanded.

The coordination and execution of the SIMEX aligns with major tenets of the West Point Leader Development System which requires cadets to exercise peer leadership in complex environments. In addition to cadet professional military ethic training that focuses on real-world vignettes from recent graduates where cadets are asked to understand and envision their reactions to other people's experience, the SIMEX is designed to force cadets into having their own experiences with moral-ethical decision making. As cadets study in the classroom and observe for themselves the difficulty of leading the nation as elected civilian and military leaders, role-playing during the SIMEX enables these cadets to wrestle with similar issues about principles, party and personal loyalty, constitutional authority and constituent desires. While no simulation can ever meet all aspects of character training or development, the SS202/American Politics Congressional Simulation Exercise provides cadets a great opportunity to implement their own leader strategies and endure those of their peers experimenting at the same time and we believe should be continued as an academic requirement precisely because it complements course goals surrounding the understanding of American government and because it contributes to the leadership laboratory opportunities cadets experience in all aspects of Academy life.

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