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# Facilitating Student Discussion: The Case of a Political Science [sic] Class

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# Facilitating Student Discussion: The Case of a Political Science [sic] Class

**Abstract**

This case study analyzed four political science simulations in an introductory course with the intent to identify students learning from the simulation and in group collaboration. Though the discussion and collaboration between students surrounds political science topics, the skills students bring into the classroom and acquired during the course can be used in numerous professional fields. The presentation will focus on the scaffolding of assignments and learning that lead up to the classroom simulations. It will also highlight the skills students developed surrounding group collaboration and student's individual conclusions on decision making.

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FACILITATING STUDENT DISCUSSION:  
THE CASE OF A POLITICAL SCINCE CLASS

By

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“Students retain 10% of what they read, 20% of what they hear, 30% of what they see, 50% of what they see and hear, 70% of what they say, and 90% of what they say as they do something.” (Stice 1987) This is a leading statistic supporting the benefit of using active learning methods in classroom environments. This form of learning requires students to apply and construct knowledge as a part of a learning experience. In a college setting active learning is the opposite of pure lecturing, in which students are viewed as passive sponges absorbing endless amounts of facts. Active learning can take many forms: simulations, case studies, discussions, problem solving, role playing or any task that requires students participate in “doing as they say” education (Powner and Allendoerfer 2008). These activities are used across disciplines and in different classrooms settings. While active learning through simulations and group activities in an Introductory to American Government class is the focus of this case study, the findings herein can be generalized to other courses and disciplines.

The benefits of active learning continue to grow as more literature is produced. Classrooms are made up of students with different learning styles and active learning is a method of teaching to the different learners found within one classroom. Multiple lists exist that define different types of learning styles, ranging from the Kolb’s Learning Style Inventory that describes four different types of learners to Howard Gardner’s list of nine Multiple Intelligences (Brock and Cameron 1999). Other authors who have developed learning style models include Richard Felder (with Barbara Soloman), Peter Honey (with Alan Mumford) and Neil Fleming. Historically, political science draws students with learning styles that benefit from experiences and reflection. In turn political science professors’ preferred teaching styles will reflect this type of learning. By incorporating active learning, the discipline has the ability to gain and better serve a diverse population of learners (Brock and Cameron 1999). By opening up courses to

include different types of active learning, a course is not only teaching students concepts and objectives but also helping students practice different ways of learning.

Active learning has proven to produce well-rounded learners with higher effective thinking and problem solving skills (Brock and Cameron 1999). Students who participated in active learning remember more course information and have a deeper understanding of course material (Powner and Allendoerfer 2008). Charles Bonwell argues that learning is not a “spectator sport” where students learn by being talked at but that learning occurs when students talk, write, and relate to their education (Brock and Cameron 1999). There is little argument that active learning does benefit students and those different forms of active education produce different benefits. As one example of active learning, simulation learning is a form of education that is used within the political science discipline to involve students as active participants in their education (Bernstein 2008).

Simulations used in classroom and educational environments fall under the large umbrella of active learning models in which students are directly involved in situations. Political science lends itself to many situations that can be used as a simulation model such as congressional meetings, town hall settings, policy development, bill writing, court debates, international affairs and others; the limit stops only with the professors’ imagination (Baranowski 2006; Bernstein 2008; Endersby and Webber 1995; Grummel 2003; Lay and Smarick 2006; McCarthy and Anderson 2000). Simulations are most effective when professors develop them with specific learning objectives in mind. The objectives can include understanding of the “mocked” political procedure and facts about the process but most of all simulations have the benefit of increasing student understanding of abstract objectives that can be difficult to teach (Lay and Smarick 2006).

Abstract objectives can include many skills that are necessary to the field of political science but difficult to grasp from a lecture. Students have been found to perform better on essay questions when they participated in a simulation incorporating the material being assessed. McCarthy and Anderson studied history and political science simulations that required students to take on role playing parts. They found that the simulations increased traditional skills taught in liberal arts education including position development, material management and process complexity (McCarthy and Anderson 2000). At the University of Maryland, Lay and Smarick utilized an online senate simulation in an introductory government course, after which they assessed students' understanding of the course material. They found that the online form helped improve students' written communication skills within the discipline (Lay and Smarick 2006). Finally, multiple studies have proven student gains in higher order thinking skills after participating in mock problem-solving questions. Students placed in situations where they are required to solve a problem, such as a public policy issue, practice developing creative solutions to situations in a controlled environment (Baranowski 2006; Grummel 2003).

Along with skill increase, simulations benefit students' understanding of lectured material. In a class where students practiced the bill development process, students demonstrated better retention of the steps when assessed on the final semester exam (Endersby and Webber 1995). Other studies have reached the same conclusion: students who participated in the simulation learned and retained more assessed material at the end of the semester than political science students who did not participate in the simulations (Baranowski 2006; Lay and Smarick 2006, Grummel 2003). However, Bernstein and Meizlish's study of student learning in a senate simulation demonstrated how adaptations of a political process to fit a classroom environment can result in student misunderstanding of the mocked process. In this simulation

the professor utilized “pork chips” to represent receiving benefits from one senator to another in return for voting for the current legislation. When the students were assessed post simulation about this interaction, they mentioned “pork chips” instead of understanding the action of bartering and promises the pork chips were meant to represent (Bernstein and Meizlish 2003).

Another obstacle to using simulations in classrooms is time constraints. Especially in introductory courses, teachers have expressed stress surrounding the amount of class that can be given over to implement a simulation. Some professors have designed simulations that can take multiple days and acknowledge the class time lost to these activities (Bernstein and Meizlish 2003). Other professors have managed the time restraint by using out of classroom time by designing online simulations (Lay and Smarick 2006) or requiring out of class preparation. There appear to be benefits and shortcomings to each solution to time constraints. Shorter simulations face the difficulty of organizing students into a large activity for one class period (Grummel 2003), while longer simulations face the trouble of material being misunderstood because of simulation adaptations and lecture time loss (Bernstein and Meizlish 2003).

With the increase in literature and the documented positive benefits of using classroom simulations, it appears that professors are willing to address or accommodate things like time constraints, to utilize simulations in their classrooms. Students also appear on average to enjoy simulation learning much more than strictly lecture based courses. Post-evaluations from classes that used simulations have reported positive feelings toward simulation learning and enjoyment of the activities (Baranowski 2006; Endersby and Webber 1995; Lay and Smarick 2006). These feelings result from multiple areas, positive interactions with classmates, being engaged with their learning or meeting the different range of learning styles within a classroom.

Simulations or other active learning techniques have also been used to incorporate citizenship education in higher education. Though less literature exists on citizenship learning in college than active learning or simulations, it is growing. The Task Force on Civic Education was developed in 1996. They discovered that a growing political apathy existed within the United States, along with a generally inadequate political science or government education among college age students (Hunter and Brisbin 2003; McMillan and Harriger 2010). Studies similar to this discovered that political participation was on the decline and negative political efficacy on the rise (Lay and Smarick 2006; Hunter and Brisbin 2003; Stranch 2006). The Task Force along with educators has begun reshaping political science education to include citizenship development to tackle these issues.

Citizenship encompasses literal ideas along with abstract concepts and skills. For an individual to be civically engaged they need basic knowledge about political processes and government. Smith, Nowacek and Bernstein argue that civic education must also include theoretical ideas and skills. Teaching empathy, disagreement and comfort with ambiguity or complexity in political processes needs to be included (Smith, Nowacek, and Bernstein 2010). Bernstein has also developed a definition of civic competence that includes three components; the ability to make sense of large amounts of political information, work with others to meet political goals, and the ability to understand how political system operate (Bernstein, 2008). Simulations are great ways to achieve civic competency goals because they provide students the time, environment and activities to practice the components of citizenship.

One subfield of civic education developed by James Fishkin is deliberative democracy or discursive democracy. Deliberative democracy is the practice of decisions made through deliberative discussions among a variety of individuals. He has implemented this practice by



holding issue forums where a group of citizens are invited to spend a weekend discussing a relevant political topic together. The goal is to have these citizens accurately represent the population being affected by the discussed political topic. Over these weekends the participants learn about the topics, discuss them in groups with trained moderators and speak with public officials on the issue (Fishkin 2011). This model can be used in classrooms to benefit political discussion. The important aspect it brings to a classroom is civic skill development. Deliberation allows students to practice the abstract concepts of citizenship listed above in a controlled setting. Students practice communication, collective decision-making, empathy, political judgment and political participation (McMillan and Harriger 2010; Strachan 2006).

Including deliberation in simulations can begin to reverse student's negative political attitudes while increasing persuasive and decision making skills. To complement deliberation practices, simulations can also include collaborative learning. Collaboration is a form of active learning that is found in many settings. In collaboration, two or more students are required to interact and be dependent on one another to achieve an objective. Students can develop or practice interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, decision making, social skills, time management and material comprehension (Hansen 2006; Rassuli and Manzer 2005; Young and Henquinet 2000). Collaborative practice is important in higher education because employers are increasingly looking for students to have skills and experience working in team environments (Hansen 2006). It is also greatly beneficial to citizenship development.

Collaboration helps students practice trusting one another, a concept important to civic education. The trust in one another and in the decision making process can also help decrease negative views toward politics and increase understanding of the complexity of government processes. Students also practice working with people who have different opinions. This is done

very well in simulations when students are assigned roles or positions to play and defend (Stranch 2006).

However, collaborative and group learning can go very poorly in college classrooms. One result can be the concept of parallel play expanded upon by Rebecca Nowacek (2010). The comparison between college group learning and toddlers during play time is not new to group learning. Parallel play occurs when students give one another roles or jobs in a project but do not oversee one another. For example, when a team gives each of their four members a different objective to research then compiles the four files into one assignment on the due date without ever talking to one another about their findings, parallel play has occurred. It can also happen without students needing to write anything down. This occurs during group discussion when one or two students take command and speak at people instead of the group discussing and reaching conclusions together (Nowacek 2010).

Group projects also produce the conditions for “social loafing” to occur. This is the idea that individuals decrease their effort in the presence of other people (Latane, Williams and Harkins 1979). In classroom settings, the social loafers are the students that sit back and let group members do the work for them. Often, groups that contain social loafers address the problem by developing a hierarchical system where students with strong personalities will take charge, to counter the loafer’s lack of effort; often, however, these strong personalities dominate over quiet or shy group members willing to participate. When this occurs the group is no longer functioning cooperatively or as a suitable learning environment for the students involved (Michaelsen, Fink and Knight 1997).

From active learning and simulation use, to citizenship education and group projects, research demonstrates benefits and difficulties in the various teaching techniques. In all forms of

education, the key to implementing successful learning activities is in the development of these activities; in higher education, this most often falls to the class's professor. The professor makes pedagogical decisions about the objectives, material, process and assessment of learning activities, all key points demonstrated in the literature that can lead to successful or ineffective educational exercises. Dr. Jeffrey L. Bernstein at Eastern Michigan University (EMU) utilizes active learning techniques in his political science classes. He is not new to the pedagogical undertakings necessary to implement successful learning simulations. This paper studies student learning in Dr. Bernstein's winter 2013, 112 American Government course where he utilized four in-class simulations during the semester to advance student learning. He has dedicated part of his career to the research of higher education teaching practices and welcomes inquiry on his performances.

Using the framework of the "backwards design" method by Wiggins and McTighe (Wiggins and McTighe 2005), Bernstein developed a list of outcomes he wanted his students to meet by the end of the semester, and then designed a class encompassing multiple teaching methods that could reach these outcomes (Bernstein 2008). The class was approached with the ultimate goal of teaching students the basics of American government and citizenship skills by making connections to the class's central theme, channeling political disagreement.

The students were introduced to this theme in the class syllabus that contained the course "Meta-Narrative":

Politics can be thought of as organized conflict between individuals and groups with competing goals. On virtually every political issue we confront, we see competing interests arrayed against each other, each hoping to make the eventual policy suit their goals. While this conflict can often seem as corrosive, difficult, and troubling, it can also be noble. Consider one particularly hot political issue today: taxes. If you (hypothetically) have a strong belief that we need to raise taxes on the rich to cut the budget deficit, and I (hypothetically) have a strong belief that we need to reduce taxes on the rich to stimulate the economy, then we

are in conflict. I think it is noble, and important, for each of us to stand up for what we believe to be in the best interests of our country.

However, if we just stand there and yell at each other, the system breaks down. So, an effective political system should provide a way to channel our disagreement. We should have enough high-quality information circulating so people can share their views, and help others make informed decisions on the issues. All sides should have an opportunity to put their views before the voters, and before the political officeholders who make the decisions. The system should provide a chance for the majority to rule, but in a way that protects the rights of the minorities. When decisions are made, they should be done in a transparent manner, in a way that the people feel is legitimate. Decisions should respect the broad, immutable, principles existing in the society, but also provide opportunity for the government to develop innovative solutions to solve the emergencies of the day.

Does the above description of an effective political system describe government in the United States? We will spend much time this term evaluating if the American political system lives up to this ideal, and considering the ways in which it might do better. We will do this in the classic way – reading, lecture, tests – but also in more engaging ways – simulations, collaborative learning, discussion, etc. As we move through our class activities this term, this “meta-narrative” of how the political system channels disagreement will be an ever-present theme in our work.

Through the backwards design technique, Bernstein designed a course taught through interactive lectures, class discussion, required reading and in class simulations. There were four simulations during the course; two Supreme Court hearings, one Blue Ribbon Commission and one Congressional Bill Debate. By using different models the students were able to experience multiple ways the American political system channels disagreement.

Though the simulations embodied different models and issues, the process and student requirements were the same across all four. Each simulation model took place within a 75 minute class period. The simulations required students to identify a viewpoint on the issues, research facts about the topic and share their knowledge with the class or a group. During each activity a group of six or seven students made up the decision panel. The students playing the

role of interest groups, attorneys and senators worked to convince this panel to support their position because the panel voted on and wrote the issues final decision.

Though the situations used in the simulations were all fictional, they revolved around the debate of one or more topic debated in politics today. The first simulation was a Supreme Court case between a high school teacher and her school district. The case ultimately hinged upon the First Amendment rights of the teacher to post about her school on the social media site, Facebook. The second simulation was a Blue Ribbon Commission on federal election reform. The third simulation was the Congressional Bill hearing. In this situation the students were required to support or reject specific pieces of a bill on gun control policy. The final simulation was another Supreme Court case surrounding the ability of the State of Alabama to charge a mother with violation of the chemical endangerment law when an infant died after the mother admitted to using an illegal substance while pregnant.

The simulation situations were dispensed to students the same day they were required to select a role. Students were able to choose any role in the simulation with the requirement that they had to sit on the decision making panel once during the semester. Every simulation consisted of a decision making panel and interest groups. The two Supreme Court simulations also included 4-6 attorneys and the Congressional Bill debate included senators. Along with the situation, students were given a pre-simulation assignment, due one class period prior to the simulation day. The assignment was a 1000 - 1200 word paper that required panel members to state their initial position on the issue and to identify questions they wanted answered during the simulation. Students not on the panel needed to develop a paper that stated their roles view on the issue and supportive arguments for their view.

All of the roles were held by two or more students. One class period before the simulation and after students had turned in their pre paper assignments; they were able to meet with classmates assigned to the same role and groups who held the same position on the issue. The class was advised to use the time to work with others to strengthen their positions by sharing the information from their pre-simulation papers and to continue to develop arguments supporting their position. In the case of the two Supreme Court simulations attorneys were able to gain arguments from interest groups supporting their clients. All students were also encouraged to work outside of class with their groups to continue developing their arguments; the only time this occurred was with members of one interest group in the Blue Ribbon Commission simulation.

On the day of the simulation students would arrive to a different classroom set-up. Tables were rearranged to have the members of the decision panel face the class. The other students were instructed to sit with classmates who had the same role. To allow the most time possible for the simulation, the professor would refrain from lecturing at the beginning of the class and only explain the time frame of the next 75 minute period. Again, the students were given time to pull together their arguments with members of the same position. Then, either as interest groups or as attorneys, the students presented their arguments to the panel. The panel was encouraged to interrupt the groups and ask questions during the presentations. The only simulations that allowed students time for rebuttal after hearing other arguments was during the Supreme Court cases. There the students had an additional five minutes to defend their argument again.

The last ten minutes of the class were reserved for the panel to hold a private meeting. During this meeting they were able to sit together without the professor or other classmates to discuss the case and reach a conclusion on the simulations situation. During this time the

students were all given a chance to present their position on the case with the rule that all of the members had to speak once before anyone could speak twice. After everyone spoke, the students were able to debate and collaborate until a conclusion was reached. The groups had to produce the simulation decision in a written document within a week of the activity. Students not on this panel held a brief closing discussion with the professor then were dismissed with a journal assignment to be written after the panel's decision was released where they reflected on their experience in the activity and the decision.

Data was collected throughout the semester and in various forms. I, the researcher, was an observer during the entire semester and assisted in the panel discussion session only to answer logistical questions from the group members. The students took two surveys, one at the beginning of the semester and one at the end. The pre semester survey consisted of a demographic section along with prior group work and political experience. The survey also required the students to gauge their collaboration and political skill abilities. These skill gauges were used for a longitudinal panel study because the students were asked the same questions in the post semester survey. I also had access to the all of the student's written work except for in-class examinations. The students were encouraged to forward me any correspondence with group members about simulation activities. Finally, I had recordings of three simulation panel meetings. All data were collected with approval from the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Board.

With access to the large amount of data I collected, I was able to perform many analyses on the class to gain insight into the outcomes of student learning in the class. The data demonstrated that through the repetition of simulations, student's confidence in their abilities to perform tasks requiring political skills and traits. The class also experienced an increase in

collaborative skills and traits but not as much as political. The data yielded insight into student group dynamics and decision making process.

The semester began with 25 students enrolled and ended with 22. Seven were males and 18 females. The students ranged in age from 18 to 38 and were on average 2.5 years into their degree programs. There were no political science majors in the class and the students are able to meet a general education requirement with this course. The data will be reviewed looking at the class as a whole and group advancement over the semester. Analysis will first describe how the class grew politically and collaboratively and conclude with their decision making processes.

During the semester, Professor Bernstein provided the students multiple opportunities to practice political skills that he feels can be applied outside of his classroom. With no political science majors in the course, and proven decreased positive attitudes among college age American students, it was important that the skills practiced in class could be applied afterward as citizens (Strachan 2006). Table 1 lists a variety of political skills, which the students rated their ability to perform in their pre and post semester surveys. The skills were targeted the most in simulation activities because it provided the students time to practice and develop them. The skills were rated on a six point scale, with one meaning they believe they cannot perform the task and six equating to their ability to do the task very well.

Table 1: Political Skills

Skill	Pre-Semester Mean	Post-Semester Mean	Average Point Change
Explain my political views to others	3.76	5.00	Increase 1.24
Write well about political topics	3.24	5.04	Increase 1.8
Persuade others to support my political positions	3.56	5.00	Increase 1.44
Weigh pros and cons of various political positions	3.96	5.39	Increase 1.43
Listen to others political opinions and ideas	4.8	5.34	Increase .55



The students demonstrated an increase in all of the political skills studied. This illustrates that the students are leaving the class with an increase in confidence in their abilities to perform these political science skills. I describe this as a confidence in their skills because the students rated their abilities, and the data is not based on performance tests. The highest increase over the semester was in the student's ability to write well on political topics, an important citizenship skill. The skills rating experienced a 30% increase, equating to over one point on the rating scale. The rise in student abilities is a result from the copious practice writing about political topics. For every simulation students were required to write a pre-paper of a minimum of 1500 words and a post-simulation journal entry of 500 words. These activities along with the semester's mid-term and final essay questions gave opportunities for students to practice writing about political topics. The second highest increased skill was persuading others to support their political positions, increasing 24%. This skill was also practiced during simulation in argument preparation, participating on the decision making panel and concluding in post journals about the simulation results. This evidence proves that the many opportunities for practice, provided students adequate experience to increase their ability to perform a political skill.

Looking at the data from a different point of view, other examples of how the increase in student's political skills appears to be the result of practice and reflection. Students rated their ability to listen to others' political opinions and ideas the highest at the beginning of the semester and it averaged second highest at the end. This trait increased 9% over the four month semester; the argument can be made that students did not have a large increase here because there was little room to increase (the so-called ceiling effect). However, the minor increase can be from the students practicing this skill in situations they had not been placed in before, such as the role playing required. The highest rated skill at the end of the semester was student's ability to weigh

pros and cons of various political positions. Increasing 23%, this skill was extensively practiced. Students practiced the skill by defending their position during simulations and while working on the panel to reach conclusions on an issue. The students reflected on this ability in their post simulation journals where they had to discuss the outcome, how they felt about the arguments presented and their personal feelings toward the outcome.

The data demonstrated that a significant increase can occur in a student's confidence to successfully perform political science skills when paired with practice or reflection. Along with these skills the pre- and post- surveys ask students to rate the likelihood that they would participate in various political or citizenship tasks outside of the class. Bernstein hoped to increase student's citizenship skills along with increasing their knowledge of the American government curriculum. When students successfully use citizenship skills in the classroom, they are more inclined to practice them outside of school (Bernstein 2008; Lay and Smarick 2006; Stranch 2006). I refer to the following data as political traits. I use this term because the question asked students to rate the likelihood that that they would participate in political acts in their daily lives. In a sense this survey question held a different weight than the political skills addressed above. The students had to think about how important it would be for them to utilize political activities in their lives outside of the political science course. Table 2 lays out the students changes throughout the semester from the data surveyed on the pre and post surveys. The traits were rated on a four point scale with 1 meaning not important to the student and 4 being essential.

Students had minor increases on these traits but all of the traits did experience an increase. The highest increase from the beginning to the end of the semester was in how important it was for the students to influence the political structure. The students learned about

various ways to influence the political structure during the semester and practiced mock situations of this on the federal level in simulations. Though the increase was less than most of the student's gains in political skills, this likely resulted from the wording of the question. "Influencing the political structure" demonstrates a more powerful statement than my quest to discover the likelihood that students would live as active citizens or potential student fears of practicing political skills in an uncontrolled environment.

Table 2: Political Traits

Trait	Pre- Semester Mean	Post- Semester Mean	Average Point Change
Importance of influencing the political structure	2.2	2.78	Increase .58
Importance of becoming a community leader	2.4	2.83	Increase .43
Importance of convincing others of your opinions/ideas	2.36	2.52	Increase .16
Importance of listening to others with different opinions/ideas	3.4	3.48	Increase .08

At the beginning and end of the semester students felt it was important to listen to others with different opinions and ideas. Though this trait did not experience a large increase over the semester, it was the highest rated out of the four point scale at the beginning and end of the term. The data fell only 13% short of receiving a four from all students; again, the ceiling effect can be playing a part again here. Under political skills students ranked their ability to listen to others at a 5.34. Here we can see a connection between a student's political skill ability and their motivation to act match. The students have the skills to listen to others political opinions or ideas and also feeling the drive to do so in their futures.

Table 1 demonstrated that students had a higher increase in their perceived ability to perform political skills after practicing and reflecting on their experiences using the skills. Now

we can add that providing students with knowledge about politics and abilities to participate in citizenship acts, students appeared more inclined to do so. At the end of the semester students gained sufficient political skills to want to apply them more often in their lives than at the beginning. This supports the data discussed in the literature review that students with more practice in citizenship skills experience an increase in political drive and decrease in negative political attitudes (Lay and Smarick 2006; Stranch 2006).

Along with political skills and traits the students were asked to rate their collaborative skills and traits on pre- and post-semester surveys. In the class Bernstein hoped to stress to students the importance of collaboration within the political science field. Collaboration within political topics related to the class's central meta-narrative of learning about how the political system channels disagreements. Citizens must work collaboratively to reach conclusions about decisions that affect the diverse populations living within their communities, states and the larger nation (Smith, Nowacek, and Bernstein 2010). Similar to the idea of Fishkin's deliberative democracy, simulations were activities that provided students with identical information on an issue and provided a controlled environment for discussion on the topic to occur. The different roles played, research performed and diversity among students imitates the different social strata and educational levels essential to deliberative democracy, while the argument development and the simulation activity provided the space for dispute resolution to occur on an issue (Fishkin 2011). Table 3 describes the collaborative skills I asked students to rate their ability to perform at the beginning and end of the semester. This used the same six point scale as political skills.

At the beginning of the semester students rated their ability to perform these collaborative skills higher than political skills. All of the students entered the class having had collaboration experience in the past. Sixteen out of 25 students reported having worked on over ten

collaborative projects in their previous school experience and the other 9 students had a minimum of 5-6 past experiences. With this amount of exposure to group environments, it makes sense that the students would have more confidence in their collaborative skills than political. The mild increase over the semester in collaborative compared to political skills should be examined. Arguably students were provided as many opportunities to practice collaboration as they were political skills but the fields did not grow equally. From Nowacek's analysis of parallel play and the research supporting social-loading in group environments, the connection can be made that the two played a role in the class (Latane, Williams and Harkins 1979; Nowacek 2010). The collaborative skill and trait data will hint that these factors but the discussion on panel data following provides the best insight into the group dynamics formed in the class.

Table 3: Collaborative Skills

Skill	Pre-Semester Mean	Post- Semester Mean	Average Point Change
Help diverse groups work together	3.96	4.87	Increase .91
Deal with conflict when it arises	4.40	5.43	Increase 1.03
Reach a compromise with others	4.48	5.17	Increase .69
Divcd work load equally	4.88	4.96	Increase .08
Follow instructions	5.60	5.74	Increase .14

The highest increase in collaborative skills was in student's ability to deal with conflict when it arises. Throughout the semester the students learned about different environments the American political system used to resolve conflicts and make decisions; three were acted out in the simulations and others discussed. Students also reflected on this topic throughout the semester in journals and in preparation for their final essays. This, along with being placed in

situations where the students were asked to work together, assisted in increasing student's confidence in their abilities to deal with moments of disagreement.

Helping diverse groups work together had the second highest increase for collaboration skills during the term, increasing 15%. Again, extensive time in various situations was provided to the students to practice this during simulations. The classroom was made up of a diverse population of students from various ages, level of schooling, work background and political experience. The simulations provided added diversity in the classroom because the role assignments required students to learn about different populations of people affected by the different issues and had to develop arguments for or against the diverse opinions. On multiple occasions students found themselves defending a position in the simulation that they did not personally believe in. Finally, working on the decision making panel added an additional way for students to practice writing an issue conclusion in a situation where diverse groups were struggling to work together. This was a great learning experience about understanding another group's position but when individuals are wrapped up in winning their argument, students' recognition of this learning can be overlooked. This is why the post journal assignments were imperative to help students meet the abstract learning objectives of Bernstein's elaborate simulations.

Now we can see how practice opportunities, knowledge and reflection have not only increased the students' political skills but collaborative skills as well. So how do these experiences affect student's collaboration motivation? Again, the difference between the collaborative traits and collaborative skills was in the question's focus. Under collaborative skills students rated how well they felt they could perform collaboration tasks and the

collaborative traits question asks students how important is it to perform these traits in their daily lives. Table 4 shows the results between the beginning and end of the semester.

Table 4: Collaborative Traits

Trait	Pre Test Mean	Post Test Mean	Average Point Change
Importance of working in collaboration with others	3.20	3.39	Increase .19
Importance of compromising with others	3.28	3.26	Decrease .02
Importance of performing to the best of your ability in this class	3.64	3.70	Increase .06
Importance of learning from your peers	3.40	3.49	Increase .09

The collaborative traits compared to skills have a similar relationship that the political skills and traits had, in that the skills revealed a more significant increase than the traits did. The highest increase students had in collaborative traits was in the importance of working in collaboration with others, again stemming from the simulation design where groups had to work together to tap the expertise of individual roles to successfully defend positions to the panel. The increase here is an example of where the students grasped the professors push for the importance of collaborative work necessary to successfully channel disagreement in politics.

The data also provide information about where the students experienced very little growth. Students reported that they did not gain a sense of the importance of collaborative traits during the semester in light of their extensive opportunities to practice the skill. For the trait, importance of compromising with others, the students had a decrease in the importance they place on this over the semester. I feel we can see the students experience of parallel play being demonstrated in the data. As stated above the students were resistant to work fully in collaboration and most got through the semester without ever collaborating on written work with another student.

By analyzing the political and collaborative traits and skills, two different definitions formed about these students. We have the student at the beginning of the semester that had mediocre confidence in their political skill capabilities, saw little importance in political involvement and only followed news stories about once a week. They also had collaborative experiences in the past and initial development of collaboration skills. At the end of the semester, this same student had a great increase in the confidence they felt about their political skill capabilities and the importance of performing political activities in their daily lives. The new student also reported an increase in their collaboration skills; however, a significant disconnect occurred with the weight they place on collaborative traits. This disconnect is where we will look at next by analyzing the collaborative experience students had on the decision making panel. There we will see parallel play and social loafing influencing group dynamics in the class.

In every simulation six or seven students were on the panel to which the interest groups or attorneys presented arguments; at the end of the simulation this group was required to reach a conclusion on the issue. The group had time to sit together in private and discuss the case after the arguments were presented. I was there to observe and answer questions any members had about the simulation logistics but not to participate in the discussion. Three of these four meetings were tape recorded and analyzed after the semester concluded. The recordings as well as student emails (or the lack of emails) are good indicators of the student's collaboration in these groups. Table 5 lays out the data about the students' interactions during these meetings. The number of inputs is based on the number of times a student began talking during the panel session. In observing this, I learned that students enjoy interrupting one another and many of the students would continue talking after someone interrupted them. In these situations the



interruption was counted as one input but if the original student continued to speak, another input was not added to their list.

Table 5: Panel Session Data

Simulation 1 Students	Number of Inputs	Simulation 2 Students	Number of Inputs	Simulation 3 Students	Number of Inputs
A	2	A	11	A	9
B	4	B	7	B	8
C	3	C	6	C	2
D	1	D	4	D	1
E	3	E	7	E	2
F	2	F	0 (absent)	F	6
G	3			G	3
Total	18		31		35
Time (min)	10		11		14

In each panel meeting the students had to speak at least once before anyone could speak again. Simulation 2 has no inputs for student F, this is because this student was absent during the panel session. At the bottom of the chart, the total number of inputs is displayed and the time each session was held for is also displayed. The shortest session time and the least amount of inputs occurred in the first simulation's discussion. During the panel session all except two students agreed about the cases decision and the two students that did not agree were not willing to defend their position to their fellow justices. The students assigned one student to write up the decision to be presented to the class, the first example of social loafing. One student did the work and the others got credit. It also shows that the students were willing to put their name on an assignment that they never read.

Simulation number 2's panel discussion was the best demonstration of collaborative discussion in the semester. These students were deciding on campaign reform and out of a list of 6 options they had to choose three to put into place. There were only five students in the session and each spoke 4 or more times. This group's student A was very good at probing the other

students to interact and share their opinions surrounding the election reform by asking them to elaborate on ideas. However, again here the students assigned one person to write up the decision and another individual to edit it, the majority of students in the group agreed to have their name on an assignment they had no input in.

Panel three is misleading. There were 35 inputs total during the 14 minute session. This is not only the longest session meeting but it also had the most input total. However, unlike in panel 2 where no one spoke less than four times, out of this group of seven, only three members spoke more than 4 times. This ratio demonstrates the lack of collaborative discussion and debates that occurred in the room, this was parallel play because the students that agreed worked to only discuss their positions with others who agreed. Two students in particular had to probe the group to vote on a decision then they discussed how to write up the paper to present the class. Outside of this explanation, there was very little input or inquiry into other members positions.

The panel data, along with the mild increase in collaborative skills and traits, demonstrates that the simulations were not as effective in increasing student's collaboration as political skills. There was not a steady increase across the panels in number of student inputs or debates during the meetings. Also, not a single group opted to write the paper as a team. All of the papers were written by one or two members of the panel and not once did all of the group members see the final paper before it was presented in class. Though the class did increase student's political writing skills, it did not increase student's collaborative writing skills. Parallel play and social loafing both occurred in these sessions. There were times when students who did not agree with one another were unwilling to discuss or compromise on ideas, along with students being entirely unwilling to participate in the decision write up.

The analysis of the panel discussion demonstrated that Bernstein’s goal for the activity to promote collaboration fell short of being met. The final analysis of the class looks at another situation where the professor’s ideal outcome was again not achieved. However, in this situation, it is apparent that the task did not lend itself well to the objective. Returning to the class focus on how decisions are made, the final essay question required the students to define for the professor what a good and bad decision looked like to them. They had to relate this to the simulation decisions and the real world. Best outcome would be that the definition of a good or bad decision would be the same in class as well as in the American politics. If that occurred, it would prove that students practiced good and bad decision making during the course and that the simulations were a good tool to help practice this in a classroom. Unfortunately, the students ideas on decision making during the class, did not completely match their definition of decision making in politics. The list of students definitions are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Decision Definitions

Good Decisions in Politics	Bad Decisions in Politics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze facts</li> <li>Analyze all positions</li> <li>Provide best outcome for all effected</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on personal perspectives or biases</li> </ul>
Good Decisions in Simulations	Bad Decisions in Simulations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facts were communicated</li> <li>Laws were followed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on bias</li> <li>Poor argument preparation</li> </ul>

Disconnect between the students classroom opinions and daily life on decision criteria is displayed above. When the students wrote about how they will apply their definition of a good or bad decision outside of the classroom, they were going to utilize different criteria than they had during simulations. For decisions decided in class, students wanted the panel to base their position on facts and laws. Though if they were reading about a political decision outside of

class, it would need to have analyzed a multitude of facts, all of the positions on the issue and reached a conclusion that would be best for everyone affected. The simulation outcomes had to meet a far lower moral standard to be good than real American politics because overall the students felt the decisions presented by the panels were defined as good under the standards above.

Bad decisions had the similar description that a decision would be poor if it encompassed one group's personal bias. However, in the simulations many also argued that a decision was poor if the panel was not presented with an acceptable argument. Again, students accepted simulation decisions to a lower standard than daily politics. The students were not willing to blame the panel on a bad decision if they felt that the panel was not presented with adequate arguments from all parties involved.

Finally we can add the last piece to the puzzle of the student produced at the end of the semester compared to the student who entered the class in January. Students are leaving the semester with more confidence in their political and collaborative skills though they did not demonstrate collaborative writing throughout the semester. The students are also leaving more inspired to participate in political or collaborative activities after the semester. Though the students were provided with the numerous experiences to practice and reflect on their learning, there is no evidence that students made the connection of the difference between how they viewed decision making inside and outside of the classroom.

In the research cannot the analysis of the simulations used in Dr. Bernstein's American Government class upheld previously reported conclusions. Under the active learning umbrella, the simulations had a positive influence on students learning during the semester. Students experience an increase in citizenship skills through applied practice in simulations. In Lay and

Smarick's argument that the importance of successful simulations comes from proper objective development, Bernstein's activities demonstrated this. For political skills the activities were great models to promote this learning in students. However, the collaboration and connection between decisions making in class to real life, were not properly met through the model of these simulations.

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