

Founders' Forum Classroom Simulation

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### Abstract

Students discover they are each a founding member of a new nation. For this simulation, the class is divided into two equal-membered factions. Each side will be able to discuss their positions on issues as a group pertaining to the government and governance of this new nation within their own group. Topics include but are not limited to: the establishment of governmental institutions and their powers, checks on powers, delegation of authority, principle form of government, regulation of commerce, taxation, and the process if the constitution needs to be amended in the future. Students will be aware of the topics and questions a few days in advance so they can start to think of some details, but they will not be divided into the two groups until the day of the simulation. Once the two groups are divided, students will work with their group to come to a decision on each topic. Once both groups finish building their respective constitution, they will discuss their concepts with one another given their answers to constitutional topics. All topics will be discussed by both groups as a class discussion. If there are any opposing views between the groups on any of the topics, the groups would work together to find a compromise. If a compromise cannot be found for any topic, then the constitution for the new nation cannot be ratified. Once all potential compromises are reached and both sides are in agreement on the constitutional topics, students can then sign the revised constitution, thus ratifying it for the new nation. By participating in this simulation, students will be able to: understand and explain the importance of establishing a constitution and government, analyze conflicting perspectives to determine how to make decisions and compromises on issues, communicate effectively in a group setting, develop critical thinking and problem-solving techniques, and practice mindfulness abilities in working with others in finding a common solution. The hope is that this simulation will be educational and informative on the intricacies of creating a constitution due to various things that need to be considered, as well as an entertaining

learning experience through the prospect of students creating their own constitution with their own ideas for a fictitious nation.

## Introduction

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, education of students has been negatively impacted. This leads to further inequalities and gaps in educational achievements, which could potentially limit the mindset of students to grow and gain more knowledge. This paper will examine these obstacles as well as how to move beyond them. It is the hope that implementing a simulation in a classroom setting will be able to motivate students to want to learn more, beyond what they would learn in a lecture. If applied properly, a class simulation will be entertaining for students while also having a lot of educational value as well. In this sense, it should provide incentives for students to want to achieve more educational standards and perform better on exams or other assessments.

## Data & Information

One notable difficulty to overcome is a trend of lower ACT (American College Test) scores over the span of the past few years. Figure 1 in the appendix below reflects this trend. Numbers presented in the figure show that average ACT composite scores are the lowest they have ever been, with a national average of 19.8 and in my home state of Ohio the average is 19.4 (American College Test – U.S. High School Graduating Class Trends). The significance of this is that overall lower scores could have deep-rooted concerns about the meaning of lower scores on student motivation and preparedness for college. Potential concerns include a lack of essential collegiate and life skills such as decision-making abilities, communication and teamwork, critical thinking assessment, and motivation to learn.

With that said, classroom activities must function as a way to energize students and allow the opportunities for students to attain these essential skills. Vlachopoulos and Makri (2017) noted that games and simulations in a classroom help improve overall knowledge acquisition and

conceptual understanding on a variety of topics (p. 15, 19). Thus, having a simulation in a classroom environment should also be able to help with student achievement, particularly with grades, as well as developing essential skills mentioned in the previous paragraph.

It is also important to consider some students may be enrolled in an introductory-level course to fulfill a mandated general elective requirement, or that some students are undecided in their majors. Thus, for implementing a classroom simulation it is imperative to emphasize skills that can be useful for all students in their respective futures while also linking it to course material, learning outcomes, and other class-related goals. In theory, this should help with motivation of students and allowing for a positive classroom environment where all students would be given the tools and skills needed to succeed.

#### Learning Objectives of the Simulation

Now that the significance of a classroom simulation has been established, it is important to turn to my specific classroom simulation and how it can be helpful for student learning. The learning outcomes and objectives of this simulation are supposed to help students both in the classroom and for their respective future careers. Some skills of note are the ability to communicate with others in a group setting, having the capacity to solve hypothetical real-world problems as it relates to conflicting perspectives on a similar topic, understanding and explaining the importance of a governing structure as well as the regulations associated with it, as well as other analytical and critical thinking capabilities.

When it comes to constructing a constitution or developing a governmental structure, there are bound to be disagreements pertaining to how to proceed about certain relevant topics. Communication is important both within a group as well as between groups in this sense. Within a group, members need to work together and come to an agreement on their rule or policy

preference. When discussing the matter between groups, there is a need to have a civil discussion regarding the merits of both preferences and strategies. This is important for how to proceed in adopting a constitution and working through any potential differences or discrepancies.

Other significant skills such as problem-solving capabilities and being able to analyze both sides of an argument critically are also important to consider when it comes to building a constitution. In discussing the distribution of power, elections, economic functions, other regulations, or a myriad of other topics, it is important for groups to overcome obstacles and solve problems. It is also beneficial to examine and understand the implications of a preference or position beyond what is stated. This allows everyone to understand the impact their decisions will have in future societies. Beyond these learning objectives that can be useful as life skills, the simulation would illustrate the role of the two-party system, something that is pertinent in contemporary times as well as in the times of the Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

### Setting up the Simulation

The simulation would be expected to take up an entire class period. Thus, it is important to let students know of the simulation about a week in advance so everyone can prepare accordingly. Information that would be shared ahead of time include the prompt, possible topics that both groups may discuss, as well as the two potential conclusions of whether or not a compromise is reached in establishing a constitution for a nation. Then, at the end of the class before the simulation, students can ask questions in order to clarify any information so they are ready to start the simulation at the beginning of the next class.

The reason for divulging as much information as possible beforehand is for the benefit of students to have the entire class period to work on the simulation. Especially for an introductory course of undergraduate students, it would be more meaningful, and probably lead to much better

engagement, to allow everyone to have some time to think about the simulation prior to the day it would be held. It should also lead to more ideas and discussion regarding various topics that students consider when building a constitution.

### Simulation Day

To start off the day of the simulation, the class will be divided in half so that there are two equal-numbered groups. From there, members of each group will discuss a variety of topics that include but not limited to:

- What are the main ideas/concepts behind why you want to implement your ideas in this constitution for a new nation? Describe the type of government you hope to build.
- How should the government be organized? How many overarching institutions should be established for this new nation?
- What powers should explicitly be delegated to the government to enforce? How will laws be established, proposed, enforced, interpreted, and upheld or overturned on the basis of your constitution?
- What system of government should be used? Should a central government have complete power and authority over regional territories within the nation, or should powers and responsibilities be shared between the central and regional governments via a hierarchical structure? Does anything set apart the central government from regional governments? How are different geographic regions within the nation established?
- How would commerce be regulated? How will revenue be raised for the nation? Does this include taxation? If not, how would any financial deficit be compensated?
- What would be the process to potentially amend your constitution in the future?
- Overall, how much authority is vested in governmental power(s)?

- Are there any checks and balances that will be implemented to ensure that no one person or entity becomes too powerful relative to other governmental entities or the general population?
- Are there elections for government officials? If not, how is it decided that these officials are granted their positions? If so, what are the respective rules for the election process (how often are elections held, how old does someone have to be to vote, etc.)?

Certainly, more topics are welcome to be discussed within a group and presented, but this array of topics is designed to simulate a potential debate between two factions attempting to establish a constitution for a newly-found nation. Both sides could agree on some topics or issues, while other topics could have dissent. In this sense, it also emulates a two-party system that stems as far back as the Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

After taking some time to discuss these topics within each respective group, both sides will present their topic ideas to the class. In other words, both sides will describe their ideal constitutional and conceptual framework of building a country to the other group. This is done to show where ideas may overlap and where other concepts may differ between both groups. It is important to assess where both groups are in their thought processes since topical ideas that are relatively close to each other can be easily adopted into the constitution. Meanwhile, ideas that are slightly different from one another would hopefully encourage civil discussion about the merits of both incremental differences and lead to an amicable compromise for the sake of the newly-found nation.

There may also be instances in which ideas about how to govern the nation are wholly different; this would hopefully generate even more civil discussion. Extreme differences may be more difficult to find an exact compromise that will leave both groups satisfied, but the exercise



allows for both groups to try and effectively communicate with each other about their needs. It also encourages both sides to explain rationales for including or choosing their specific functions. Additionally, if there are two wholly different ideas for any number of topics, both groups would still have to negotiate and work out an agreement on all topics within the constitution in order for it to be officially ratified. If, by the end, there are still any disagreements on any topic(s) and a deal has not been reached, then the constitution cannot be ratified for their nation and a constitution cannot be adopted.

This is done to promote skills of communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities. The aspect of communication is clearly shown in how group members discuss topics with their own group members, as well as how everyone conveys their ideas with the other group. Critical thinking is shown through the policies and ideas that each side wants in their constitution. These ideas being presented reflect how people view what is necessary for building a society, what laws are needed to govern a land, what those ideas mean for future societies and how everyone is impacted by those implementations, etc. Problem-solving abilities are shown when there may be an impasse in wholly different ideas. Both sides would need to work together to find an agreement or compromise on some ideas in order to proceed with officially establishing the constitution. Intermingled in all this is also the notion of mindfulness and civility to encourage being respectful of other ideas and see the value of those other opinions and ideas.

As previously alluded to, failure in reaching an agreement in all facets of this constitution would mean that it cannot be adopted. This shows the back-and-forth nature in trying to establish a constitution. Unlike in real-life situations, though, students would not have to re-do the simulation for this classroom scenario. However, it would be noted that not coming to an agreement in realistic scenarios of trying to ratify the constitution would have typically meant

starting over and re-building ideas. Thus, it demonstrates the importance of holding true to core principles and values while still attempting to find a common solution that would best benefit the public as a whole. This latter aspect is something that can be a valuable lesson beyond historical lessons of constitution building, as it also pertains to present-day situations as well.

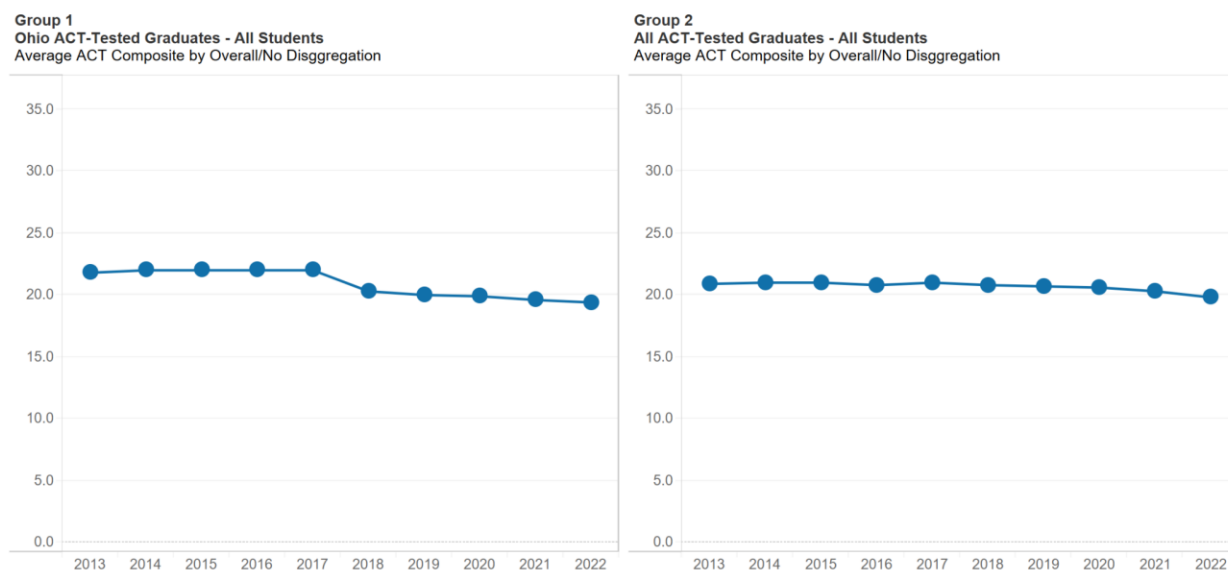
### Concluding Remarks

It is important to allow for student creativity at any level so that they may have the best possible chance to learn and want to explore more about any subject. The simulation described above looks to apply this concept in an academic setting. It is designed to provide a learning environment that students would enjoy experiencing, while also having a lot of educational value that can explain the nature of creating a constitution for a new nation. This should hopefully help students to be motivated in understanding the course material and even want to learn more about the subject matter beyond the classroom.

This constitution-building simulation also emphasizes several key aspects that have dwindled as a result of the pandemic. These include communicative abilities, problem-solving capabilities, and critical thinking skills, which are all helpful tools in the classroom as well as beyond academia in the future careers of students after they graduate. This simulation capitalizes on the opportunity of addressing these skills which have dwindled in the past couple of years. The hope is that implementing these capabilities will help restore these skills in future societies and be valuable for reinvigorating learning and produce better testing scores. In this sense, it is essential to provide educational opportunities for all students so that everyone can receive the skills needed to succeed.

## Appendix

Figure 1: ACT Composite Score Averages, State of Ohio and National, 2013-2022



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