

**Online Delegate Training IV**

Welcome! The meeting will begin shortly



Exam Copy – www.engagingtheun.com

Sample Instructor’s guide with online exercises

email [engagementlearning@gmail.com](mailto:engagementlearning@gmail.com)

Today we will contrast two models of delegate training – incremental, scaffolded learning versus being thrown in the deep end.

**Upcoming Fall Conferences**

Florida MUN Oct 17

Contact Doug Ryan FMUN.org

SRMUN Atlanta Oct. 23-Oct 25.

You can visit srmun.org/atlanta for info.

COCMUN October 24th and 25th

Contact Phil Gussin phil.gussin@canyons.edu

NMUN-DC ,Nov 6-8, info is at NMUN.ORG

Contact Richard

MCCMUN Sonoran Desert Conference Nov 20 and 21

Contact Brian Dille bdille@mesacc.edu

Today we will share online instructional design best practices. We will use the QM rubric as a framework.

ISA 2020 Paper

Model UN experience is deeply rewarding

A Model UN conference presents an immersive, experiential learning experience for students. They are able to put into practice the concepts of international relations they learned through books in class. They also develop important life skills as the conference is conducted on a professional level, using rules of procedure and maintaining diplomatic decorum. Most students who participate find this experience deeply rewarding. They return again and again to attend additional conferences. A mature MUN program harnesses this energy and provides opportunities for students to demonstrate leadership and organizational skills as they help to train new delegates. “Addicted” is not to strong a word to describe many students' passion for Model UN once they are introduced to it.

Some delegates unprepared

That is not the experience for all students, however. Some students are ill-prepared for the academic and social demands of a Model UN conference. They may struggle to produce the written work necessary prior to conference or to be able to engage in the public speaking and vigorous negotiation that occurs at conference. These students may be drawn into their struggle, resulting in their Model UN experience being defined by embarrassment or frustration. These students are unlikely to return to future conferences or help train new delegates.

Training Environment is key to a successful program

Avoiding this outcome is one of the main reasons a Model UN advisor should be intentional in constructing the training environment for delegates.

THE SKILLS NEEDED TO SUCCEED AT MODEL UNITED NATIONS

Technical research

Professional writing

Persuasive public speaking

Effective negotiation

There may be a steep learning curve

The task before a Model UN program advisor is how to help students acquire these skills where they are lacking and finely tune them if they already have them. Delegates often did not do MUN in high school, so they have not had any prior experience or training, yet they are expected to participate alongside veterans and experts at conference.

This steep learning curve is even more pronounced at the community college or junior college level. At institutions with open enrollment, there is no guarantee that students have college-level skills in reading, writing and critical thinking. At Mesa Community College where I teach, many of the students who would like to do Model UN have never written a paper using formal English, have never given a speech in front of an audience of a couple of dozen people, and often have never needed to wear professional business attire, such as a tie or dress skirt. In addition, typically half to a third of the Model UN team at MCC are international students. The Model UN program has acquired a reputation among these students as an effective vehicle for learning to speak and write in professional English. This means that they are doing the required research and writing in a second language.

Training Guidelines

High tolerance for failure

So given the high need for training required in order for students to have a successful experience, how can a program advisor meet this need? As an adviser with 20 years experience, the short answer is to pair high expectations with a high tolerance for failure. That combination quite often leads to a level of success that is surprising even to the students themselves and also mitigates the inevitable failures that accompany poorly-prepared students who are attempting to reach beyond their ability. A platitude like this may be true, but it's not particularly helpful. A more detailed answer will examine specific training strategies and approaches used by successful program advisors over the years.

Go fast or go slow?

These strategies can be lumped into two broad categories: go fast and go slow. To use a swimming analogy, what is the best way to get used to cold water? Do you slowly wade in, or just jump into the deep end. One approach condenses training into a very short period in order to quickly get the students to the experiential part of the training, since that is where most of learning occurs. The other approach is to gradually introduce new skills over a longer period, which allows students to acquire and practice the skills they need so their initial conference can be a success and not a failure experience. There are pros and cons to both approaches, and I have tried both over my years of experience.

THE GO-FAST APPROACH - JUMPING INTO THE DEEP END

The first approach is fairly common. It is to hurry up the training rather than spread it out. In this approach, after introducing students to the requirements for Model UN along with some minimal amount of orientation with expectations and training, you immediately give them the assignment to write their first policy brief. A Model UN policy brief is often the hardest paper students have ever written. Unlike most undergraduate work, it has to be written at a professional level, meaning there can be no mistakes.

Meanwhile, at the team meetings or class, students are also introduced to the committee rules and negotiation strategies. Students begin giving public speeches, even as their research is not yet complete. For many students, public speaking is stressful and traumatic, and speaking in a professional setting is an entirely new skill set. With luck and skillful coaching, this experience will not be so humiliating that the students abandon the effort.

This intensive, demanding level of work will consume several hours a week, more if the students are less prepared for college-level work. This tremendous effort is usually done on top of their normal school load. Model UN typically attracts A-level students, so they are already working long hours to maintain their grades. In this approach, the two or three months prior to attending a conference can be consuming for students who are new to the program. It can also be an intensive time for the veterans, as they also have to write to their own briefs and practice their speeches while also mentoring, coaching, and in some cases hand-holding the less experienced delegates.

This is the approach that I used for my first 15 years as an adviser. It can be done successfully, and in my experience had a very high level of student satisfaction. When you set high expectations and demand a lot from students, more often than not they will try very, very hard to meet those expectations. By asking so much from them, they will often reach levels of success that they themselves did not know they were capable of. There are definite pros and cons to this approach however.

Advantages

1. Team Unity. The most obvious advantage to this approach is that a strong cohort is formed. A team develops a sense of camaraderie that comes with the shared trauma of the conference preparation experience. Deep friendships can form when people help each other get through a difficult time.

Onr example of this was a Serbian immigrant named Maja. She struggled with both written and spoken English, and just barely was able to complete her preparation for conference with a lot of help from her teammates. At the conference, the team was recognized for an award, and they asked her to represent them by going up to receive the award. She had felt insecure in her role and in her contribution to the team, but when they gave her that place of honor, she realized that she belonged, and she counted them as some of her best friends from then on. These connections helped both the international students and their American counterparts succeed in their other classes as difficulties arrived.

1. Student Engagement. Given the condensed time frame, it is unlikely that students will lose interest or forget about their delegate training. Completing the work in a short period of time requires an intensity of effort that sharpens focus and ensures involvement. As with most things, with Model UN, students get out of it what they put into it. As students make the tremendously high investment in time and effort to prepare quickly, they reap the rewards of that effort and feel a connection to the program.
2. Addiction. A third advantage to point out is that in this preparation model, there is a fairly short time frame between a student joining the program and actually participating in a conference. Participation at conference is often such a positive experience that the students become hooked. Doing Model UN becomes a passion, and at that point it ceases to be work. Students who experience this transformation often become veterans who can be relied upon to carry the load of training new delegates. In a mature program, the advisor may actually have very little work to do as students do everything. They can't help themselves because they are having so much fun. When people invest a large amount of effort in something, their identity often becomes wrapped up in it. The sooner you can move students from joining the program to having the conference experience, the more likely it is that you will be able to harness that energy to improve your program.

An extreme example of this is with my former student Andrew. Andrew was not a political science major, but was talked into joining the Model UN program by his friends to fill a gap in their team which opened up when somebody quit at the last minute. In just ten days, and with a tremendous amount of help by his teammates, Andrew completed all of the research and wrote a set of very good policy briefs which were turned in on time. At the conference, which was just a few weeks later, he had a great time and discovered an aptitude for negotiation he did not know that he had. In four or five weeks, Andrew was transformed from a student who often missed classes and turned in C-level work to a highly motivated student that completed his degree program successfully, still not political science. Throughout his time at the college, he continued to do Model United Nations, and as an alumni volunteered for several years at the High School conference we host. Given his rather lackadaisical study habits, Andrew may not have had the same transformation if he had been participating in a program that was not so condensed. Having to do a tremendous amount of work in a short period of time convinced him that he was capable of doing high quality work, which changed his outlook on his studies.

**Disadvantages**

1. High Attrition. The story of Andrew highlights the greatest disadvantage to the go-fast approach. The reason Andrew had to join the team and perform the Herculean task of doing all of his preparation work in just a few days is because the person who was supposed to do that work gave up and walked away from the program at the last possible minute. The go-fast approach creates a high-stress, high-demand environment that some students are just not able to maintain. At some point, a student might look at this amount of hard work and ask “why and I doing this?” They may also tire of having multiple drafts returned, especially when asked to revise a policy brief that would already be earning an ‘A’ in a regular course. The go-fast approach asks a lot, and students are tempted to just withdraw from the situation. With the high school programs I work with, a twenty to forty percent loss in students is normal once the work begins.

1. Reinforcing Privilege. One of the uncomfortable truths of Model United Nations is that it continues in practice to be a playground for the elite. Most of those who participate come from privileged backgrounds and excellent schools. Schools in poorer neighborhoods tend to not offer Model UN at the high school level. At the collegiate level, wealthier students are better able to find the money to travel to conferences and may come to college better prepared to succeed in a go-fast model. The high attrition rate discussed above is not experienced uniformly across the population of students who attempt to do Model UN. Students from less-privileged backgrounds are more likely to come to the program with deficient skills. While they may be very interested in international relations and seek a future that involves professional work and practicing diplomacy, the go-fast model creates a demand for high-quality work produced in a short period of time that may simply be beyond their current ability.

Defenders of this approach might argue that the program is just giving students an opportunity, they can choose to do the work needed to succeed. This argument ignores the reality that students are starting at different skill levels. Those who come to college from a school system that did not prepare them for college level work will struggle, while those who come from a school system that did prepare them are more likely to succeed the gauntlet of expectations that come with the go-fast approach. Without taking this disparity into account, the advisor risks having their Model UN program be yet another failure experience associated with education. Seen this way, presenting them with what amounts as an opportunity to fail is not doing them a favor.

As mentioned earlier, I teach at a community college, so we have a wide range of students coming to our program. When students from poor backgrounds go to conference, they can see that they are capable of interacting with students from elite populations as a peer. This realization is often transformational, it is one of the most rewarding parts of being a program advisor. But they have to make it through the preparation process before they can have this experience. The go-fast approach may place this experience out of reach, especially when it demands upper-classmen competence when they are just starting their college experience. In my experience, the vast majority of students who give up are those who come from a background that made them ill-prepared for the demands the go-fast approach placed on them.

1. Low Comprehension. One final disadvantage of the go-fast approach is that the focused attention required to get the work done in the shortened time frame does not lead to a more holistic understanding of the subject matter. A student might, for example, be fully capable of talking at length about El Salvador's view on the Sustainable Development Goals, but still propose a policy solution that is unrealistic or violates the charter of the United Nations. Because they're writing a policy brief on topics within a single committee, their knowledge can be easily siloed. There simply is not time in the go-fast approach to explore the wider context in which the policy discussion is taking place. Nor is there time to look at the structure and history of the United Nations as an intergovernmental organization or the nuances of foreign aid.

One year I had a student who was preparing to be a delegate for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) committee. The student wrote great policy briefs dealing with women and development, empowering women in rural communities, and solutions for minimizing violence against women. In the committee debate on the final topic, the student proposed that UN peacekeepers be used to end civil wars around the world, since women and children are disproportionately victimized by these conflicts. Because the student had focused their research solely on CSW, they were unaware that CSW lacks the authority to establish peacekeeping missions, where the troops for those missions come from, or how to pay for those missions. Fortunately, the student raised their idea with their teammates before proposing it in committee, saving them the embarrassment of having their proposal laughed down.

The go-fast approach can be used effectively. For several years, I used this approach to great effect, helping to train students from a variety of backgrounds to succeed at conference. This experience expanded their worldview and prepared them to succeed in professional settings. Faced with the disadvantages of this approach, however, I transitioned a few years ago to a different approach in an effort to spread out the preparation time.

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HE GO-SLOW APPROACH - WADING IN GRADUALLY

The second approach is less common since Model UN programs are not always connected to an academic course. Instead of spending several weeks to research and write the material for a conference, the go-slow approach takes several months, spreading out the preparation over the course of an academic year. The idea is to build a lattice of assignments to gradually acquire the skills and confidence needed to succeed at conference.

I moved to this approach about five years ago out of frustration with the academic outcomes of the go-fast reproach. While my students were successful at conference, I had no confidence they were learning the material adequately. I decided that a more structured approach could provide a thorough introduction to the United Nations as an institution as well as provide an opportunity to acquire the skills needed to succeed at a Model UN conference. I was unable to find instructional materials that matched both goals, so I began to construct my own. The result was the textbook *Engaging the United Nations*. This book provides the foundation of the go-slow approach that I'm discussing.

One reason this approach made more sense was the growth of international students in my program. These students are drawn to Model UN as a way to develop professional English writing and speaking skills. This means that they lacked the pre-existing skill sets to succeed in the go-fast approach. By going slow, we're able to give the students the ability to gradually acquire the skills so that they can be at a professional level by the spring semester.

Another difference between these approaches is that unlike the high stress, condensed nation of the go-fast approach, the go-slow approach enables students to complete low-stakes, incremental assignments before they begin writing professional-level policy briefs. By connecting these earlier writing and research assignments to the course content of an introductory course about the United Nations as an institution, students are able to acquire foundational knowledge at the same time they are acquiring foundational skills. They are also able to be assessed on their learning through traditional test and assignments, and practice their new skills through engaging class activities.

This approach has been appreciated by students who need to develop their skills. The international students in particular are able to gain the confidence they need. Those who already have a base-level of skills and probably would have been able to succeed in the go-fast approach also enjoyed the this approach, as they could take the time to learn more about the UN as an institution than they otherwise would have. There are advantages and disadvantages to this approach as well. To a degree, these are simply the inverse of the advantages and disadvantages of the go-fast reproach.

**Advantages**

1. Increased Understanding. Having a textbook that explains how the United Nations works and provides a basic introduction to intergovernmental organizations has changed the way my students comprehend the UN. The textbook provides a structure to introduce ideas and a sequence that builds a foundation of understanding. They now better understand the history of the UN, what the institution can and cannot do, and how negotiations take place among professional diplomats. When they role play diplomats at a Model UN conference, they are no longer simply guessing or portraying caricatures of countries. Instead, they understand the context of the conversations they are having in committee. In addition, this approach enables students to learn about other related topics beyond a single committee they might be preparing for.

Students now have opportunities in class to explore these ideas and practice them. Students who are learning make lots of mistakes. By providing students a semester of instruction prior to going to conference, they can make mistakes in class and not in public. This enables them to go to conference with more confidence in their abilities and in their understanding of topics they're discussing.

1. Assessment of Student Learning. This approach allows the time and opportunity to use assessment to determine comprehension. as students learn core concepts about the UN or are introduced different skill sets like negotiation in public speaking, it's important to make sure that a concept is mastered before moving on to the next concept. having a series of low stake assignments enables an advisor to back up and redo conversations or reintroduce opportunities to demonstrate skill it is not quite it at acceptable levels.

This approach also allows the time to assess the program itself, in addition to individual student learning. The purpose of assessment is to discover the level of learning that has occurred and identify areas where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed. At its core, assessment involves a feedback loop where teaching is informed by the assessment of learning.

Once our Model UN program was a year-long course of instruction, I was able to conduct a formal assessment process. This assessment established a baseline by which I can now evaluate program improvements moving forward.

1. Leveled Playing Field. One of the greatest advantages of this approach is it gives students who do not have the needed level of preparation a way to acquire those skills so that they have an opportunity to succeed. Because there are several low-stakes assignments and opportunities to demonstrate learning early, students are able to discover gaps in their knowledge and fill those gaps. By the time students are preparing policy briefs, which can be a crushing experience in the go-fast model, they are able to successfully perform that task. Students with poor writing get opportunities to practice writing. Students who don't understand how to research get opportunities to do research. Students who lack confidence in speaking get opportunities to practice speaking. Each of these opportunities comes with some instruction and a low-cost to failure. With a structured lattice of instruction, the adviser can set high expectations while simultaneously having a high tolerance for failure because students will get multiple opportunities to succeed.

The gradual, lattice-approach structure inherent in the go slow approach builds confidence. Confidence is one of the key attributes of a successful Model UN delegate. In order to negotiate effectively and portray a sense of competence, students need to believe in themselves. This sense of self-efficacy can be hard for inexperienced students to acquire, especially if they come from an unprivileged background that may have been characterized by struggle and failure experiences. The biggest risk of the go-fast approach is to compound a sense of personal inadequacy if an unprepared student fails. By gradually developing the skills that lead to success, students from these backgrounds can become the competent delegate they need to portray at conference.

An example of the effectiveness of this lattice is found in a student we will call David. David was a nontraditional student, returning to college as an adult with a family to gain skills he lacked. He came from a poor background with inadequate schools and no college attendance. He worked as a long-haul trucker, planning his trips to be back home in time to attend classes once or twice a week. He joined the Model UN team to learn how to negotiate. He took the fall United Nations Studies course. His work in that class was rough, as his written English needed a lot of work, and research was a new adventure for him. He had a strong work ethic though, and refused to give up. Gradually, over the course of the semester, he was able to turn in professional level work. He continued his preparation in the Spring, practicing the negotiation skills he was learning, as well as honing his public speaking skills. He was able to attend the collegiate conference. His work there was not outstanding, but it was as good as most people in the room, which for him was a spectacular success. Given his skill deficits starting the program, he most likely would have given up in the go-fast approach, as the required pace would have crushed his efforts to learn the basics. The go-slow approach enabled him to build his skills to the point where he could succeed.

**Disadvantages**

1. Lower Student Engagement. The go-slow approach is not all-good, however. There are drawbacks to using it. The most consequential is that it delays the experience of attending a conference and thereby postpones some of the best experiential learning opportunities as well as the more fun part of the program for students. Unlike the go-fast approach, there is no adrenaline rush or sense of urgency. For the students, the program feels like a regular academic course, only harder. The lattice structure of low-stakes assignments, while building skills for those who need it, may produce boredom for students who already have the necessary skill set since they are not challenged. In addition to the dullness of plodding along through a set curriculum, there is the possibility that low-stakes leads to low commitment. Students may feel emboldened to not turn in work or skip classes because the individual assignments are worth so few points in a lattice-building structured program. Overtime, such an attitude can lead to a disconnect between the simple work they are doing and the professional expectations of the conference that they will eventually attend. Simply put, it is difficult to maintain a sense of excitement over a several months training.

This has been a problem every year since the change to the go-slow approach in my program. Each year, students join the program seemingly eager and excited to learn about diplomacy and the United Nations. After a semester of turning in assignments and focusing on the preparatory work, without experiencing the excitement of a conference, that eagerness wanes. There has consistently been one or two students who did not return for the spring semester to finish their training and attend the conference, even after they had completed most of the preparatory work that used to stress students out in the earlier go-fast approach. They had simply moved on in their interests.

1. Diminished Team Unity. A second and related problem is that in the absence of the shared pain of the go-fast approach, it is more difficult for the students to unify into a cohesive team. Since most of the preparatory work occurs in a normal academic course, it is completed as individual assignments. There is not the need for the frantic team meetings outside of class or the all-night work sessions that create environments where students forge friendships and become willing to make sacrifices for each other. Instead, while the program still is organized into country teams, students mainly see it as a vehicle for individual development and growth.

Every year since switching to the go-slow approach, I have had teams where committee gaps develop as people walked away. Those remaining have had to scramble to fill in the gaps. Granted, most of the work was done in the fall, so the gaps were smaller. The cost of quitting has been lowered, so people quit more often. It has become apparent that teams now are not really becoming cohesive units until immediately before the conference as they practice speeches together.

Table1: The Advantages and Disadvantages of these two approaches

Adv DA

Go-Fast Team Unity High Attrition

High Engagement Reinforcing Privilege

Addiction Low Comprehension

Go-Slow Increased Understanding Lower Engagement

Assessment Lower Team Unity

Leveled Playing Field

EITHER WAY, MAKE SURE THEY DON’T DROWN

The advantages and disadvantages of these approaches to training in an academic program like Model United Nations are to some degree the inverse of each other. The advantages of one approach are the disadvantages of the other. This is to be expected, of course, since the two approaches are different in pace and style but not content.

Having been an advisor for many years, and experimenting with both approaches, I am reluctant to definitively argue for one approach over the other. I'm currently working within and further developing the go-slow approach, but I used the go-fast approach for many years with great success.

Whichever approach one chooses, it is important to intentionally structure the training and instruction given to students in order to offset the known disadvantages to each approach. If using the go-fast approach, is it necessary to make sure that support structures and resources are available to students who come to the program less prepared or otherwise lack the necessary skills. These students will need extra help, so the advisor should anticipate that need rather than be surprised or inconvenienced by it. These extra support structures would include writing tutors (perhaps offered by veteran delegates), training videos, and personalized instruction outside of the regular class or team meetings.

If using the go-slow approach, it is necessary to provide experiential learning opportunities early in the training process to maintain interest, engagement, and motivation. This could be done with a series of simulations in class or other active learning method. There are some collegiate Model UN conferences that provide a simpler, more brief conference experience so they require less preparation. Attending one of these conferences early in training may produce the desired effect of getting students addicted to the event so they are willing to complete the long preparation process inherent in the go-slow approach.

Clearly, whatever approach one uses, a program advisor still has to do the work of being an effective teacher. This means intentionally preparing learning opportunities, delivering those opportunities in an engaging way, assessing student learning after those activities, and adjusting the teaching methods as needed based on that assessment. Being aware of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these approaches will hopefully help advisors in making those choices.



**Upcoming Topics**

Sept 21 noon EDT

Dialogue on team building and fundraising

Oct 5 noon EDT

Commiseration

Oct 19 noon EDT

Open forum?