



“Diplomacy & Education: Discovering & Teaching Reality”
an Arthur Ross Discussion of American Diplomacy
June 13, 2011

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**Workshop Summary:
Methods, Alternatives and Issues in Teaching What Diplomacy is
All About**

How can one teach students who have never experienced the time pressures, conflicts, interest trade-offs, and domestic and foreign political pressures to understand the realities of diplomacy? Students want to understand the reality of the process; some because they may hope to enter the field and others to become better and more informed citizens. How can they learn to go beyond thinking about the goals of policy to understand the limitations and realities of successfully implementing policy; the “how” as well as the “what” of policy? Answers (summarized below) to these issues were proposed by 18 former practitioners and professors all engaged in this expanding area of education.

Two papers with somewhat differing perspectives kicked off the discussion. Georgetown University’s Ambassador Howard Schaffer discussed how in-class simulation of certain aspects of diplomacy can draw students into the process, both in regionally-focused courses, such as his own on United States, India, Pakistan and Afghanistan, and in courses focused on broader diplomatic practice. Princeton’s Ambassador Barbara Bodine raised the issue of whether diplomacy is a process or a means to an end. While simulations have value for diplomatic practitioners trying to sort out policy choices, a classroom simulation may also lead to a misperception because of an unrealistic time compression.

The pros and cons of simulation are many. There is wide variation in students’ background and capacity to understand their roles, so bridging the gaps between students is difficult. Some thought that this could be managed by keeping students role playing relatively junior positions and using instructors or visiting outsiders to role play senior officials. Simulations can also take many different forms. At the Fletcher School, Ambassador Bill Rugh does simulations of American diplomats meeting with foreign officials in a specific country, using students who are from that country or know it well.

Georgetown University's Ambassador Chet Crocker noted his experience using historical case studies as a basis for replaying a crisis, so that students work in a more known and therefore finite universe from which insights and lessons about diplomacy can be derived. One debility noted is that there are not enough new case studies. However, there are several hundred that GW's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy has online, which can be accessed thematically, regionally, or chronologically. The very best ones include Teaching Notes.

Another approach discussed was the use of policy workshops, where students pursue an historical or current issue over a lengthy period – e.g., as much as a semester- learning to frame recommendations in terms of specific programs and resources needed for implementation. The format is more conceptual, structural and historical than simulations or case studies alone, but it is also very labor intensive and “not for the part-time professor.”

American University's Ambassador Anthony Quinton uses an imaginary country Erehwon, poor, benighted, suffering from disasters, natural and political, that experiences an ascending complexity of challenges that the students, functioning as an embassy country team, must respond to. Schaffer also uses an imaginary country and embassy in the Balkans to have the students handle problems from the trivial (but bureaucratically sensitive) to extreme crises. He noted also the very different motivations of undergraduates and graduates that influence the effectiveness of different approaches, a view in which many concurred.

Texas Tech University's Ambassador Tibor Nagy puts the students in the role of desk officer for real countries, so that they must follow developments in their country throughout the course. A mid-term paper becomes a briefing memorandum for a congressional delegation (Codel in diplospeak). George Washington University's Ambassador Edward Gnehm has teams of students adopt the role of inspectors. They interview several former ambassadors and write a report and recommendations on a particular subject, such as the interaction of ambassadors with CIA station chiefs. In another case, Ambassador Peter Romero has students interview former senior officials and later draft papers based on the interviews to make recommendations for country or public diplomacy approaches. Some of the resulting papers were so good that they were published. Ambassador Bill Rugh published a peer-reviewed book of 15 of his Fletcher student term papers.

Those teaching in the Washington, DC area have a particular advantage in the easy access to former officials. For those teaching outside the Washington area, case studies are particularly useful. Another source is the oral histories of former ambassadors done by the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training and available on the Library of Congress web site:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/diplomacy/>. These histories are searchable by country and subject as well as by author. The University of Central Florida's Ambassador Harriet Elam-Thomas observed that an additional resource for real world inputs into teaching lies in foreign consulates located in many major

US cities. Phone interviews for students with serving U.S. Department of State and foreign embassy officials can sometimes be arranged, but they are all people with busy schedules so care, personal contacts by the professors, and selectivity are key to making this idea bear fruit.

Ambassador Ken Yalowitz, now at Dartmouth College, spoke about his experience co-teaching with academics courses on Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Former Soviet Union, and Language and Politics in the Caucasus Region. After presenting discussion on theory Yalowitz then spoke about policy issues the US faces, the diplomatic tools available and how decisions are made within the USG, particularly focusing on the role of embassies and the ambassadors. The students, according to their end of term ratings, very much liked the combined approach of the theoretical and the "real world" insights they would not have otherwise received.

One of the most difficult problems, all agreed, is teaching students to write short, concise papers with action recommendations. Academic instruction appears to be particularly deficient in teaching this skill, yet it is crucial to success in all fields related to diplomacy and is highly useful in many other areas of real life work. Moving from long, descriptive papers to short ones with well thought-through recommendations for specific actions was a problem that most teaching in the area of practice have encountered.

Ambassador Melvyn Levitsky of the University of Michigan's Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy finds assigning action memoranda and one-page case study memoranda particularly useful because they encourage students to think about core issues, broad US national interests and options for decision making; "Whether to do (or approve)" a specific action. Bodine noted that it is sometimes useful to let students insert longer, background sections that would not be part of a real policy paper because it allows one more insight into how a student thinks about and understands an issue. It is particularly important that those grading papers take seriously the responsibility to work through student's prose, giving specific reactions and recommendations, sometimes with an opportunity to rewrite and improve papers. In fact, much of what is being taught through the practice of diplomacy is not teaching diplomacy directly so much as teaching students how to operate and think in a professional, policy making environment; skills that are transferable to many other areas.