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EU Simulations and Engagement: Motivating Greater Interest in European Union Politics

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Abstract: While the effects of simulation-based courses on the knowledge of participating students may be marginal in relation to standard lecture and discussion-based courses, this paper argues that the greatest leverage is gained by increasing participating students' level of interest in the subject of study and in politics more broadly. Participants tend to become increasingly absorbed in their roles and in the politics of the institutions at the center of the simulation. To better consider this possibility, we conduct a survey of students participating in the 2015 Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation and of appropriate control populations. The survey results indeed suggest that, much more than simply acquiring knowledge about the EU, the simulation experience serves to generate more robust interest in the subject of study.

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The benefits of active and experiential learning are well established within the conventional wisdom of the academic teaching community and in the scholarship on Political Science pedagogy. Political simulations, in which students play the roles of decision-makers and deliberate over issues of the day, are a popular mode of such learning. Teacher-scholars have theorized that simulations offer several benefits, including deeper insights into political processes, improved written and oral communication skills, and increased self-confidence (Newmann and Twigg 2000, Caruson 2005). Amongst the relatively few efforts to empirically investigate the potential benefits of simulations, teacher-scholars have largely focused on determining whether simulations improve students' acquisition and retention of factual knowledge (see, for example, Krain and Lantis 2006). This paper assesses another potential benefit of political simulations: whether such exercises promote greater interest in the subject in question and/or the broader political arena.

The literature on active learning stresses that interactive and student-centered activities improve learning outcomes by enhancing students' cognitive processing and promoting their ability to identify linkages between distinct high-level concepts (Omelicheva and Avdeyeva 2008). Such experiences may also facilitate deeper internalization of information, as students embed factual knowledge and meaningful personal experiences within their memories. Might these same mechanisms create, reinforce, and/or strengthen interest in the topic at hand? Might students who learn political content through engaged and interactive experiences develop stronger affective connections with, and/or investments in, that material?

In this paper, we investigate these questions by studying outcomes among students who learn about European politics through a simulation of European Union (EU) decision-making. We test the intuition that such students, as opposed to those who take a standard lecture-based

course, are more likely to develop a connection with EU affairs and to feel invested in the EU's political process. To investigate this possibility, we rely on surveys of students who participated in the 23rd annual Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation in November 2015. The surveys were administered to students before and after participating in the simulation and include a number of questions measuring both knowledge about EU affairs and interest in EU politics. The paper proceeds as follows. First, we review the existing scholarship on the benefits and drawbacks of active learning and political simulations. We then describe the survey instrument and the sample population in greater detail and proceed with a preliminary analysis of the survey findings. Our results suggest that simulations indeed have an effect on participants' interest in the subject of study.

The Benefits of Active Learning

Traditionally, the classroom experience for college and university students has been an instructor-focused enterprise: the professor stands behind the lectern and presents his/her knowledge and wisdom to a group of students sitting quietly—and passively—in their lecture hall seats, supposedly listening attentively and taking notes on the lecture material. In fact, Omelicheva and Avdeyeva (2008) remind us that the “lecture is, arguably, the oldest known instructional technique,” dating back to Plato's Academy and consistently “an indispensable part of teaching across the college and university curriculum” (603). The classic image and description of the professor in this scenario is that of the “sage on the stage,” who might occasionally draw students out of their passivity by using “the tried and true Socratic method” (Raines and Rochester 2003, 432).

In contrast with this approach, many teacher-scholars have started to rely on instructional techniques that involve experiential and active learning. This pedagogy has emerged from a greater understanding of the Kolb Experiential Learning Model, which introduces four distinct stages/modes of student learning: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. As Brock and Cameron (1999) point out, “[t]he key to planning lessons that take students full cycle is to note that the second word in each of the four stages’ names indicates what the learner experiences” (251).

Numerous articles have been published about the applicability of the Kolb model to the political science classroom (see, for example, Fox and Ronkowski 1997; Rosenthal 1999; Brock and Cameron 1999; Kelle 2008). A range of classroom activities and instructional tools are often listed as supporting active and experiential learning, including (but not limited to): fieldwork, trigger films, case studies, laboratory projects, problems sets, guest speakers, projects on actual policy proposals, debates, media and internet assignments, journal writing, and simulations (Fox and Ronkowski, 736; Brock and Cameron, 254). More recent additions to this list, and specifically in the area of European Studies, are problem-based learning, blended learning, and exercises involving various social networks, utilizing today’s technologically advanced classrooms (Maurer and Neuhold 2014; Klymenko 2014; Mihai 2014; and, Farneti et al 2014).

Such active learning experiences are thought to improve students’ retention and understanding of information about the subject in question (Silberman 1996, Hertel and Millis 2002), beyond the traditional lecture-based classroom. The lecture-format of instruction has been criticized for supporting only one empirically-proven learning outcome, that being “short-term memorization of lecture content,” so that the student can reproduce “information laid out by the instructor” (Omelicheva and Avdeyeva 2008, 603). Conversely, active learning pedagogies have

been praised because they produce such learning outcomes as “fostering higher order cognitive skills” in which students are able to comprehend complicated material and draw linkages among “several components of a phenomenon in a logical and meaningful way” (Ibid, 603-4). While the lecture-model may be ineffective for learning the “skills of application, analysis, and evaluation” (Ibid, 604), active learning “help[s] the students understand the concrete application of the concepts and theories through the use of hands-on activities, small group analysis, role-plays, and group projects” (Raines and Rochester 2003, 432).

The use of political simulations, in particular, has generated substantial interest within the pedagogy literature. As Smith and Boyer (1996) argue, simulations have multiple, valuable learning outcomes: giving students “a deeper level of insight into the political process;” encouraging an increase in student attentiveness and activity within the learning process; encouraging greater retention of academic information over the long-term; helping students “develop critical thinking and analytical skills through collaborative efforts;” and, enabling “students to develop speaking and presentation skills, [while] simultaneously building their confidence”(690-691). Simulations also create a space in which students may develop empathy for opposing viewpoints and develop unique leadership experiences (Newmann and Twigg 2000, Morgan 2003).

Assessing the Benefits of Political Simulations

This paper builds on the existing literature in two ways: first, by contributing a multi-institutional, empirical assessment of the value of political simulations and, second, by expanding on prior empirical studies to consider the benefits of simulations beyond information acquisition. Until recently, relatively few efforts sought to empirically verify whether such

methods are effective for teaching Political Science. As both Smith and Boyer (1996) and Krain and Lantis (2006) note, while other disciplines have produced a robust body of research on the implications of active learning, relatively few efforts have sought to empirically verify whether such methods are effective for teaching Political Science. However, over the last decade, a number of efforts have been made to perform systematic assessments of specific experiential learning exercises conducted within semester-long classes (see, for example, Krain and Shadle 2006; Krain and Lantis 2006; Jones, 2008; Kelle 2008, Amyot 2014). More specifically, in the field of European Studies, Jones and Bursens (2014) have made significant headway in formally assessing the influence of simulations on learning outcomes (also see Jones, 2008).

These contributions have produced rather mixed results in regards to the relative benefits of simulations for learning outcomes. Krain and Lantis (2006), for instance, use the same assessment instrument to compare the learning outcomes of a traditional lecture-based International Relations (IR) course with a simulation-based course focused on similar IR content. They find that both courses yield statistically significant positive effects on learning, but that neither one approach appears to have an advantage over the other. Using similar pre and post-exercise assessments, Amyot (2014) compares the results of a problem-based learning (PBL) exercise, in which student participants created their own constitution, with a traditional lecture on constitutional design. The PBL groups exhibited a marginally better improvement than the lecture-based groups on the immediate post-exercise assessment, but the latter performed better on that same assessment when it was administered two weeks later.

While this research may lead us to question whether students better acquire information through simulation experiences, there are a number of other potential benefits to the simulation experience. In particular, participating in political simulations may increase students' short and

long-term interest in the topic at hand. As Dougherty (2003) notes: “[b]y putting students in control of their learning, interactive exercises can make the real world both relevant and intellectually exciting” (245). Fowler (2005) similarly maintains that active learning tools “encourage students to become engaged in international issues by interacting with one another and grappling with problems as a practitioner might” (156). The use of simulations may thus encourage greater interest in the disciplines of Political Science and European Studies. Students are more likely to form “a [more] positive relationship with an academic discipline that they would otherwise find dull, difficult, and uninteresting were it presented through only one [more traditional] method” (Fox and Ronkowski 1997: 736).

The same cognitive process through which students internalize the experience (and, presumably, information acquired through the experience) may also implant a deeper and more abiding interest in the topic. Students who learn political content through engaged and interactive experiences may also be more likely to develop an affective connection with and/or investment in that material. The use of Model EU simulations with American students may best illustrate the first point. American college students, especially those who have never travelled to Europe, may have some difficulty in relating content about the EU to their own experiences. Thus, for those teaching about the EU, a common objective is to find methods to better relate the content to the student. The simulation experience offers an invaluable tool toward that end. Much of the anecdotal evidence from these simulations suggest that American students indeed develop a new and, often, strong interest in Europe as a result. Some students, who had little prior experience or interest in European affairs, focus their later undergraduate studies on Europe and/or the EU, and a few move on to European Studies graduate programs after graduation. This particular benefit

has not been examined in most (if not all) efforts to empirically assess the benefits of political simulations.

A Multi-Institutional Simulation of the European Union

The Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation Consortium (MEUSC) offers the setting in which we investigate this theory. Over the last twenty-two years, several universities and colleges have participated in the MEUSC. The MEUSC brings students from the mid-Atlantic region to Washington, D.C. each fall semester to participate in an experiential learning program: a three-day simulation of the European Union's decision-making institutions and policy-making procedures. The MEUSC now has over 2,000 student alumni, who have completed the program over the last two decades. The simulation allows college students to merge academic knowledge about the European Union with practical application in debating and legislating over questions in EU politics and policy making. In this applied learning setting, students also learn critical lessons related to consensus building while protecting parochial interests; the value of oral argumentation and debate; and the complexity of public policy analysis and implementation.

The MEUSC program is managed by the participating faculty, including all administrative, financial, and budgetary decisions and oversight. At MEUSC participating universities, students enroll via an actual course or other academic club or organization that culminates in the simulation in Washington D.C. toward the end of the semester. At the simulation, students play the roles of various European leaders in several different EU institutions. Each participating school represents a particular country (or countries) within the EU. The structure of the simulation reflects the multi-level and multi-layered EU policy-making

process by incorporating various meetings of the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Council.

To start, the topic for debate is chosen by the participating faculty members a year prior to the simulation. In selecting a topic, faculty members collectively discuss and consider current events of both practical and theoretical importance, the interests and research backgrounds of participating faculty members, and a desire to diversify discussions and debates within the simulation over time. As an example, at the fall 2014 simulation, the refugee/immigration crisis was chosen as the topic for 2015. This proved to be a fortuitous choice, given the escalation and sharpening of the crisis during 2015. The topics are chosen for two year periods, with some variation in sub-themes between each year. Country assignments are also made for two year periods so as to reduce the prep work needed for faculty from year-to-year. Note that not every country is represented as the MEUSC has fewer than 28 universities participating, but every effort is made to balance representation of large and small member-states, older and newer member-states, geographical location, and traditional intra-EU country dynamics (North/South, East/West, Scandanavian vs. Mediterranean, etc.).

In the MUESC program, student delegates to the simulation represent actual “alter egos” from the European Commission, the European Council, the Council of the EU, and the European Parliament. Students represent prime ministers and ministers, depending on the topic under discussion, as well as MEPs such as Marie Le Pen, Martin Schulz, José Bové, or Nigel Farage. The students playing the roles of European Commissioners are charged earlier in the semester with drafting a 6-8 page formal resolution that will serve as the draft to be debated during the simulation. One or two faculty advisors coordinate and guide the student commissioners in drafting the resolution so as to ensure the document’s realism and clarity. The draft resolution is

composed via virtual coordination over a period of 5-6 weeks. Typically, it is divided into two parts to reflect the institutional make-up of two EP committees and two ministerial councils. Once the draft resolution is complete, commissioners circulate it to all university delegations approximately two weeks prior to the simulation. While the detailed provisions of the draft are unknown to the student participants until shortly before the simulation, the general outline and topic of the resolution is well-known to the faculty who prepare the students for the simulation over the course of the semester. As an example, with the recent refugee crisis topic, student participants had a full understanding of relevant policy issues, key concepts and history, as well as current debates about the topic prior to receiving the resolution.

On the morning of the first day of the simulation in Washington, D.C. the students visit the embassy of the country they are representing in the simulation and meet with (often high-ranking) officials to discuss the resolution and other issues relevant to the simulation. Student feedback suggests that the embassy visits are one of the most popular and useful aspects of the simulation. Once the actual simulation begins, students deliberate within the parliamentary committees and ministerial councils. These deliberations start with working dinners and parliamentary caucus meetings on the first evening of the simulation and continue with an eight-hour session on the second day of the simulation. During that session, students playing MEPs are divided into two separate committees, each of which focuses on the relevant areas of the draft resolution. On day three, the program convenes the EP plenary, the goal of which is to create a consensus document based on the work of the two committees.

Two ministerial councils and the European Council, meanwhile, work in parallel to the EP committees and plenary. The ministerial councils ultimately produce a joint Council resolution reflecting the input and interests of the member states. For their part, the heads of state

and government formally open the simulation with a public address to all participants. When MEPs and ministers are debating and amending the Commission's draft resolution, the European Council meets in another parallel venue and simulates a summit. Under the leadership of a president, it drafts conclusions covering a broad agenda of issues of the day; its work goes beyond the narrower, legislation-focused agenda of the EP and the Council configurations.

Once the EP and the Council have amended the draft document, the simulation calls for a conciliation session where EP and Council representatives attempt to iron out differences that have emerged in their respective drafts. Such a meeting provides participants with a glimpse of an important reality of the EU's complicated co-decision process. Following conciliation, a final amended version of the legislation is presented to both the European Parliament and the European Council for concluding deliberations and approval (or not), depending on the nature of the debate surrounding the resolution.

MEUSC faculty members have developed rules and procedures to organize the simulation meetings and deliberations, which are shared with students ahead of the simulation. The parliamentary committees and the EP plenary use established EU parliamentary procedures (which can be very different from Roberts' Rules of Order, to which most students are accustomed). The Parliament is also organized based on the transnational party groupings that seek to overcome national divisions and perspectives. Students sit in parliamentary groupings, not country or university groupings. In contrast, Council meetings are more diplomatic and free-flowing, most often operating under the guise of a tour de table but also increasingly using new methods of (qualified) majority voting. The tour de table allows the discussion to move around the table, enabling each minister to offer an opinion, the ultimate goal being a gradually emerging consensus position. While the parliament is likely to take multiple votes, both

procedural and substantive, the ministers try to avoid taking votes, if at all possible, so as not to isolate or back any one country into a defensive position.

For those institutions that combine the simulation with an EU course, the instructor typically identifies learning objectives focused around communication and negotiation skills as well as analytical and career skills. But, overall, the value of the simulation is that it captures the institutional and policymaking dynamics of the EU. It demonstrates the supra-nationality of the Commission, the European Parliament, and the European political parties. It illuminates the relevance of “spillover” as students realize the connections between distinct EU policy issues. The simulation also illustrates the nature of power politics, as the students assert national interests in the European Council summit and the ministerial councils. In sum, the simulation gives the students a concrete sense of who is doing the acting as well as how EU actors shape and are shaped by the institutions, rules, national interests, and power structures that are mirrored in the simulation exercise, and thus the “real” EU.

The Survey Instrument and Treatment Groups

To determine the extent to which participation in the simulation encouraged interest in the EU, investigators designed a survey. Institutional Review Boards at multiple participating universities¹ approved the survey design and procedures, and all participating students granted their informed consent before participating.

Faculty advisers at colleges and universities that participated in the 2015 MEUSC administered the surveys to students. Each adviser chose whether to administer a pen-and-paper

¹ The participating institutions include Susquehanna University, The University of Scranton, James Madison University, Lebanon Valley College, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, West Chester University and John Carroll University.

or an online version of the instrument. Investigators designed the survey to facilitate pre-treatment/post-treatment comparisons. In the “pre” phase, students who planned to participate in the simulation completed the survey 2-3 weeks before the event took place. In the “post” phase, students who had participated in the simulation completed the same survey (with the small modifications discussed below) 2-3 weeks after the simulation event. Investigators embedded a question of particular relevance to the current study within the pre/post instrument: “To what extent would you say you are interested in the European Union?” The survey also included a factual knowledge battery of true/false questions taken from EU public opinion surveys fielded by the Eurobarometer and the European Election Study. The full survey instrument is presented in Appendix A. Investigators were able to match students’ pre and post responses via recourse to an anonymized two-factor authentication process embedded in the instrument.

Pre/post comparisons of answers to the aforementioned question offer the most direct way of addressing this study’s primary question. To generate additional insights, however, investigators also pursued additional strategies. First, they included two additional questions on the post instrument (one close-ended, one open-ended): “Has participating in this Model European Union simulation affected your interest in the European Union?” and “How would you describe your experience with the EU simulation? What benefits if any, did you derive from participating in the simulation?” Answers to these questions elicited reflection from participants and allow investigators to differentiate between objective indicators and subjective perceptions of simulation-driven “interest dividends.”

Second, investigators took steps to facilitate comparisons between students who had participated in the simulation and students who had not participated in the simulation. To this end, a subset of faculty members administered the instrument to various groups of simulation

non-participants. Specifically, they administered the survey to two different types of non-participants: (1) non-participants who were completing a course on the politics of the European Union, and (2) non-participants who were completing a course on a more general subject in political science (e.g., Introduction to International Relations). This design facilitates differentiation between kinds of treatment (e.g., simulation participation vs. coursework that does not integrate a simulation) and between treatment-in-general (e.g., academic work focused on the European Union) and a control group. Table 1 reports the number and nature of subjects in the various treatment groups.

Survey Results

While the primary focus of this paper is the relationship between participating in political simulations and interest in the subject at hand, we are building on an extensive body of research that addresses information acquisition. We thus begin our analyses by examining simulation outcomes as they pertain to information acquisition.

In the first analysis, students who participated in the EU simulation served as the experimental group and students enrolled in a political science course not involved with the simulation acted as the control group. The average number of correct responses to the true/false questions for the students participating in the simulation (n=55) was 5.13, with a 95% confidence interval between 4.87 and 5.39. For the control group (n=37), the average number was 4.14 with a confidence interval ranging between 3.7 and 4.57. The difference of means t-test finds that participating in the simulation had a statistically significant effect on student performance on the true/false battery; the t-statistic is -4.17 and the corresponding two-tailed p-value is .0001. This is particularly noteworthy as the control group included students who were currently enrolled in

an EU course or had taken an EU course in the past. Figure 1 illustrates the differences between the two groups. More than 70% of simulation participants scored a 5 or 6 on the knowledge battery, whereas fewer than 50% scored at that level amongst the non-participants.

To better contextualize these results, we compare the performance of simulation participants on the first four true/false questions with survey respondents from the 2009 European Election Study (EES), which included those same four questions. Figure 2 displays the differences between the two groups. Only 47% of EES respondents were able to correctly answer three questions, and only 17% correctly answered all four questions. In contrast, 93% of simulation participants correctly answered three questions, and nearly 62% correctly answered all four. Of course, we might hope and expect that university students participating in an EU simulation would be more knowledgeable, but these differences are still edifying for instructors teaching about the EU.

While the prior analysis documents a substantive difference between participants and non-participants, we still do not know how much the former actually learned by participating in the simulation. Thus, we next compare the results for participants surveyed before and after the simulation. We were able to match the pre and post-simulation survey responses for 34 of the student participants. Prior to participating in the simulation, the average number of correct responses to the true/false questions was 5.24 with a 95% confidence interval between 4.89 and 5.58. After the simulation, the average number of correct responses actually decreased slightly to 5.06 with a confidence interval between 4.69 and 5.42. As might be expected, the result of the t-test leads us to reject the null hypothesis that there is an actual difference in the mean between the pre and post-treatment groups. The t-statistic was .72 and the p-value was far from statistical significance. These results suggest that the improvement in knowledge about the EU may have

more to do with taking an EU course, and that participation in the simulation does not have an independent effect on knowledge about the EU.

To investigate that possibility with more precision, we further examined the effect of taking an EU course on knowledge about the EU. The survey asks respondents if they are currently taking a course on the European Union. As noted in Table 1, not all of the simulation participants took an EU course, and some of the respondents who took an EU course did not participate in the simulation.² This diversity of experiences allows us to better parse out the effects of taking a traditional lecture-based course and participating in the simulation. The mean score on the knowledge battery for respondents who self-identified as taking an EU course at the time of the survey (n=53) was 5.09, with the 95% confidence interval between 4.82 and 5.37. The mean score for those not in an EU course (n=37) was 4.16, with a confidence interval between 3.72 and 4.6. The t-statistic is -3.83, and the two-tailed p-value is .0002, suggesting that taking a course indeed has a significant effect on knowledge. Altogether, these results largely confirm earlier findings (Krain and Lantis 2006) that simulations have a positive effect on information acquisition, but are not necessarily superior to the traditional lecture-based classroom.

That simulations do not necessarily improve upon knowledge gained in the traditional classroom environment does not invalidate the purpose of such exercises. There are many alternative benefits to be gained through such active learning techniques, including the development of a greater interest in the subject matter. Returning to the initial two groups of simulation participants and non-participants, we now compare their expressed levels of interest in the European Union. The survey question asks respondents “to what extent would you say you

² The correlation between taking an EU class and participating in the simulation is .4, suggesting that the two are relatively weakly correlated.

are interested in the European Union?” with responses varying from (1) “very” to (5) “not at all”. The mean response for students participating in the simulation (n=55) was 1.85 with a confidence interval between 1.61 and 2.1. For those not participating, the mean response was 2.57 with the interval ranging from 2.1 to 3.04. The t-statistic is 2.98, and the p-value for the hypothesis that the two means are different is .003. In other words, the simulation participants register higher levels of interest in the EU. Figure 3 illustrates the difference between the two groups. Nearly 90% of simulation participants indicate that they are very or somewhat interested in the EU. Only 64% of non-participants express that level of interest.

The next question concerns whether simulation participants experienced an increase in their engagement with the EU as a result of the experience. Returning to the same 34 students for whom we were able to match pre and post-simulation responses, the average score for respondents assessing their own interest in the EU was 2.06 prior to the simulation with a confidence interval between 1.68 and 2.44. After the simulation, the average self-assessed interest increased to 1.62, with the interval varying from 1.35 to 1.89. The t-statistic is 1.9, and the null hypothesis that the two means are not equal has a p-value of .06. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of respondents declaring that they were very interested in the EU increased from 35% before the simulation to 50% after the simulation. The percentage of respondents indicating they were only a little interested in the EU declined from 20% before to 6% after the simulation. These results suggest that the simulation experience may, indeed, enhance interest in the subject at hand.

To test for the possibility that the traditional classroom experience enhances interest, we analyze the differences between respondents taking an EU course and those not enrolled in any such course. The average response for students taking an EU course (n=53) was 1.89 with a

confidence interval between 1.64 and 2.13. For those not enrolled in an EU course, the average response was 2.54 with the interval ranging from 2.07 to 3.02. The t-statistic is 2.68, and the p-value for the hypothesis that the two means are different is .008. This suggests that taking a course on the EU is also associated with greater interest in the EU.

To conclude, we conducted a pair of multivariate analyses that incorporate demographic and behavioral predictors (sex, age, frequency of travel to Europe, and frequency of political discussion) into models explaining both interest in and knowledge about the EU. As shown in Table 2, neither of the coefficients for having taken an EU course or having participated in the simulation registers a statistically significant effect on interest. However, greater frequency of political discussion, increasing performance on the true/false knowledge measure, and decreasing age (92% of respondents fall between 19 and 22) all correspond with greater levels of expressed interest in the EU. As both the simulation and classroom experiences appear to boost knowledge, the knowledge coefficient may be capturing some of the variation that would otherwise be attributed to these variables. Indeed, after removing the knowledge measure from the model, the simulation coefficient comes very close to statistical significance (.07). The classroom coefficient, however, remains insignificant both after removing the knowledge measure and the simulation dummy variable.

Table 3 documents the results of the analysis of knowledge about the EU. Of note, here the coefficient for the classroom dummy (signifying a student has taken a course on the EU) reaches statistical significance, while the simulation dummy does not. Here again, more frequent political discussion and declining age both correspond with higher performance on the knowledge index. Not surprising, greater interest in the EU is also correlated with more knowledge about the EU. However, contrary to what we might expect, decreasing number of

visits to Europe appears to be correlated with greater knowledge about the EU. That result is likely due to most respondents having never visited or having only visited Europe once.

Altogether, these results largely confirm past research and our expectations as to the benefits of the simulation experience. Having participated in a simulation does increase knowledge, as documented in prior research, but not necessarily beyond the increase that can be attributed to the traditional classroom experience. In fact, simulation participants actually registered slightly lower levels of knowledge on the (admittedly imperfect) knowledge scale after having participated in the simulation. Additionally, taking an EU course has a positive, statistically significant effect on knowledge, while participating in a simulation does not appear to have a significant effect. In contrast, simulation participants expressed higher levels of interest in the EU after having participated in the simulation. Moreover, in the multivariate analysis, having participated in a simulation has a much stronger relationship with interest than having taken an EU course. This finding affirms our expectation that the greater value of simulations may lie in stimulating student engagement with the subject of European integration.

The open-ended responses to our survey question about the benefits of the simulation also suggest that simulation participants take away far more than information about the EU. While some responses suggest that students indeed learned about the EU as a result of the simulation, far more of the participants identify skills related to negotiation and compromise, public speaking and debate, as well as leadership as the main benefits of having participated in the simulation. As a few examples:

“The biggest take away would be the experience of negotiating a resolution. For someone who is thinking about going into politics, the simulation gave me a glimpse of what it is like to be a member of a decision-making committee debating on what I feel is the best way to solve the problem.”

“Awesome! Absolutely loved it. Debate and discussion experience, diplomacy and negotiating skills.”

“The experience was wonderful! I loved being able to combine what I learned in class to the ‘real world.’ I was able to refine debating and public speaking skills.”

“It was fascinating. The EU is surprisingly complicated and it's interesting to see how compromise can work. There were 19 states represented, each with its own interests to protect. Within each state, there are multiple parties jostling for power and influence at the European Parliament. Although it wasn't completely accurate as far as being impartial representatives (dropping personal beliefs and truly being a Hungarian, French, German, etc.), I do believe that this was a valuable experience for the importance of compromise. And not just compromise during the debates. A lot of time was spent on considering what we would be willing to give up, where we would draw the line, how we would defend that line during debates, and so on and so forth.”

Conclusions

The benefits of using political simulations and other active learning tools are apparent to most, if not all, educators that have incorporated them into the classroom, but efforts to empirically verify those assumptions are relatively recent and have largely focused on learning outcomes. Some of this research has produced rather mixed results as to whether simulations facilitate greater information acquisition, suggesting that simulations may be as good as, without surpassing, traditional classroom lectures. In this paper, we argue that there are other benefits to be gained from the simulation experience; specifically, students' level of interest in the subject under study. We have analyzed the effects of simulations on both student interest and knowledge, using pre and post-surveys of participants in a large, multi-institutional simulation (the Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation) as well as surveys of students just taking a course on the EU and those with no exposure to the EU at all. While only a preliminary analysis, the results largely affirm our expectations that the simulation experience enhances participants' interest in the subject matter of their experience.

We believe there are benefits to generating a more invested and engaged student population. Such interest tends to facilitate the development of other skills and abilities. Such interest may motivate students to seek out additional information on the subject and sustain students' commitment to learning about the topic beyond the semester-based course. Many of the faculty involved in the MEUSC have taught and advised simulation participants who went on to graduate studies focused on Europe and the European Union and who credited the simulation with stimulating their interest in the European Union. These experiences may thus increase long-term information acquisition even if the short-term benefits are not immediately visible. More interested students may also be more likely to speak out about the topic and, in so doing, develop public speaking, leadership and debate skills. In other words, greater interest may be the mechanism through which simulations achieve the many benefits that are often attributed to active learning experiences.

This paper builds on past research by assessing the relationship between simulations and interest, and in performing that assessment with a multi-institutional simulation. Much of the existing research focuses on class-based simulations, often focused around a single lesson. This research is clearly valuable in addressing the teaching circumstances of many college instructors, but it overlooks the unique benefits that might be achieved through participation in large simulation programs such as Model European Union, Model United Nations, and Model Arab League. While requiring a much larger institutional investment, these simulation programs offer the potential advantages of introducing students to many new people (another benefit often identified by MEUSC participants) and more fully immersing students in the simulated environment. The institutional dynamics modeled within the MEUSC could not, for instance, be achieved in a classroom setting due to the differing scope of that environment. By connecting the

existing pedagogy research with such a simulation program, we hope to generate a body of research that contributes to each.

Following on that objective, we hope to continue to implement, and improve upon, the survey in future years. Part of the difficulty in assessing the outcomes of a large multi-institutional simulation lies in coordinating institutional reviews and survey implementation across a number of colleges and universities. Using this last year as a template, we plan to develop a clearer protocol for faculty who choose to participate in the assessment process. We also plan to expand upon the initial survey to include measures of other skills and abilities, such as public speaking and leadership. Ultimately, we find there to be enormous potential in establishing a larger database that measures the benefits of the simulation experience for multiple generations of participants.

Appendix A: Survey

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Please do not put your name on this document. Your responses to these questions will in no way be factored into your grade.

Date:

What is your class rank (i.e. first year, second year....)?

How old are you?

What is your gender? Male/female

What is your favorite book or movie?

What is your favorite color?

Have you ever visited Europe?

If so, how many times have you visited Europe and for how long did you stay during these visits?

Have you taken a class on the European Union?

1. Yes, I am currently taking a course on the European Union
2. Yes, I took a course on the European Union in a previous semester/term or in high school
3. No, I have never taken a course on the European Union

If so, when did you take a class on the European Union?

1. Before my undergraduate studies
2. During my first year of college
3. During my second year of college
4. During my third year of college
5. During my fourth year of college
6. During my study abroad

Have you prepared for an EU simulation through any of the following?

1. A club or organization
2. A 1-credit simulation mini-course

If so, for how long were you or have you been a part of that club, organization, or 1-credit mini-course?

Have you ever participated in the Mid-Atlantic European Union Simulation or some other simulation of the European Union in the past and, if so, how many times have you participated in an EU simulation?

To what extent would you say you are interested in politics?

1. Very
2. Somewhat
3. A little
4. Not at all
5. Don't know

To what extent would you say you are interested in the European Union?

1. Very
2. Somewhat
3. A little
4. Not at all
5. Don't know

When you get together with friends and relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about...

1. Local political matters. Frequently, occasionally, or never
2. National political matters. Frequently, occasionally, or never
3. International political matters. Frequently, occasionally, or never

To what extent do you think that you are well informed or not about European matters?

1. Very well informed
2. Fairly well informed
3. Not very well informed
4. Not at all informed
5. Don't know

Using the metric below, to what extent do you ____?

1. Every day/almost every day
2. Two or three times a week
3. About once a week
4. Two or three times a month
5. Less often
6. Never
7. No access to this medium

Watch television on a TV set

Watch television via the Internet

Listen to the radio

Read the written press

Use the Internet

Use online social networks

Where do you get most of your news on American political matters?

1. Television
2. The written press
3. Radio
4. The Internet
5. Other
6. You do not look for news on American political matters

Where do you get most of your news on European political matters?

1. Television
2. The written press
3. Radio
4. The Internet
5. Other
6. You do not look for news on European political matters

And would you say that your sources of news about European political matters are mostly American or European-based?

1. American-based
2. European-based
3. Do not know

Please answer the following true/false questions:

1. Switzerland is a member of the European Union. T/F
2. The European Union has 28 member states. T/F
3. Every country in the European Union elects the same number of representatives to the European Parliament. T/F
4. Every six months, a different Member State becomes president of the Council of the European Union. T/F
5. The European Union has a single seat on the United Nations Security Council. T/F
6. The European Union has primary authority to legislate in the area of education. T/F

How would you explain the purpose or objectives of the EU?

What was a major change introduced by the Treaty of the European Union (sometimes referred to as the Treaty of Maastricht)?

The following two questions were only included in the post-simulation survey.

Has participating in this Model European Union simulation affected your interest in the European Union?

1. Yes, I am far more interested in the EU
2. Yes, I am slightly more interested in the EU
3. No, I am no more interested in the EU than before the simulation
4. No, I actually have less interest in the EU than before the simulation

How would you describe your experience with the EU simulation? What benefits, if any, did you derive from participating in the simulation?

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Figures and Tables

Figure 1: Comparing knowledge performance of simulation participants and non-participants

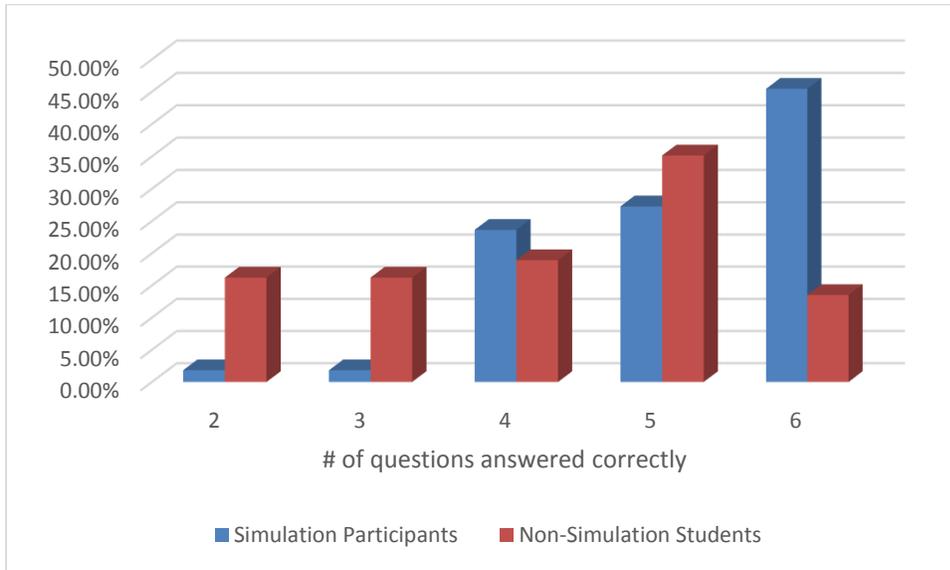


Figure 2: Comparing knowledge performance of simulation participants and EES respondents

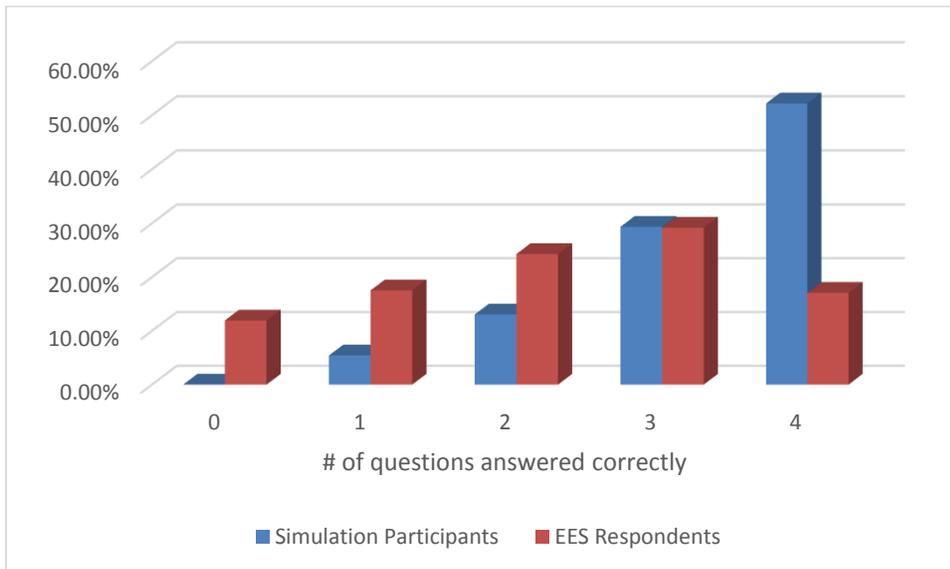


Figure 3: Comparing EU interest of simulation participants and non-participants

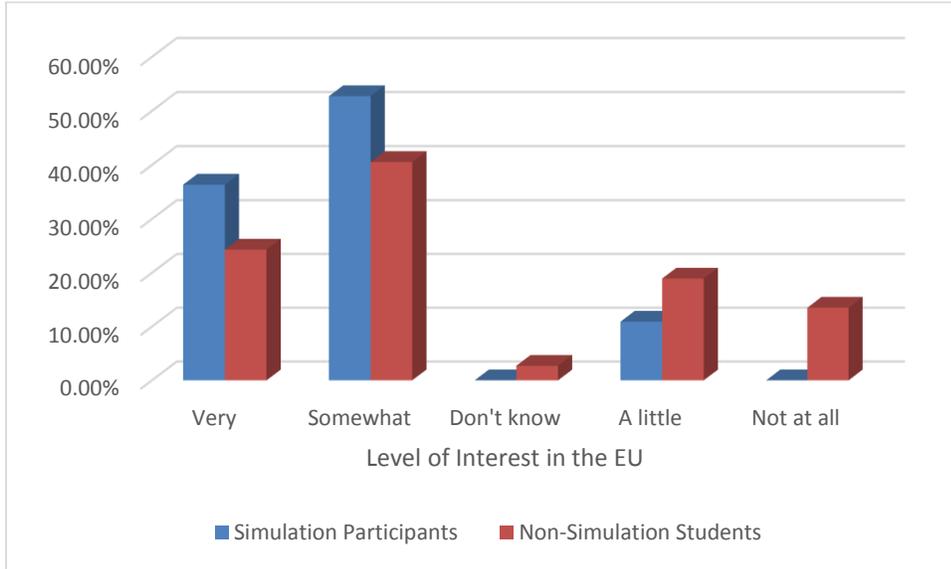


Figure 4: Comparing EU interest of simulation participants before and after simulation

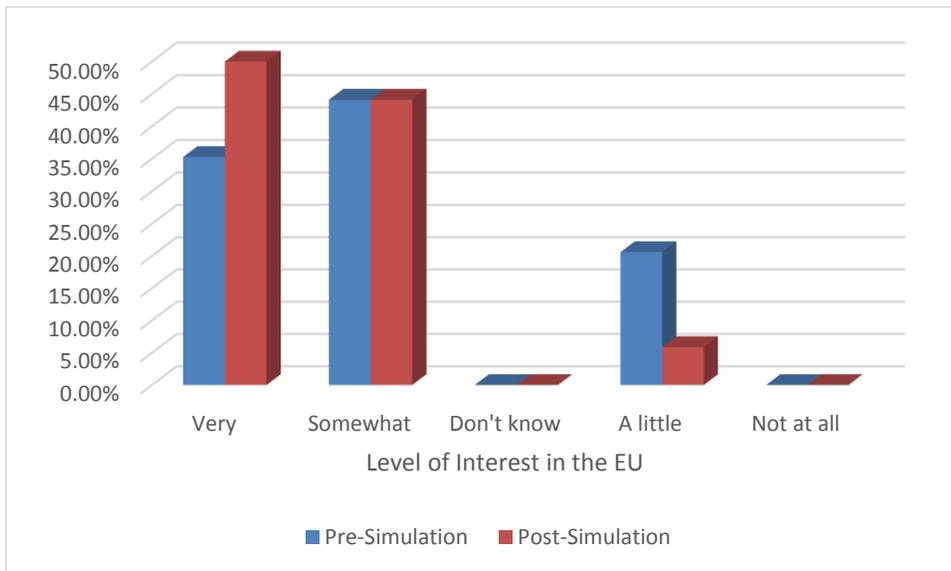


Table 1: Treatment Groups

Type of subject	N
Students who participated in the simulation and completed a course on the Politics of the European Union	40
Students who participated in the simulation and did not complete a course on the Politics of the European Union	13
Students who did not participate in the simulation and completed a course on the Politics of the European Union	13
Students who did not participate in the simulation and did not complete a course on the Politics of the European Union	24
Students who participated in the simulation and completed both the pre and post instruments	34

Table 2: Predictors of Interest in the European Union

	Political Interest
Sex	-.05 (.48)
Age	.45** (.16)
Frequency of Visits to Europe	-.07 (.15)
True/False Knowledge	-.43* (.22)
Frequency of Political Discussion	-.37* (.18)
Simulation	-.62 (.51)
EU Course	-.02 (.28)
N	81

Notes: Cells report coefficients with standard errors in parentheses from an ordered logistic regression model. The dependent variable is the level of a respondent's expressed interest in the EU, with lower values indicating greater interest. * and ** denote significance at the .05 and .01 levels. Source: MEUSC Survey

Table 3: Predictors of Knowledge about the European Union

	Political Interest
Sex	-.59 (.46)
Age	.36* (.16)
Frequency of Visits to Europe	-.33* (.17)
Interest in the EU	-.41* (.2)
Frequency of Political Discussion	.38* (.18)
Simulation	.76 (.49)
EU Course	.77** (.29)
N	81

Notes: Cells report coefficients with standard errors in parentheses from an ordered logistic regression model. The dependent variable is the level of a respondent's expressed interest in the EU, with lower values indicating greater interest. * and ** denote significance at the .05 and .01 levels. Source: MEUSC Survey