Syracuse University

OFFICE OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Assignment Design Guide

Instructional Strategies for Simulations

A practical guide for faculty on designing, facilitating, and debriefing simulation-based learning experiences grounded in active learning and reflective instructional practice.

WHY USE SIMULATIONS?

ACTIVE LEARNING

Simulations immerse students in experiential learning where knowledge develops through participation and interaction.

REAL-WORLD APPLICATION

Students apply course concepts in realistic contexts that mirror professional environments.

DECISION-MAKING & PROBLEM SOLVING

Simulations challenge students to analyze information, respond to changing conditions, and evaluate consequences in real time.

Pre-Simulation Facilitation

Purpose:
Effective simulations begin long before the activity itself. Intentional preparation ensures the simulation supports course learning objectives rather than becoming solely an entertaining exercise.

Align Simulation With Learning Objectives:

- What should students know and be able to do
- Why the simulation matters academically
- Which skills or concepts they are practicing
- How participation connects to course content and post-graduate situations

Facilitators should:

- Read all supporting materials carefully
- Run a trial simulation when possible
- Anticipate areas where confusion or failure may occur

Set Clear Expectations:
Establish norms for:

- Participation
- Role responsibility

Simulation Facilitation

Purpose:
During simulations, instructors shift from lecturer to facilitator. The goal is to guide learning while allowing students autonomy within the experience.

Encourage Active Engagement:
Require all students to:

- Assume a role
- Make decisions
- Respond to changing conditions

Simulations are most effective when learning emerges through interaction rather than observation.

Monitor Without Dominating:

- Observe group dynamics
- Intervene only when learning objectives are at risk

Post-Simulation Facilitation

Purpose:
Debriefing is the most important part of simulation-based learning. Reflection transforms experience into meaningful learning.

Allocate Time for Debrief:
Learning is solidified through discussion and reflection, not solely through participation. Debrief immediately while emotions remain fresh, decisions are still memorable, and students can clearly analyze outcomes.

Ask Purposeful Debriefing Questions
Effective prompts include:

- "What happened?"
- "Why did it happen?"
- "What decisions mattered most?"
- "How does this connect to course concepts?"
- "How would this apply in the real world?"

Resource adapted from Caniglia, J. (2019). Simulation as a teaching strategy. Kent State University Center for Teaching and Learning. https://www.kent.edu/ctl/simulation-teaching-strategy