Teaching Negotiation Online - Part 2: Getting Started
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In Part 1 of this 2-part article series, we discussed the challenges associated with teaching negotiation online (e.g., faculty ambivalence and translating the experiential learning model to a virtual format) as well as the opportunities (e.g., greater attention to multimedia uses in the classroom and facilitating cross-cultural collaboration) (SIGNAL 28(3), 20; http://ssrn.com/abstract=2409075). In this article, we focus less on the context surrounding teaching negotiation online and more on the content and practice of teaching negotiation online. By reflecting on our experiences teaching negotiation online, we hope to demystify the process for those contemplating using this new course delivery format, as well as to offer new insights for instructors who are already using online learning technology to house all or part of their negotiation classroom. We begin by highlighting a number of critical preliminary considerations, and then offer specific suggestions for getting started and fostering engagement in an online learning environment.

Evaluate Available Assets

When planning an online course for the first time, it is crucial to assess the assets of the institution that will be hosting the course. To this end, we recommend some preliminary questions to help you take inventory of said assets. (1) What is the learning management system (LMS) currently in use at my university (e.g., Blackboard, Canvas, Moodle, and Desire to Learn)? (2) What technology do I have at my disposal to help facilitate online teaching (e.g., Web conferencing software, lecture capture rooms, and video recording equipment)? (3) Will I have support, and from whom will that support come (e.g., IT department, program Chair/Director, Dean, network of experienced online teachers)? (4) Do I have online instructional design experts with whom I can work (e.g., in house or external partners)? One good way to discover the answers to these questions, is to ask around and find someone who has taught online in your institution. If you can’t identify anyone who has done this, contact your university IT department and ask who you should talk to about teaching online.

Once you have assessed the assets of the institution that may be leveraged for your online class, the next set of critical choices specifically pertain to the design of the course.

Design the Learning Environment
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Your design should be influenced primarily by the learning objectives to be achieved by the course. Keeping your objectives in mind, the first general design considerations pertain to determining the nature of the learning environment: (1) determine if you will teach wholly online or in a hybrid form that includes some face-to-face components; (2) if teaching entirely online, decide if you will teach asynchronously (where students complete course work on their own time and at their own pace) or synchronously (where students and instructor occasionally interact simultaneously in real time via technology such as videoconferencing, live streaming of lectures or webinars); (3) decide if your class will be text-based, lecture-based, a combination of the two or something entirely different; finally, (4) decide if students will learn using an interactive, experiential-based approach or work independently. After the previous general design elements are considered and the above choice points made, the specific design elements of the class may then be addressed.

Design Course Content

A well-designed online course begins with a well-written syllabus. The syllabus should include, among other things: (1) a timeframe for the class (e.g., 8 weeks); (2) an outline of topics to be covered; (3) a grouping of topics into units (also sometimes called modules or blocks) along with the material for each unit. The material for each unit then becomes the critical foundation for the “class”. Each unit tends to include an introduction in the form of written text, pre-recorded video, and/or voice-over PowerPoint or audio files. Each unit may also contain some or all of the following assignments: assessed work (e.g. a quiz or a written paper), lectures, threaded discussion forums, negotiation exercises, simulations, video clips, quizzes, web field trips, and reading material. These final design elements will again be determined by the learning objectives of the course and therefore will be topic-specific.

Incorporate Experiential Learning

Most negotiation classes use an experiential learning model that centers on concrete experiences, mainly in the form of in-class simulations and exercises that are then integrated and synthesized through debriefing in the classroom (Lewicki, 1997). While using simulations is not the only pedagogical option for teaching negotiation (see Druckman & Ebner, 2013), it is one that is both familiar and engaging and the dominant model for teaching negotiation (Lewicki, 2014). Several challenges need to be explored and decisions made if simulations or exercises will be used in the online classroom: how to assign roles, conduct the negotiations, report out results, and facilitate a meaningful discussion and debrief.

While there are many ways to do this (see the range of options discussed by Matz & Ebner, 2012), we will share one example of how we have addressed these challenges. As part of the set up for the class, students are assigned to groups in the LMS. Each student is only allowed access to his or her group. All roles and counterparts are assigned prior to the beginning of class. A document with the roles and counterparts is posted on the LMS for all students to see. When a particular negotiation is assigned, students download their role information from the group area in the LMS and refer to the roles-and-counterparts document to get contact information for their counterpart. Students then contact their
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counterparts to set a mutually convenient time to conduct the negotiation. For most negotiation simulations in the course, students are asked to conduct negotiations via Skype or a similar web conferencing tool where they can both see and hear the other party. Other negotiations in the class may be via email, telephone, or a combination of communication modes. Negotiations using different media are specified in the syllabus. After completing the negotiation, students “report out” on an online white board (e.g., GoSketch.com). On prepared boards, students fill in their outcomes and any other information the instructor requests (e.g., opening offers and reservation point). All students are given a deadline for reporting and then asked to review all the reports posted. In classes where discussion forums are regularly used, the debrief can take place in a dedicated discussion forum (Weiss, 2005), with students responding to specific questions posed to them by the teacher in the forum. In courses built around real-time lectures and engagement, a webinar or some other synchronous discussion format can be used to debrief the simulation.

Foster Engagement

One of the reasons that negotiation courses have been so popular, and role plays such a critical tool, is that they create strong student emotional engagement which differentiates the course from most others in the curriculum. Recent research (e.g., Parlamis & Mitchell, 2014) suggests that fostering students’ social and emotional experiences in the online negotiation classroom requires more effort than in an in-person negotiation classroom environment. Therefore, we now offer some recommendations for building an engaged learning environment that will promote more significant student-to-student and instructor-to-student interaction as well as a more satisfying social-emotional experience. Setting the tone for the class, fostering student-to-student connections, and establishing open communication channels with the instructor are essential components of building an engaged classroom.

First, to foster engagement, it is important to set a suitable tone for the online negotiation class. Students should understand that the syllabus is the guide to the class; knowing all the specific course elements and requirements, and being accountable for engaging in these elements, is critical. You may underscore this by (1) creating an interactive syllabus with hyperlinks to anything useful, (2) anticipating questions about how all course elements will be handled, particularly graded assignments, and (3) administering a syllabus quiz that requires a perfect score to ensure that students are fully acquainted with the content and requirements of the class.

Second, students should quickly get to know their classmates and instructor. As the instructor, you should post your own personal introduction (in addition to a more formal bio) and ask students to post their own, in a common area in the course. You might require students to post introductions that use multi-media (e.g., pictures with text, video introductions, and web photo albums that tell their story), and set an example with your own post. Continue to deepen interpersonal connectivity via instructor-initiated behaviors by: (1) requiring that a second introduction be conducted via buddy interviewing - where one student interviews another and then posts new and interesting information about the student they interviewed; (2) creating a Facebook (or other social media) group for the

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class to have informal discussions and greater connection; (3) using collaborative assignments that require that students work together and get to know one another; and, (4) mindfully facilitating dialogue in discussion forums such that students are drawn to interact with one another.

To further ensure engagement, it is crucial that the instructor promote and initiate frequent communication with students. We recommend teachers adopt some of the following elements: scheduling conferences with students, offering online office hours, soliciting mid-semester feedback, emailing students weekly to discuss student progress and, posting/emailing audio or video feedback and/or announcements for the entire class.

Teachers interested in learning more about designing negotiation courses can avail themselves of the work done by the Rethinking Negotiation Teaching project. This project, which started in 2009 and continued through 2013, produced four volumes dedicated to the topic of negotiation teaching, all of which are freely available for reading and download here: http://law.hamline.edu/rethinkingNegotiation.html. Only a few of the pieces in these books, however, address online negotiation teaching specifically. Instructors interested in more specific resources for online negotiation teaching, can contact one of us and we will add you to the network we’ve created, giving you access to an online area where you will find examples of syllabi for online negotiation courses and other resources to assist you in designing your course. Feel free to contribute your own material, once you have begun teaching negotiations online!

We hope that this article has clarified some of the major decisions and possible options to consider when designing an online negotiation class. In addition, we hope that this overview has provided some new insights and ideas for those who are currently teaching negotiation online. We look forward to continuing this discussion, and building a network of instructors interested in teaching negotiations online, at IACM meetings in the future.

References


