

# NEWS

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1987 will be the last year that the NEWS will be published as a "newspaper." In response to the readers' survey, the NEWS will become an 8½ x 11½ "magazine" in 1988. Information on the focus and format of the magazine is on page 7.

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## Simulating the Politburo

by Nicolai N. Petro, Monterey Institute for International Politics

For the spring semester of 1986 I designed a seminar on the problems of contemporary Soviet society that would give students a different perspective on the dynamics of decision-making in the USSR. The class, which met once a week for fifteen weeks, culminated in a series of Politburo meetings during which students acted as key Politburo members and considered proposals for reform submitted to them by specialists from various branches of the soviet government.

The idea for such an exercise came to me after reading Douglas W. Simon's recent article in *News for Teachers of Political Science* about a National Security Council simulation he conducted at Drew University. I felt the most crucial difficulty with a Politburo simulation as opposed to the NSC simulation would be the paucity of reliable and detailed information on sessions of the Politburo. Specialists on the Soviet Union and other communist countries have consequently avoided simulations as a teaching tool. My own initial reservation led me to structure the course so that it would focus on perennial problems of the Soviet system rather than, as was the case with Professor Simon's NSC simulation, on every-day crisis management. As the semester wore on, however, students found considerable information on nearly every topic they wished to examine, thus my main concern proved unfounded.

Like the NSC simulation the Politburo simulation was a unique experience for students because it brought the difficulties, limitations and conflicts within the Soviet leadership alive. The seminar's purpose was to give students an easier and more direct understanding of the difficulties facing Soviet decision-makers. The exercise forced them to think about the possible implications of their decisions, and to be conscious about the peculiar circumstance of being a leader in the Soviet Union.

### The Course Design.

The course was divided into two sections. The first was designed to introduce students to the basic sources of conflict within Soviet society. They prepared brief discussion essays for each class session focusing on a given aspect of Soviet society—e.g., military, elites, nationalism, agriculture. The readings, mainly recent journal articles, highlighted the sources of discontent and stability and analyzed trends in each area. Two recent analyses provided excellent counter arguments for the theme of the course—the dilemmas of reform in the Soviet Union—, Timothy Colton's book by the very same title and Richard Pipes' *Dangerous Relations*.

In addition to introducing the theme of the course, the first half prepared students for the simulation exercise of the latter half. Each student chose a particular realm of Soviet society to concentrate on and a corresponding Politburo member (or other high ranking Soviet official) to profile in-depth. They prepared four short memos no more than six pages each in length. In the first they were asked to give an official description of an area of Soviet society from the perspective of a Soviet commentator presenting to a non-Soviet audience. Only references to Soviet sources were allowed; many of these, like *Soviet Life*, are readily available in English.

In the second and third papers they described Soviet decision-making and administration for their particular area. The former paper outlined how policy decisions were arrived at in broad terms in, for example, trade, foreign policy, or the economy. The latter paper then focused in greater detail on a subsection of particular interest to the student—e.g. the ministry of foreign trade, the international department of the CPSU Secretariat, or a single ministry of the USSR Council of Ministers.

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## Role Playing in Teaching Public Administration

by Sidney Duncomb  
University of Idaho

How do you teach a student of public administration how to make a management study or examine a budget in a classroom setting? How do you give a rural Idaho student a sense of the tensions, conflicts, and problems of a major metropolitan area without having lived in that area? How do you dramatize the logical consequences of administrative theorists in a humorous manner that reinforces learning? Role-playing and role-playing drama have been used by the author over the past decade to accomplish each of these objectives.

### The Limitations of the Standard Lecture as a Teaching Technique

All too often college professors, even well-known scholars at the cutting edge of their disciplines, give "standard" lectures day after day without varying their lecture style or considering alternative methods of presenting the same material. As an undergraduate, I heard a nationally known philosopher drone on day after day dulling the value of his own significant research with an unvaried teaching style and boring monotone. Is it any wonder that many students in this famous philosopher's class had difficulty staying awake, even though his nationally known book had been widely acclaimed in his profession? Commenting on a number of attention span studies, Peter Frederick says these studies "suggest that after 15 or 20 minutes the lecture loses its effectiveness even in transmitting information."<sup>1</sup>

The major limitation of the standard lecture is that it can produce inattentiveness unless the professor periodically inserts some humor, shifts the focus to students with questions, or significantly changes his tone or style of presentation. Second, the standard lecture may not involve the emotions as well as the intellect of the students.<sup>2</sup> Third, the usual lecture cannot effectively place a student in a new situation or

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