Active Learning Across Borders:
Lessons From an Interactive Workshop in Brazil

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Abstract

This article reports on the results of a workshop on active teaching and learning sponsored by the Instituto de Relações Internacionais at the University of Brasilia. This two-day, intensive workshop was designed by the authors to introduce teaching and learning strategies and to promote critical dialogue for professors and advanced students from institutions across Brazil. Details are provided on sessions that addressed the philosophy behind active teaching and learning, resources available for developing and carrying out exercises, a wide range of techniques, and the importance of debriefing and assessment. Finally, the article provides an evaluation of the workshop experience, emphasizing its potential value for training international relations instructors, both within the United States and across other international contexts, on ways to integrate active teaching and learning into their classrooms.

Keywords: active learning, teaching workshop, assessment, Brazil
INTRODUCTION

Workshops are a popular and effective method to increase exposure to active learning ideas and approaches. This is illustrated by the range of recent workshops affiliated with the Active Learning in International Affairs Section (ALIAS) of the International Studies Association (ISA) that have been undertaken at the regional ISA conferences and the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association (ALIAS Notes, 2007). Such workshops can offer tremendous value-added experiences by providing instructors with the background and tools necessary to integrate active learning techniques into the classroom. To date, however, workshop efforts by American scholars connected with ALIAS have largely remained within the United States. This is unfortunate since American instructors who have been engaged with teaching approaches outside of the United States have demonstrated that the use of such techniques can have positive benefits (Fowler, 2005; Aviel 2005).

This article provides an overview and assessment of the authors’ effort to reach out across borders to implement an active teaching and learning workshop for Brazilian instructors and advanced students. The workshop was hosted at the University of Brasilia’s Instituto de Relações Internacionais in October 2006. The initial sections of this article review the approach taken and material covered during the workshop.¹ This is followed by an assessment of the workshop built around the educational objectives set forth for the event: to familiarize the participants with a wide range of active teaching and learning strategies; to enable participants to think about these strategies in a more systematic manner through clearly articulating educational

¹ For the specific schedule of the workshop held at the University of Brasilia, see the Appendix. For further information on the range of workshop session possibilities, see: http://www.wooster.edu/ir/Active-TeachingIR.
goals and conducting careful assessment; to actively engage the participants in a range of related applications and to enable them to learn about active teaching and learning through their own experiences; to generate an international dialogue about active teaching and learning approaches and to help build a community of teacher-scholars in Brazil who would design and apply their own active teaching and learning techniques; and to provide an enjoyable, fulfilling and valuable professional development experience.

This assessment demonstrates that the workshop achieved our educational objectives. Indeed, it exceeded our expectations and provided a very positive experience for the participants and directors alike. Our analysis suggests that such workshops can provide valuable opportunities to share ways of improving the pedagogy of international relations, whether participants come from the active learning community in the United States or are international teacher-scholars.

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING AT THE WORKSHOP

The Philosophy of Active Teaching and Learning

The workshop opened with an overview of the philosophy of active teaching and learning. We outlined several benefits of active teaching and learning as presented in the related literature. First, active learning enriches student understanding of key concepts in international affairs (Fox and Ronkowski, 1997; Jensen, 1998; Kuzma and Haney, 2001). Second, active teaching and learning approaches can create powerful and effective learning environments by encouraging students to take risks and to express their views on complex and controversial issues (Lamy, 2000). Third, active teaching and learning exercises increase the retention of knowledge (Brock
and Cameron, 1999). Studies show that educational approaches that combine sensory experiences in the learning environment enhance retention (Dale, 1969).

The discussion of active teaching and learning was framed within the larger recent educational transformations in higher education. In a notable 1995 article Robert Barr and John Tagg described these trends as a move from a traditional, lecture-oriented “instructional paradigm” to a new “learning paradigm.” The new learning paradigm essentially involves a shift toward learning as a process of discovery and places students in the position of generators of knowledge in an active classroom. Innovations in international studies education are also related to the ongoing transformation of the content and goals of global education (Holsti, 1993). Today, some teacher-scholars believe that the complex realities of contemporary global politics transcend many of the constructs useful for understanding the Cold War era, and numerous ideas compete as to what curricular themes are more appropriate (Rosenthal and Pijnenberg, 1991; Butler, 1996; Applegate and Sarno, 1997; Fischer and Suleiman, 1997). These changes—and numerous others—have been catalogued in a growing active teaching and learning literature in academic journals, in particular International Studies Perspectives, The Journal of Political Science Education, and Simulations and Gaming.

We also discussed ways that technological advances have helped to change the nature of international studies instruction. In today’s smart classrooms, instructors can lead classes using traditional chalkboard presentations (“chalk and talk”), incorporate overhead or PowerPoint projections of still images to illustrate key points, ask students to form in-class or virtual discussion groups to address a controversial issue, show video clips or films, interact with Internet sites of interest, and even teleconference with experts or students in other classes around the world.
Finally, we introduced the four organizing themes of the workshop: Educational Objectives, Examples/Range of Applications, Procedures, and Assessment & Debriefing (or EEPA). In this session we stressed that the first step of any active teaching and learning approach is to consider specific educational objectives. Objectives may vary as a function of the curriculum, the class, the institution, the departmental culture, or other factors. Learning goals may also be very broad or more specific. Thus, we discussed the importance of clearly matching any active learning exercises to one’s educational objectives, and began the conversation about how to best achieve this. In the later sessions of the workshop we presented specific examples of exercises that could be employed to achieve objectives. We also discussed how a clear set of procedures helps to guide instructors and students through the experience. Depending on the exercise, procedures may include a list of questions for discussion, a set of rules in a role-playing exercise, a list of required websites in a research project, or an essay assignment to guide students along. We concluded by stressing how active learning experiences need to be placed within a theoretical context during a period set aside for student-centered debriefing and assessment.

Active Learning Tools and Approaches: Overview and Breakout Group Discussion

The next session of the workshop provided a brief overview of the wide range of instructional tools and approaches available to international studies instructors. This material was designed both as a preview of some of the workshop programs to follow and a catalog of additional ideas that could be explored by participants. Building on the presentation of the learning paradigm, we emphasized the value of active teaching and learning approaches in terms of experiential
learning, bringing abstract concepts and processes to life, deepening understanding of complex phenomena, and critical thinking and communication skills. We noted that, in general, active teaching and learning approaches are especially useful for studying policy making, negotiation and bargaining, and decision-making processes, as well as exploring critical cases in depth.

Workshop participants were then divided into three breakout discussion groups. Each group was led by one of the workshop directors. The breakout session had several purposes. The conversation was used to establish a baseline of knowledge and interest in areas of active learning based on previous experience so that we had a better idea of the needs and capabilities of the participants. The breakout discussion also provided an opportunity to reinforce the EEPA framework in relation to individual pedagogical approaches. The participants were provided with the following questions that captured the EEPA concepts in an accessible manner:

1. *What* teaching approaches have you used in your classroom? [Examples/Range of Applications]
2. *How* have you employed these teaching approaches? [Procedures]
3. *Why* have you been using these approaches? [Educational Objectives]
4. *How well* have these approaches used for teaching worked? [Assessment]
5. What advantages and challenges do you perceive for active teaching methods?

In addition, we pointed to how such a small group discussion approach can be used as an active learning technique in the classroom. Finally, we encouraged ongoing discussion between the workshop participants outside of the breakout session, and beyond workshop as well, as we emphasized our hope that the participants would establish connections and continue to be engaged as an active learning community in Brazil in the future. Following the breakout interactions, all three groups were brought back together for debriefing and comparative
discussion of the ideas that had arisen. Overall, these discussions were highly engaging and helped to set a tone that would shape many of the sessions that followed.

*Assessment and Effectiveness*

We also devoted a session during the first morning of the workshop to assessment, an essential component of the active learning paradigm. We began this session by reminding participants of the ways that active learning can be highly effective, including the articulation of clear educational objectives, selection of teaching tools to meet specific learning goals, and creating a student-centered learning atmosphere based on experiential learning that can promote a deeper understanding of concepts (Lantis, Kuzma and Boehrer, 2000). We also stressed the importance of creating opportunities for student-centered debriefing, in which students would have the opportunity to discuss their individual and group experiences, and showed how experiential learning frequently occurs after rather than during the exercise (Lantis, 1998; Cooper, 1998; Mooney and Edwards, 2001; Sutcliffe, 2002). Assessment of these approaches is critical, as it helps us to reflect upon teaching successes and challenges, guides students toward specific educational goals, and helps to channel student thinking (Angelo and Cross, 1993; Lipka, 1997; Walvoord and Anderson, 1998; Palomba and Banta, 1999).

We then described various types of assessment. Direct measures assess what students learned, while indirect measures help us to assess students’ perceptions of what they have learned (Angelo, 1998; Walvoord and Anderson, 1998). Quantitative measures focus on data collected as definite numerical or “quantifiable” amounts. Such measures can include scores on quizzes or tests, grades of written assignments, content analysis of student journals or other types
of written reflections, and quantified performance assessment (Brown and King, 2000; Krain and Shadle, 2006; Krain and Lantis, 2006; Smith, 2006). Qualitative measures focus on data collected as descriptive information or observations. Examples of qualitative assessment measures include participant-observation, impressionistic performance assessment, analysis of themes that emerge from class discussions, a qualitative review of student journals, debriefing or other structured reflection, analysis of open-ended survey questions, evaluations by peers, and even student overall self-assessment (Angelo, 1998; Eisenbach, Curry, and Golich, 1998; Walvoord and Anderson, 1998; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Krain and Nurse, 2004; Smith, 2006).

A good illustration of qualitative assessment would be a “muddiest point” paper in which students are asked to reflect on what they find are the most difficult concepts, theories, or terms to understand (Angelo and Cross, 1993). This simple assessment tool provides immediate feedback from the class and allows the instructor to better consider whether it is necessary to go back and revisit unclear concepts. Another approach is the “minute paper” exercise in which students are asked questions such as: What are the two most significant things you have learned during this class session? What questions remain uppermost in your mind? Here the instructor is able to gauge almost immediately whether students have grasped the main ideas of the class and to compare student perceptions and knowledge to instructional goals. It also aids students in reflecting on experience, organizing thoughts, extracting lessons, and identifying remaining questions (Angelo and Cross, 1993).

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2 There are many excellent examples of how instructors can attempt to assess student learning using quantitative performance-based measures. For instance, one can utilize student scores in games or simulations, count the number of resolutions passed in Model United Nations, or assess the number of tasks completed correctly within an allotted time. For more on performance assessment, see Brualdi (1998).
The session on assessment, positioned at the very start of the workshop, also emphasized the systematic approach that can be taken to active teaching and learning. Many participants commented at the outset that they were already using active teaching and learning approaches in the classroom, but were unsure as to these methods’ effectiveness. The session helped them think about the variety of methods available in order to better determine whether they were achieving their educational goals in the classroom. Participants recognized the importance of assessment, but acknowledged that the assessment movement in the United States was ahead of Brazil. However, most agreed that the EEPA framework offered greater clarity to the enterprise, and discussions that followed tended to adhere to the framework for organizational purposes.

**ACTIVE LEARNING EXERCISES IN THE WORKSHOP**

*Human Rights Treaty Simulation*

With the core concepts of active learning established, the workshop shifted into direct engagement with a range of exercises. Two sessions were devoted to a Human Rights Treaty Simulation in order to explore this oft-employed active learning tool for teaching international relations (Crookall, 1995; Beriker and Druckman, 1996; Kaarbo and Lantis, 1997; Kaufman, 1998; Jefferson, 1999; Newmann and Twigg, 2000; Flynn, 2000; Thomas, 2002; Shellman and Kursad, 2003; Hobbs and Moreno, 2004; Asal, 2005; Wheeler, 2006). This simulation offers a short and simple exercise in which students make both personal and country-based arguments as they work to create a new international legal standard for human rights (Kille, 2002). The simulation was run as if the workshop participants were students in a class so that they could be directly engaged with the exercise, and not simply in the abstract. The workshop members
participated enthusiastically. In fact, they had to be forced to end the negotiations during the first session to attend lunch, and they eagerly launched back into the simulation after the meal break. While involved in the simulation, the participants were allowed to ask a range of clarifying questions regarding the procedures.

At the end of the simulation, participants engaged in a written and oral debriefing period. The written debriefing questions were intentionally open-ended to allow those completing the simulation to express reactions in their own way (Smith and Boyer, 1996; Boyer, 2000). This process reinforced the vital debriefing dimension to be incorporated when running a simulation (Syler, Gosche, and Leders, 1997; Lantis, 1998). The debriefing discussion fed into a re-examination of the educational objectives. Having experienced the simulation first-hand and then being debriefed, the participants were well placed to consider the educational objectives that underpin the exercise.

This period concluded by considering how the participants could construct their own simulations. Drawing on the simulations literature, the directors presented core considerations that should be taken into account when designing a new simulation (Winham, 1991; Smith and Boyer, 1996; Lantis, 1998; Shaw, 2004, 2006; Asal and Blake, 2006; Ellington, Grillo, and Shaw, 2006). Based on examples from the earlier breakout session, we considered other simulations currently being used by Brazilian instructors in their classrooms in order to extend thinking about different types of simulations.
Structured Debates

The workshop continued with a session on the use of structured debate exercises for the classroom. Any contemporary challenge may serve as a useful teaching moment around which to develop structured debates and analytical exercises (Budesheim and Lundquist, 1999; Walker and Warhurst, 2000; Hess, 2004; Omelicheva, 2006). To illustrate this point, we emphasized how the study of ethical dilemmas in foreign policy can achieve important educational objectives in courses on international relations (Lantis, 2004). The specific classroom debate exercises that we shared at the workshop were oriented around considering when humanitarian intervention may be justified, the implications of the International Criminal Court for state foreign policies, and the ways in which just war theory provides a tool for critical thinking about foreign policy and international security.

In order to provide first-hand experience we divided participants into debate groups on the topic of whether or not Israel’s invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 2006 met with the standards of the just war tradition. Participants were encouraged to critically and creatively assess this issue based on a set of readings. Each team was allotted a set amount of time for presenting their three main arguments regarding the conflict, and these arguments provoked highly spirited rebuttals and wider discussion. Participants enjoyed the opportunity to make critical arguments with regard to ethics, morality, and power politics. The sessions concluded with a discussion of debriefing and assessment, which included reflections about the debate and the participants’ own personal views on the application of just war theory.
Technology in the Classroom

The workshop also addressed the many possible applications of technology to the international studies classroom (Bitter and Pierson, 2005; Denton and Hallstrom, 2005). We began with a discussion of the utility of the Internet for international studies classes, detailing how instructors’ own web-pages can be a good place to start (Kuzma, 1998). We then broadened the discussion to the use of interactive exercises and archives on the Internet that can be effectively integrated into an international studies course (Hamann and Wilson, 2003; Selcher, 2005). For example, students can learn about the Prisoner’s Dilemma by playing against a computer (http://www.gametheory.net/Web/PDilemma). Faculty and students can work with online archives (Tolley, 1998; Golich, Boyer, Franko, and Lamy, 2000; Hewitt, 2001). Instructors can design and run online interactive games, exercises, and simulations (Asal and Blake, 2006).

International relations instructors are also experimenting with the creation of interactive virtual learning communities. By overcoming traditional boundaries of the learning space, these programs for learning across distances can enhance the international studies classroom experience (McLellan, 1997; Palloff and Pratt, 1999). We examined the use of listservs—electronic communication tools that create a discussion forum open only to a select group of subscribers—and discussed the potential for course management software, such as Moodle™ (http://moodle.com), to reshape the international studies classroom. We then reviewed the benefits and costs of interactive video conferencing (Grasinger, 1999; Cogburn and Levinson, 2003). We concluded this section with a broader discussion of technology, institutional resources available to support the use of such technology, and the connection between technology and student orientations toward learning in international studies.
Participants in the workshop found the session valuable, but raised concerns about the accessibility of some technologies in Brazilian university classrooms. Some classrooms and buildings at the University of Brasilia, for example, were not equipped with televisions or video players. Others expressed concern about technology as a distraction from the larger educational process. Nevertheless, many noted in the surveys completed at the end of the workshop that this session helped them to reconsider incorporating information technology more directly into their classes to enhance active learning.

Teaching with Case Studies

The second day of the workshop opened with a focus on teaching with case studies. Case studies are stories or narratives that recount real, or at least realistic, events or problems, yet leave key issues open to interpretation, and thereby provide instructors and students with a method of investigation of real world problems and related educational objectives (Cusimano, 2000; Golich, 2000; Odell, 2001; Erskine, 2006). This session opened with a review of the types of case material available and how to approach its use in the classroom (Christensen, Garvin, and Sweet, 1991; Lynn, 1999; Duch, Groh, and Allen, 2001), before turning to engaging the participants with specific examples.

Since case studies typically incorporate common reading assignments for students in advance of one or more class periods that are devoted to case exploration, participants were given a short reading assignment: a transcript of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s formal remarks at the 61st Annual Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on September 20, 2006. The directors then facilitated a discussion that explored the messages of the speech in
relation to key themes in world politics, such as U.S.-Venezuelan relations and the war on terror. This material also generated intense discussions about the implications of the speech for Latin American politics, with some participants arguing that it reflected a real sentiment in the region and others contending that Chávez’s position is marginalized in the eyes of most Brazilians. Assessment and debriefing focused on encapsulating the session through both instructor-led and student-led summary.

Global Problems Summit Simulation

Another session of the workshop engaged participants in the Global Problems Summit, a role-playing simulation (Lantis, 1996; 1998; Krain and Lantis, 2006). The simulation reflects dynamics of real world summits organized around international issues and provides for a focus on contemporary global problems. Instructors have great flexibility to gear the exercise toward global problem(s) of their choosing in order to best meet a course’s educational objectives. The summit design was influenced by Model United Nations programs, as many simulations reflect real-world international organizations (Van Dyke, Declair, and Loedel, 2000; McIntosh, 2001; Dunn, 2002; Zeff, 2003; Switky, 2004; Chasek, 2005), but it has been adapted in several ways for implementation in a variety of courses and levels.

Workshop participants were assigned countries to represent in the short version of the summit we integrated into the workshop. They received a copy of the summit guidelines and rules of procedure, as well as a two-page briefing of their country’s position on nuclear proliferation. After a short review of the rules of procedure, the newly minted country “delegates” worked to create a resolution addressing nuclear proliferation. As with the other
exercises, the participants became very animated and engaged in the proceedings. Debate continued to rage across the “caucus coffee break” and into the concluding formal session, which eventually created two hotly debated competing resolutions—only one of which was approved. The process energized many participants. Some enjoyed the challenge of playing roles very different from that of Brazil in world politics, others were caught up in the substance of the debate, while some enjoyed the competitive dynamic.

Debriefing discussions built on responses to a brief post-simulation questionnaire asking about the role that participants played, the negotiation strategies employed, and what lessons were learned. We also reviewed both qualitative and quantitative ways to systematically assess such an exercise in relation to the desired educational objectives (Krain and Lantis, 2006). Given the level of support among the workshop participants for the use of simulations, but a general lack of previous detailed assessment of their effectiveness at achieving educational goals, this portion of the session generated a range of interesting comments and suggestions for linking such assessment to the Brazilian educational context.

*Teaching with “Alternative Texts”*

This session emphasized using a range of “alternative texts” (i.e., source material that can be drawn upon to support the teaching of international relations beyond standard textbooks and readings). For the purposes of the workshop, we identified alternative texts as including film and video, television, theater, music, comics and cartoons, novels, memoirs, news articles and editorials (examples include, Lang and Lang, 1998; Deibel, 2002; Dougherty, 2002; Albers and Bach, 2003). We opened the session with a survey of the various alternatives available and the
wide range of possible educational objectives associated with their use in the classroom, including enhancing the teaching of theory and ambiguous concepts, improving student understanding of global issues, building knowledge of historical, religious and cultural dynamics, learning about primary actors, institutions and processes in international relations, and enhancing critical thinking skills.

The session then focused on the use of film and video, probably the most widely used form of popular culture for teaching international relations (Gregg, 1998, 1999; Kiasatpour, 1999; Lindley, 2001; Weber, 2001; Pollard, 2002, 2005; Waalkes, 2003; Weber, 2005). We discussed how some instructors have built their classes completely around movies, while many others have used films to supplement their courses. A prominent example of the former comes from Kuzma and Haney (2001, 2002; Haney 2000) who use films as key texts for their classes on foreign policy. A series of possible assignments for use in a film class were presented and the workshop participants were directly engaged in watching and responding to a clip from the film *Patton* as an illustration.

We also explored the strategic use of television for educational purposes. Although not as widely referenced in the teaching of international relations as film, we reviewed related “success stories” in using television shows in such an analytical manner (for example; Weldes, 1999; Scanlan and Feinberg, 2000; Beavers, 2002; Misra, 2000). Indeed, television provides some especially interesting educational avenues and it is hard to deny the sway that television holds over many college students today (Cantor, 2001). As with the use of *Patton*, we drew on clips from the television shows *Survivor* and *Sesame Street* to demonstrate the use of television as a teaching tool to illustrate international relations concepts.
Finally, as part of assessing the use of alternative texts, we drew the workshop participants into a broader discussion of what would work best in the Brazilian educational environment. Most participants agreed that this teaching approach was potentially very useful, and several instructors have already successfully incorporated video clips, films, and even music into their educational plan. One of the more interesting workshop discussions focused on the use of Brazilian soap operas (telenovelas) to illustrate key themes in world politics. Given the different nature of soap operas in the United States, we concluded that this served as an example of how the process of selection of texts that would best resonate with students needs to be culturally sensitive.

Service-Learning

In the final workshop session detailing particular exercises, we discussed the value of service-learning projects. Service-learning is experiential learning designed to provide a needed service to the community while allowing students to learn and apply course concepts in the real world (Eyler and Giles, 1999). Service-learning differs from community service in that the former involves interdependent linkages between coursework and volunteer activity (Barber, 1997; Battisoni and Hudson, 1997; Hepburn, Neimi and Chapman, 2000). Thus, coursework is informed by student action and this action is informed by, and occurs within the context of, the academic study of relevant topics. In order for the service activity to be a successful pedagogical tool, it must be directly linked to the course and its objectives and it must be carefully interwoven into the learning process set out in the course (Weigert, 1998; Howard, 1998).
First, we reviewed the theoretical concepts behind service-learning as a pedagogical tool, as well as the extensive research that suggests that it can be extremely effective (Markus, Howard and King, 1993; Batchelder and Root, 1994; Astin and Sax, 1998; Eyler and Giles, 1999). Then, following the EEPA framework, we specifically laid out the educational goals of service-learning and discussed a range of service-learning project examples (Patterson, 2000; Quirk, 2003; Smith, 2006). We then presented a particularly powerful illustration originally developed by Krain and Nurse (2004)--a mask-making project designed to make students think critically about human rights issues by fostering communication and understanding between two very disparate populations: first-year undergraduate students and juveniles in a local detention center. We discussed the importance of assessment of service-learning projects and illustrated how this could be done with reference to qualitative and quantitative evaluations of the mask-making project (Krain and Nurse, 2004; Nurse and Krain, 2006).

We concluded the session with a discussion of how to adapt service-learning to the Brazilian educational context. We addressed whether, and in what pedagogical context, participants felt that service-learning would work for them. Next, we walked through the steps necessary to design and run a service-learning program effectively. Finally, we brainstormed about how best to secure resources for project development. The general position put forth by the workshop participants was that while service-learning seemed useful, it was probably too time and resource intensive for use in Brazilian international studies programs. However, the session did prompt a few participants to consider how they might employ some form of service-learning in their classes, particularly those on international economic and environmental issues.
ASSESSMENT OF THE WORKSHOP

At the conclusion of the workshop, we asked participants to fill out a workshop assessment survey. Fifteen of the twenty workshop participants filled out the survey instrument. The first section of the survey listed three questions evaluating the overall quality of the experience, as well as questions asking participants to evaluate each of the eleven workshop program sessions. Respondents were prompted to rank the workshop, the materials provided, the quality of instruction, and the individual sessions using a 1-5 Likert scale (1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent). The numerical data culled from this portion of the workshop assessment survey are shown in Table 1.

< Table 1 about here >

The second section of the survey consisted of the following open-ended questions:

• Which of the activities from the workshop do you think you might adopt in your teaching?
• What were the strengths of this workshop?
• What were the weaknesses of this workshop?
• What suggestions do you have for future workshops on active teaching and learning? Are there other approaches or resources that were not addressed that you believe should be incorporated into the workshop?
• Were there any ideas that did not translate well from American colleges and universities to your educational system?
• Would you recommend this workshop to others? If so, to whom?

3 The participants who did not fill out the survey did not have the opportunity to do so because they had to leave early on the last day of the workshop, either to teach their own classes or to catch a flight back to their home institution.
• Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?

We supplemented this assessment tool with our own participant-observation. We also engaged participants with a series of unstructured questions and interactions throughout the workshop. Our assessment is the result of the combined analysis of the information gathered from all of these sources of information. In order to properly assess the workshop, we need to see whether it met our educational objectives. We designed the workshop to produce five primary learning outcomes. Thus, we structure the following assessment analysis around each objective and how well each of these was achieved.

Familiarize Participants With a Wide Range of Active Teaching and Learning Strategies

In response to the open-ended question about the strengths of the workshop, one of the most frequent statements made was that participants were introduced to a wider range of teaching techniques than they had been familiar with before the workshop. While most of the participants had some prior experience with active teaching and learning tools, many expressed amazement at the range of possible alternatives available to them. Later in the survey, many respondents listed activities or approaches that they had never used before among those that they were likely to adopt following their workshop experiences. Our conversations with participants throughout the workshop confirm that they were excited to learn about and try some or all of the techniques that we had discussed. Perhaps this is why, as Table 1 shows, among the first four “foundation” sessions of the workshop, the session introducing the range of Active Learning Tools and Approaches achieved the highest average rating.

During the workshop we also provided participants with resources to help familiarize
them with the range of active teaching and learning exercises available. Each participant received a CD-ROM containing: highlights from the workshop; detailed bibliographies of resources related to workshop sessions that drew from traditional publications and online resources; and worksheets, rules, and guidelines to help instructors run their own active learning exercises in the classroom. Hard copies of many of these items (bibliographies, worksheets, guidelines) were also distributed during the workshop at appropriate sessions. Respondents viewed these materials very positively. As Table 1 demonstrates, all viewed them as either “very good” or “excellent”, with an average rating falling right in between these two options.  

*Enable Participants to Think About Active Teaching and Learning in a More Systematic Manner, Through Clearly Articulating Educational Goals and Conducting Careful Assessment*

Many of our workshop participants already had experience using some active teaching and learning techniques. Yet most noted that they had not been thinking systematically about how and why they were using these techniques, how the techniques were connected to their educational objectives, and whether or not the techniques were achieving the desired results. One of the most consistent responses that we received in conversations with participants and in the survey’s open-ended questions was that the workshop helped them to think more systematically about the use of these pedagogical approaches and how to improve their effectiveness.

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4 In fact, we believe that these ratings are actually lower than they should be. Participants received many of the hard copy materials during the workshop, and were likely responding to those resources – most notably the resource bibliographies and instructions and worksheets. However, some did not realize that at the end of the workshop (and after the surveys were filled out) they would receive a CD-ROM with additional materials. We believe that some participants might have ranked the materials higher had they had access to the full range of materials earlier in the process.
In addition, our observation of the change in tone of the conversation over the two days of the workshop suggests that participants learned and internalized the importance of linking the use of active learning tools to clear educational objectives and carefully assessing how effective the tools are in achieving these goals. By the end of the workshop, rather than us prompting them to consider these issues, participants were challenging us, and each other, to explain underlying objectives, and to come up with assessment techniques for different exercises. Moreover, they began to talk in terms of how they would assess their own teaching approaches, and reassess how they would deploy them given differing educational objectives or varying degrees of success. We saw similar acknowledgement of the importance of clear educational goals and careful assessment in the survey responses to open-ended questions.

While the early sessions of the workshop that set up the philosophy of and best practices in active teaching and learning were not as highly rated among participants as the more interactive and technique-specific sessions, the respondents clearly recognized their value. As Table 1 shows, while these sessions rated lower than most of the later sessions, these valuable first four sessions still rated from 4.21 to 4.36 on a scale of 1-5, with very few respondents rating any of these sessions below “very good”.

*Actively Engage the Participants In a Range of Related Applications and Enable Them to Learn About Active Teaching and Learning Through Their Own Experiences*

Clearly, our workshop participants saw the value of interactive and experiential learning and recognized the need to engage learners in non-traditional ways. This was reinforced through their own learning experiences during the workshop. In responses to open-ended questions about strengths and weaknesses of the workshop, respondents kept returning to the theme of the
benefits of “learning by doing” during the workshop, and how it made them more interested in translating that experience into their own classrooms. Many noted how the most important part of the workshop for them was “real experience with active learning.” One respondent reflected upon how dynamic the sessions were and the way that this positively affected the ability to visualize how and when the tools could be used in the classroom. One of the most frequently cited weaknesses of the workshop was that participants wanted even more time to “learn by doing” and less learning through traditional lecture and discussion approaches. During sessions in which participants were actively engaged in a simulation, role-play, or other experiential exercise we found that they were often so engaged that they wanted to continue interacting, discussing, or experiencing that active teaching and learning approach.

It is thereby not surprising that three of the four highest rated sessions on the workshop assessment survey were also the most interactive sessions: Teaching with Case Studies (4.64), Global Problems Summit Simulation (4.60), and Using Structured Debates (4.43). When asked the open-ended question, “Which of the activities from the workshop do you think you might adopt in your teaching?”, eleven of the fifteen respondents mentioned simulations, games and role-play more generally, or the Global Problems Summit or Human Rights Treaty simulations specifically. Almost half (seven) indicated that they would adopt interactive case study teaching, and six said they would adopt structured debates.5

5 The only other tool more likely to be adopted than the activities with which the participants had “active” experience in the workshop was the use of film, video, and “alternative texts.” Nine participants reported being likely to adopt such “texts,” though many workshop participants had already been using these in the classroom before the workshop. Therefore we suspect that these respondents were more likely to be adapting already existing tools rather than adopting them anew. This is still quite an important outcome, though a different one than that which is examined here.
There were really two underlying objectives in this category. First, we wanted to generate an international dialogue about active teaching and learning approaches between American and Brazilian teacher-scholars. But perhaps more importantly, we wanted to create a learning community in Brazil within which international relations teacher-scholars could generate an ongoing dialogue about their use of active teaching and learning techniques. We believe that, as an initial step, the workshop succeeded in both of these areas.

We designed the workshop to be a presentation of some of the ideas and techniques that work well in American classrooms. However, we were aware that some of these techniques might not work in other contexts. To that end, we spent much time during the workshop soliciting examples of techniques and tools that our Brazilian counterparts were using in their classrooms. Comparing notes about how and why some of these techniques or exercises worked, or did not work, in our classrooms and in theirs helped highlight both how much they have already done in this area and how much they could benefit from considering the literature on systematizing the active teaching and learning approach. We, in turn, learned much about how these techniques do and do not translate outside the context of the United States, as well as learning about some interesting new active learning exercises or approaches that our Brazilian colleagues were using.

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6 On our survey instrument we specifically asked, “Were there any ideas that did not translate well from American colleges and universities to your educational system?” Responses suggested that most or all of the tools we discussed during the workshop translate quite well to the Brazilian context. Concerns or issues raised by respondents had more to do with access to relevant resources or technology to employ some of the techniques discussed, especially when the ideas involved the use of multimedia or computer-based technology.
Such a dialogue was possible in part because of the openness of the participants and workshop directors to that conversation, and in part because of the overall approach taken by the workshop directors. We also tried to pick topics, examples and cases of broad international appeal when possible. Rather than think of the workshop as a method of exporting our ideas, we approached each topic, each session, and each interaction with the attitude of being in Brazil to share our ideas, to listen and learn about the ideas of others, and to generate an exchange between international relations instructors in different contexts. We consistently reminded the participants that exercises that were effective in our U.S. classrooms might work differently in theirs. We often spent time discussing how and why exercises might need to be modified for the Brazilian classroom. As a result of this conscious effort to maintain a dialogue, and not to simply “teach” about active and experiential learning, we believe that all involved benefited greatly. On the surveys and in person, workshop participants remarked that they were happy to see how willing we were to engage in such a dialogue. Consequently, we believe that the participants were more willing to listen, participate, and learn, and that we were able to benefit from the sessions as well.

Another important goal was to create a learning community in Brazil within which international relations teacher-scholars could generate an ongoing dialogue about their use of active teaching and learning techniques. One major benefit of the workshop to the participants was that they realized that they were not alone in their interest in, or use of, active teaching and learning techniques. Many participants commented during the workshop and on the survey assessment tool that they were surprised and excited to learn that, unbeknownst to them, they were doing the same things as many of their colleagues across the country. During meals and breaks between sessions we observed faculty from different institutions, and even sometimes
from the same department, sharing their ideas about this approach to pedagogy with colleagues for the very first time. The experience was clearly exhilarating for them. We heard many promises among colleagues to stay in touch, to continue to share ideas, and to reconvene at a later date to do so.

To push this process along, we encouraged the host institution, the Instituto de Relações Internacionais at the University of Brasilia, to create and maintain a listserv discussion group where workshop participants could continue to share ideas and exchange information (with each other and with us) beyond the confines of the two-day workshop. We also generated a contact sheet of all participants to encourage one-on-one follow-up interactions between colleagues as well. Only time will tell whether a true learning community of Brazilian international relations scholars interested in active teaching and learning can be sustained. Yet, in the short term, Brazilian teacher-scholars using active teaching and learning techniques or those curious about these tools no longer believe that they are alone within their professional context. They know that they have a support network within the country, and can now better tap into resources to aid them in their endeavors at home and internationally as well. If for no other reason than this, we judge this goal of the workshop to have been achieved.

*Provide an Enjoyable, Fulfilling, and Valuable Professional Development Experience*

An intensive two-day workshop can be a taxing experience. This is especially true if participants are operating in a language other than their native one, required to engage with a wide range of topics, and participate in discussion and interactive exercises throughout the experience. Thus
we were surprised that after two extremely full days, participants seemed to want more rather than less time to engage in the workshop.

When asked in our survey about the weaknesses of the workshop, one of the most prevalent answers given was that a two-day workshop was too short. Our experiences are in line with these observations. As noted earlier, we had a difficult time ending many interactive and experiential sessions, transitioning to new sessions, and ending each day of the workshop. Rather than move on, participants in the workshop were often so engaged that they wanted to continue interacting, discussing, or experiencing the active teaching and learning approach of the moment. This speaks to the wealth of material on active teaching and learning approaches available to the interested teacher of international relations. However, it also indicates the degree to which the workshop participants enjoyed their experience, and just how professionally valuable and fulfilling they found it.

Of course, as teachers of the material, we hope that the quality of instruction may have also enhanced the experience for participants. The evidence seems to suggest this possibility. As seen in Table 1, all but one of the respondents (93%) rated the quality of instruction as “excellent,” (mean = 4.87 out of 5.00). Responses to open-ended questions also routinely listed the quality of instruction as one of the most significant strengths of the workshop.

While the participants certainly found the workshop rewarding for themselves, they saw value in it for others as well. When prompted on the survey, the respondents unanimously agreed that they would recommend the workshop to others. All but one said that the workshop would be most valuable for faculty who teach international relations at colleges and universities, in Brazil and elsewhere around the world. A few of these respondents noted that graduate students would also benefit significantly from experiencing the workshop. The lone dissenter
suggested that diplomats and foreign ministry officials would benefit most from the workshop, perhaps because of its emphasis on simulations of negotiating processes and its careful and interactive examination of cases and key debates.

CONCLUSION

We are pleased to report that this international workshop on active teaching and learning was a success. Our assessment of the workshop suggests that it achieved our educational goals. Participants learned about a wider range of active teaching and learning strategies than they had been aware of previously. Participants learned the value of thinking about these strategies in a more systematic manner, through clearly articulating educational goals and conducting careful assessment. We engaged the participants in a range of related exercises, which enabled participants to learn about active teaching and learning through their own experiences. We began to build a teaching and learning community among the participants and generated a spirited dialogue on pedagogy. Finally, we provided workshop participants with an enjoyable, fulfilling and valuable professional development experience.

Although before the workshop experience we had a wide range of engagement with active teaching and learning, up to this point it had all been within the U.S. educational setting. However, the successful workshop in Brazil clearly demonstrates how well active learning concepts and approaches translate to other educational environments. In reverse, the opportunity to extend our engagement with these important pedagogical issues outside of the United States proved to be an equally valuable experience. Clearly, if active engagement of the study of international affairs is truly to be promoted, such cross-border interaction should be encouraged.
Overall, the experience with the workshop in Brazil suggests that similar workshops should have great benefit for training international relations instructors seeking to better integrate active teaching and learning into their classrooms, both within the United States and across other international contexts.
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**NOTES**
- Likert Scale values: 1 = poor; 2 = fair; 3=good; 4 = very good; 5 = excellent
- Numbers in columns below Likert scale values are number of responses per value
- n = number of respondents
References


*ALIAS Notes: Newsletter for the Active Learning in International Affairs Section of the International Studies Association.* (2007) 5 (2).


Appendix: Workshop Schedule

*Active Learning: Applied Lessons for Teaching International Studies—
A Teaching Development Workshop for International Relations Instructors*

**Monday, October 16**

**SESSION I: Introduction to Active Learning**

A. Introduction [8:30-8:45 a.m.]

B. The Philosophy of Active Teaching and Learning [8:45-9:00]

C. Active Learning Tools and Approaches [9:00-9:30]

D. Discussion—Breakout Session 1 [9:30-10:30]
   - Coffee Break [10:30-10:45]

E. Active Learning Advantages and Challenges [10:45-11:15]

F. Assessment and Effectiveness [11:15-11:45]

   - Lunch Break [12:30-2:00]

**SESSION II: Active Learning Exercises**

A. Human Rights Treaty Simulation, Phase II [2:00-3:30 p.m.]
   - Coffee Break [3:30-3:45]

B. Using Structured Debates [3:45-4:15]

C. Discussion—Breakout Session [4:15-4:45]

D. Structured Debate Exercise [4:45-5:15]

E. Technology in the Classroom [5:15-5:45]

F. Active Learning Homework Assignments Handout: [5:45-6:00]
   - Case review for “Teaching a Case Study”
   - Country research review for “Global Problems Summit Simulation”
Tuesday, October 17

SESSION III: Case Studies and Simulations

A. Teaching a Case Study [8:30-9:30 a.m.]

B. Preparing for the Global Problems Summit [9:30-10:00]

C. The Global Problems Summit Simulation [10:00-12:30]
   - Caucus Coffee Break- [available from 10:45-11:15]
   - Lunch Break- [12:30-2:00]

SESSION IV: Teaching with “Alternative Texts”: Popular Culture, Visual Media, and Experiential Learning

A. Using Film, Video, and other “Alternative Texts” [2:00-3:45 p.m.]
   - Coffee Break- [3:45-4:00]

B. Experiential and Service Learning [4:00-4:45]

C. Workshop Debriefing: Lessons Learned, Future Plans [4:45-6:00]