

# POLICY WRITING SIMULATIONS: PEDAGOGY, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE CANADIAN HISTORY CLASSROOM

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## Introduction

Historians have the important task of preparing students for life after a history degree.<sup>1</sup> We frequently fight the popular perception that our practice of discerning meaning from the past renders our students ill-equipped for success. Perhaps this is because history degrees do not lead directly into a profession, other than those small few who become professional historians or work in related fields.<sup>2</sup> The reality is that students who complete history undergraduate and graduate programs are amongst the most prepared for a successful career in a diversity of professional fields. In particular, an undergraduate history degree provides its graduates with a strong skillset for the professional job market.<sup>3</sup> History majors have successful careers in communications, teaching, the military, international relations, journalism, politics,

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1 This paper is inspired by a post the authors wrote for <http://activehistory.ca> in the spring of 2018 and by a paper they presented at the Universities Art Association of Canada annual conference at the University of Waterloo (Waterloo, ON, 26 October 2018).

2 Paul B. Sturtevant, "History Is Not A Useless Major: Fighting Myths With Data," *Perspectives on History: The News Magazine of the American Historical Association*, 1 April 2017, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/april-2017/history-is-not-a-useless-major-fighting-myths-with-data>.

3 Ibid.

law, and archaeology, among many other fields and professions.<sup>4</sup> This is unsurprising because a history degree offers its holders well-defined and definite benefits: writing skills, research skills, critical-thinking skills, and an ability to speak knowledgeably of the past.<sup>5</sup> This success is nurtured in the university classroom by history instructors who encourage students to be creative and effective at research and analysis.<sup>6</sup> Undergraduate students in particular are well-prepared, from a skills perspective, for life after their degree program.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, as historians, we have an obligation to do more for our students by facing down the difficult questions that plague our discipline. These questions must be addressed by departments and instructors across our vocation.

Writing about Sam Houston State University's history department, Brian Domitrovic explains that faculty rejuvenated their program by capturing their students' "natural interest in history."<sup>8</sup> In other words, they sought the core of what made history interesting and fun. Part of their department's rejuvenation efforts included situating students in historical

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4 Canadian Historical Association, "What Can You Do With a History Degree? Many Things | Que Faire Avec Un Diplôme En Histoire? Plein De Choses!" <https://historydegreediplomehistoire.blog>.

5 Jason Steinhauer, "Fewer Students Are Majoring in History, But We're Asking the Wrong Questions About Why," *Time*, 6 December 2018, <https://time.com/5472828/history-majors/>.

6 Jessica Shortall, "It's time to start ignoring people who question your 'impractical' degree," *Forbes*, August 22, 2016, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jessicashortall/2016/08/22/its-time-to-start-ignoring-people-who-question-your-impractical-degree>.

7 Katharine Brooks, "Why Major in History? Is there value in a history major these days?", *Psychology Today*, August 5, 2012, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/career-transitions/201208/why-major-in-history>.

8 Brian Domitrovic, "Major Renovations: Reviving Undergraduate History at Sam Houston State," *Perspectives on History*, November 2017, <https://www.historians.org/publications-and-directories/perspectives-on-history/november-2017/major-renovations-reviving-undergraduate-history-at-sam-houston-state>.

places. The department organized monthly trips to relevant local historical sites and to theatres to watch historically relevant movies as a history community.<sup>9</sup> These are positive initiatives that inspire duplication – but they necessitate department-wide cooperation. What can one history instructor do to take students to historical places without leaving the classroom?

Simulations that emphasize and build upon skills that history departments proudly champion in their students are an adaptive way for history instructors to situate students in historical places. Incorporating simulations as experiential learning practices into undergraduate history classrooms is both fun and challenging. Simulations, particularly those that emphasize policy writing, situate students within historical places and sharpen the skills that history majors utilize for success outside universities. The 1956 Suez Canal Crisis provides an opportunity for historians to engage students in a simulation that situates them in historical places, requires students to demonstrate writing skills, and prepares them for diverse professional experiences after graduation. In this paper, we articulate the value of simulations and experiential learning, provide an example of a simulation related to the 1956 Suez Canal Crisis, and discuss writing options and general strategies to be used when incorporating simulations in your teaching.

## **Simulations and Experiential Learning**

Simulations are an innovative method of teaching, learning, and assessment for undergraduate students pursuing a degree in history. A simulation is a “device for replacing some aspect of reality for purposes of experimentation, prediction, evaluation, or learning.”<sup>10</sup> Dean S. Dorn contends that simulations “provide teachers ... with an alternative to traditional and conventional

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9 Ibid.

10 J. Barton Cunningham, “Assumptions Underlying the Use of Different Types of Simulations,” *Simulation & Games*, 15, no. 2 (1984): 215.

modes of classroom instruction.”<sup>11</sup> While Dorn emphasizes that simulations are games that are inherently adversarial with winners and losers,<sup>12</sup> we suggest that simulations can enable groups of students to accomplish goals through collaboration and teamwork.

Substantial literature attests to how student learning is enhanced through simulations.<sup>13</sup> In particular, simulations combine several High-Impact Educational Practices (HIPs) into one activity. George D. Kuh argues that HIPs facilitate student learning and retention because they demand time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, promote meaningful interactions between faculty and students, foster collaboration, and necessitate feedback.<sup>14</sup> Simulations necessitate a writing intensive course, facilitate undergraduate research for the instructor, demand collaboration between students for

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11 Dean S. Dorn, “Simulation Games: One More Tool on the Pedagogical Shelf,” *Teaching Sociology* 17 (1989): 1.

12 *Ibid.*, 3.

13 James E. Stice, “Using Kolb’s Learning Model to Improve Student Learning,” *Engineering Education* 77 (1987): 291-296; M.A. Boyer, R.A. Denemark, E.C. Hanson, S.L. Lamy, “Visions of International Studies in a New Millennium,” *International Studies Perspectives* 1 (2000): 1-9; J. Patrick McCarthy and Liam Anderson, “Active Learning Techniques Versus Traditional Learning Styles: Two Experiments from History and Political Science,” *Innovative Higher Education* 24, no. 4 (2000): 290-291; Stephen M. Shellman, “Active Learning in Comparative Politics: A Mock German Election and Coalition-Formation Simulation,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 34, no. 4 (2001): 833; Brian Frederiking, “Simulations and Student Learning,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 1 (2005): 392; Stephen M. Shellman and Kürsard Turan, “Do Simulations Enhance Student Learning? An Empirical Evaluation of an IR Simulation,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 2 (2006): 29-30; Mary Pettenger, Douglas West, and Niki Young, “Assessing the Impact of Role Play Simulations on Learning in Canadian and US Classrooms,” *International Studies Perspectives* 15 (2014): 504.

14 For a deeper discussion on the benefits of the eleven established High Impact Practices, see George D. Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why they Matter* (AACU, 2008); George D. Kuh, *Ensuring Quality & Taking High-Impact Practices to Scale*, (AACU, 2013).

assignments, and offer diverse learning opportunities. They can provide a solid mechanism for teaching about the state, particularly when instructors adopt a role-playing simulation that assigns students a place within the political process and demand that they act “like real political actors.”<sup>15</sup> Simulations ground students in the course material and, according to Jeremy Youde, force them “to adopt and defend a world view which may not comport with their own.”<sup>16</sup> Simulations also offer a refreshing break from the regular lecture-driven classroom model for both students and instructors.<sup>17</sup>

Abundant literature on simulations exists in political science, sociology, and international relations. Nina Kollars and Amanda Rosen draw attention to the substantial time it takes to create the simulation experience, and they suggest that professors design portable simulations that work within frameworks for different subjects, classes, and disciplines.<sup>18</sup> It is important the simulation design be considered alongside proper methods of assessment. Chad Raymond and Simon Usherwood have highlighted the equal importance that assessment in simulations shares with the design of scenarios and gameplay. They argue that the learning objectives need to be established from the outset and the course itself requires that assessment be integrated from the start and be informed by those objectives.<sup>19</sup> The simulation itself also needs to

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15 Elizabeth T. Smith and Mark A. Boyer, “Designing In-Class Simulations,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 29, no. 4 (1996): 691.

16 Jeremy Youde, “Crushing Their Dreams? Simulations and Student Idealism,” *International Studies Perspectives* 9 (2008): 355.

17 Rebecca A. Glazier, “Running Simulations without Ruining Your Life: Simple Ways to Incorporate Active Learning into Your Teaching,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 7 (2011): 376-377.

18 Nina Kollars and Amanda Rosen, “Bootstrapping and Portability in Simulation Design,” *International Studies Perspectives* 17 (2016): 203.

19 Chad Raymond and Simon Usherwood, “Assessment in Simulations,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 9 (2013): 164. This argument is also made in Timothy Wedig, “Getting the Most from Classroom Simulations: Strategies for Maximizing Learning Outcomes,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43, no. 3 (2010): 548.

critically engage with the course material. Therefore, it is essential that simulations are not conducted for the sake of doing them; they need to be relevant to course content.<sup>20</sup>

Universities across Canada are encouraging their faculties to introduce experiential learning practices in their courses. In the summer of 2017, the Ontario government's Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development issued *Guiding Principles for Experiential Learning*, indicating a commitment to ensure every Ontario student in a publicly funded post-secondary institution graduate with at least one experiential learning activity. This is a key aspect of the province's plan to create a "highly skilled workforce."<sup>21</sup> Carleton University, Dalhousie University, McMaster University, Queen's University, the University of Guelph, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Saskatchewan, among many others, have all instituted university-wide experiential learning initiatives to various degrees. Canadian provinces and universities are part of a broader movement emanating from the United States that has also emphasized the benefits of experiential learning.<sup>22</sup> The Beek Center for Social Impact and Innovation at Georgetown University, for example, brands itself as an "experiential hub" for training students<sup>23</sup> while the Center for Law, Engagement, and Politics at Sam Houston State University (LEAP) enriches students through experiential learning opportunities.<sup>24</sup> At the University

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20 Wedig, "Getting the Most from Classroom Simulations: Strategies for Maximizing Learning Outcomes," 547.

21 Ontario, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, "Published Plans and Annual Reports 2017-2018," June 29, 2018, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/published-plans-and-annual-reports-2017-2018-ministry-advanced-education-and-skills-development>.

22 Janet Eyster, "The Power of Experiential Education," *Liberal Education* 95, no. 4 (2009): 24-31; Learn Through Experience, "Colleges and Universities," <http://learnthroughexperience.org/program-types/colleges-universities/>.

23 The Beek Center for Social Impact and Innovation, Georgetown University, "What is the Beek Center?" <https://beekcenter.georgetown.edu/>.

24 Center for Law, Engagement, and Politics (LEAP), Sam Houston State

of Waterloo, the Faculty of Arts piloted its *Arts First Initiative* in 2018 which “builds students’ foundational competencies in communication and analysis in their first year in small course settings.” The initiative, which was fully adopted across the university’s Arts Program in 2019-2020, utilizes both active and experiential learning practices to improve students’ abilities in comprehension, conceptualization, and contextualization of ideas and knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the framework this article proposes is a welcome approach to history programs across Canada and the United States.

### *Simulating the Suez Crisis*

The 1956 Suez Canal Crisis provides an opportunity for a historical simulation. In 1956, the last of British forces, which had been stationed at the Suez Canal, left the region after Prime Minister Anthony Eden negotiated promises of goodwill from Egyptian dictator Gamal Abdel Nasser. However, the Suez Canal remained the property of British and French investors. After failed attempts to negotiate an American and British development loan to build a dam at Aswan on the Nile, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. Eden, furious and betrayed, preferred military action to overthrow Nasser and restore British prestige. The British, French, and Israeli governments met in secret to concoct a plan for the invasion of Egypt. Israel attacked Egypt, and Anglo-French forces prepared to enter the canal zone to secure it under the claim of neutrality. Eden testified that the Anglo-French intervention was a “police action,” but the Americans were furious with the Israelis, the French, and the British for their actions. Similarly, the new and recently decolonized members of the British Commonwealth, led by India, sympathized with Egypt. Canada was in a difficult position – clearly offended by the British actions, but also uncomfortable with the American position. There was a genuine

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University, <https://www.shsu.edu/centers/leap/>.

25 University of Waterloo, “About Arts First,” <https://uwaterloo.ca/arts-first/about>.

concern that a split would occur in the relationship between the United Kingdom, France, and the United States – Canada’s principal allies in the Cold War. There were also domestic political considerations for the Canadian government to consider. Liberal Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent’s government was nearing its fourth year, and an election was on the horizon.<sup>26</sup>

The simulation tasks students with recognizing and addressing the difficult position that Canada found itself in at the beginning of November 1956. Lester Pearson, Canada’s Secretary of State for External Affairs, was encouraged by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and petitioned member countries of the United Nations on the creation of a United National Emergency Force (UNEF). Students are placed in the same situation that Pearson and St. Laurent found themselves: accept a deal with India that would lead to the creation of a peace force at the cost of supporting India’s motion demanding the immediate withdrawal (thus condemning) of the British, the French, and the Israelis; or reject it and let the alliance potentially falter.<sup>27</sup> Using primary documents provided by the instructor, students assume the role of Canadian Department of External Affairs employees writing a one-page action memorandum to Prime Minister St. Laurent before he enters Question Period in the House of Commons.<sup>28</sup>

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26 For a summary of the Suez Crisis from Canada’s perspective, see Robert Bothwell, *Alliance and Illusion: Canada and the World, 1945-1984*, (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 124-132.

27 India was balancing its long-standing and evolved relationship with the United Kingdom and the rest of the British Commonwealth, as well as its diplomatic ties to the Afro-Asian countries who looked to India for leadership and who believed the UK and France were taking advantage of Egypt. See Zorawar Dault Singh, “India’s Role During the 1956 Suez Crisis: Between Peacemaking and Postcolonial Solidarity,” *India Review* 17, no. 5 (2018): 456-475.

28 Question Period in Canada occurs each day that the House of Commons sits. Members of Parliament direct questions to the government that are typically answered by the relevant government minister or their parliamentary secretary. The questions are not submitted in advance, and they typically are relevant to the major news of the day. The prime minister does not have to attend, but they often do. The Official Leader of the Opposition usually asks the first several questions,



They are tasked with independently dividing the documents amongst their group, triaging the important information, and writing the four relevant sections of the action memorandum: background, options, considerations, and recommendation.<sup>29</sup> It is not important that students follow the same course of historical events as 1956; rather, it is essential that they demonstrate an aptitude for dissecting the primary documents and disseminating an opinion through a written policy document in a specific allotment of time. Thus, it is central for the instructor to select the right documents but also to frame the assignment in a specific way that articulates the simulation's priorities. Here is an example of the scenario provided to students for the Suez crisis:

It is 4 November 1956, and the world is engulfed in crisis with Egypt's nationalization of the Suez Canal, the Israeli invasion of Egypt, and the planned British/French seizure of the canal zone. Diplomats at the Canadian Department of External Affairs have worked tirelessly with their American, French, and British allies to avoid hostilities between them. Canadian External Affairs Minister Lester Pearson has struck an agreement to create a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to enforce a ceasefire in the canal zone. However, Canada needs the support of India and other aligned states to support the motion. India has agreed to support Canada's motion in exchange for Canada's vote condemning the British, French and Israeli actions at the United Nations. Your team, who work as advisors to Pearson, must advise Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent with a 1-page action memorandum on whether or not they should support the Indian motion demanding the immediate withdrawal of invading forces

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and thus an exchange between the prime minister and his principal foe occurs.

See Scott Piroth, "A Bilingual Legislature? Question Period in Canada's House of Commons," *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 18, no. 2 (2012): 161-183.

<sup>29</sup> See Adam Chapnick, "The Action Memorandum: An Assignment with a Promising Future," *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal* 5, no. 3 (2012): 1-12 for an explanation of how to write an action memorandum.

(thus publicly condemning the British, French, and Israelis) and allowing for the creation of the UNEF. The UNEF will not be created without India's support. What options does Canada have at this point, and what considerations must Canada keep in mind? Finally, you must make a reasonable recommendation for the St. Laurent government to follow. Advise the prime minister. Remember, the Opposition are on the heels of the government, and a wider war amongst Canada's allies is possible in the region. It is imperative that your knowledge and analysis of the events are clear. Your memorandum must be supported by the facts provided by the instructor, address the seriousness of the situation, and protect Canada's national interest. The prime minister requires this note today before Question Period commences.<sup>30</sup>

The scenario outlines the specific expectations for the assignment, its boundaries, as well as its purpose and final objective. Using a package of primary documents, groups are expected to triage their contents and create a concise one-page memorandum. Each group is tested on their skills for collaboration, policy writing, research, and analysis in an experiential setting that reaffirms how dire and complex the crisis was.

This simulation utilizes primary documents from volume twenty-two, 1956-1957 Part 1, of Global Affairs Canada's "Documents on Canadian External Relations" and the *Globe and Mail*. These documents trace the major developments of the crisis over the course of four days. The first several documents establish the Canadian government's position from the outset of the Israeli invasion into Egypt. Students read of the Canadian government's negative reaction to the invasion with communication between Canada's Secretary of State for External Affairs to the Canadian Ambassador in the United States (volume 22 – document 107), their frustration with the United Kingdom's position

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30 From author's course assignment.

and actions (volume 22 – documents 108 & 113), as well as the United Kingdom Prime Minister Anthony Eden’s justifications to Prime Minister St. Laurent (volume 22 – document 110). The subsequent documents outline Lester Pearson’s canvassing for a negotiated and acceptable solution to the hostilities for the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, and Egypt (volume 22 – documents 118, 120, 125, & 128). These official diplomatic cables are also supported by public reporting found in the *Globe and Mail* over the same period. These English Canadian press reports provide relative historical context, reaffirm the opposed positions of the major western allies on the crisis, and detail how Pearson’s negotiations were being received abroad.<sup>31</sup>

Regardless of what simulation instructors choose to design, there are an abundance of primary sources at their disposal to generate experiences like the Suez Crisis exercise. Whether their instructors provide documents from their own collection of private materials or make use of the many archival collections that have been published or digitized online, undergraduate history students have the opportunity to experience a near endless array of simulations that enhance their classroom experience through experiential learning. Instructors can make ready use of the “Documents on Canadian External Relations” which have been released in twenty-nine volumes that are available at many university libraries. Furthermore, volumes twelve to

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31 Moshe Brilliant, “France Supports Action: Israel Invades Egypt,” *Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1956; Philip Deane, “London Considering Net Step in Israel-Egypt Case,” *Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1956; Leonard Ingallis, “Washington and U.K. Deeply Worried Over Israel’s Action; Cabinet Meets Twice,” *Globe and Mail*, October 30, 1956; Philip Deane, “Brand Britain, France As Aggressors: U.S.,” *Globe and Mail*, October 31, 1956; George Bain, “Canada Opposes Plan of Britain and France to Intervene in Egypt,” *Globe and Mail*, October 31, 1956; Osgood Carthurs, “U.K., France Veto U.S. Ceasefire Plan,” *Globe and Mail*, October 31, 1956; David Spurgeon, “Canada Backs U.S. in UN Vote,” *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1956; Clark Davey, “PM Uncertain on Suez Case; Scolds Press,” *Globe and Mail*, November 2, 1956; David Spurgeon, “Canada Makes Police Plan Bid: Canada Would Contribute Men to UN Force,” *Globe and Mail*, November 3, 1956.”

twenty-nine have been digitized for the period between 1946 and 1963 and are accessible on Global Affairs Canada's website.<sup>32</sup> Global Affairs Canada also has key documents pertaining to the Canadian North digitized for the periods between 1874 and 1949.<sup>33</sup> In fact, documents on the Canadian North are readily available. Scholars from the Centre for Military and Strategic Studies at the University of Calgary and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism at St. Jerome's University have released twelve volumes in its *Documents on Canadian Arctic Sovereignty and Security* (DCASS) series.<sup>34</sup> These volumes present a wide

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32 Global Affairs Canada, "Documents on Canadian External Relations," <http://www.international.gc.ca/history-histoire/documents-documents.aspx?lang=eng>.

33 Ibid.

34 Ryan Dean, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, and Adam Lajeunesse, *Canadian Arctic Defence Policy: A Synthesis of Key Documents, 1970-2013*, DCASS volume 1, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2014); Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Legal Appraisals of Canada's Arctic Sovereignty: Key Documents, 1905-1956*, DCASS volume 2, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2014); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and K.C. Eyre, *Unfurling the Air Force Ensign in the Canadian Arctic*, DCASS volume 3, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2015); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Daniel Heidt, *The Advisory Committee on Northern Development: Context and Meeting Minutes, 1948-1966*, DCASS volume 4, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2015); Adam Lajeunesse, *Ice Islands in Canadian Policy, 1954-1971*, DCASS volume 6, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2015); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, *Canada's Northern Strategy under the Harper Conservatives: Key Speeches and Documents on Sovereignty, Security, and Governance, 2005-2015*, DCASS volume 6, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2016); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Peter Kikkert, *Lessons in Arctic Operations: the Canadian Army Experience, 1945-1956*, DCASS volume 8, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2016); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Kristopher Kinsinger, *Arctic Show Trial: The Trial of Alikomiak and Tatamigana, 1923*, DCASS volume 9, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism,

array of simulation experiences for students studying Canadian history. Depending on their university's licensing agreements, instructors may also have access to the National Film Board and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's Digital Archives for additional primary source materials.<sup>35</sup> They can also make use of their home university library's microfilm collections of newspapers or access Library and Archives Canada's digitization of Cabinet Conclusions, which provide tremendous insights into the deliberations and decision-making of Canadian cabinets.<sup>36</sup> In addition, there are distinct opportunities for branching into American history. The United States' Department of State in the Office of the Historian has digitized a series of documents on American external relations from 1861 through to 1988. The *Foreign Relations of the United States* series is readily available

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2017); Richard Goette and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Northern Skytrails: Perspectives on the Royal Canadian Air Force in the Arctic from the Pages of the Roundel, 1949-1965*, DCASS volume 10, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2017); Adam Lajeunesse and Rob Huebert, *From Polar Sea to Straight Baselines: Arctic Policy in the Mulroney Era*, DCASS volume 11, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2017); P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Elizabeth Elliot-Meisel, "*One of the Great Polar Navigators*": *Captain T.C. Pullen's Personal Records of Arctic Voyages, Volume 1: Official Roles*, DCASS volume 12, (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2018); Adam Lajeunesse, *Documents on Canadian Arctic Maritime Sovereignty: 1950-1988*, DCASS volume 13 (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2018); and Peter Clancy and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Shaping Arctic Policy: The Minutes of the Eskimo Affairs Committee, 1952-62*, DCASS volume 14 (Calgary and Waterloo: Centre for Military and Strategic Studies and the Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 2019).

35 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, "CBC Archives," <https://www.cbc.ca/archives>; National Film Board, "Welcome to the National Film Board of Canada," <https://www.nfb.ca>.

36 Library and Archives Canada, "Cabinet Conclusions," <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/politics-government/cabinet-conclusions/Pages/cabinet-conclusions.aspx>.

online for consultation.<sup>37</sup> They can also join Barnard College's *Reacting to the Past*, which supports members with historical role-playing games for engaged classroom learning with a variety of learning outcomes.<sup>38</sup>

## Policy Writing in the Classroom

Policy writing is the process by which “government employees and non-governmental organizations create written documents for lawmakers and policy professionals to read.” It is an effective skill that history instructors should teach their students for life after their undergraduate degree. Policy documents can be a variety of lengths, ranging from short-briefings to lengthy reports.<sup>39</sup> In the course model proposed in this article, students learn policy writing while they also continue to develop valuable history-related skills such as research and analysis, creativity, and critical-thinking. Victor Asal has argued that “the best way to get educational mileage out of a simulation is to treat it as an interactive case where learning takes place before, during, and after the simulation.”<sup>40</sup> Assigning an independent policy writing assignment in place of the traditional undergraduate research essay in conjunction with the live simulation has significant benefits for student learning. The Suez Canal Crisis simulation policy writing exercise gives students first-hand experience working collaboratively with one another in a political decision-making setting.

Students are introduced to policy writing during an instructor-led workshop that details the purpose of policy writing,

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37 United States of America, Department of State, Office of the Historian, “Historical Documents,” <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments>.

38 Reacting to the Past, Barnard College, “Role-playing Games for Engaged Learning,” <https://reacting.barnard.edu/>.

39 Andrew Pennock, “The Case for Using Policy Writing in Undergraduate Political Science Courses,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 44, no. 1 (2011): 141.

40 Victor Asal, “Playing Games with International Relations,” *International Studies Perspectives* 6 (2005): 362.

its different formats, and how to effectively write one in the course's selected format. The workshop communicates the criteria of the major policy writing assignment and the live simulation in a structured environment. This includes defining the simulation's explicit rules. In this proposed simulation, for example, students cannot use primary sources that existed after 4 November 1956, the beginning of the Suez Canal crisis simulation. The ideal time to clearly communicate the assignment's ground rules is when the instructor discusses its criteria in detail with context. In the context of the Suez Canal simulation, the major purpose of the workshop is to teach students *how* to write an action memorandum. Thus, it is critical for the instructor to break down the four sections of the action memorandum: background, options, considerations, and recommendations so that students have a firm understanding of the simulation's expected outcomes.<sup>41</sup> To help facilitate student understanding in our particular workshop, student teams are given three memorandums and asked to evaluate and compare the effectiveness of each. Each team is required to break down each section on a white board while the instructor observes and engages with the groups. Throughout the workshop, the instructor should frequently field active exchanges with the class during the initial presentation and follow up the dialogue with a hands-on practice exercise where students practice their understanding of each section.

Instructors with large classes may choose to adopt this workshop in a tutorial meeting time slot and run it several times for smaller groups. An alternative approach to the in-class activity requires the students to submit a short one-page breakdown explaining each section, how sections differ, and what the critical functions of each is prior to the next class. The size of the classroom and the number of students will change how the workshop can be adopted, but instructors can adopt one of

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41 See Chapnick, "The Action Memorandum: An Assignment with a Promising Future," for more a detailed breakdown of each section.

or several of these components. If instructors are attempting this assignment for the first time, they can use the example created by Chapnick in his article in *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, or they can connect with colleagues for other suggestions.<sup>42</sup> In subsequent courses, instructors can also utilize the best examples from their students who provide them permission to do so. Students may also benefit from long-term access to these examples outside of the workshop through the duration of the course.

This approach is supported by other history instructors who have departed from the traditional research paper in their course assignments in exchange for alternative assignments that also demand creativity, as well as effective research and analysis skills. Daniel J. Sherman and Israel Waismel-Manor argue that “course syllabi that limit themselves to [traditional term papers] neglect an entire range of assignments that can bring students a deeper understanding of the political subject matter.”<sup>43</sup> Some instructors have innovated this practice by assigning a written briefing note or action memorandum assignment in the place of the traditional research paper. Though the briefing note is more frequently seen in the political science classroom, some historians have utilized this assignment in their history courses. Adam Chapnick, a trained historian and Professor in the Department of Defence Studies at Royal Military College, utilizes an action memorandum assignment in his undergraduate classes. Chapnick argues that the assignment is an effective learning and assessment tool, inspires critical thinking, and is difficult for students to plagiarize.<sup>44</sup> Yet

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42 Chapnick’s example tackles “How the Canadian delegation to the Imperial Conference of 1921 should respond to the British proposal to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.”

43 Daniel J. Sherman and Israel Waismel-Manor, “Get It In Writing: Using Politics to Teach Writing and Writing to Teach Politics,” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 36, no. 4 (2003): 755.

44 Chapnick, “The Action Memorandum,” 2-3; P.E. Bryden, Norman Hillmer, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, and Ryan Touhey have all employed policy writing



there are other benefits. These assignments force students to confront the difficult decisions of professional life. Fabrico H. Chagas-Castos and Sean W. Burges argue that a briefing note is effective because it “involves hard choices about what to include and what to exclude.” They also argue that it forces students to “confront their own assumptions and ... use the selectivity inherent in composing a briefing note to guide the reader towards a specific understanding of an issue.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, policy writing assignments challenge students in a professional setting and force them to make difficult, evidence-based decisions. It also forces students to make choices on courses of action they may have mixed moral values with and in so doing, provides them with an understanding of how difficult a historical moment in decision-making actually was. The difficulty of decision-making in the policy process can be easily misunderstood and understated through traditional classroom lectures. In particular, a policy writing assignment can “serve to teach about various topics” because it “gives students the opportunity to familiarize themselves with potentially any real-world issue or context.”<sup>46</sup> Policy writing connects students to the political process “like real political actors.”<sup>47</sup>

To prepare students for the policy writing simulation and integrate it into the entirety of the course, another option is to replace the course’s typical major research paper with an independent long-form policy writing assignment. For best results, the assignment should replicate the format that the

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assignments in their classrooms. Undoubtedly there are others.

45 Fabrico H. Chagas-Bastos and Sean W. Burges, “The ‘Briefing Note’ as a Pedagogical Tool for Teaching Politics and International Relations,” *Journal of Political Science Education* (2018): 8-9.

46 Vincent Druliolle, “There is No Debriefing Without Prior Briefing: Writing a Briefing Memo as a Preparatory Activity to Make the Most of the Pedagogical Potential of Simulations,” *Journal of Political Science Education* 13, no. 3 (2017): 362.

47 Smith and Boyer, “Designing In-Class Simulations,” 691.

students are expected to write in their collaborative group simulation. Like a standard history research paper, the action memorandum assignment necessitates skill-building in research and analysis, creativity, and argumentative writing. Though the format is different, combined with a workshop and a clear description in the course syllabus, the independent action memorandum writing assignment offers students additional practice to execute the format in the context of their own research topic. Ryan Touhey, a colleague of ours at St. Jerome's University, provides his students with a list of historical scenarios to write their action memorandum assignments on. These examples are easily attached to the course syllabus or shared through the course's digital online portal. Touhey offers his students examples from the nineteenth through to the twenty-first century. While this assignment fulfills the same learning objectives that a major research paper does, it also prepares students for the simulation by helping them understand the policy writing assignment before they begin the simulation. Ideally, instructors should set their deadlines early enough in the semester to ensure that they can provide students with written feedback prior to the execution of the simulation. The ideal result of this preparation is that students focus on preparing for several historical events because they already understand the four sections and their purpose. While established knowledge of the historical scenario is helpful, it is not a prerequisite. It is far more critical that students have an active understanding of the four action memorandum sections.

## **Rethinking Traditional Course Structures**

The key to establishing a successful simulation is structuring the course in a way that optimizes student success. It is imperative to explain to students at the outset the expectations for the simulation. This simulation assumes that students have practiced skills in conducting research and analysis, preferably established through course experience in history, political science, legal

studies, or sociology. In other words, it is not ideal that students undertake this simulation without a demonstrated success in an equivalent field. It is also reasonable that the instructor has expectations that students arrive in the class with a particular set of skills and knowledge, regardless of whether or not simulations are being used. It is also crucial for the instructor to establish clear learning objectives that articulate the skills and knowledge students are expected to develop throughout the course.

In this simulation on the Suez crisis, students are anticipated to cultivate skills for collaboration and policy writing, as well as further their preexisting skills in creative-thinking, research and analysis. For this simulation model it is also expected that students develop an understanding of Canadian external affairs throughout the semester. In this sense, the near end of the course is the ideal moment to situate the simulation, as students will have had time to learn and refine those skills and their knowledge base throughout the entirety of the course. Yet, students should not be expected to approach the live simulation without any prior experience. In fact, it would be unsurprising if as soon as students learn that they will be tasked with writing something other than the traditional research paper and that they will be participating in a group-based simulation, that the instructor would be met with nervous looks and second thoughts. It is important that the instructor reinforce to students that they will not be left to figure out this challenge on their own. That is why courses that employ live simulations should include instructor-led workshops that explain the specific kinds of policy writing the course demands, and replacing the traditional research paper with an independent policy writing assignment.

Instructors also need to consider the relationships between the students. As students are expected to work together in the simulation, the instructor should impose measures that produce comradery and collaboration in the classroom environment. In order for the simulation to be successful, students will have to

establish relationships with one another, as well as expectations that they can work together in a collaborative way. An innovative method to achieve this is to encourage students to give themselves and their peers grades out of ten for regular tutorial or discussion group meetings, as well as during the simulation itself. These grades should also be accompanied with explanations that make the student accountable to the grade that they assigned each of their peers. This technique prevents students from randomly assigning perfect scores to their colleagues who may not have earned them. The grades themselves are unimportant for the instructor during the tutorial meetings (where they are making their own assessments) but they may be critical to understanding how the group dynamics functioned during the simulation. Using this process throughout the course creates accountability between the students, who must rely on one another during the simulation. Thus, learning occurs before, during, and after the course components.

Scaffolding a simulation exercise in the history classroom engages students in multiple HIPs that increase student engagement and learning. It is a recognized HIP when students write and revise in a variety of different forms for interchangeable audiences.<sup>48</sup> In particular, writing intensive courses critically engage students with the information they consume to synthesize knowledge and articulate their ideas concisely. The simulation relies on the incorporation of research as another effective HIP. By engaging students through primary research material to the ends of incorporating undergraduate research, student learning is significantly enhanced. This learning is especially impactful if the research is incorporated into the instructor's own research

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48 Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*, ACRL, "High-Impact Educational Practices: A Brief Overview," <https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>; University of Waterloo Centre for Teaching Excellence, "High Impact Practices (HIPs) or Engaged Learning Practices," <https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/support/integrative-learning/high-impact-practices-hips-or-engaged-learning-practices>.

projects.<sup>49</sup> Instructors who encourage their students to engage with documents from their own primary research are actually facilitating knowledge mobilization to unprecedented degrees. Not only does this HIP have the opportunity to enhance the instructor's research agenda in a collaborative environment that promotes student engagement, but it also conceptualizes the importance of student contributions in faculty research. Collaborative assignments are also a recognized HIP. Students must work collectively to solve problems and sharpen their own understanding by communicating their work to their peers.<sup>50</sup> Thus, a collaborative live simulation of this nature exposes history students to four HIPs in a single assignment and classroom experience. So long as students are provided adequate guidance and time to reflect on the learning process, frame-working HIPs can significantly enhance student learning.<sup>51</sup>

Collaboration is an essential skill in most professional and scholarly environments.<sup>52</sup> In a professional environment, collaboration is even more important where coworkers bring diverse backgrounds, ideas, and skillsets into the workplace. Thus, history instructors have an obligation to meet this challenge. While this article has emphasized the importance of preparing students for life after an undergraduate degree in a professional environment, collaboration is just as important for those students destined for academia as well. Collaborations between researchers and scholars within and across disciplines is becoming more common and lucrative. The Government of Canada recently announced four billion dollars in research

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49 Kuh, *High-Impact Educational Practices*.

50 Ibid.

51 John E. Bands, Juan José Gutiérrez, "Undergraduate Research in International Settings: Synergies in Stacked High-Impact Practices," *Council on Undergraduate Research Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017), 25.

52 Marc Hurwitz and Samantha Hurwitz, *Leadership is Half the Story: A Fresh Look at Followership, Leadership, and Collaboration* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

funding grants that emphasize interdisciplinary international collaborative research projects.<sup>53</sup> This new stream of research grants adds to the major government funding options focused on partnerships and collaboration such as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Grants.<sup>54</sup> Imbedding collaboration into undergraduate classrooms is a vital professional skill, but it is also becoming increasingly relevant for emerging scholars. As the next generation of historians progress from undergraduate history programs through graduate studies and into the academy, collaboration, both within and between disciplines, is fundamental to a marketable research agenda. Historians must seize on these opportunities early.

This simulation exercise inherently requires a student-centered, active learning environment that is ripe for history courses. Active learning, like HIPs, has been employed across disciplinary boundaries to improve student engagement and learning.<sup>55</sup> Active, student-centered learning is one of many terms

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53 Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, "Government of Canada launches new research fund to push beyond the frontiers of Canadian science," <https://www.canada.ca/en/social-sciences-humanities-research/news/2018/12/government-of-canada-launches-new-research-fund-to-push-beyond-the-frontiers-of-canadian-science>.

54 Some examples include: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, "Partnership Development Grants," [http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/partnership\\_development\\_grants-subventions\\_partenariat\\_developpement-eng.aspx](http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programmes-programmes/partnership_development_grants-subventions_partenariat_developpement-eng.aspx); Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, "A CMHC-SSHRC Joint Initiative: Collaborative Housing Research Network," <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/nhs/a-cmhc-sshrc-joint-initiative>.

55 Robin Bell, "The Continuing Search to Find a More Effective and Less Intimidating Way to Teach Research Methods in Higher Education," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 53, no. 3 (2016), 287; Sang Joon Lee, Robert Maribe Branch, "Students' Beliefs About Teaching and Learning and Their Perceptions of Student-Centred Learning Environments," *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 55, no. 5 (2018): 585-593; J.W. Neumann, "Developing a New Framework for Conceptualizing "Student-Centered Learning," *The Educational Forum* 77 (2013): 161-175.

including authentic, situated learning, where the *it* is the learner's active participation, rather than instructor lecturing, that is the focus of the classroom that ultimately leads to the generation of new knowledge.<sup>56</sup> For example, students can be told how dire the Suez crisis was in 1956, but they will not necessarily understand why. A live simulation exercise that forces students to consider all of the domestic and foreign policy considerations in the context of the moment will make clear just how tense, complex, and fragile the events were. It will also require students to consider the other course material in new and engaging ways. This is exactly the kind of student learning that history is positioned to facilitate because it mimics the complexity of real-life bureaucratic political decision-making.

## Conclusion

Simulations and policy writing in Canadian history undergraduate courses offer students an opportunity to learn course content and experience writing documents they may encounter in professional positions. Incorporating multiple HIP into the simulation assignment and frame-working the course with introductory workshops and foundational content ensures students are prepared to grapple with the complexities of the exercise. The collaborative course structure and transparent assessment process incrementally prepares students to succeed in the simulation and the workplace challenges they imitate. Simulation assignments require students to synthesize research materials and their knowledge of course content into a single cohesive document that incorporates the themes of the course.

This article does not propose a radical departure from

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56 Debra D. Burke, "SCALE-UP! Classroom Design and Use Can Facilitate Learning," *The Law Teacher* 49, no. 2 (2015), 190; Erik Driessen and Cees Van Der Vleuten, "Matching Student Assessment to Problem-Based Learning: Lessons from Experience in a Law Faculty," *Studies in Continuing Education* 22, no. 2 (2000): 235-248.

traditional training for history undergraduates; rather this is a new approach for history instructors to assist students in building important professional skills. Policy writing encourages collaboration and allows students to explore how to apply their creativity, critical thinking, and research and analysis in a professionalized setting. Student reflection is a vital final step to the simulation experience. An instructor-facilitated reflection on the knowledge synthesis process and skills required to complete the synthesis allows students to connect their course work and simulation exercise to their academic achievements and professional aspirations. It is imperative not to overlook the opportunity for reflection as student learning happens before, during, and after assignments.

The policy writing simulation outlined here has been executed in the classroom, but it requires additional practice. Further research is needed to quantify the extent to which the simulations impact student engagement, learning, and professionalization.<sup>57</sup> History class simulations would also benefit from further work comparing different simulation structures and formats for primary analysis learning. The goal of these future studies should focus on improving the simulation delivery as well as the outcome assessments.

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<sup>57</sup> Future use of this simulation will coincide with clearance from the Office of Research Ethics and follow-up interviews with students. Unfortunately, this data is currently unavailable.