

CSL uses experiential learning to develop future security professionals

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Students at the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce, University of Kentucky, take part in a Center for Strategic Leadership sponsored International Strategic Crisis Negotiation Exercise.

April 18, 2012 -- The recent war in Iraq and the continuing effort in Afghanistan have identified necessary changes to the U.S. military skill-set: changes that have moved Soldiers into areas that were once the sole concern of State Department diplomats – namely the conduct of negotiations. In both conflicts noncommissioned and commissioned officers of all ranks increasingly found themselves in negotiation with military leaders, tribal leaders and local politicians as part of their daily mission. However, most military school curriculums do not encompass formal training in negotiations. While mastering negotiation techniques is not a core task of the military, it has become a necessary skill in the era of asymmetric warfare where winning the hearts and minds of local populations and leaders is an essential component.

For its part, the Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership has been in the vanguard of teaching negotiation skills and techniques as part of its experiential education mission.

Since 1998, CSL has run a strategic-level negotiation exercise for its International Fellows class – the International Strategic Crisis Negotiation Exercise. Since 2003 CSL has used a slightly modified version of this exercise – the International Strategic Crisis Negotiation Exercise – in partnering with universities from around the country to educate and develop future leaders.

This partnership began with Georgetown University and has expanded to include Princeton University, the University of Kentucky, Texas A&M University, the University of Texas, Syracuse University,

Penn State University, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. The rapid expansion was due in no small part to the popularity of this unique experiential learning event.

The IFSCNE and ISCNE are both experiential learning simulations set in future years against the backdrop of a United Nations Summit. The summit has been called to attempt to resolve a long-standing and potentially volatile crisis – such as the almost three decade-old frozen conflict involving Nagorno-Karabakh in the South Caucasus region, or the long-term international dispute over the island of Cyprus. Up to 80 participants are placed into roles as members of a diplomatic mission on country-teams invited to the summit. The teams are charged by their governments with negotiating an advantageous solution based on their own confidential instructions and publically and privately held positions. Students work as part of their team to negotiate the best solution in a tough, real-world stalemated conflict.

These exercises are true experiential learning events, as the ebb and flow during the two-day exercise is strictly based on student interactions and decisions – nothing is scripted. Students are asked to assume new and unfamiliar roles and positions. In these roles they develop negotiation strategy, work through a series of bi- and multilateral negotiation sessions, write communiqués and press releases and strive to arrive at a solution while protecting their national interests.

The exercise culminates with a Ministerial Meeting to report their progress to a United Nations Special Representative. Throughout the process, mentors – career diplomats, senior military officers, regional experts and university faculty – coach and teach the students as they hone their strategic thinking and negotiation skills. Of significant note is the participation of retired U.S. Ambassadors as mentors. The ambassadors are chosen because of their significant experience in these regions and conflicts or have actually been the lead U.S. negotiators in the real-world efforts to resolve these conflicts. For university students and war college Fellows alike, this experience and interaction with seasoned diplomatic practitioners is a priceless component, and help make these exercises unique learning opportunities.

The U.S. government’s shift to more “full spectrum foreign policy” highlights the need for full spectrum national security practitioners – foreign service, economic, cultural, military and international law professionals who are adept at navigating the demanding 21st century international environment. The U.S. Army War College and the Center for Strategic Leadership are well-positioned as valuable partners in the development of these practitioners – both military and civilian.