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# Students Role Play Stakeholder Positions To Simulate Policy Debates

## Teaching Strategy

Professor Parthasarathy teaches an interdisciplinary graduate course that integrates sustainability into public policy from a global, comparative perspective. Specifically, the focus is on investigating the lessons that can be learned from different countries' attempts to address global issues in sustainability through public policy.

This course is structured to foster interdisciplinary dialogues based on public policy case studies. Carefully selected international cases engage students in real-world challenges and policy debates. Cases include stem cell research in Germany, climate change in China, dam building in India, and toxic chemical pollutants in Canada. Role-playing techniques facilitate students' engagement with the cases. Instructor-formed, multidisciplinary groups are challenged during class to develop political strategy memos for a scenario. Students have ten minutes to define position statements and then present them as an expert panel, defending challenges to their position from peers.

Students also work in multidisciplinary teams on capstone projects. Groups select a controversial policy debate, and each member of the group must research and play the role of a stakeholder. Teams must represent the full range of stakeholders, forcing students to engage with extreme and marginalized positions. Team members produce stakeholder memos, press releases, and strategy memos detailing plans for successfully creating change. Based on their memos, teams creatively role play debates among the stakeholders for classmates, simulating interactions in real-world public forums. Audience members play the part of constituents from the general public and must submit discussion questions in advance based on the memos and press releases from each group. This process of embodying stakeholders requires students to think about the complexity of evidence and motives in the policy world.

These experiences help students develop their abilities to analyze policy effectively, communicate with stakeholders, and strategically navigate complex political environments. They also prepare students to collaborate effectively within multidisciplinary and multicultural professional networks.

## Examples of Teaching and/or Student Artifacts



Students Role Playing Marginalized Stakeholders  
in International Public Policy Debates

## Faculty Perspectives

*"You can't solve any of these problems with one discipline alone. To say something is a purely technical, economic, social, OR political problem is to ruin the solution before you have even tried to solve the problem. It circumscribes our options far too early in the process of developing solutions."*

*"There is a lot going on outside the US in terms of sustainability that we don't necessarily know about or think about. It is important to train students to think about the lessons we can draw from other places. What do we need to think about before assuming something that works elsewhere will work here in the US?"*

## Student Perspectives

*"In this class, you have to develop a broader perspective. You are looking at such a diverse array of issues, not just directly consuming resources. It's the second and third order effects, and the chain of effects, that need to be considered when creating policy."*

*"If you start looking deeper, it's not just about sustainability, but about who is assessing it and their role in the process."*