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January 2019

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Fiona McGaughey  
*University of Western Australia*

Lisa Hartley  
*Curtin University*

Susan Banki  
*University of Sydney*

Paul Duffill  
*Rikkyo University*

Matthew Stubbs  
*University of Adelaide*

*See next page for additional authors*

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## 'Finally an academic approach that prepares you for the real world': simulations for human rights skills development in higher education

### Abstract

Effectively addressing violations of human rights requires dealing with complex, multi-spatial problems involving actors at local, national and international levels. It also calls for a diverse range of inter-disciplinary skills. How can tertiary educators prepare students for such work? This study evaluates the coordinated implementation of human rights simulations at seven Australian universities. Based on quantitative and qualitative survey data from 252 students, we find they report that human rights simulation exercises develop their skills. In particular, students report that they feel better able to analyse and productively respond to human rights violations, and that they have a greater awareness of the inter-disciplinary skills required to do so. Overall, this study finds that simulations are a valid, scalable, classroom-based work integrated learning experience that can be adapted for students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, across a range of disciplines and in both face-to-face and online classes.

### Publication Details

McGaughey, F., Hartley, L., Banki, S., Duffill, P., Stubbs, M., Orchard, P., Rice, S., Berg, L. & Kerdo, P. (2019). 'Finally an academic approach that prepares you for the real world': simulations for human rights skills development in higher education. *Human Rights Education Review*, 2 (1), 70-93.

### Authors

Fiona McGaughey, Lisa Hartley, Susan Banki, Paul Duffill, Matthew Stubbs, Philip C. Orchard, Simon Rice, Laurie Berg, and Peggy Kerdo

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Fiona McGaughey, University of Western Australia

Lisa Hartley, Curtin University

Susan Banki, University of Sydney

Paul Duffil, Rikkyo University

Matthew Stubbs, University of Adelaide

Phil Orchard, University of Wollongong

Simon Rice, University of Sydney

Laurie Berg, University of Sydney

Paghona Peggy Kerdo, Kerdo Legal

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## **'Finally an academic approach that prepares you for the real world': simulations for human rights skills development in higher education**

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3093>

ISSN 2535-5406

Fiona McGaughey, University of Western Australia, Australia

Lisa Hartley, Curtin University, Australia

Susan Banki, University of Sydney, Australia

Paul Duffil, Rikkyo University, Japan

Matthew Stubbs, University of Adelaide, Australia

Phil Orchard, University of Wollongong, Australia

Simon Rice, University of Sydney, Australia

Laurie Berg, University of Sydney, Australia

Paghona Peggy Kerdo, Kerdo Legal, Australia

[fiona.mcgaughey@uwa.edu.au](mailto:fiona.mcgaughey@uwa.edu.au)

[lisa.hartley@curtin.edu.au](mailto:lisa.hartley@curtin.edu.au)

[susan.banki@sydney.edu.au](mailto:susan.banki@sydney.edu.au)

[duffill@rikkyo.ac.jp](mailto:duffill@rikkyo.ac.jp)

[matthew.stubbs@adelaide.edu.au](mailto:matthew.stubbs@adelaide.edu.au)

[orchardp@uow.edu.au](mailto:orchardp@uow.edu.au)

[simon.rice@sydney.edu.au](mailto:simon.rice@sydney.edu.au)

[laurie.berg@uts.edu.au](mailto:laurie.berg@uts.edu.au)

[peggyk@migration-lawyers.net.au](mailto:peggyk@migration-lawyers.net.au)

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### **1. Introduction**

Teaching in vocational fields at tertiary level aims to develop students' skills, in order to prepare them for the workplace. This is certainly the case in human rights and social justice teaching. The applied contexts in which skills are developed also provide a rich environment for deep inquiry into the substantive issues of a course. Experiential learning and work-integrated-learning (WIL), with these concurrent educational outcomes of enhanced skills and deeper learning, are common in cognate

fields such as social work and law, which often include field work, practicums, clinics, and simulated activities. However, for education in social justice and human rights, the broad range of domestic and international employment options, and the complexity of advocacy responses to human rights violations, requires a diverse and interdisciplinary set of skills. Internships and other WIL opportunities that engage students directly with industry can be useful but, from an institutional perspective, can be a logistical challenge and may omit the opportunity for guided reflection on student learning. Students also require some classroom-based preparation before engaging with complex human rights violations. This presents a challenge for educators who must grapple with how to offer experiential learning that offers both deeper learning and enhanced skills.

This study aimed to find a solution to this challenge. It developed a range of social justice simulations across seven Australian universities and surveyed students to ascertain whether they perceived that specific skill development had been achieved. We also sought their general feedback on the simulation exercises in order to inform our future pedagogy. Our intent was to establish whether, as classroom-based activities, the simulations offer both an active, experiential learning technique for students, and a scalable and logistically manageable WIL solution for universities.

In this article, we begin in Section Two by providing the context of the study; we discuss the skills required for human rights work and outline what the existing literature says about simulations in tertiary teaching. Section Three then outlines the method we used to collect the evaluation data and Section Four describes each of the seven case studies. The case studies have been made available, together with teaching resources (Banki et al., 2016a, 2016b) that can be used by other academics in tertiary human rights courses. In Section Five, we synthesise the empirical results and discuss our broader findings, before offering our conclusions in Section Six, which includes lessons learnt and opportunities for further development and research.

## **2. Human Rights Skills and Simulations**

In approaching this study, we reflected on the skills that are important for students who may enter the world of work as human rights professionals. Although human rights education and work is sometimes seen to be dominated by lawyers, there is now a keen interest in fostering human rights skills across disciplines, and, concomitantly, in adopting an interdisciplinary approach to tackling human rights issues. Ife (2012) and Briskman and Ife (2018) have championed the essential role to be played by social workers and community workers in human rights protection, Gready (2008) has analysed rights-based approaches to development, and Miller (2010) suggests that the language of rights has been taken up in many non-legal sectors including public relations, fundraising and communications. Therefore, we selected a range of courses within which to trial our simulations, broadly spanning domestic law, international law, international relations, and the humanities.

Identifying human rights skills of relevance to these diverse academic disciplines is complex. In any case, skills required for human rights work may be subjective. Coysh argues that both human rights and education are multifaceted and, as such, the way that human rights are conceptualised will determine the types of educational practice and processes engaged in (2014, p. 89). For this project, we particularly built on the previous work of Banki et al. (2013), which establishes the following key principles for tertiary human rights education: it should develop skills

that complement legal approaches; it should provide students with the tools to grasp both the root causes and the multi-spatial nature of human rights violations and associated systems of remedies; and it should involve collaborative opportunities for skills practice.

This approach resonates with previous scholarship on human rights skills. For example, O’Flaherty and Ulrich’s research with human rights field officers found that the officers identified their roles and functions as: ‘monitoring the human rights situation, reporting human rights abuses, assisting local actors through capacity building and partnerships, and providing assistance and human rights-based advice to other international actors’ (2010, p.15). O’Flaherty and Ulrich note that human rights officers may well locate their primary knowledge base in another discipline, but argue that every professional in the field ‘needs at least a basic understanding of all subject categories of human rights law and, in particular, of treaty provisions for the protection of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights’ (2010, p. 12). Furthermore, they stress the importance of localising formal knowledge within the local societal norms, politics, gender roles and socioeconomic situation (O’Flaherty and Ulrich, 2010, p.14). Coysh also concludes that although human rights education should be learned in terms of different contexts, cultures and peoples, these particular and specific instances must not be isolated from the global social, political and economic forces that shape and influence them (Coysh, 2014, p.114).

The result of our analysis of previous scholarship, our own research, and our combined experience as both educators and practitioners, led to a synthesis of these findings into the survey questions in Table 2. These questions encapsulate the essential core skills: understanding the complex nature of the legal, institutional, social and cultural dimensions of rights violations; and understanding the multi-spatial nature of rights violations. There were a number of other skills areas: analysing and productively responding to the interests and motivations of the actors involved; having an awareness of relevant evidence and practical data; and understanding the role of awareness raising. Finally, being able to effectively communicate about human rights issues, and developing group work and collaboration skills, were also identified as core skills.

It has been established that simulation exercises can bridge the ‘knowing-doing gap’ (Banki et al., 2013) and that they can combine academic learning and civic action as a ‘valued hybrid: knowledgeable action’ (Parker & Lo, 2016, p. 227). For this project, classroom-based simulation exercises were chosen as a way of developing these interdisciplinary skills. Simulations are complex role plays, increasingly used as pedagogical tools at the tertiary level (Usherwood, 2014) in order to provide an authentic learning environment in the classroom. The intent is to develop ‘work-readiness’ in students through skills development (see for example Crossley-Frolick, 2010; Taylor, 2012), and to do so using active learning techniques. The quote from a student, used in the title of this article – ‘Finally an academic approach that prepares you for the real world’ – resonates with literature that has identified skills development for human rights advocacy as a gap in human rights courses (McElwee, Hall, Liechty, & Garber, 2009). Banki et al. (2013, p. 318) have joined a number of educators who have begun to ‘bridge the “knowing-doing” gap’ by using simulation exercises. Furthermore, Hartley and McGaughey (2018) have found that simulations are a worthwhile pedagogical tool for both face-to-face and online human rights teaching at tertiary level, contributing to deeper learning and skills development.

Other previous studies on simulations have also indicated that they can contribute to skills development. For example, with regard to teaching international relations, Simpson and Kaussler (2009) found that simulations contribute to the development of key communication and analytical skills. There has also been a long history of Model UN simulations, which can provide students with key vocational skills (Obendorf & Randerson, 2013). Similarly, for law students, moot courts are a well-established simulation exercise to develop oral and written skills, 'to be successful not only in cases brought before their home courts, but in front of international tribunals and other organs' (Grossman, Martin, Rodríguez Pinzón, 2008). Many previous studies, however, are unlike the current study; they have looked at simulation exercises focused on only one vocational area (e.g. law) or on a more narrow set of skills and tend not to function on multiple spatial levels.

There has been criticism of the move towards skills development. Griffin (2014) argues that, when balancing theory and practice in the postgraduate international human rights law curriculum, the pendulum must swing towards teaching international law and theory. Across tertiary education in general, Daniels and Brooker (2014) argue that this trend has resulted in a problematic shift of emphasis from the student experience to the work-readiness of the graduate, meaning that the educational focus is on students' future identity as an employee rather than on their current identity as a student. We were aware of this potential risk and reflect on it in the discussion section.

Since we did prioritise skills development, the simulation exercises were based on principles of active learning whereby, in addition to the presentation of knowledge, students' opportunities for practice and particularly production are stressed. This approach, known as 'PPP' has been outlined by researchers such as Crookes and Chaudron (1991), Brown (2001) and Gavilán Galindo (2008), within the fields of intercultural communication and communicative language teaching. It has been applied widely in these fields and also been used, more recently, in social justice simulation pedagogy (Duffill, 2018; Duffill, Lambourne, Faire, & Manirakiza, 2018; Banki et al., 2013).

Within the PPP model, during Presentation the teacher presents the target knowledge, skills or content to students. In Practice, this target content is typically divided into smaller chunks and practiced in low-context, low-pressure simulated situations where students have time to prepare and carefully practice and receive feedback from the teacher. Production 'creates realistic situations in the learning environment where students are free to experiment with the application of their knowledge' (Banki et al., 2013, p. 323). During production, students re-integrate elements of the target content through realistic activities carried out in real time. Production allows for creative experimentation and integration of past learning and personal interests with the new content. Production activities also typically promote collaboration and team work between students who may have different approaches to learning and the content; each simulation case reported in this paper culminated in a group role play - an example of this aspect of production.

The PPP approach has not escaped criticism, particularly of reductive, rigid, purist interpretations of the theory that have seemed to reduce teaching and learning to a linear three-step process (Criado, 2013; Ellis & Shintani, 2014). However, the approach does not require adherence to a linear three-stage process, and different stages can be deliberately re-cycled to enhance student learning, respond to students' emergent learning needs, adapt to different learning contexts, and allow greater

flexibility in learning activities (Brereton, Lesley, Schaefer & Young, 2018; Criado, 2013; Ellis & Shintani, 2014, pp. 120-121; Hurling, 2012).

Following production, each simulation case study reported on here concluded with review and reflection activities, which could be termed the Probe stage, forming the 4Ps model (Duffill, 2018; Duffill et al., 2018). In Probe activities students are encouraged to critically reflect on their own learning -both process and outcome - and to consolidate what they have learnt. Probe exercises can help students link their experience in the production activity back to theory and concepts introduced earlier in the course, thereby bridging theory and practice. Rust and Froud argue that of all of the graduate attributes, the critical one for sustainable employment is critical self-awareness and personal literacy (Rust & Froud, 2011). Debriefing was an essential component of each simulation, giving students the opportunity to step out of their roleplay roles and reflect critically on their learning experiences.

A criticism of simulation-based pedagogy and associated scholarship is that the efficacy of simulation exercises is 'generally untested in any rigorous fashion' (Krain & Lantis, 2006, p. 400). Therefore, robust, empirical data on their efficacy is essential. Specifically in regard to social justice, an earlier study within one university (Banki et al., 2013) provided preliminary evidence for the positive impact of social justice simulations on skills development but recommended more empirical data. Our study is the first comprehensive analysis of student perceptions on the use of simulation exercises and their contribution to their learning and skills development in human rights tertiary education. It has a broad scope: seven universities are involved, with survey data from 252 students enrolled in law and humanities courses, at both postgraduate and undergraduate level. This provides a robust dataset. In analysing this data, we reflect on the benefits, limitations, and utility of using simulation exercises to bridge the 'knowing-doing gap' (Banki et al., 2013, p. 318).

### **3. Method**

#### ***Procedure***

Face-to-face students were generally given a paper and pen version of the survey tool by each unit coordinator directly after they participated in the simulation, while online students were sent the survey instrument electronically (students in Case Study G – see Section 4 -undertook a face-to-face activity but completed their survey online). Students were provided with brief information about the survey and then completed a consent form and the survey. Only those who consented to participate completed the survey. Ethics approval was sought and granted (University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Approval 2013/1082).

#### ***Survey***

The survey had questions relating to skills for responding to rights violations, as well as open-ended questions about the simulation. Each of these will be discussed below. The extent to which skills were developed through participating in the simulation was measured by nine questions constructed specifically for this study. The questions can be found in Table 2. Students rated the questions on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree, where 6 = not applicable). In addition to these nine questions, students completed five open-ended questions relating to their experience of the simulation: 'What aspects of the simulation did you find most useful to learning?'; 'What exercises were particularly useful, or not useful



to building your skills?'; 'Please comment on your personal experience of the group work and on the utility of the group work component of the simulation'; 'In what ways would you suggest the simulation could be improved?'; and 'If a friend asked you to sum up your impressions of participating in the simulation, what would you tell them?' One open-ended question asked how participation in the simulation contributed to the students' personal and professional development and a final open-ended question asked students to provide any other comments about the simulation. A constructivist approach was used to thematically analyse the responses to the open-ended questions, using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Students' actual skills attainment specifically due to the simulation was not assessed; the data is entirely reliant on self-reporting and one limitation of this is response bias (Lavrakas, 2008). However, Fielding argues that once methodological, measurement and selection biases are accommodated, self-report data is essentially robust (Fielding, 2006).

### ***Participants***

All students enrolled in each of the classes were required to participate in the simulation exercise, as it was incorporated into the curriculum and assessment tasks. The classes were both undergraduate and postgraduate and ranged in size, but most classes had around 30 students; one had 76 and another had 379. Participation in the survey was voluntary and of a total of 636 students, 252 students completed it. 142 filled in the online survey tool and 110 filled in the paper survey tool. Thus there was a 39.6226 per cent participation rate in the evaluation. 172 participants were female (68.2539 per cent), 74 male, and six did not respond to the gender question. A total of 56 postgraduate students and 196 undergraduate students responded. The average age of the participants was 24.044 years. 18 of the students were international students, the rest (229) were domestic students.

## **4. The Simulation Case Studies**

The simulations engaged a range of disciplines, recreating the multi-spatial nature of human rights violations and the diversity of local and global actors involved and relationships between them (see for example Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Merry, 2006; Simmons, 2009). Each simulation was based on a case study of a specific human rights issue: disability rights, Indigenous rights, women's rights, sovereignty claims, responses to mass atrocities, migrant rights, and refugee rights. The simulations were designed to develop the core human rights skills we discuss in Section 2 above; however, this had to be balanced with meeting the particular learning outcomes for each course. This resulted in bespoke case studies which allowed us to test whether a range of different simulation exercises could successfully develop the same core set of skills. As well as seeking the same core skills development as an outcome, a number of shared techniques were integrated into the case studies. Each case study began with a 'Trigger' – a specific event requiring responses from a range of actors – and culminated in a group Role Play that simulated a key event or events in the case study.

Drawing on a range of activities that are central to social justice action (Banki et al., 2016a, 2016b), the simulation required students to work in groups and engage in various exercises. The exercises varied slightly, depending on the specifics of each case study, but commonly used activities included:

- Brainstorming Data, which involved thinking critically about the role of information in understanding and addressing human rights issues. This exercise is followed by identifying, analysing and applying data to the issue;
- Tactical Mapping, which involved visually plotting the actors and relationships that comprise a specific situation;
- Fishbowl Interviews, which involved thinking about, preparing for, and practising interviews in order to develop skills in strategic thinking and information analysis;
- Media Communication Exercises such as press conferences and press releases, which involved considering how to frame arguments effectively and present information to target audiences;
- Litigation Tactics, which involved using the courts as a transparent and impartial mechanism for accountability; and finally,
- Role Play, all simulations included a role play – it was the culminating exercise of a human rights simulation and gave students the chance to put into practice the principles and skills that they had learned. The role plays generally revolved around a meeting or series of meetings where all of the actors and student groups were present and required interaction to negotiate, advocate, debate or lobby.

These activities are based on principles that recognise the performative aspect of simulated learning and the need for a degree of structure in simulations. (Banki et al., 2016a, 2016b). We provide here a brief description of each case study. Educators interested in adopting the simulations for their own teaching can use the case studies and exercise manual published for this purpose (Banki et al., 2016a, 2016b).

Case Study	University	Topic	Year Level	Cohort Size	Extent of Simulation
<b>A</b>	University of Sydney	Self-Determination in West Papua	Postgraduate	30	Two 3-hour classes plus one full day
<b>B</b>	Australian National University (ANU)	Northern Territory Emergency Response	Upper undergraduate elective	31	60-90 minutes activity each week for eight weeks
<b>C</b>	Curtin University	Women's Rights in Australia	Postgraduate	35 (9 face-to-face, 26 online)	Face-to-face: 1-hour classes over two weeks plus one 3-hour session Online: One 75 minute session
<b>D</b>	University of Technology Sydney	Offshore Processing of Asylum Seekers	Upper undergraduate elective	22	Two full days

<b>E</b>	La Trobe University	Dog-Whistle Politics and Asylum Seekers	Upper undergraduate elective	35	90 minutes per week for 12 weeks plus two 4-hour sessions
<b>F</b>	University of Queensland	Responding to Mass Atrocities	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year undergraduate Elective	76	Three 1-hour tutorials
<b>G</b>	University of Adelaide	Vision-Impaired Voting in South Australia	1 <sup>st</sup> Year undergraduate compulsory	379	One 2-hour lecture plus one 1-hour tutorial

**Table 1: Case Studies at a glance**

*a) Peacemakers and warriors: Self-determination in West Papua, Indonesia<sup>1</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken in a postgraduate unit entitled The Dynamics of Human Rights Violations, with 30 students. The simulation used the real situation of a Papuan university student killed by the Indonesian military as a Trigger to elicit responses from local, national, regional, and international activists and advocates. Students, playing the roles of these stakeholders, prepared for and formulated responses at a simulated meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR). The simulation aimed to develop students' knowledge of the current situation in West Papua and their awareness of sociological principles as applied to social movement theory.

*b) Human rights law and the 'Northern Territory Emergency Response'<sup>2</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken by 31 students in an undergraduate unit entitled Human Rights Law in Australia. It analysed the human rights implications of the various measures of social control that were introduced in the Northern Territory by the Commonwealth Government as the 'Northern Territory Emergency Response' ('NTER'). It used the real situation of various Indigenous groups as a Trigger to elicit responses from students playing the roles of those affected groups. Students prepared for and formulated submissions to a simulated independent panel convened to review the NTER. Several exercises, including Tactical Mapping, Mobilising, and Litigation Tactics, aimed to raise student awareness of the nature of human rights and the problems associated with their embodiment in law. It also enabled students to engage with the legal, procedural, and institutional means available for protecting and promoting human rights in Australia and the relationship between Australia and the United Nations human rights machinery.

*c) Women's rights in Australia: A United Nations' treaty body simulation<sup>3</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken in a postgraduate unit entitled 'Human Rights Instruments and Institutions', and 35 students - nine face-to-face and 26 online - participated. It focused on issues of violence against women and Indigenous women's rights and used as a case study the review of Australia by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women ('CEDAW Committee') as a Trigger to elicit responses from NGOs and Australian government delegations. Students, playing the roles of these stakeholders, prepared for and

formulated responses at a simulated session of the UN Committee on CEDAW in Geneva. Exercises such as Tactical Mapping, Analysing Data Sources and Press Release were used both in-class (for students attending face-to-face classes) and online (for external/distance students) so that students could apply the international human rights system to promote human rights.

*d) Offshore processing of asylum seekers: A multilateral human rights negotiation<sup>4</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken in an undergraduate elective unit entitled 'Refugee Law and Practice', and 22 face-to-face students participated. It was about the human rights implications of Australia's processing of asylum seekers in a detention centre on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea. In the context of that real situation, it used an invented asylum seeker's plight as the Trigger to elicit responses from a range of actors, including government representatives, corporate detention contractors, and human rights advocates. Students, playing the roles of these stakeholders, prepared for and formulated responses to several disputes between these actors at a simulated broad-ranging multilateral negotiation. Through several exercises, including Tactical Mapping, a Press Conference, and Negotiation, students engaged with the interaction between domestic policies and international human rights law and had to devise, articulate, and integrate legal and non-legal strategies to achieve an outcome.

*e) Bridging the gap: Teaching about the impact of dog-whistle politics on the implementation of law and the effect on asylum seekers and immigrants<sup>5</sup>*

This simulation was run alongside an undergraduate unit entitled 'Clinical Legal Education' that assists disadvantaged people with their immigration issues. This course studies immigration law in depth in the classroom and runs immigration cases in the clinic. The purpose of the simulation was to give the 35 enrolled students a deeper understanding of the issues and influences involved in a complex policy situation - the formulation and implementation of immigration law. The simulation used as a Trigger a current amendment before the Federal Senate Committee for Legal and Constitutional Affairs, namely the abolition of the complementary protection system, proposed by the Migration Amendment (Regaining Control Over Australia's Protection Obligations) Bill 2013 (Cth). Students played the roles of State and non-State actors and used exercises such as Tactical Mapping and Role Play.

*f) Responding to mass atrocities: The role of the United Nations Security Council<sup>6</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken in an undergraduate unit entitled 'Human Security and the Responsibility to Protect', and 76 students participated. The simulation concerned the international community's response to allegations of mass atrocities, using the fictional Case Study of a country - 'Zanda' - emerging from civil war. The government was accused of engaging in mass atrocities, and the United Nations Security Council (the Council) placed Zanda on its agenda. The Council debate served as a Trigger to elicit responses from four groups: the Zandian government; the Zandian opposition and local civil society; international NGOs; and member states on the Council itself. Students, playing roles in each of these four groups, prepared strategies and negotiated with other groups to influence the Council on whether it should proceed with a resolution on Zanda and, if so, the language and outcomes to be included. Using exercises such as Tactical Mapping and Negotiations, students

developed an understanding of mass atrocities and the mechanisms through which the international community can respond to them.

*g) Is justice blind? Vision-impaired voting in South Australia<sup>7</sup>*

This simulation was undertaken in an undergraduate compulsory first-year law course entitled ‘Principles of Public Law’, with 379 students. The simulation, about disability rights, used a dramatisation of the real situation of a blind person in South Australia being denied a secret ballot as a Trigger to elicit responses from government and NGO actors at international, national, and state levels. Students, playing the roles of Human Rights Watch, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Blind Citizens Australia and the Government of South Australia, prepared for and formulated responses which they delivered in the form of posters and oral presentations at a simulated voting accessibility forum. The simulation used exercises such as Tactical Mapping and Role Play to develop students’ understandings of human rights law and social justice issues in the real world. It introduced them to some of the practical considerations and advocacy skills that are necessary in order to translate human rights law into social justice outcomes.

## 5. Findings and Discussion

This section reports on both the quantitative and qualitative data. These have been combined, as the qualitative data gathered from student text responses to the survey provides further insights into the quantitative findings. Some specific themes emerged from the analysis of the qualitative survey data; these are discussed below. There was consistency in the themes, despite the fact that there were differences in the simulation exercises used, the cohort (undergraduate / postgraduate), mode of delivery, teaching staff, subject area, class size and so forth.

When reporting on the qualitative data we provide limited information about the specific respondent(s), for a range of reasons. Human research ethics approval required us to ensure the anonymity of students and to de-identify any responses. This means that because some class sizes were small it is not possible to link quotes to specific cohorts without risking identification. In any event, since we have adopted a thematic analysis report, individual quotes used for illustrative purposes are not unique to any one course.

For all quantitative questions, combining the survey data from all of the case studies, students rated the simulations above the mid-point (3) on a scale of 1-5 on all nine evaluation questions, as shown in Table 2 below. This indicates that a wide variety of types of simulation activity for social justice and human rights used with various student cohorts made a contribution to student learning and skills development.

Skills for responding to rights violations	<i>M(SD)</i>
1) I have a better understanding of the complex nature of the legal, institutional, social and cultural dimensions of rights violations	4.22(0.85)
2) I have a greater awareness of the multi-spatial nature of rights violations (that is, that rights violations can be considered at local, national, and international levels)	4.23(0.79)

3) I am better able to analyse and productively respond to the different interests and motivations of various actors associated with rights violations	4.17(0.80)
4) I have a greater awareness of the sorts of evidence and practical data that are necessary to make a convincing case that a particular rights violation requires action	4.05(0.96)
5) I am better able to understand the role public awareness raising plays in responding to rights violations	4.14(0.87)
6) I have improved my ability to effectively communicate about human rights/social justice issues	4.03(0.97)
7) I am more aware of the skills that will help me address the complex real-world problems associated with rights violations.	4.21(0.86)
8) Being involved in a practical simulation helped me gain skills relating to human rights and other social justice issues that I could not gain in a conventional academic classroom	4.15(1.01)
9) The group work component of the simulation helped me develop skills of collaboration	3.81(1.16)

**Table 2. Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD) for all the quantitative items. Notes: All scales ranged from 1-5.**

*i. Theme one: the complex and multi-spatial nature of human rights violations*  
 Agreement was strongest in relation to an understanding of the complex nature of the legal, institutional, social and cultural dimensions of rights violations and the multi-spatial nature of rights violations (i.e., that rights violations can be considered at local, national, and international levels) (Questions 1 and 2). This type of understanding is arguably the most challenging with which to engage in the classroom; we might rather expect it to emerge from internships or other types of WIL. That students were positive in their responses to these questions suggests that the simulation exercises succeeded in creating an authentic learning environment in which to begin to bridge the knowing-doing gap.

This was also a strong theme emerging from the qualitative data (based on frequency in NVivo coding). Students were struck by the awareness they developed of the various actors or stakeholders - their agendas, motivations, the relationships between them. For example: 'Made me consider more groups of people and their values'. This sometimes aligned with their awareness of how to engage with such actors through lobbying, negotiation and other communication skills. Several students referred to the benefits of watching, listening and learning from others in the dynamic environment created through the simulation. The conscientisation (Freire, 1970) experienced by some students seemed to galvanise them towards a career in social justice:

'Made me reflect on the reality that comes with working with human rights and also on which areas I really want to do for a job.'

An important result for some students was that they became more aware of the limitations of social justice work and international and domestic human rights law. Some described this as a 'cynicism' they had developed, and a few felt less inclined to

pursue social justice-related employment, or employment in an international organisation or government:

Simulation taught me to be cynical about human rights in Australia and as such I don't feel like I can really find a career that effects meaningful change, especially given conflicting stakeholder priorities.

It left me feeling quite cynical about change within the UN Security Council.

It taught me how resistant bureaucracy is to radical change and how working in bureaucracy would not be conducive to my action-orientated personality.

The awareness of others' roles, motivations and developing skills to work with them also links to another theme discussed below – that of group work.

Working collaboratively and group was particularly useful – not just our individual groups but as a group as a whole (sic). It assisted me in localising the complexities of civil society relationships.

Some students reflected that the simulation had given them more insight into employment options. For some, it had helped them make decisions about their future career or they felt better equipped to embark on a career as a result, for example:

Made me more engaged and hopeful for career prospects in this area. Made it seem like an achievable goal.

A role working with CEDAW would be a dream job. It was exciting to imagine.

*ii. Theme two: analysing and responding to human rights violations and acquiring skills*

Table 2 shows, critically for our purposes, that students also responded positively regarding the impact of the simulations on their ability to analyse and respond to human rights violations. They strongly agreed that the simulations enabled them to acquire skills they could not have gained in a traditional classroom (questions 7 and 8). Creating a WIL environment that contributes to the acquisition of skills is a primary driver for the use of simulation exercises.

Although still positive, there was a slightly weaker student response to two parts of the survey: 'I have a greater awareness of the sorts of evidence and practical data that are necessary to make a convincing case that a particular rights violation requires action' (question 4); and 'I have improved my ability to effectively communicate about human rights/social justice issues' (question 6). These are areas for improvement in future simulations.

Skills development and the practical and/or useful nature of the simulation exercise was the second most common theme in the qualitative survey data. Many students found the simulation exercise overall to be 'practical', 'useful', or they commented that they had felt engaged in a realistic scenario. Within this theme, there were a number of specific subthemes. Some of these emerged throughout the qualitative data while others were responses to specific questions: 'What aspects of the Simulation did you find most useful to your learning?' and 'What exercises were

particularly useful or not useful to building your skills?'. When reflecting on their learning and skills acquisition, the most common type of activity that students mentioned as beneficial was formal interaction in the form of presentations or meetings: for example, presenting at a regional level to ASEAN, at an international level to a UN Committee, or a domestic level to a panel on the Northern Territory Emergency Response. The learning and skills development included improving presentation and work readiness skills, and developing a more realistic understanding of how such mechanisms work. For example:

Conference presentations are new to me, and public speaking is not my strongest point so this was particularly useful for building my skills. The positive feedback I received also boosted my confidence and motivation to undertake exercises like this again!

It gave me an appreciation of how much work goes on behind the scenes to achieve awareness of key human rights issues, and the reporting processes with UN treaty bodies. Prior to this I considered these review processes somewhat intimidating and perhaps too bureaucratic. Now equipped with a better understanding of the processes I am confident I will be able to participate proficiently in actual treaty body reviews in the future.

Related to the presentation activities, there were also frequent references to the benefit of having to respond to questions. Many students felt that this developed their responsiveness, flexibility and communication skills. When asked 'What aspects of the Simulation did you find most useful to your learning?' there were several comments like these:

Being put on the spot. Having to improvise responses based on existing knowledge.

Public speaking and being able to think and articulate rationale and reasoning on my feet.

Hearing the concerns from the panel and expanding ideas in response.

We posit that these are skills that students use to develop their extracurricular lives even before they leave campus, as they engage in communications with peers and educators to offer suggestions or make changes at policy and social levels. Other specific activities that were quite commonly cited in the responses in terms of skills development were lobbying, interviewing and tactical mapping. In particular, students offered several comments that suggested that their learning was tied not only to future work plans, but also to important 'soft skills' such as communication, understanding the nature of power, and negotiation skills.

I learnt how there are more efficient way of getting messages across to those who are in power.

I understand now why peace negotiations take so long to achieve anything, because it is a lot more complex than just deciding to end the violence and



sign a peace agreement. It requires a lot of back and forth negotiation... It really made me rethink how I looked at political decision-making and international conflict negotiations. It helped more professional development, because normally in the class room I don't get to test more negotiation skills or use the knowledge from the course in a life-like situation.

The simulation affirmed that I want to work in the nongovernment sector. It was useful to practice negotiation skills, which I think are broadly applicable.

Academic skills development also featured in the feedback, with several students referring to the development of their researching and writing skills through the simulation exercise.

*iii. Theme three: group work*

One area of notably weaker student response in the survey was in relation to the question 'The group work component of the simulation helped me develop skills of collaboration' (question 9). Group work was an integral part of all the simulations; it is an integral part of human rights advocacy in the real world and so key to creating simulation exercises for teaching social justice (Banki et al., 2013, p. 332). Despite its academic benefits for students, there are challenges associated with group work (Lavy, 2017; Nilson, 2016, pp. 179-189). Student resistance to group work is common in higher education, so these figures are not surprising – the response in our data remains positive, but notably less so, and the standard deviation is greater for this question than any other in our survey.

In the qualitative data, group work was the third most common theme and in fact, overall, positive comments about group work were more prevalent than negative comments. This is interesting as Banki et al. (2013) found the qualitative feedback on group work to have been 'about evenly split' (p. 331). Many students when asked 'What aspects of the Simulation did you find most useful to your learning?' mentioned group work. For example:

I enjoyed the lobbying task and collaborative aspects. Working as a group and bouncing ideas off each other was very useful.

Students were asked in the survey 'Please comment on your personal experience of the group work and on the utility of the group work component of the simulation'. Again, responses were mixed, although quite positive overall; for example:

Loved working in a group – it both developed skills I forgot I had and slightly alleviated the stress of addressing the simulation alone.

It was great to work with the same group... to know the group and go in-depth with ideas and discussion.

Other students did not have such a positive experience of group work, stating that it was 'challenging', 'did not work', 'unnecessary' and that some group members did not contribute or take the exercise seriously, a particular concern in assessment tasks. Examples include:

My personal experience was not positive. I think it's unfair that all group members are awarded the same mark, as some group members did not participate...

I did essentially the whole thing as no other group member wanted to put in the effort for something worth 5%.

Some of the most negative comments about group work came from students in the large undergraduate class (University of Adelaide), and the students involved in the online simulation (Curtin University), suggesting that some teaching environments are more conducive to group work than others. Students involved in the online simulation, for example, highlighted frustration arising from a lack of engagement by other group members in that they were not responding to other member's posts in their online group platform or contributing their thoughts and ideas. Solutions to this may include having more active participation by teaching staff in the online group work, particularly in the early stages (see Hartley and McGaughey, 2018, for more discussion on the challenges and possible solutions for online group work). The large undergraduate class undertook a relatively short simulation in a cohort of first-year students probably relatively unaccustomed to university group work. It may be that greater emphasis on building group work skills and a more extended simulation experience would address some of these concerns.

Finally, some students acknowledged that group work can be challenging but is essential nonetheless – 'Group work is part of most professional working environments, so understand the importance'.

*iv. Theme four: overall reflections*

In addition to the main findings from the survey instrument and the themes from the qualitative data in the three previous sections, an overview can be provided through an analysis of responses to two questions that garnered their overall reflections on the simulation exercise. These were: 'If a friend asked you to sum up your impressions of participating in the Simulation what would you tell them?' and 'Finally, do you have any other comments about the Simulation?'. The majority of students who responded to these questions gave positive responses. As discussed above in Section 5ii, many students reported finding the exercises very useful or practical. Many commented on what a wonderful opportunity or experience it had been and how rewarding it was, and there were quite frequent references to having fun or, as one student said, 'Almost fun!'. We might dismiss such comments as not relevant to our central research question of whether simulations can help with the development of skills required for human rights advocacy. However, educators intuitively know that happy and engaged students learn better. This is also supported by scholarship. Ziv (1988) found that students enrolled in a class where educators who created a fun environment by using humour received approximately 10 per cent higher marks in their exam than students in a non-fun control group. Horan, Martin, and Weber (2012) argue that positive emotions help students 'feel empowered, motivated, attend class and study – all approach behaviours that should manifest themselves in increased cognitive and affective learning' (p. 212).

As well as enjoying the experience, many students commented that it was challenging or stressful but, generally, this brought about a positive outcome. For example:

I would tell them that it was really fun and challenging, I haven't done anything like that in Uni before getting to play a role, being in a team and getting to use things we learnt from the course and use our negotiation skills in a hypothetical situation that reflects real-life conflict.

One of the most rewarding exercises I've done in an academic setting.

Overwhelming, challenging, scary! But a good way to learn.

Students were asked 'In what ways would you suggest the Simulation be improved?', and made suggestions for improvement in response to other questions in the survey. From these responses we have learnt how to refine future iterations of the simulation to enhance its pedagogical value.

Some comments related generally to preparation for, and logistics of, the simulation. For example, several students identified the need for clearer instructions in the simulation activities, feeling at times that what was expected of them was unclear. Other students expressed specific frustrations, for example with the timing of the simulation right before exams in one case, or with the logistics of participating in the online simulation. Some students felt that they would have benefitted from more in-depth knowledge on the subject area in order to be able to participate as effectively as possible; for example, one student suggested:

Having completed an actual 'research' assignment before undertaking the simulation would have been useful to develop the knowledge base needed to complete simulation.

A number of students commented on assessment. Some students reported a lack of assessment tasks associated with the simulation and/or the disproportionate amount of time and work required for the simulation. Some case studies assessed the simulation activities in their entirety, others assessed aspects of it and some used it as formative rather than substantive assessment. Several students mentioned needing more time to prepare, or the simulation exercises being too rushed, for example: 'I would liken it to the Olympic 100m Race: incredibly enjoyable, but not near long enough'. The issue of the time commitment for simulations has also been considered by researchers. It has been noted that simulations can be time consuming but also that there can be a risk that they do not make a proportionate contribution to student learning (O'Toole & Absalom, 2003). The question of assessment has also been considered in the literature, and the full potential of future simulations may be realised if assessment is incorporated into their overall design (Raymond & Usherwood, 2013, p. 164).

With regard to the trend of a shift away from the student experience to the work-readiness of the graduate (identified by Daniels & Brooker (2014) above), our findings reject the binary that insists on one approach - skills development for future employment versus analytic and social development for current student identity. Instead they point to an approach that achieves both. Our research shows that students value not only the 'hard' skills they develop for future careers (such as knowledge about how human rights instruments might be deployed in international meetings), but also the 'soft' skills that they use during class, outside of class, and in the future. Furthermore, students expressed a high level of satisfaction and

enjoyment from the simulations in their qualitative survey comments. This indication of a positive student experience suggests that student experience is not necessarily compromised by skills development for work-readiness, as identified by Daniels & Brooker (2014).

Finally, we have to report that a small minority of students were dissatisfied with their simulation exercises; one stated 'I never fill out these surveys but my hate for that activity was so strong I had to'. As well as some comments about group work (discussed in the previous section), a few students commented that they felt that simulation was pointless or they did not learn anything from it. As noted in the previous section, although comments remained overwhelmingly positive, some cohorts (e.g. large classes and online students) expressed more negative feedback than others. The feedback provided by students in response to the question 'In what ways would you suggest the Simulation be improved?' is being used to refine the simulation exercises so that they are useful and positive classroom experiences for as many students as possible.

## 6. Conclusion

Based on quantitative and qualitative survey data from 252 students across seven Australian universities, this study found that human rights simulation exercises were reported by students to have contributed to skills development. In particular, students reported having a better understanding of the complex nature of the legal, institutional, social and cultural dimensions of rights violations, and a greater awareness of the multi-spatial nature of rights violations. Students also reflected on their increased ability to analyse and respond to violations and on the practical and useful skills they had attained through the simulations. The simulations were successful active learning techniques and were positively received by students, with student enjoyment also likely to support skills development. As well as developing skills, it was clear that the simulations also helped students to be better informed about their career choices. The weakest responses were in relation to the group work component of the simulation and qualitative data suggests that group work was more problematic for some cohorts than for others - specifically, large classes and online classes.

Universities are increasingly prioritising WIL, with Universities Australia having adopted a National Strategy on Work Integrated Learning in University Education (2015). Overall, this study finds that simulations are a valid, scalable, classroom-based WIL experience that can be adapted for students at undergraduate and postgraduate level, across a range of disciplines and in both face-to-face and online classes.

Our data also points to opportunities for further research. A limitation of the current study is that students' actual skills attainment specifically due to the simulation was not assessed and that self-reporting was used. Future studies could include assessment of actual skills attainment. Also, human rights simulations may have other benefits not assessed in the current study. In particular, the question of student well-being should be a key consideration for human rights educators, considering the importance of emotional resilience in social justice activism (Abarbanel, 2012). In fact, student well-being is a matter for all university educators, given the high prevalence and severity of psychological distress among student populations (Bore, Pittolo, Kirby, Dluzewska, & Marlin, 2016). According to Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), regular experiences of three feelings -

competence, autonomy, and relatedness - foster student wellbeing. As simulation exercises help with skills development (competence) and are largely driven by the student groups (autonomy), it is likely that simulations will promote student wellbeing. The final feeling – relatedness - involves a sense of group belonging and close relationships (Baik et al., 2017). Where students work with their peers on a number of group work exercises over a period of time, it is likely that this aspect of simulations also fosters student wellbeing. This hypothesis warrants further exploration. Different class sizes and educational contexts would allow further differentiated research into this, and other related areas.

To conclude, simulation exercises are a valuable learning and teaching tool in the suite of WIL offerings in tertiary education. They prepare students for human rights advocacy in the real world, and thus help to bridge the knowing-doing gap.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Developed by Susan Banki.

<sup>2</sup> Developed by Simon Rice.

<sup>3</sup> Developed by Fiona McGaughey and Lisa Hartley, with input from Mary Anne Kenny and Anna Copeland.

<sup>4</sup> Developed by Laurie Berg.

<sup>5</sup> Developed by Paghona Peggy Kerdo.

<sup>6</sup> Developed by Phil Orchard.

<sup>7</sup> Developed by Matthew Stubbs.

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