McGill University
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
Winter Term 2020

POLI 452

Conflict Simulation

INSTRUCTOR: Prof. Rex Brynen
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CLASS HOURS: TR 14h35-15h55 (ADAMS 211)

OFFICE HOURS: Mondays 15h30-16h00, Tuesdays 13h30-14h00, Thursdays 13h15-14h00
or by appointment (Leacock 510).

WEBPAGES: http://www.mcgill.ca/politicalscience/rex-j-brynen (political science)
http://www.paxsims.org (conflict simulation)

Course Description
This course will introduce students to conflict simulation design and explore the use of wargaming and other serious games for military planning, policy analysis, training, and education.

Readings should be done in advance of each lecture. In addition to regular class lectures, conflict simulations will also be organized from time to time outside of regular class hours to demonstrate approaches, mechanisms, and techniques.

Prerequisites
Students are required to have taken at least one previous course in comparative politics or international relations.

Course Texts

The required texts for this course are:


While the following is not required, it is a very useful resource on game mechanics:


Items marked “recommended” in the reading list below will be useful in your coursework but are not required. Those marked “optional” are suggested if you want to dig even deeper into the topic. Content from these will not appear in the quizzes.

**Course Requirements and Grading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiz 1 (February 13)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiz 2 (March 12)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Game design group project</td>
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<td>• Status report 1 (February 18)</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Status report 2 (March 19)</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Finished game (April 9)</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<td>• Specialization and team contribution</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict simulation activities</td>
<td>15%</td>
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*Quizzes 1 and 2*: One hour in-class exams, consisting of multiple choice and short answer questions.

*Game design group project*. All students will take part in a serious game design project as part of a group. The game should:

- examine a historical or current conflict in a way that balances accuracy and playability, while offering insight into conflict dynamics and the choices faced by real-world actors; or
- examine a potential future conflict, in a way that offers insight into capabilities, strategies, and choices; or
- address some other serious gaming topic approved by the instructor.

Students with a game idea will be invited to present these in a brief 2-minute game pitch in class on January 21. This will not be graded but will earn activity credits for those presenting.

The top 8-10 topics will then be selected, and design groups of 4-5 persons will be formed. Each group will consist of the following specializations:

1. **Team leader** *(project management and documentation)*
2. **System designer** *(game rules, mechanics and systems)*
3. **Graphic designer** *(game components and graphics)*
4. **Researcher** *(background research on conflict)*

Note that while each team member has a different specialization, the project is very much a team effort and will be graded as such.

Each group will make two *status reports* to the class on February 18 and March 19. These will consist of a 4-minute class presentation and a 3-5 page written report to the instructor. This should include details of the topic; an overview of key game mechanics, images of game components and artwork (in development); and a summary of playtests to date. Each status report is worth 5% of your course grade. PowerPoint slides and the written report must be emailed to the instructor at least one day before the report is delivered in class.
The finished game is due in class on April 9, at which time each group will demonstrate their game. Late submissions will generally NOT be accepted. This game should include:

- a physical copy of the playable game
- a copy of the rules
- background research on the conflict (c2,000 words, plus bibliography of sources consulted)
- a development diary, documenting the rationale behind the game design, as well as an account of development, meetings, playtests, and revisions (c2,000 words)

The rubric to be used in assessing each game will be posted to myCourses, as will additional information on the assignment. The finished game is worth 35% of your course grade. An additional 10% of your grade will be based on how well you performed your team specialization and how much your teammates felt you contributed to the project.

Throughout the term, students will be given an opportunity to earn conflict simulation activity points by taking part in approved games, attending events, organizing their own game sessions. Further details on this will be posted to myCourses. This will be worth 15% of the course grade. It is important to attend games early in the term—you will find this VERY useful in designing your own projects.

**Important Fine Print**

Group work can be challenging, and games take far longer to design, playtest, and revise than you think—indeed, considerably more time than writing a conventional research paper. This is not something that can be left until late in the term, or you may fail. Good project management and teamwork skills are essential. Failure to contribute to group efforts will result in a substantial reduction of your grade.

_In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded._

Also, it is important to note that incidents of plagiarism will be dealt with severely. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is or how to identify your sources, ask your teaching assistant. McGill University VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE, ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/integrity for more information).

**Lectures** (all dates approximate)

1. **Introduction** (January 7)

2. **History of wargaming** (January 9)

Invicta, “How Did War Become a Game?” YouTube, 28 June 2019, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=selIA9tukDs


3. **Principles of serious game design** (January 14, 16)


4. **Game design proposals** (January 21)

5. **Modelling conflict I** (January 23, 28, 30)


Recommended reading: skim Geoffrey Engelstein and Isaac Shalev, *Building Blocks of Tabletop Game Design*.

6. **Modelling conflict II** (February 4, 6)


Optional reading: other chapters from *Zones of Control*.

7. **Game design session** (February 11)

8. **Quiz 1** (February 13)

9. **Status reports** (February 18)

10. **Negotiation simulations** (February 20)

Natasha Gill, *Inside the Box: Using Integrative Simulations to Teach Conflict, Negotiation, and Mediation*, (Zurich: Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2015), at
http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/Inside_the_Box-Gill.pdf, read Chapter 1 and skim rest.

11. Seminar and matrix games (February 25)


12. Game design session (February 27)

*Reading Break (March 2- 6)*

13. Best and worst practices (March 10)


14. Quiz 2 (March 12)

15. Game design session (March 17)

16. Status reports (March 19)

17. Topics in gaming 1 (March 24)

Readings TBA

18. Game design sessions (March 26, 31, April 2)

There will be no formal class on March 26 and 31 because of the POLI 450 Brynania simulation, but students are free to meet in the classroom.

19. Topics in gaming 2 (April 7)

Readings TBA

20. Game design final reports (April 9)