

A Mock United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for Undergraduates at the University of Oklahoma

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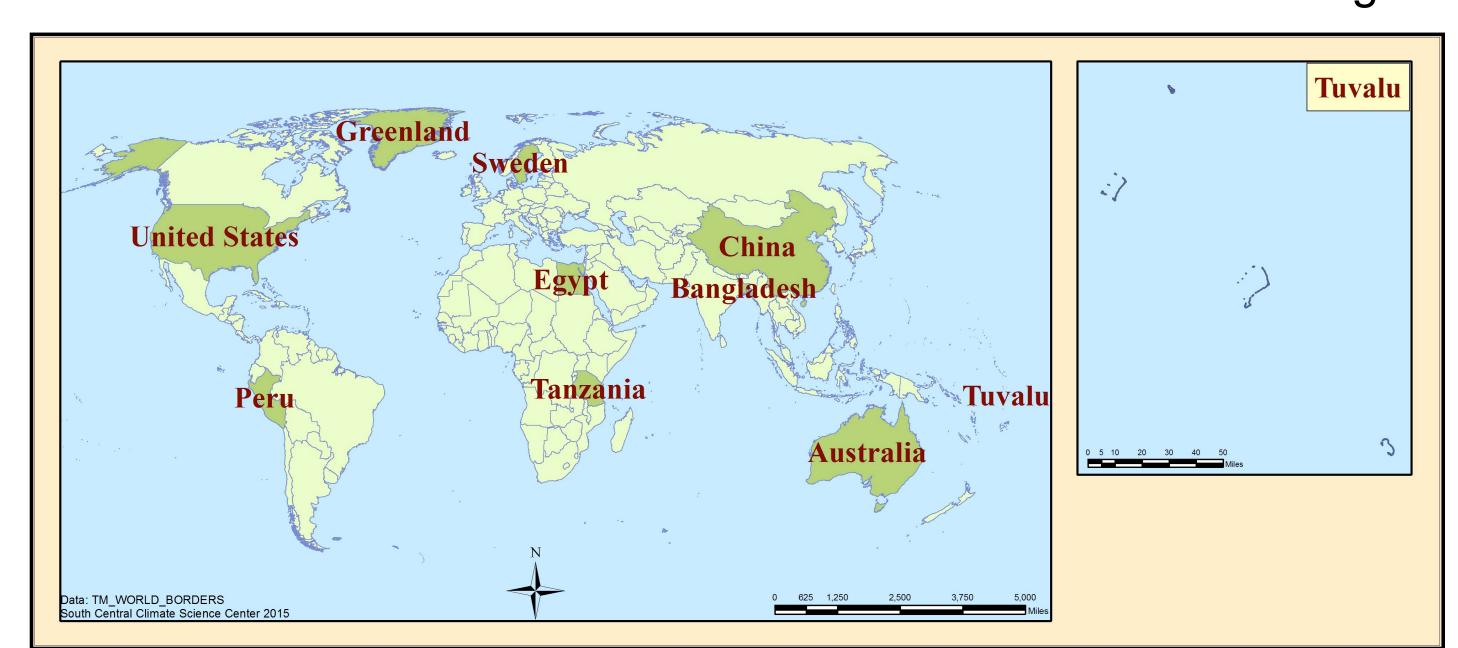


1. Overview

Today's university students are our future decision makers. Their understanding of the impacts of climate change is important both for long-term strategic planning and for preventing short-sighted tactical decisions that ultimately affect the environment. Colleges and universities worldwide have developed new climate change courses to help provide this education. But many of these courses do not help students practice negotiation skills needed for nations, peoples, and businesses to mitigate and adapt to the future. Thus, we took the opportunity of the 21st Conference of Parties to engage students at the University of Oklahoma (OU) in mock United Nations' negotiations during the real deliberations in Paris, France.

2. Course Overview

In a new, Fall 2015 course entitled "Managing for a Changing Climate," the author team mentored juniors and seniors on the science, impacts, and economics of climate change, what types of policy solutions may address these impacts, and how to negotiate a viable climate agreement under international scrutiny. Students were mostly majors in environmental sustainability, meteorology, geography, and geographic information systems. We assigned groups of 2-3 students to one of 10 countries (see map) to conduct research in eight, individual homework assignments and to represent their nation as a coordinated group during a two-day mock United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.



The individual assignments focused on the nation's physical and human geographies, including its indigenous peoples; historical climate and future projections; climate policies, economic drivers, and energy sectors; and the impacts of, vulnerabilities to, and risks from climate change. Each group presented a synthesized summary of its country's background, a speech on its nation's climate policy position, and a formal debate with all other nations.

3. Mock United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) marked the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris, France, from 30 November to 11 December 2015. The convention's objective was to achieve the first major binding, international agreement on climate since the Kyoto Protocol was adopted on 11 December 1997. COP21 culminated in the Paris Agreement, adopted by 195 nations on 12 December 2015.

On 1 December, the OU students presented five-minute arguments a single policy option that their team agreed best represented the strategy of their assigned





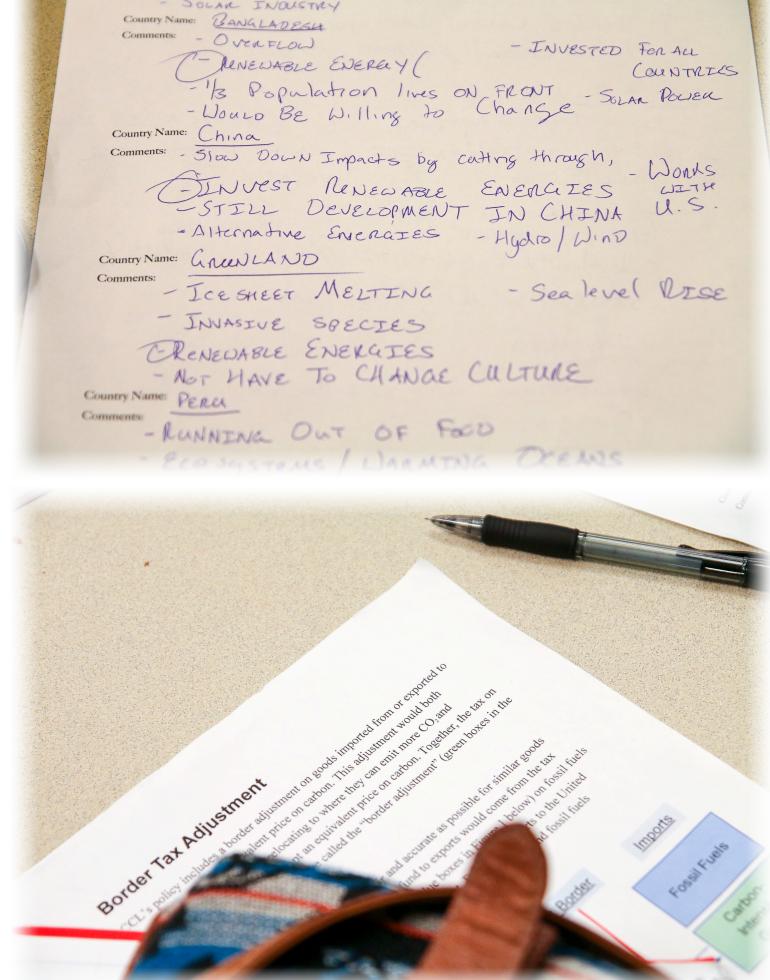


3. Governments must pay a tax on carbon usage.

On 3 December, the students used the information gathered from the prior statements to formally debate the policy resolutions, attempting to sway the other groups to their own policy position. Then they had an unmoderated, informal caucus before reconvening

for a final vote. During the caucus, the student "delegates" left their seats to discuss topics freely with other countries.







On the following week, faculty members provided in-person (Dr. Moore) and Skype (Dr. McPherson) updates about their direct observations of COP21. Students asked questions based on their mock negotiations and new knowledge of these 10 nations. Afterward, the OU students wrote reflective papers about what they learned throughout the semester.

"It felt like we were doing something greater than just the everyday, routine style of learning. In hindsight, I realize this is mildly absurd to say, but it felt like we were actually making a difference by doing this. I left the Thursday of the negotiations, and had two individuals from different countries tell me that they had their minds' changed by my efforts, and that resulted in a greater feeling than any feeling I have had from school in as long as I can remember."

4. Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Broadening perspectives

"I have a new found respect for the plight of developing nations in their fight against climate change."

"I have such a different perspective on developing countries and an empathy for their people."

"When we were presented PowerPoints on the other countries and the possibility of what could happen to them, it made me realize how selfish I had been in the past only focusing on what could happen to the United States."

"In the end I wish that I would have been able to do some research about countries other than the one I was assigned to."

Bringing the real world into the classroom

"It really made me reflect on my actions as a young adult, how I can and should be involved in the politics of global climate change, and how fortunate I am to be where I am today."

"I knew that mankind was negatively effecting Earth's environment, but I did not realize the degree to which this was happening until this class."

"By studying the island nation, I discovered how fragile lesserdeveloped countries are to the consumptive actions taken by developed or developing countries."

"I would encourage earlier inter-team interactions, to foster a more active negotiation, perhaps creating more challenges – puzzles even – requiring collaboration, negotiation, and even compromise to solve."

An engaging learning process

"The idea of the Mock-UN style group discussions and presentations on climate change was a refreshing take on the collegiate classroom."

"Taking the climate challenges facing some of the world's most hardhit countries and biggest economic players and making them mine was a task that I have never considered. Introducing the UNFCCC project, with its relevance and timeliness to COP21, I saw it as a phenomenal way to gain emotional and heartfelt commitment to resolution – in class and out."

Acknowledgements

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