

U.S. GOVERNMENT

Debriefing Questions

NOTE TO INSTRUCTORS: The following “debriefing questions” are designed to illuminate, for the entire class, key concepts that are experienced most intensely by certain students rather than the whole class. For example, members of Congress will most directly experience the pressures of seeking reelection and passing legislation, and these questions prompt members of Congress to share these experiences with others. It is recommended that you spend at least 30-60 minutes of class time focusing on debriefing after the simulation has concluded for the semester.

Instructional:

1. Have the students break into 3 to 5 person presentation teams with a mix of Media, Congress, ACLU, and Executive Branch in order to allow a 3 dimensional and deep view of each topic.
2. Have the students either prepare an in person presentation or 10 minute video going over one or more of the below topics
3. If in person have them present for 10 minutes to the class with 5 minute QA
4. If online or zoom show the 10 minute video of the group and allow them to answer questions for 5 minutes.
5. Grade the presentation quality in both preparation, clarity, and how well they addressed the topic and you're done!

★ Questions related to the Media

- 1. What were your incentives as a member of the news media? That is, what achievements gave you points and which outcomes resulted in lost points?**
- 2. What kinds of stories were rated with a higher impact level, on the 1 to 5 scale? What kinds of stories were rated lower? How closely did the impact scale correspond to stories' newsworthiness? Give examples. What did this impact level of stories reveal about the types of stories that tend to sell newspapers or gain viewers?**
- 3. What methods did you use to find stories? How did you go about trying to verify stories as true before publishing? What pressures did you feel to publish quickly, and did this ever lead you to compromise accuracy for the sake of speed?**

4. What other players were your best sources for stories? What roles did they play? Did you ever make deals with these players to get good stories, and if so, what was the nature of these deals?
5. Did you ever face difficult decisions about whether or not to publish certain stories? What concerns did you have about publishing them – were these ethical qualms, fears of retaliation by certain players, or concerns about the impact of such stories on national security? Give examples.
6. How influential was the media in your simulation, in terms of affecting government policies, public opinion, and election outcomes? Give examples of any actions the media took that were particularly influential. How do you think this compares to media influence in the real world?

★ *Questions related to the Executive Branch*

1. What were your goals in this simulation? That is, what outcomes were you trying to achieve or avoid in order to maximize your performance points?
2. If you played a role other than President or Vice President, what organization or agency did you work for? How did that organizational role affect your policy preferences and goals? What other executive branch agencies did you find yourself cooperating with or clashing with, and why?
3. Describe your relationship with members of the media, interest groups, and Congress. Which actors were particularly helpful as you sought to achieve your goals, and which actors were unhelpful? Give examples.
4. Did you face any dilemmas about whether or not to leak specific stories to the news media? Why did you hesitate, and what was your ultimate decision?
5. If you were a member of the military or the intelligence community, describe the kinds of actions and decisions you routinely made as part of your job. What obstacles did you face in your efforts to safeguard national security? How did you try to overcome these obstacles?
6. If you played the role of the president, describe the cross-pressures you felt from various sides on the issues of military action, counter-terrorism policies, and civil liberties. Why did you end up making the decisions you did on these issues? Be specific about your decision-making process.
7. If you were the president, describe the role of political parties in the simulation. You were a Republican president facing a Democrat-controlled Congress. What was the impact of this “divided government” scenario?

8. How much did you decide to consult with Congress on the military operations in Syria? What concerns did you have about consulting too little or too much with Congress?
9. If you were a military chief or the Defense Secretary, explain the tug-of-war that occurred regarding civil-military relations and say who won this battle. Also describe some of the standard operating procedures that you noticed and any unforeseen consequences that resulted from seemingly simple organizational routines, like military exercises or rules of engagement.

★ *Questions related to Congress*

1. As a member of Congress, what were your incentives in this game? (That is, what outcomes earned you points or led to point losses?).
2. What steps did you take to try to ensure your reelection? Which actions were successful or unsuccessful? How much effort did you spend on reelection activities as opposed to policymaking activities, like working on legislation?
3. What role did committee chairs, party leaders, and whips play in passing legislation (or stopping legislation from being passed)? Be specific.
4. When seeking to pass legislation, what efforts did you take to make sure the votes turned out in your favor? Give specific examples here.
5. How did your party affiliation affect your policy preferences and constituent demands? Give examples. How constrained did you feel by your party, as opposed to having the freedom to take whatever actions you chose?
6. Describe your relationships with members of the news media, interest groups, and executive branch officials. Which players were particularly helpful or influential, and why? Which players did you find yourself clashing with, and for what reasons?
7. In your simulation, did Congress fulfill its Constitutional role in terms of war powers, oversight of the executive branch, and approving spending? Or was Congress weaker than it should have been – either because the president cut you out of the process or because Congress deferred to the president?
8. What strategies did you use to minimize the impact of the campaign finance scandal? Were these successful? Do you think the scandal affected the substance of your policy decisions? Did it affect how much attention and resources you could devote to policy issues, as opposed to scandal management? What are the implications for real-world political leaders who face scandals?

☆ *Questions related to the ACLU*

1. **What were your major goals in the game? (That is, what outcomes were you trying to achieve, and which ones were you trying to avoid?).**
2. **What specific tools did you use to influence public opinion, legislation, and executive branch policies? Which of these tools were most effective and why?**
3. **What players did you interact with most in order to accomplish your goals? (These could include players in the executive branch, Congress, or the media). Why did you choose these players, specifically? What about their roles or skills made them especially useful allies?**
4. **Did members of one party or the other seem particularly receptive to your influence? Why do you think this was the case?**
5. **Did members of one branch of government (executive branch or Congress) seem particularly receptive to your influence? Why do you think this was the case?**
6. **Were there certain issues on which you had significant influence and others on which you had almost none? What explains the difference?**
7. **Overall, how influential did your interest group seem to be, relative to the other actors in the game (executive branch players, Congress, and the media)? What explains your degree of influence? Does this accurately reflect the influence of interest groups in the real world?**