# SIMULATING THE WORLD: ROLE PLAYS

## General Guide

In this experience, students take on the role of various stakeholders of a sustainability problem or solution context while discussing the issue or simulating a real-world scenario like a public meeting. This experience gives students unique insight into a problem or solution via a specific person or role. It also gives them an opportunity to practice interpersonal skills like communication, deliberation, negotiation, conflict resolution, and decision making under uncertainty, which are valuable for engaging people in sustainability problem solving. Role plays are excellent tools for observing and evaluating student knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

> "If you can learn a simple trick, Scout, you’ll get along a lot better with all kinds of folks. You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it."  -Atticus Finch in To Kill a Mockingbird (1962)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Level: 300; can accommodate group size: 3-20</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Easy to complete, hands-on, game-like simulation. The experience can be frustrating or superficial if roles, boundaries, and guidelines aren’t clearly defined in the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Can illustrate concepts that students may be familiar with conceptually but not personally. Can also inspire empathy and motivate action.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adjustments</td>
<td>Requires few adjustments beyond creating assignment and discussion experience afterwards, and helping students channel knowledge and empathy gained into constructive activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits</td>
<td>Requires few adjustments and provides students with an intensely personal real-world learning experience.</td>
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Make links between lessons learned in the game and their relevance in real-world contexts. [SYSTEMS THINKING]
- Distinguish and explain the perspectives of persons and groups accounting for history and context. [VALUES THINKING]
- Justify your decision involved with developing a strategy or solution option while accounting for uncertainty, trade-offs, plural perspectives, alternative options, and consequences of choice. [STRATEGIC THINKING]
- Develop an approach for acting according to your role and collect background information to help you adopt the perspective of someone else throughout the experiences. [INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES]

ACTIVITIES

In this activity, students take on roles of stakeholders of a given sustainability problem during an in class activity. The purpose of this activity is for students to see the problem and its impact from another’s perspective and consider how this insight might influence the student’s understanding or construction of the problem, vision, and strategy. The student’s role is to engage in the activity trying their best to assume the role of their assigned stakeholder. The instructor’s role is to set up a role play activity with clear roles, instructions, and guidelines. If students have trouble getting the role play going, instructors may need to prompt them with questions.

Timeline

- Create role play assignment around a sustainability problem, vision, or proposed solution-option, specifying the role play scenario, roles, and instructions (rules).
- Make sure that students are familiar enough with the problem and with relevant stakeholders to participate in the role play experience.
- Introduce the assignment in class. Describe and provide written explanations of the role play scenario, roles, and instructions (rules).
- If students have trouble getting the role play going, prompt them with questions about “their” thoughts, perspectives, concerns, and ideas related to the scenario.
- Facilitate discussion with students after the experience on how the experience impacts students understanding of the problem, vision, and strategy and this insight might or might not change the way they framed problems, crafted visions and strategies, and implemented solution options.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT

The assignments below that can maximize learning outcomes of the role play experience and produce outputs that can be assessed to determine achievement of the learning objectives.

- Assume role of stakeholder and follow instructions to engage in role play.
  Output: participation.
• **Reflect** on how the experience impacts students understanding of the problem, vision, and strategy and how this insight might or might not change the way they framed problems, crafted visions and strategies, and implemented solution options. Output: participation.

Use a Likert-scale to determine if students achieved all, most, some, little, or none of the learning objective. Develop a rubric with examples of answers that demonstrate students have achieved all (5), most (4), some (3), little (2), or none (1) of the objective.

**TAKE THIS EXPERIENCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL!**

- **Engage the world:** Have students introduce the assignment and relevant preparatory material to friends or family, help them complete it, and document their reflections.

- **Engage the world:** Have students create posters about eating on $1.25/day and share with ASU community at Farmer’s Market or other venues or do service learning or group research with an organization addressing poverty, hunger, and inequality.

- **Group research:** Have students research why certain foods so inexpensive in the USA; how $1.25/day is calculated in the MDG report; what makes up a typical meal for someone in poverty in different places (comparing different parts of the world and urban vs. rural).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY & RESOURCES**

- Extending the Land Ethic and Golden Rule to Biotic Community: [http://serc.carleton.edu/bioregion/examples/59362.html](http://serc.carleton.edu/bioregion/examples/59362.html)
- Geoscience Scenarios: [http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/roleplaying/scenario.html](http://serc.carleton.edu/introgeo/roleplaying/scenario.html)

**ROLE PLAYS EXAMPLE: EATING IN EXTREME POVERTY**

**SUMMARY**
Groups of students prepare a meal for themselves that costs no more than $1.25 per person in order to experience what it is like to prepare food and eat in conditions of extreme poverty. This experience gives students perspective and empathy that contributes to understanding poverty as a sustainability problem, and also motivation and insight to consider solution options. As a group activity, it also provides an opportunity to develop teamwork skills. This activity is especially appropriate for large classes due to group work and minimal coordination required by instructor.

*Simulations give students the opportunity to learn experientially and have been shown to develop different skills from [conventional] classroom teaching—especially those of being imaginative and innovative.* - Starkey & Blake, 2001

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<th>Level: 300; can accommodate group size: 5-100+</th>
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<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>Easy to complete, hands-on. Most enjoyable when linked with opportunities to take action on poverty, hunger, and inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>Can illustrate concepts of poverty, hunger, and inequality that students may be familiar with conceptually but not personally. Can also inspire empathy and motivate action.</td>
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<td>Adjustments</td>
<td>Requires few adjustments beyond creating assignment and discussion experience afterwards, and helping students channel knowledge and empathy gained into constructive activities.</td>
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**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**
- Take the perspectives of others (practice empathy) who may live in completely different circumstances that you and reflect on insight gained through the experience. [INTERPERSONAL COMPETENCIES]
- Analyze inequity of the food system, its drivers and consequences based on your experience. [SYSTEMS THINKING]
- Analyze the actions, needs, motives and intentions of people who live in poverty with respect to the food system, considering similarities and differences for people in different places. [SYSTEMS THINKING]
- Distinguish and explain the perspectives of persons and groups accounting for history and context. [VALUES THINKING]
ACTIVITIES
This fun homework assignment introduces students to concepts of poverty, hunger and inequality through stimulation of the experiences of eating in poverty. Groups of 3-5 students are tasked with preparing and eating a meal which costs no more than $1.25 per person, which is the daily income of people who live in extreme poverty. Students write an account of the meal (what they chose to buy, where, how they prepared it) as well as a short reflection about what it is like to live off of only $1.25/day and other thoughts this exercise stimulated. An in-class discussion facilitated by the instructor where students can hear about the meals each other were able to prepare as well as their reflections is very useful in order to push the students past superficial analysis. This joint reflection greatly enhances the impact of the assignment. Students should be given at least one week to complete this experience as they will need to plan, go grocery shopping and may have to look for a kitchen.

Timeline
- Choose an appropriate place in the syllabus to introduce topics like poverty and food systems.
- Create and post assignment for students specifying rules, guidelines, and required outputs.
- Prompt students to do research on poverty, food, etc. in specific countries (start with World Bank and Millennium Development Goals websites - links below).
- Lead discussion on students experiences and insights, use think-pair-share to get students to take ownership of their experiences and to interact with peers.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ASSESSMENT
The assignments below that can maximize learning outcomes of the role play experience and produce outputs that can be assessed to determine achievement of the learning objectives.
- Describe exactly what you bought, where you found it, what it cost and how you prepared it. Reflect on challenges you faced and reflection about experience. Output: 1-3 page reflection.
- Think-pair-share in class after the experience, select students to present what the person they talk with had to say about their experience. Output: 1-3 minute informal presentation.
- Discuss the actions, needs, motives and intentions of people who live in poverty with respect to the food system, inequity of the food system and its consequences; and intentionality, systemic inertia, path dependencies, and barriers for those in poverty. Also consider how students can take action on issues of poverty, hunger, and inequality. Output: participation.

Use a Likert-scale to determine if students achieved all, most, some, little, or none of the learning objective. Develop a rubric with examples of answers that demonstrate students have achieved all (5), most (4), some (3), little (2), or none (1) of the objective.
**Take This Experience to the Next Level!**

- *Engage the world:* Have students introduce the assignment and relevant preparatory material to friends or family, help them complete it, and document their reflections.

- *Engage the world:* Have students create posters about eating on $1.25/day and share with ASU community at Farmer’s Market or other venues or do service learning or group research with an organization addressing poverty, hunger, and inequality.

- *Group research:* Have students research why certain foods so inexpensive in the USA; how $1.25/day is calculated in the MDG report; what makes up a typical meal for someone in poverty in different places (comparing different parts of the world and urban vs. rural).

**Bibliography & Resources**


ROLE PLAYS EXAMPLE ASSIGNMENT: EATING IN EXTREME POVERTY

SUMMARY:
The purpose of this experience is to stimulate the experiences to better understand concepts of poverty, hunger, and inequality. In groups of 3-5, you will be tasked with preparing and eating a meal which costs no more than $1.25 per person, which is the daily income of people who live in extreme poverty. Afterwards, you will write an account of the meal (what you bought, where, how you prepared it) as well as a short reflection about what it is like to live off of only $1.25/day and then discuss the experience with peers and instructors in class.

INSTRUCTIONS:
- **Plan** your shopping trip and cooking event with your group in class on January 15. Specifying date, time, location of grocery store and location of cooking, and transportation.
- **Shop** as a group, spending no more than $1.25 per person.
- **Prepare** food as a group. Complete this step by January 22.
- **Write** reflection individually. Describe exactly what you bought, where you found it, what it cost and how you prepared it. Reflect on challenges you faced and reflection about experience. Output: 1-3 page reflection. Due 5pm on January 24.
- **Think-Pair-Share** in class about experience on January 25. Select students will present what the person they talk with had to say about their experience.
- **Discuss** the actions, needs, motives and intentions of those in poverty with respect to the food system, inequity of the food system and its consequences; and intentionality, systemic inertia, path dependencies, and barriers for those in poverty. Also consider how students can take action on issues of poverty, hunger, and inequality. Output: participation.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:
- Embrace the perspectives of others who may live in completely different circumstances that you and reflect on insight and empathy gained through the experience
- Analyze the actions, needs, motives and intentions of people who live in poverty with respect to the food system, considering similarities and differences for people in different places.
- Analyze inequity of the food system, its drivers and consequences based on your experience.

You will be evaluated on how far your reflection and class participation demonstrate your achievement of these learning objectives.