

## Simulation Review

**“The Zinnia”:** A Collective Bargaining Simulation. This simulation accompanies **Labor Relations: Striking a Balance** by John W. Budd. 2008. New York: McGraw Hill/Irwin. 608 pp.

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Instructors of courses in labor relations or collective bargaining often use a collective bargaining exercise to give students in the course an opportunity to experience the process of negotiating a collective bargaining agreement. One such exercise is “The Zinnia” developed by Professor John Budd of the Industrial Relations Center of the University of Minnesota. The Zinnia gives students an excellent opportunity to experience the process of collective bargaining negotiations.

While The Zinnia is part of a labor relations text by Budd, the exercise can be used separately (see [www.thezinnia.com](http://www.thezinnia.com)) or in combination with another text. However, instructors who adopt Budd's text have access to more material than instructors who use the exercise without adopting his text. With the text, professors have access to a CD that enables instructors to use the exercise without accessing the Internet and also have access to a two-page "instructors' manual" -- a word document that gives instructors suggestions about how to use the exercise. Even if you choose not to adopt the text, Professor Budd is extremely good about helping instructors who utilize this exercise. In fact, he would probably share with instructors all of the information contained in the "instructors' manual" even if they did not adopt the text. Personally, I have had a number of questions come up in the years that I have used the exercise and whenever I have e-mailed a question to him, he has responded with an answer within a matter of days. Rarely does one get that kind of service from the author of a book.

The Zinnia exercise, utilizes "The Zinnia," a 300-room hotel in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Employees of the Zinnia are represented by Local H-56 of the International Union of Service Workers and Allied Employees. In the exercise, the hotel and the union are parties to a collective bargaining agreement that is about to expire (the exercise enables the instructor to choose the date of expiration). The objective of the exercise is for the parties (i.e., the students participating in the exercise) to negotiate a new collective bargaining agreement to replace the current one prior to the date of expiration.

The exercise also provides a website for the hotel and a website for the union. The hotel's website contains a great deal of information such as the corporation's history, financial information, and internal memos (not available without a password). The union's website contains the current collective bargaining agreement (contract) as well as additional information such as employees' preferences, negotiations background, and internal memos (not available without a password).

One particularly helpful feature about the exercise is that it contains a "costing program." The program allows the students using the exercise to calculate the actual cost of various changes to the existing agreement. For example, if the parties agree to a 3% wage increase, the costing program calculates how much this will cost The Zinnia. The costing program also allows students to calculate the cost of alternative actions such as increasing employees' vacation, adding additional benefits, changing the overtime rules, etc. This feature is extremely beneficial because it allows the students to understand one of the most important principles in collective bargaining – that is, changes in a collective bargaining agreement cost money and these costs must be taken into consideration by both sides.

For the exercise, students are typically divided into teams of four members. As Budd himself states, four is a good number to divide the workload without any one person being overly burdened while, at the same time, not having members on the same team get in each other's way. Then, it is up to the instructor to determine how long and where the bargaining should take place. Some instructors require the students to conduct their negotiations outside of class time while others allow the students to devote class time to bargaining. Personally, I usually give the students approximately three weeks of class time to bargain during the semester and explain that, if they have not reached an agreement after three weeks, they can finish bargaining outside of class in order to come up with a new contract. Permitting students to bargain during class time allows me to observe the bargaining, see who has come to the bargaining sessions prepared to bargain, who is taking leading roles in the bargaining, etc. Three weeks is generally more than enough time for the teams to reach a new contract. Over the years, I have had only one instance in which a dyad needed one session out of class to finish bargaining and only one instance in which the dyad did not reach a contract, even by the end of the semester.

Typically, what I do is start the process by dividing the class into teams. Then, I give the teams approximately a week to submit to me -- privately -- their initial bargaining goals. As I explain, these initial team bargaining goals are probably the most important part of their grade for the exercise. The point that I am trying to illustrate here is that success in bargaining is directly dependent on how much research each team does *prior* to the beginning of bargaining. Each side (union and management) must know exactly what it wants in their new agreement, exactly what their constituents' want, exactly what the economic conditions will allow, etc. Without extensive, thorough research, the teams will not know what they should strive for in the bargaining sessions and they will not be successful. Then, at the end of the exercise, I require each team to submit a "bargaining notebook" containing their new agreement, the costs of the new agreement, any research they did in preparation for bargaining, minutes of intra-team meetings and meetings of the bargaining sessions. Their grade is based on their initial bargaining goals (discussed above) and the quality of the bargaining notebook. I do not assign grades based on the quality of the final contract per se, but I do examine the contracts carefully because the final contracts generally tend to show me which team has done the most research in preparation for bargaining.

As with any exercise, The Zinnia has pros and cons but overall, the positive aspects far outweigh the negative ones. Probably the greatest benefit of the exercise is that it gives students an exposure to how complex the collective bargaining process is. It shows clearly that there are a number of different issues that need to be considered when the parties attempt to reach a new

agreement. As stated above, the costing program that comes with the exercise is extremely useful at showing users the costs of various provisions. In addition, the exercise contains links to other websites and these links give students a taste of how much needs to be considered when negotiating a collective bargaining agreement. On the other hand, while useful, the costing program that comes with the exercise is limited. Because it is an Excel spreadsheet, there are limits to the types of changes for which one can calculate costs. Despite this drawback, I believe that The Zinnia is an extremely useful collective bargaining exercise and would be an excellent supplement to any course in labor relations or collective bargaining.