Project Title: Commons Problems and Resource Sustainability  
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Project Report:  
Grant funds were used to purchase the Fishbank exercise and for summer stipends to support the principal investigators efforts to evaluate, plan, and deliver curriculum modules that explored the political and cultural challenges associated with conflicts between individual rights and interests and collective efforts to conserve and protect resources. Each session was tailored to the particular class and student constituency.  

Spring 2001 Session  
This session combined a freshman level Contemporary Political Issues class (Political Science 102) and an upper division International Relations Theory class (Political Science 360). A total of 60 students participated. Here, we hoped to observe differences between freshman and more senior level students and between those exposed to the theoretical framework on which the exercise is based and those who participated in the exercise prior to any such exposure. Hence, we grouped student teams on the basis of class and on the basis of their exposure to the idea of the tragedy of the commons. What was intriguing was that many of the students who knew of concept of commons problems did in fact anticipate the problem of over-fishing but did little to try and avoid the depletion of resources. Many said they did not believe others would listen to them and thought it a waste of time to try influencing others. Some also were angry that they knew and wished they would have been ignorant of the problem so that the "game" would be more “fun.”  

This experience taught both the students and the instructors a powerful lesson within a lesson. One major teaching point of the Fishbank simulation is that politics is inevitable, that limits on resources require some explicit/implicit cooperative/conflictual effort to allocate resources. The passivity of those who had the information needed to take action helped us make the point that mere information is not enough, that feelings of efficacy and commitment are also needed. This opened up a very interesting discussion of why the students so often view political participation as fruitless and not worth the effort.  

Fall 2001 Sessions  
Three fall sessions were held, each of which combined students from three classes: an undergraduate Introduction to Public Policy class taught by Dr. Jos (Political Science 201), a graduate seminar in Public Policy taught by Dr. Halfacre (EVSS 602) and a graduate seminar in Public Policy taught by Dr. Mark Tompkins (PUBA 602). A total of 56 students participated.  

Each instructor designed their class so that the Fishbank exercise would move forward appropriate themes and concepts. Several student groups were required to write reflective papers on the experience that integrated course readings. As a means of following up on the reluctance to take collective action to stop over-fishing that emerged in the spring, the Introduction to Public Policy section was asked to identify characteristics of people or circumstances that might encourage or discourage activism. In an addendum to the standard class evaluation, these undergraduates were asked to evaluate the in-class simulations. Of the fourteen students completing the evaluation, thirteen indicated that the exercises were effective learning tools and several singled out Fishbank as the most effective of all in-class simulations used. Professor Tompkins and Halfacre used the simulation to offer students an active learning experience in public choices. Students were forced to confront the common property dilemma in a tangible way, facilitating class discussion about these issues. In Dr. Tompkins’s class, students wrote a short paper that gave them the opportunity to draw on their personal experiences with such issues.