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*Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University) provides an experienced user's perspective on LINKS.*



### *How are you using LINKS?*

I have a breadth of experience in LINKS for the past two years in all kinds of formats, which might distinguish me among all the people who use LINKS. I've done it in front of all kinds of audiences; in person, in a class, all on-line, Exec MBA students, Evening MBA Students, and Executives. I always use LINKS Services Marketing.

### **Nancy Stephens**

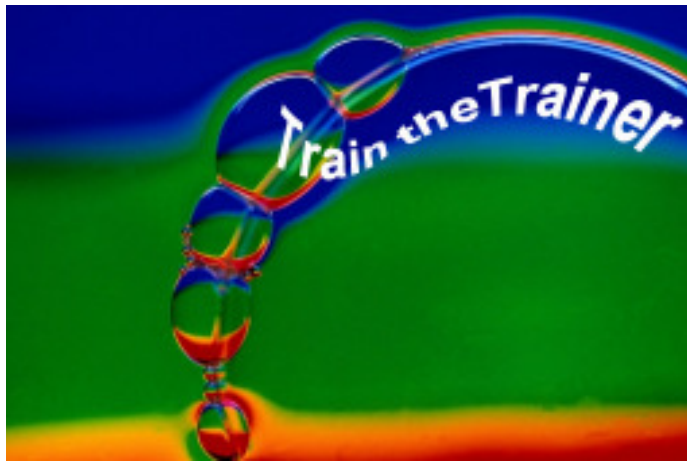
I always do Services Marketing rather than Services Management, because I don't want to overwhelm them with too many decisions. And by the time we are two-thirds of the way into Services Marketing they tell me they wish they could do Services Management because they would like to have more control, more decisions especially over the CSRs. If I gave them the full simulation, I don't think they would be happy. It would be way beyond the scope of the course. They want that control. They really get into it more and more and more, and the fact that they want more control is a strong indicator of that.

### *Describe your typical students.*

These are all Marketing Management courses, and a lot of times these are the only marketing courses these students will take in their lifetimes. I teach working professionals and they are going to school at nights and on weekends. A lot of them are engineers, and people who never

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## LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars

December 15-17, 2009 and January 5-7, 2010

LINKS Simulations Immersion Experience

Five Teleconferences and a Four-Round LINKS Simulation Event

Registration is available for the next three-day, intensive-mode Train-The-Trainer distance-learning seminars for the LINKS simulations. Randy Chapman, the LINKS author, leads these distance-learning events for academic faculty interested in learning more about teaching with LINKS. This intensive-mode seminar format includes 5-6 hours of work per day during the three days of the distance-learning seminar.

LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars are offered for the enterprise management, marketing, services, and supply chain management LINKS variants.

Current LINKS instructors are invited to pass along this announcement to faculty colleagues and

advanced doctoral students who might be interested in learning more about teaching with LINKS.

Experienced LINKS instructors sometimes participate in a LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminar to refresh their memories of LINKS details just prior to teaching with LINKS or to explore another LINKS simulation variant for a future teaching activity. Such experienced LINKS instructors may elect just to participate in the TTT's four-round simulation event, ignoring the public teleconferences included in the LINKS TTT program. (PowerPoint decks are e-mailed to all LINKS TTT participants before each teleconference, so such experienced LINKS instructors may freely choose to participate in all, some, or none of the teleconferences as per their availability and interest.)

Details about LINKS Train-The-Trainer seminars may be accessed via these URLs:

- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/EMttt.pdf> [Enterprise Management]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/MSttt.pdf> [Marketing]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/SMttt.pdf> [Services Marketing]
- <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/TTT/SCttt.pdf> [Supply Chain Management]

## LINKS Benchmarking Survey

The LINKS Benchmarking Survey program accumulates and reports benchmark statistics on LINKS student learning. LINKS-simulation.com subscribes to Zoomerang, a commercial web-based surveying service, for the LINKS Benchmarking Survey. Separate web-based questionnaires exist for all LINKS simulations variants.

When instructors participate in this no-cost, value-added program they receive a statistical summary report about their students' responses compared to the current benchmark statistics of all participating LINKS instructors and the evolving LINKS learning benchmarking database.

LINKS instructors must specifically opt-in for each LINKS usage occasion because automatic participation does not exist. If an instructor opts-in to participate, their LINKS students will be sent an e-mail message saying something similar to "Your LINKS instructor has asked that you complete this survey about your LINKS experience. Thanks, in advance, for participating." The students are sent reminders if they do not reply in a timely manner, but they may also opt-out and will be permanently removed from Zoomerang's mailing list if they choose to do so. The Zoomerang surveying system includes checks to ensure that each invited student only completes the survey once.



The student is expected to take this survey on his/her own time, outside of class. After surveying is complete, instructors will receive an appropriate summary statistical report for their LINKS event. This summary statistical report will include results and the comparative benchmark statistics from all LINKS instructors participating in this learning benchmarking study. Only participating LINKS instructors receive the summary report for her/his LINKS class.

If an instructor wishes to try a demo version of the LINKS Benchmarking Survey, click on the "more information" link on the Instructor Resources webpage under the heading of LINKS Benchmarking Survey. This is found at the bottom of the page directly above "Other LINKS Stuff".

Demo responses are not included in the benchmarking database, so feel free to complete the survey yourself to see what your students will be asked. And, your feedback on the survey is always welcome!

Please contact Randy Chapman (Chapman@ChapmanRG.com) with any questions about the LINKS Benchmarking Survey or to sign-up to participate in the LINKS Benchmarking Survey.

# New LINKS White Paper

**A** new LINKS white paper has joined the evolving “LINKS Papers” collection in the Instructor Resources section of the LINKS website: “Individual Performance Assessment in Business Simulations”

The full set of LINKS white papers includes:

1. “Best-Practice Teaching With Business Simulations”  
[<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/PAPERS/Best-Practice.pdf>]
2. “Extreme Customization With LINKS Simulations”  
[<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/PAPERS/Extreme.pdf>]
3. “Practice Rounds in LINKS Events”  
[<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/PAPERS/PracticeRounds.pdf>]
4. “Adding Ethical Dilemmas To LINKS Events”  
[<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/PAPERS/EthicalDilemmas.pdf>]
5. “Individual Performance Assessment in Business Simulations”  
[<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/PAPERS/IndividualPerformance.pdf>]

The “LINKS Papers” collection includes articles, presentations, and white papers about the LINKS simulations.

## LINKS Simulation Database Enhancement

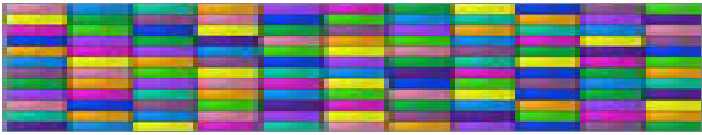
**T**o enhance usability of the LINKS Simulation Database, a “Return To Front Page” button has been added to each of the input web-screens immediately below the “Submit Inputs” button.

Clicking on the “Return To Front Page” button returns the user immediately to the front page of the LINKS Simulation Database without the need to click the browser’s “return”



control or to log-out of LINKS and then log back in. Like all clickable LINKS buttons within the input web-screens of the LINKS Simulation Database, any input changes on the current web-screen are saved to the LINKS web-server as part of the “Return” button processing.

Thanks to Jeff Thieme (University of Memphis) for suggesting this usability enhancement.



## Mid-Event LINKS Enhancements

**A**s the mid-point of many instructors' LINKS events approaches, LINKS instructors are reminded of the potential for mid-event enhancements. Generally, such enhancements are designed to further challenge LINKS participants after they've mastered the basics of managing their firms. These enhancements also keep the simulation fresh, so that participants don't think that they can simply proceed on "auto-pilot" after a few decision rounds.

The "Customizing LINKS" link in the Instructor Resources section provides convenient access to customization possibilities.

If you'd like to chat about possible mid-event enhancements to your LINKS event (via instructor-optional switches available within LINKS), please contact Randy Chapman ([Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com](mailto:Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com)).

## Daylight Savings Time For LINKS Instructors

**T**he LINKS website runs on US Eastern Time. With the forthcoming change to daylight savings time in the US Eastern Time zone, some current LINKS instructors might be impacted.



If your time zone has "unusual" behavior relative to daylight savings time in the US Eastern Time zone, it's possible that your game run schedule could be one-hour off from your expectation after daylight savings time begins. Please review your LINKS game run schedule on your "firm-0" webpage to ensure that it is still correct after the change to daylight savings in the US Eastern Time.

If any scheduling adjustments are appropriate, please contact Randy Chapman.

[Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com](mailto:Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com)

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had a business degree. They don't want to focus in Marketing and so they have this one course. So this is it, this is our chance to get across the principles of Marketing to future business leaders. I have never offered this class to undergraduates. All of my remarks are limited to MBA students.

### ***What is your typical class size?***

Each class is around 40 people. I have almost exclusively teams of four, and perhaps a few teams of five. Four is the ideal number, three isn't enough and with five somebody can be a free rider. So I want to prevent the free riders. I don't think there is as much free riding in the LINKS Simulation as a group project compared to all other group projects because they all get so into it and they all want to win.

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### ***Do you think a competitive environment helps?***

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Yes, I think a competitive environment helps because it provides motivation. They really want to beat their competitive teams. In fact in my class I think they are almost too oriented to competition at the cost of being oriented sometimes to the customer. I tell them the most important thing is you have to have a very attractive service design but they are concerned with “my competitor this, and my competitor that...” They just get really cranked up about competitors and market share. And certainly, market share is one of the most important criteria, but it’s not the only one, and its not heavily weighted.

### ***What response have you gotten from your students?***

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The simulation itself...my students love it. They just love it. I was just having coffee with one of my students. He was a supply chain major in undergraduate school. He said he just loves the simulation because it makes marketing real to him. I think another huge benefit is that it takes advantage of the MBA students natural bent toward competitiveness. I have taught MBAs for 20 years and they just have a competitive gene that the rest of us may not have so I think those two reasons, it’s really competitive and makes the course come alive in a way that sitting in a lecture or doing a case just doesn’t.

What’s so valuable about LINKS is that you have to balance in the same way that you do in the real world. You can’t just game it, or go for one thing. You really have to consider factors that are often at odds with each other--trade offs such as market share and net income.

### ***Do the students just seem to get it from the start?***

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No, they don’t get it from the start. The benefits accrue immediately to those people who take the time to read the manual. We’re on about the 4th or 5th week now and a lot of the students are so funny. They tell me “you need to tell the students to read that manual.” Because I don’t see myself as ‘Mom’, and I don’t say “You guys need to read that. Don’t forget to read that.” I say “It’s important to read the manual.” End of story. The ones who don’t listen find themselves behind the eight ball. I always think that is a pretty good way to go at it. It’s a pretty good way to distinguish people in the real world too. People who prepare, who are quick on the uptake, who try to figure out what’s going on and learn more about it. Those are qualities that are very beneficial in the business world. I think it’s OK for me to do what I do and say “Read the manual.” and not coax them all the time.

### ***When the students catch on, what happens?***

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The students quickly figure out ways that work for them. Forecasting is the biggest problem for them. That’s pretty realistic. It’s hard to forecast in the real world. That’s what is interesting about teaching these particular students. They are working in banks, Intel Corp., Honeywell, and a lot of companies like that. It makes marketing real for them. They come into this world thinking that marketing is advertising. But any service enterprise would say that it involves the people decisions, the physical evidence decisions, and marketing is a much bigger thing than just the message and pricing.

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### ***Is there a reoccurring topic that comes up regularly?***

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The students always ask “what is the service? We need to know what the service is.” I recently mentioned this to Randy and he sent me a great slide deck that’s going to solve that problem. I really don’t want to tell them. I agree with Randy’s idea about that. I tell the students just focus on the data because that’s what you are always going to have--data.

### ***Do your students order the research and do they find that it helps?***

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I don’t think they would order it as widely as they do if I didn’t encourage them. So when I introduce LINKS, I talk about some of the different research reports and show them examples and encourage them to order. Then I think they quickly figure out the reports that they find useful and the reports they don’t. I tell them, “Some of these are going to be good and some of them aren’t. You figure it out.” And I also tell them that teams that use research do better because knowledge is expensive and ignorance is more expensive. They see the teams that don’t order the research are behind the 8-ball immediately. That’s how you figure out what service design you should offer. I encourage them to order a lot of research.

### ***Your students have a high participation rate in the LINKS Benchmarking Survey. How do you encourage this?***

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I do look at the overall results from the benchmarking survey. I get tons of feedback from my students.

I think what you are seeing is my focus on customer service and feedback in general. I tell my students they are customers, they are paying \$40-45,000 to be there. A lot of people don’t think of students as customers but I do because they have money and they have choice. They don’t have to come to us. So I really have them so cranked up about customer focus and feedback that at the end of the course I am not surprised that they give feedback. They give me a lot of feedback. I really, really encourage it. In the middle of the course I give them a form for feedback, and then I put it up on a power point and show them what they said. I promote the idea of feedback. I tell them that the complaining customer is your friend—because you get to solve the problem. That might be what I do that really primes them to co-operate in the Benchmarking Survey and give their feedback. I tell the students about Randy. I use his name. I say that this simulation was prepared by Randy Chapman and Ruth Bolton, who used to be on our faculty. I tell them I send emails to Randy. I think it makes them feel that somebody is actually going to read their input.

I have the same attitude toward feedback that Randy has--he acts and reacts once he gets some feedback. That’s really a strong, strong value of Arizona State University. The only suggestion that I would make to Randy on that survey is to make room for open-ended comments because my students really have a lot of them to make. I think that survey is a bit frustrating to them because it doesn’t give them a chance to say anything.

Going through the LINKS experience produces a lot of angst. My students desire at the end to make comments and do a lot of decompressing. I do that for presentations on the last night, but

I also tell them, write down your feedback, email it to me and I'll send it to Randy, and I often do. I think it would be even better if it didn't have to go through me. They might want to say something they would not send to me. I hate to be gatekeeper to them. I believe in blunt feedback. I think it's a very good thing. I couldn't agree more with Randy.

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### ***Have your teaching evaluations changed since you began using LINKS Simulation?***

My teaching evaluations have gone up since I started using LINKS. I think it appeals to working MBAs--working professionals. At the end of every class we are required to offer the students the opportunity to evaluate the course and the instructor. And those evaluations are extremely important to each of our individual professional futures because we want our professors to be good teachers. It's my job performance. So my students perceptions of my job performance have increased greatly since I started using the LINKS Simulation. Despite the fact that I would change some of the interfaces, everybody loves the way it runs.

This simulation has put everything together for me in teaching this class. It has really made it so enjoyable for me and for the students. I could be a sales rep for this probably. I think it's really a great simulation and I am pretty sure that my students are more engaged and learning a lot more about marketing than before I used this simulation. I would like to help Randy get this in more schools because it really is good for the students. The way that the LINKS Simulation runs, I can't say enough about how good it is and how much my students love it. I don't have anybody who just doesn't love it. I teach executive MBAs over the winter...we start in the middle of November, we have another class in December then we take four weeks off. And then we have three classes...its a weird schedule...the point is, the last year when I taught this I started the simulation after the first of the year because I thought this will just be too disjointed. And they practically demanded...they said "now next year you are going to have to start this before Christmas. The students are going to want to do this. They are going to want to get into this." I almost think the students could do testimonials. They really like it. Please use all this stuff, I hope Randy sells a ton of simulations and I think it will make people better marketers and it will focus on the right things.

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### ***Do you have anything more you would like to add?***

Another thing that is really, really good about this simulation is Randy is "Mr. Responsive". When you have any kind of issue or problem, I am amazed at how fast he gets back to you and how responsive he is. I ran another simulation and they were pretty good, but you had to call their office and they didn't work on the weekend. Randy is "Mr. Responsive" and that's so important when you are faced with a problem with your simulation. It means everything that you get an e-mail response on a Friday night or the weekend. I think Randy offers service that no other simulation company offers. He has a great product and I am honored to be asked about it.



## Reminders

### LINKS Passcode Retrieval:

Convenient LINKS passcode retrieval for a LINKS participant (student or instructor) is possible via the “Retrieve LINKS Passcode” link on the main LINKS webpage (<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com>). Executing the “Retrieve LINKS Passcode” operation e-mails the firm’s passcode to the participant’s official e-mail address as currently recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

### E-Mail Address Management:

LINKS instructors submit their students’ e-mail addresses (grouped into teams) as part of the information-set provided to initialize a LINKS industry. Often, these are institutional rather than personal e-mail addresses. Since some participants prefer to use a personal e-mail address rather than an institutional e-mail address for LINKS, it’s possible for participants to update their official e-mail address as recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

Participant updates of official e-mail addresses as recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database are possible only after initialization and publication (via e-mail to all team members) of each LINKS firm’s passcode. Using their LINKS firm’s passcode, LINKS participants may change their official LINKS e-mail address after LINKS initialization via the “E-Mail Address Management” button in the LINKS Simulation Database. Confirmations of e-mail address changes are e-mailed to the old and new e-mail addresses.

### Student Payment Timing:

The published LINKS price (the discounted price) is in effect until the first round of LINKS is complete. Then, the price is increased 25%. This means that we can initialize your LINKS simulation event (and advance LINKS through to its normal starting point) and students can continue to pay at the discounted price until the first scheduled round is run. Before initialization can occur, we do need to receive your game-run schedule and the students’ e-mail addresses (grouped into teams).

It is not necessary for your students to pay before LINKS begins to have access to the discounted LINKS price. Students must only pay before the first official game run on your game-run schedule to receive the discounted price. Thus, student payments can occur simultaneously with the beginning of your LINKS simulation event.

Student payment with a personal credit card is via the “Pay For LINKS” link on the LINKS webpage.

As a practical matter, a final warning/reminder will be e-mailed to those students who haven’t paid by the first game run, before implementing the non-discounted price.

## LINKS Website Resources:

LINKS website (<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com>) links provide convenient access to all LINKS simulation variants, to the LINKS Simulation Database, to passcode-protected instructor resources, and to user interaction contact points such as "Pay For LINKS", "Payment Questions?", and "Retrieve LINKS Passcode".

## Some LINKS Resources:

- **Printed Manuals:** All LINKS manuals are freely available for download via the LINKS website. However, some LINKS instructors prefer to have publication-quality printed manuals provided for all of their students, rather than relying on their students to individually download/print the participant's manual from the LINKS website. We're happy to provide this service for LINKS instructors. The all-inclusive additional cost for participant manuals varies from \$18/student to \$28/student depending on the LINKS simulations variant. We normally need three weeks advance notice to arrange for production and shipping (to the instructor) from our on-demand printer.

- **What's New Document:** Please access the following document at the case-sensitive URL <http://www.LINKS-simulations.com/WhatsNew.pdf> to obtain a detailed listing of new updates/enhancements to LINKS. Experienced LINKS instructors should access this document several months before their next usage occasion, to review the updates/enhancements to LINKS since their last usage occasion.

- **LINKS Instructor Resources Access:** You may access the evolving LINKS Instructor Resources via the LINKS webpage. Contact Randy Chapman ([Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com](mailto:Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com)), the LINKS author, to obtain the relevant access parameters (username and passcode).



The LINKS-Simulations Newsletter is a monthly newsletter for current and prospective LINKS instructors and for LINKS friends. Please e-mail questions, comments, suggestions, and other contributions (e.g., LINKS teaching tips) to [Winkler@LINKS-simulations.com](mailto:Winkler@LINKS-simulations.com).

Editor: Cyndy Winkler



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