

⊗ <b>Professor's Column: Double-Team Final Presentations</b>	<b>1</b>
⊗ <b>How Is The LINKS Within-Simulation Grade Calculated?</b>	<b>3</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS FAQs--General Advice</b>	<b>5</b>
⊗ <b>Where In The World Is LINKS Simulations?</b>	<b>6</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS Global SCM Competition</b>	<b>7</b>
⊗ <b>Competing Against Historical LINKS Teams</b>	<b>8</b>
⊗ <b>Historical Benchmarks</b>	<b>9</b>
⊗ <b>Presidential Review Meetings</b>	<b>10</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars</b>	<b>12</b>



## Double-Team Final Presentations



*Nancy Stephens is a longtime user of the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation in the first-year MBA marketing course at Arizona State University. Nancy joined the LINKS Hall of Fame in 2012.*

**W**e all probably agree that ending the LINKS simulation with a team presentation is a very good way to get students to look back over their experiences and think about what they learned. However, if you have many students, it is unrealistic to ask every team to present in class. The class's attention span disappears and no one gains anything.

A solution is to assign double presentations – that is, assign two teams to prepare and present together. I first employed this method for practical reasons – to make sure I could fit every team into the presentation schedule. I discovered an even greater benefit – the learning that occurs when two teams discuss their experiences together.

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In the course syllabus, I inform the students that on the last day of class, teams will be doing a presentation regarding their experiences and lessons from participating in LINKS. No further information is given and students are told not to prepare; instruction will be given on that day. Inevitably, students ask questions and I simply advise them to come to class with their LINKS materials and to be thinking about what they have learned.

The double-presentation method works especially well if you have more than one industry but it can work even if you have just one industry. Prepare index cards and at the beginning of the last class period, let each team from Industry A select a card which reveals its partner team in Industry B. (This shows the students that the pairings are random and that you didn't assign them based on how well they performed in LINKS.)

Then, instruct the pairs of teams to leave the classroom for 60-90 minutes and prepare a 15 or 20-minute presentation answering two questions: (1) What was your team's strategy and how did you execute it? (2) Firm-specific questions such as "What was your most difficult decision in LINKS?" "What was your easiest decision?" "If you could change one thing, what would it be?" "What two or three pieces of advice would you give to the next management team that takes over your firm?" In other words, ask the teams to discuss questions that will encourage them to reflect on their experiences and what they learned.

I evaluate the presentations on how well the students integrate marketing concepts and lessons from the course into their LINKS experiences. It always seems difficult for teams to do this. They inevitably take a descriptive approach, e.g., "First, we did this, and then we did that." That earns an average grade on the presentation. An excellent grade on the presentation is earned by teams who integrate broad lessons from the course. (Because the preparation time is so short, I never grade on the look/feel of the presentation, just on the content.)

I encourage you to think about the double-presentation method, even if you have a small number of students. The learning that occurs is well worth it.



# New LINKS Instructor FAQ



## How Is The LINKS Within-Simulation Grade Calculated?

The LINKS within-simulation grade, reported in the Instructor Reports, is based on firms' KPI (Key Performance Indicators) standings. The KPIs for a LINKS simulation event are described in the LINKS participant's manual. KPI standings, without grades, are reported to firms on the first page of their Word doc results files.

We'll use the sample results shown below from the Instructor Reports file for a LINKS industry to detail the LINKS within-simulation grade calculation.

	Current Results		Total	
	Industry	Weighted	Weighted	
	Firm 1	Average	Points	Points
<b>FINANCIAL</b>				
Net Income to Revenues	-0.5%	1.9%	0.0	12.0
Change in Net Income to Revenues	2.9%	2.6%	2.5	7.0
<b>OPERATIONAL</b>				
Forecasting Accuracy	62.5%	73.6%	0.0	12.0
(Marketing + Service) to Revenues	8.7%	8.3%	1.0	4.0
<b>CUSTOMER</b>				
Change in Market Share	0.6%	0.0%	1.0	4.0
Customer Satisfaction	16.8%	20.9%	1.0	4.0
Firm 1 Total Weighted Points			5.5	43.0
Maximum Possible Weighted Points			27.0	108.0
Firm 1 Grade			76.1%	81.9%

For each KPI, a firm scores one ranking point for each competitor that the firm's KPI is "better" than (e.g., higher for a more-is-better KPI like "Net Income To Revenue"). For example, in a 4-firm industry, the top-scoring "Net Income To Revenue" KPI firm receives 3 ranking points each LINKS round.

For each KPI, multiply the ranking points times the KPI weight (KPI weights are detailed in the LINKS participant's manual).

Sum over all KPIs to obtain the total weighted KPI ranking points in a LINKS round.

In the example above, the firm received 0 weighted KPI points for Net Income To Revenue because it scored "worst" (lowest) in this LINKS round.

In the example above, firm 1 achieved a total of 5.5 weighted KPI ranking points in this LINKS round.

"Maximum Possible Weighted Points" is the upper limit possible if a firm scored best on every KPI in a LINKS round.

The firm's current-round grade reflects the re-scaling of the weighted KPI ranking points from the interval zero to max to the LINKS grading interval 70 to 100 (70% to 100%). For example, a firm that is 40% along the weighted KPI ranking points range of zero to max would be given a grade equal to 40% of the 70-100 grading interval (i.e., 82 which is 40% of the way along the range 70-100).

In the example above, firm 1 has 5.5 current-round weighted KPI ranking points, relative to the maximum possible 27 KPI ranking points. This corresponds to a grade of 76.1% in the grading interval 70% to 100%.

"Total Weighted Points" references the cumulative LINKS within-simulation grade for rounds #4 through to the current round.

The LINKS FAQs are a rich self-service support resource for LINKS students and instructors.



## General Advice

“What general advice can you offer for a new LINKS participant?”

*Five general advice nuggets are offered to guide your efforts at mastering LINKS and to offer hope that you might be able to continuously improve your performance throughout your LINKS exercise:*

- 1. read and re-read the LINKS participant’s manual (there’s lots of good stuff in it);*
- 2. think about general management principles and how they might work within the simulation;*
- 3. get the facts and base your decisions on the facts, not on wishes, hopes, and/or dreams;*
- 4. you can learn a lot from monitoring the competition; and,*
- 5. ask your coach/instructor questions, but don’t ask about things that are well-described in the LINKS participant’s manual (since you can always read and re-read the LINKS participant’s manual yourself).*

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## Where In The World Is LINKS Simulations?



**L**INKS Simulations exhibits at 12+ conferences annually to reach out to prospective LINKS instructors and to interact with existing LINKS users.

We'll be exhibiting at these conferences in the near future:

September 17-19	MMA Fall Educators' Conference @ San Antonio
September 20-21	SCMEC Conference @ San Antonio
November 5-7	SMA Conference @ New Orleans
November 22-25	DSI Conference @ Tampa

If you're attending any of these conferences, please do stop by our exhibit to chat.

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# LINKS Global SCM Competition

The 2014 LINKS Global SCM Competition is scheduled for October-November 2014. The LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation is used in the LINKS Global SCM Competition.

Highlights of the LINKS Global SCM Competition:

- Cross-Institution 8-Round Supply Chain Management Simulation Competition
- Your Student Teams Compete Against Student Teams From Other Institutions
- Challenges Students in an Intense Team-Based Cross-Institution Competition
- For Students in Academic Degree-Granting Programs Worldwide
- Targeted at Upper-Level Undergraduates and All MBAs



Further details about the October-November 2014 LINKS Global SCM Competition (scheduling, student eligibility, costs, and registration procedure) are accessible via the LINKS Global Competition link on the LINKS website.

Registration signup and payment deadline for the 2014 LINKS Global SCM Competition is September 26, 2014.

Participating in a LINKS Global SCM Competition is an alternative instructional/learning opportunity to the traditional usage of LINKS within a single instructor's course (i.e., an event with students from a single course conducted according to the course instructor's preferred scheduling).

Faculty members with questions about the LINKS Global SCM Competition are invited to contact Randy Chapman, the LINKS author (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com).

# Competing Against Historical LINKS Teams

In standard LINKS usage, an instructor's class is divided into teams ("firms" in LINKS) that compete against one another within a LINKS industry. This is traditional live direct competition among current-student teams in an instructor's current course. There are no computer controlled firms in LINKS.

Instructors can include historical LINKS firms as competitors in a current LINKS event.

Competing against historical firms involves a re-play of a pre-existing (historical) LINKS industry with the same setup, market conditions, and within-event instructor-optional switches. In this LINKS re-play, some firms are managed by current-student teams who compete against the historical decisions of other firms within the re-played LINKS industry.



This LINKS innovation will be especially interesting to instructors with smaller classes whose only other viable alternatives would seem to be:

- Use an inert firm, which provides uninteresting competition.
- Use more smaller-sized teams to provide meaningful competition in a LINKS industry. Smaller-sized teams may miss the richness and associated inherent learning opportunities of within-team discussions in larger-sized teams.
- Seek to join forces with another instructor using the same LINKS simulation variant with a similar event schedule in a cross-institution LINKS industry.

In a re-play of a pre-existing (historical) LINKS industry, some firms are composed of current students in an instructor's course while other firms (and their decision inputs) are drawn from the historical LINKS archives. Instructors can freely mix-and-match current-student teams and historical competitors within a re-play of a pre-existing (historical) LINKS industry. By assigning current-student teams to manage lower-performing historical firms in a re-play, better-performing historical teams provide meaningful and even challenging competition for current-student teams.

Since the current and historical firms are competing in the same LINKS marketplace, they both have to (for current firms) or had to (for historical firms) respond to common underlying market forces such as cost structure, market drivers, and market growth patterns. Thus, such historical firms provide meaningful competition for current-student teams.

For more details (including logistics and practical considerations), please access the LINKS White Paper "Competing Against Historical LINKS Teams" from which this text is abstracted.

Instructors interested in exploring the option of a LINKS event with their current-student teams competing against historical LINKS teams are invited to contact Randy Chapman, the LINKS author ([Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com](mailto:Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com)) for conversation



## Historical Benchmarks

**H**ow high is “up”? In LINKS, the answer is partly provided by the within-industry benchmarks reported on the first page of each firm’s financial reports. These within-industry benchmarks provide a firm’s current-industry performance “ups” (current-industry minimums, averages, and maximums) on Key Performance Indicators such as Net Income To Revenue % and Forecasting Accuracy %. However, the larger question remains: what’s possible? ... what’s the upper limit of performance? The LINKS Historical Benchmarks provide the answer to this broader question.

LINKS Historical Benchmarks are based on the history of all firms since February 1, 2012 for a particular LINKS Simulations variant.

These Historical Benchmarks provide a meaningful cross-industry performance reference for any firm at any point in time in a LINKS event. For example, a firm in a LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation industry in Month #6 may compare its performance to all past firms in Month #6 of LINKS Supply Chain Management Simulation industries via the Historical Benchmarks.

**Note:** The Global Top-10 Rankings also provide benchmarks, but the comparison in the Global Top-10 Rankings is to all other firms in all LINKS Simulations variants with a scheduled game run in that calendar week. And, of course, those other firms are using any LINKS Simulations variant (not necessarily your LINKS Simulations variant) and are at various stages in their LINKS events.



# Presidential Review Meetings

## Best-Practice Presidential Review Meetings

### What?

- o Private, pre-scheduled 30-minute meetings with each LINKS team to permit the LINKS instructor to review a team's LINKS business, to answer team members' questions, and to sense the progress that teams are making in the simulation. This is one-with-a-few style of teaching/coaching, rather than the one-to-the-masses lecture-hall style of instruction.
- o "Private" due to the competitive nature of LINKS.

### Why?

- o Provides a different kind of powerful teaching/learning opportunity (instructor as coach) at key points during the simulation event.
- o Simulates business review meetings with a "boss" or senior management official.

### Who?

- o Instructor and all members of a single LINKS team.
- o Instructor plays multiple roles during a presidential review meeting: "firm president," instructor, coach, and encouraging/proud/supportive "parent."

### When?

- o Re-assigned class time is recommended, with teams not meeting with the instructor using that time for their own private firm deliberations. In most cases, meetings will extend beyond class time, due to the number of firms involved.
- o In shorter LINKS event, a single round of review meetings might be held, perhaps just before (or no later than just after) the second decision round. In longer LINKS events, several waves of presidential review meetings might be scheduled with the second round of presidential review meetings occurring at about the mid-point of the simulation event.

### Where?

- o Private meeting space is required, possibly the regular course classroom for presidential meetings scheduled during class hours.

### How?

- o Meeting Scheduling
  - Pre-scheduled meetings, normally permitting students to pick their own times from a range of available meeting times.
  - Classroom-hours meeting times might be rotated around all teams, if multiple presidential review meetings waves are held. With a single set of presidential review meetings, classroom-hours meeting times might be randomly assigned.
- o Instructor Preparation: Bring printed firm results output to the meeting, to reference during the discussion.
- o Meetings Format Options:
  - No Student Prep [Not recommended]: Just discussion and Q&A.
  - Some Student Prep [Recommended]: Team members collaborate and submit (via e-mail) questions/issues to be discussed. Submissions are due at least 12 hours before the scheduled presidential review meeting to permit the LINKS instructor time to review and prepare.
  - Substantial Student Prep [Optional]: SWOT Analysis. Submissions due at least 24 hours before the scheduled presidential review meeting to permit LINKS instructor review and prep.

- o Some Instructor Questions To Pose During the Meeting:
  - What are the largest problems that your firm faces?
  - What's been your best and worst team decision to date?
  - Who is the best performing competitor in your industry? Why?
  - To customers, what differential advantage does your firm offer compared to competitors?
  - How is your firm currently organized (e.g., by function, by region, as a committee of the whole)? Is this organization "best" for the current problems/challenges faced by your firm?

## Likely Outcomes Arising From Presidential Review Meetings

### For Students:

- o Greater emphasis on research study needs going forward.
- o More attention to prioritization of issues.
- o More focus on the really important issues.
- o More systematic attention to division of labor and responsibility assignments.

### For Instructors:

- o Deep appreciation for team and individual-student progress.
- o Ideas for in-class discussion and in-class tutorials, based on common issues and concerns arising across teams.
- o Follow-up meeting scheduling for "lost"/"deeply troubled"/"unprepared" teams.

## Variations on Private, Single-Team, Scheduled Presidential Review Meetings

- o With many industries in very large courses, schedule joint meetings with each firm 1 from all industries meeting with the LINKS instructor simultaneously. Repeat for firm 2, etc. Note that non-competing teams are jointly meeting with the LINKS instructor.
- o In distance learning, use teleconferences for meetings.
- o Automatic presidential review meetings must be scheduled immediately by any firm with two successive rounds of losses (negative net income).



## LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars

October 6-10 and December 8-12, 2014

LINKS Simulations Immersion Experience

Five Teleconferences and Four-Round LINKS Simulation Events

Registration is available for the next five-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. These intensive-mode seminar formats includes 2-3 hours of work per day during each of the five days of the distance-learning seminars.

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.)

# Reminders

**LINKS Passcode Retrieval:** 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 recorded in the LINKS Simulation Database.

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

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 a LINKS 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.

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

**E-Mail Address Management:** Using their LINKS firm’s passcode, LINKS students may change their official LINKS e-mail address 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.

**LINKS Instructor Resources:** Instructors access 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 username and passcode.



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



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