

⊗ <b>Historical Benchmarks</b>	<b>1</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS Hall of Fame - Class of 2015</b>	<b>2</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS Global Services Competition 2015</b>	<b>3</b>
⊗ <b>Where In The World Is LINKS Simulations?</b>	<b>4</b>
⊗ <b>Decision Variables Checks and Messages</b>	<b>5</b>
⊗ <b>“LINKS Online Teaching Tips” (White Paper #17) Updated</b>	<b>6</b>
⊗ <b>LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars</b>	<b>8</b>

## 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 the upper limit of performance? The LINKS Historical Benchmarks answer this broader question.



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

Historical Benchmarks are accessible to firms within the LINKS Simulation Database.

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.



## Class of 2015

**L**INKS Hall of Fame membership reflects recognition, respect, and thanks accorded long-time (5+years) LINKS instructors for their interest in, support of, and commitment to the LINKS Simulations. Along with LINKS Hall of Fame enshrinement, the title "LINKS Fellow" is bestowed on these distinguished LINKS supporters.

The LINKS Hall of Fame class of 2015 includes these 7 long-time LINKS users/supporters:



**Helen Benton,  
Anglia Ruskin  
University**



**Shankar Ganesan,  
University of  
Notre Dame**



**David Paul,  
Monmouth  
University**



**Tom Robbins,  
East Carolina  
University**



**Gordan Smith,  
University  
of Houston**



**John Taylor,  
Wayne State  
University**



**Zach Zacharia,  
Lehigh  
University**

# LINKS Global Services Competition 2015

The 2015 LINKS Global Services Competition is scheduled for March-April 2015.

Student teams participate in either of two separate services competitions ... either with the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation **or** with the LINKS Services Operations Management Simulation.

These mid-sized simulations are appropriate for students in **introductory or elective courses** in marketing, services, or operations management.

Highlights of the LINKS Global Services Competition:

- Cross-Institution 6-Round Services Simulation Competitions
- 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



Two separate LINKS Global Services Competitions are offered, with the LINKS Services Marketing Simulation **and** with the LINKS Services Operations Management Simulation. These are integrative, team-based, competitive simulations suitable for upper-level undergraduates and all MBAs.

Further details about the March-April 2015 LINKS Global Services Competition (scheduling, student eligibility, costs, and registration procedure) are accessible via the **LINKS Global Competition** link on the LINKS Simulations website:

<http://www.LINKS-simulations.com>

Participating in a LINKS Global Services 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).

Questions? Faculty members with questions about the LINKS Global Services Competition are invited to contact Randall G Chapman PhD, the LINKS author (Chapman@LINKS-simulations.com).

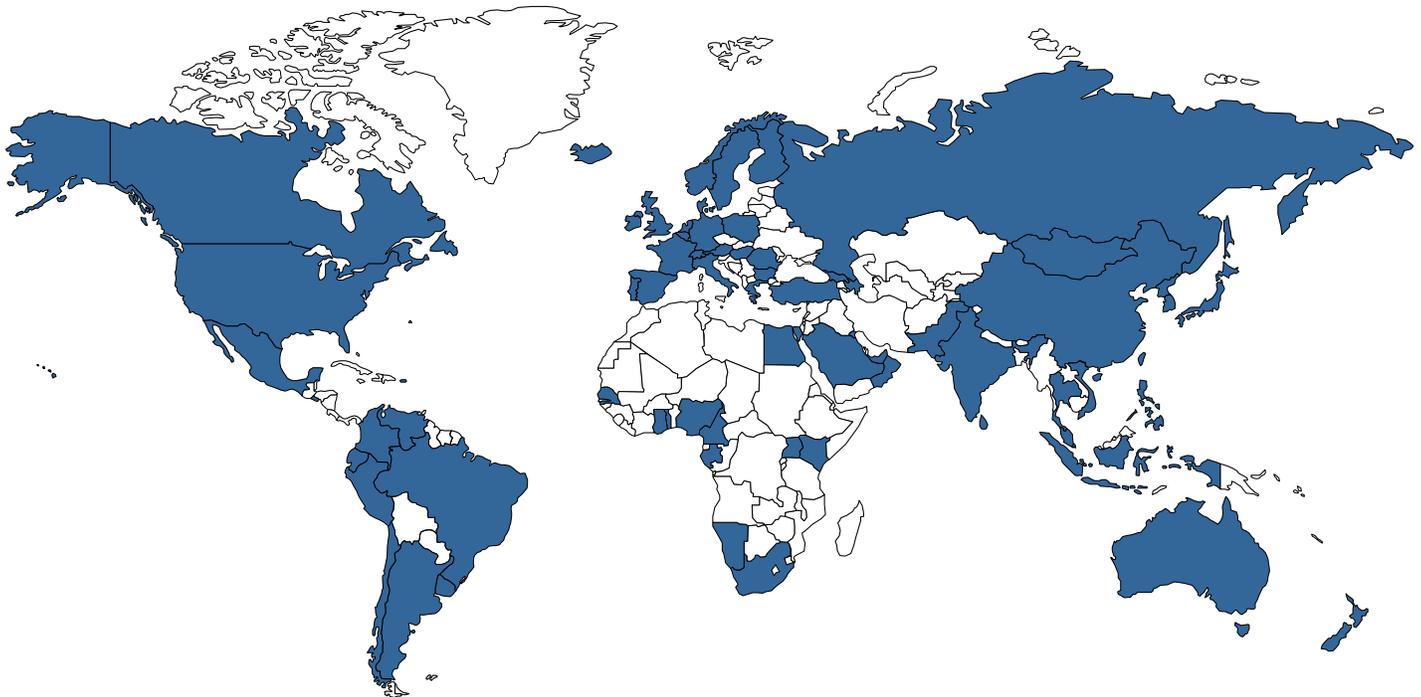
# Where In The World Is LINKS Simulations?

**L**INKS Simulations exhibits at 10-12 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:

March 25-27	MBAA Conference @ Chicago
April 15-17	Marketing Educators' Association Conference @ Las Vegas
May 8-11	POMS Conference @ Washington
June 18-20	INFORMS Marketing Science Conference @ Baltimore
July 10-12	Frontiers in Service Conference @ San Jose

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



# Decision Variables Checks and Messages

With the lengthy reports in LINKS, instructors are challenged to identify noteworthy issues for attention and follow-up after LINKS game runs.

To assist instructors and to increase the visibility of “unusual” developments and questionable student inputs, “Decision Variable Checks and Messages” e-mail is sent to LINKS instructors immediately after game runs to provide top-line reporting of noteworthy but potentially low-visibility circumstances in just-completed LINKS game runs. No new information is reported that is not already in the instructor and firm reports, but this instructor e-mail increases the visibility of these developments.

A sample “Decision Variables Checks and Messages” e-mail is shown below.

```
Decision Variables Checks and Messages for Quarter 10 are included near the end of the financial reports of each LINKS firm in industry SAM. To provide convenient instructor access and to ensure the visibility of these Decision Variables Checks and Messages, this instructor e-mail message reports the Decision Variable Checks and Messages for each firm in industry SAM in Quarter 10.
```

```
Status of Decision Variables Checks and Messages For Industry SAM Quarter 10:
```

```
Firm SAM1: No decision variable checks and messages to report.
Firm SAM2: Decision variable checks and messages reported in the attachment SAM2.txt
Firm SAM3: Decision variable checks and messages reported in the attachment SAM3.txt
Firm SAM4: Decision variable checks and messages reported in the attachment SAM4.txt
Firm SAM5: No decision variable checks and messages to report.
Firm SAM6: No decision variable checks and messages to report.
Firm SAM7: No decision variable checks and messages to report.
Firm SAM8: Decision variable checks and messages reported in the attachment SAM8.txt
```

```
DISTRIBUTION DECISION VARIABLE CHECKS [Firm SAM2]
```

```
DC2 closed; DC2 inventory has been disposed (@ 80.0% of current book value).
DC2 inventory disposal costs = 11,400 (recorded as Consulting Fees).
```

```
SERVICE DECISION VARIABLE CHECKS [Firm SAM3]
```

```
Service outsourcing now exists in region 1 so 34 CSRs are fired in region 1.
```

```
FORECASTING DECISION VARIABLE CHECKS [Firm SAM3]
```

```
4 forecasts are unchanged. Forecasts are normally changed every quarter.
```

```
FORECASTING DECISION VARIABLE CHECKS [Firm SAM4]
```

```
4 forecasts are unchanged. Forecasts are normally changed every quarter.
```

```
RESEARCH STUDIES DECISION VARIABLE CHECKS [Firm SAM8]
```

```
No research studies have been ordered.
```

```
Research studies are normally ordered every quarter.
```

Based on this sample “Decision Variable Checks and Messages” e-mail, instructor follow-up would be appropriate with firms SAM3 and SAM4 regarding their unchanged forecasts. Forecasts are normally changed in every LINKS round, reflecting most-recent sales history, competitor actions, and a firm’s forthcoming business/operating plan. And, for firm SAM8, a watchful and inquisitive LINKS instructor might converse with this firm about the value of research studies and the implausibility/inappropriateness of ordering no research studies.

Frequent messages included in these “Decision Variable Checks and Messages” are “forecasts are unchanged” and “no research studies have been ordered.”



## “LINKS Online Teaching Tips” (White Paper #17) Updated

*“A few things matter most. Find those things.” - Richard Koch*

**A** Google search of “*online teaching tips*” (quotes included) yields 31,900+ hits. Clearly, there are now many web-based resources to assist instructors in crafting and executing online courses. And, online education resources at the instructor’s local institution are likely to offer plentiful advice for new online instructors.

This LINKS White Paper highlights special considerations arising in online courses (compared to traditional classroom-based courses) which include team-based competitive business simulations as a course component.

This discussion is relevant to all online courses which include team or group activities, such as traditional cases and group projects.

### Online Instructional Environment

- Exploit the LINKS Simulations website resources throughout the online course, especially the video resources included on the LINKS website.
- The online instructional environment typically includes recorded lectures as a major component. Michele Bunn (University of Alabama at Birmingham) offers this advice to the online instructor: *If possible for online classes, integrate discussions of LINKS concepts (e.g., forecasting, manufacturing, pricing, and performance assessment) into recorded lectures or into other course materials. Provide frequent opportunities for online students to connect the LINKS analysis and activities with the course material. This typically happens in a live class on an ad hoc basis, so it is important to plan for it in the online class.*

### Simulation Teams in Online Courses

- Strongly encourage LINKS teams to communicate regularly via teleconference rather than solely using e-mail or private course-specific chat rooms. Within-team teleconferencing fosters more expansive back-and-forth conversation among team members when compared to relatively brief e-mails, texts, or chats. If your institution’s online program doesn’t offer teleconferencing capabilities, part-time students who are employed full-time may have convenient teleconferencing access within their work environment. And, of course, Skype, Google Chat, and Google Hangouts are accessible to everyone at no or nominal cost.
- In forming LINKS teams, attention to the students’ geographical locations is relevant. A team with members from Brazil, Qatar, and Singapore will have obvious difficulty in meeting together simultaneously online or via teleconference. Thus, forming LINKS teams with members from “relatively close” time zones is prudent, so as not to unduly burden students.

- Consider using smaller-sized LINKS teams in online courses ... perhaps even two-person teams, especially with the small- and mid-sized LINKS Simulations. It's much more difficult for an individual to become "lost" in the online-team crowd within a smaller-sized team. Also, two-person telephone conversations don't require teleconferencing capabilities.

## Student Assessment in Online Courses

- Use two early LINKS quizzes (perhaps each weighted as 10% of the total LINKS grade) to ensure that each online-course student is LINKS-engaged at the beginning of the simulation event. The first quiz might be scheduled just before the first scheduled LINKS game run, with the second quiz scheduled no later than just before the third scheduled LINKS game run. An early immersion into LINKS ensures that students acquire adequate simulation knowledge and helps create enthusiastic participation within the online team environment.

- Use a combination of individual-student and team-based written reports — both mid-event and post-event — rather than relying solely on an end-of-event team-based report to ensure individual-student accountability.

- Include LINKS-related questions on course examinations. Advise your students of this assessment element in your course syllabus.

## Within-Event Individual and Team Monitoring in Online Courses

- Use multiple, private team presidential review meetings (via teleconferences) to assess the relative contribution of each team member. More frequent presidential reviews are preferable in online environments in comparison with traditional classroom-based courses.

- Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University) offers this sage advice: *In an online course where the students can't see the instructor, constantly reinforce your availability. Otherwise, students may feel that they are imposing on you and that their questions and issues aren't important enough to bother you. They may become disconnected from the school. I posted at the end of almost every Blackboard announcement a friendly offer, e.g. "As always, please do not hesitate to get in touch if I can be helpful."*

Additional resources for LINKS online teaching, and elaborations on these key LINKS online teaching tips, are accessible on the LINKS Simulations website. In particular:

Instructor Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· December 2010: Stacey Hills (Utah State University), "Individual Performance Assessment in Large Group Projects"</li> <li>· July 2010: Dwight Dowdell (Dowdell &amp; Associates), "E-learning and LINKS in Corporate Education"</li> </ul>
Professor's Column	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· September 2012: Nancy Stephens (Arizona State University), "About LINKS Online" Revisited</li> <li>· October 2011: Carol Scovotti (University of Wisconsin - Whitewater), "Five Lessons Learned Teaching LINKS Online"</li> <li>· July 2010: Chester Xiang (Clarkson University), "Online LINKS SCM"</li> <li>· March 2010: Karl Manrodt and Susan Manrodt (Georgia Southern University), "Two-Person LINKS Teams at Georgia Southern"</li> </ul>
White Papers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· LINKS White Paper #5: "Individual Performance Assessment in Business Simulations"</li> <li>· LINKS White Paper #12: "LINKS Teaching Tips"</li> </ul>



## LINKS Train-The-Trainer Seminars

March 2-6, June 22-26, and August 3-7, 2015

### LINKS Simulations Immersion Experience Five Teleconferences and a Four-Round LINKS Simulation Event

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



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