

# Role playing exercise for the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea



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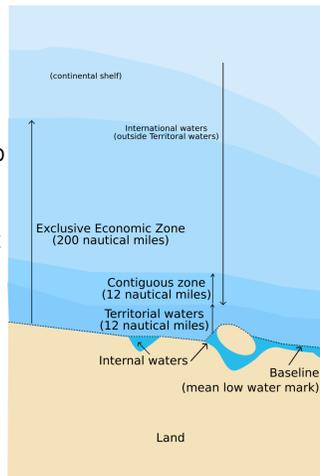


## Summary

This is a role playing exercise where students are divided up into five make-believe countries, and they have to come up with a framework similar to the Convention on the Law of the Sea.

**Scenario:** All prior treaties and laws of the sea have collapsed. Throughout the world, a series of greed and “might is right” prevails. Many technologically superior nations are planning programs to exploit previous minerals, energy, and food resources from the world’s oceans. The United Nations feels that the only potential for a negotiable solution capable of averting conflict rests in their organization.

In a last ditch effort, the United Nations has selected five representative countries from a cross-section of its membership to attempt a compromise in the form of a new “Law of the Sea”. These five representative countries must develop a solution. The entire world is concerned that, if this conference is not a success, world war may be eminent as several countries are poised to set their plans into operation.



## Context

### Type and level of course:

Introductory Oceanography lab section. Lab is a 1-credit course that is co-requisite with the 3-credit lecture section.

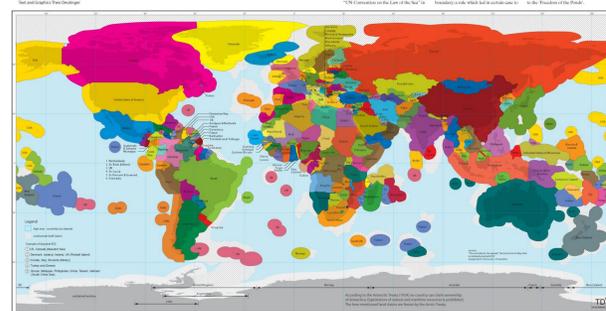
### Skills and concepts students have mastered before the activity:

Students have completed labs covering primary productivity, marine biology, tides, estuaries, ocean circulation, and climate change. The more background students have, the deeper they can get into the discussion during the role-playing.

### How activity is situated in the course:

This is the second to last lab in the semester.

### Exclusive Economic Zone



## Goals of the Activity

### Content and Concept Goals:

Familiarity with concepts like Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), defensible borders, international disputes, geoid. Understanding of how the UNCLOS plays out today. Articulate the perspective of other countries.

### Higher order thinking skills:

Evaluation of written and oral arguments, critical evaluation of competing models, synthesis of ideas from previous labs.

### Other skills:

Comfort speaking in front of class. The following week students give final project debates. Consideration of ethical issues surrounding UNCLOS



## Description and Teaching Materials

Students are split into five groups and assigned a country at random. Each group is given a sheet of paper with more specific information about their country. Briefly, the five countries are defined as:

**Country #1** is a land-locked country with a single river that is large enough to be used for a port.

**Country #2** is a coastal country that is very poor.

**Country #3** is a small island country that depends on fishing for its livelihood.

**Country #4** is a middle-sized island country that has a powerful navy.

**Country #5** is a large coastal country with a few good ports, an underdeveloped, agricultural and limited industrial economy.

The conference and negotiations must address the following topics:

§ How far from any country’s boundaries can militarily defensible borders extend?

§ How far can any country extend its economic boundaries?

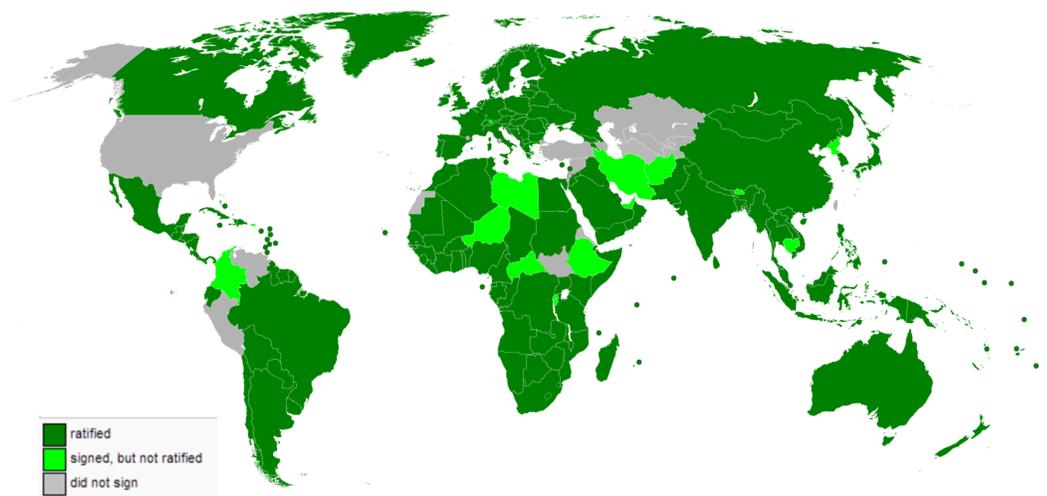
§ What happens when two countries’ defensible or economic boundaries overlap?

§ Since some countries are more technologically advanced than others, should the oceans be free economic zones for any country or corporation to manage as its resources allow? Or should the information and profits from the ocean’s exploitation somehow be divided? If so, how (i.e. to whom and how much)?

§ Who will settle disputes when they arise?

### The flow of the exercise is as follows:

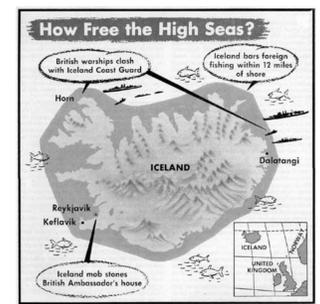
- Exercise overview
- Country assignment, review, and naming
- Strategy session I
- Conference opening statements
- Strategy session II
- Conference debate
- Strategy session III
- Treaty writing
- Follow-up writing



## Assessment

Students are assessed based on their participation (10 pts) and brief reflective writing assignment (10 pts) that is completed at the end of the exercise before the lab is completed. We have students to respond to the following questions:

1. Did your country decide to sign the treaty? Why or why not?
2. What compromises (if any) did your country decide to make throughout the process? Do you feel these are realistic? If you chose not to compromise on any of the five issues, why?
3. How did you decide to prioritize which issues were most important to your country? For example, was it most important to your country to maximize its use of the sea in an economic sense, or was it more important to come to an overall agreement with all nations? Why were these particular priorities chosen?
4. During the conference, what do you feel was the most difficult or frustrating part of the process of creating and signing the treaty? Why?



## Resources

The following websites are useful for teachers and students to learn more about the UNCLOS:

UN overview of the UNCLOS:

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/oceans/>

The actual UN webpage: <http://www.un.org/Depts/los/index.htm>

Wikipedia is a useful source of information:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United\\_Nations\\_Convention\\_on\\_the\\_Law\\_of\\_the\\_Sea](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea)

The New York Times has a webpage that collects articles related to this topic. This is really helpful for current news items:

[http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/l/law\\_of\\_the\\_sea\\_convention/index.html](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/l/law_of_the_sea_convention/index.html)

There are a number of policy groups, think tanks, PIRGs, etc. with opinions on the matter. Here is one website that students frequently use (because they think it is the official UN website, which is a good segue into reliable sources): <http://www.unlawoftheseatreaty.org/>

The UN has a good collection of related links:

<http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/oceans/links.shtml>