

# Making the Case for Case Study Learning

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## Abstract

*"Through service, through application, through rendering their learning far more active, reflective, and collaborative, students would actually learn more liberally, understand what they have learned more deeply, and develop the capacity to use what they have learned in the service of their communities" (Shulman, 2004, p:26).*

Teaching in the leisure discipline can be a challenging task. It requires professors to be well versed in the growing base of literature and theory, to translate them to learners and to somehow have them link to the real world where students will apply their newfound knowledge. One of the most effective tools that professors have at their disposal is the use of the case study method in the classroom. This paper will "make the case for case study learning" in the leisure discipline and hopefully encourage more widespread development and use of case studies within classrooms.

## Cases as conduits between theory and practice

There is ample evidence that engaged students learn more effectively (Bonwell and Eison, 1991; Dunne and Brooks, 2004). Authentic and enduring learning, according to Schulman (2004) occurs when the learners is an active agent in the process. This type of deep learning is critical in disciplines where students are going to have to apply their knowledge and skills upon graduation. Practice with "real life" scenarios can provide them with the confidence, analytical and decision-making skills that they will need to become effective practitioners.

Case studies are an effective method to ignite inquiry in students. Case studies can be defined as:

*"A means of participatory and dialogical teaching and learning by group discussion of actual events". (Association for Case Teaching)*

*" complex examples which give an insight into the context of a problem as well as illustrating the main point". (Fry 1999)*

*"student centred activities based on topics that demonstrate theoretical concepts in an applied setting". (Penn State, 2005)*

## Pedagogical rationale for using cases to facilitate learning

There are numerous pedagogical reasons for incorporating cases into the classroom. Cases have been found to shift the emphasis in the classroom environment from a teacher centered to student centered activity (Grant 1997). Others have found that cases can empower students and increase student motivation and interest in subject matter (Mustoe and Croft, 1999). Summarizing the contributions of the case method in disciplines such as Business, Law and Health, Dunne and Brooks suggest that cases are effective vehicles in developing a variety of skills as shown in Table 1. Many of these skills such as the ability to make sound judgments, analyze data, work effectively in groups and present information, are transferable skills that cross-disciplinary boundaries.

**Table 1. Why cases are used in Law, Business and Medicine**

<b>Law</b>	<b>Business</b>	<b>Medicine</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn law and legal process</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop analytical skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase motivation for learning</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teach students to "think like a lawyer"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop sound business judgment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structure knowledge in ways that can be used in clinical contexts</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote judgment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Test understanding and application of theory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote integration of knowledge</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance advocacy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a real world perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop clinical reasoning skills</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop critical analysis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Motivate a topic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop self directed learning skills</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage and involve students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote evidence based practice</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn to work in groups</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop self confidence</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop presentation skills</li> </ul>	

*Source: Summarized from Dunne and Brooks (2004)*

Davis and Wilcock (retrieved April 2005) provide support for the notion that cases develop transferable skills. In particular, skills in working effectively with groups are enhanced as individuals have to learn to trust, share, dialogue and work together to address a shared problem. Similarly, individual study skills are enhanced when students are tasked with doing external research to feed into case discussions. Good decision making requires students to become more adept at information gathering and analysis. They also suggest that for longer cases, students develop better time management skills as they learn to carry out work, arrange group meetings and target final products for deadlines. As many students are required to present the results of their case analysis to others either orally or in writing, cases assist students to develop stronger presentations

## **Incorporating cases into the classroom**

While valuable, using cases in the classroom requires advance preparation, strong facilitation skills and some trial and error. Student centered does not mean all the responsibility is on the students, or that one simply provides a case to students, expects that they read it and come to class eager to discuss! Depending on what students are used to, the introduction of case learning may require some readjustment and some discomfort. The Teaching and Learning with Technology Department at Penn State University suggests that many students find it difficult to learn with case assignments. Some students are uncomfortable with open-ended questions and problems that have more than one potential solution. Others may find that the complexity of case studies is difficult to make sense of, and unless supported they may become frustrated and shut down instead of engage in critical thinking. If the case is done in a group environment, problems between group members may create “noise” and interfere with learning. Some cases deal with sensitive information that may require trust between learners.

Clyde Freeman Herreid, at the National Center for Case Study Teaching in Science at the University at Buffalo provides a comprehensive list of what not to do when teaching with cases (retrieved April 2005). His list is particularly useful to become more effective at using the case method and includes:

1. Don't fail to prepare
2. Don't start a discussion with a closed-ended question
3. Don't deal with controversial emotional material until you have analyzed all the facts in the case
4. Don't forget to use the blackboard in an organized way
5. Don't expect to have a great discussion until the students know one another
6. Don't forget to call on different people
7. Don't forget to listen to the students and respond to them
8. Don't leave the seats in a row
9. Don't stand in one place, move around
10. Don't fret if the discussion isn't enthralling
11. Don't expect to have a great discussion in a 50 minute period
12. Don't just have students discuss things, have them produce a final product

A different take on Herreid's “don't do” list might be to provide tips on how to select, incorporate and evaluate cases in the classroom. The following suggestions should provide some basic information to those who have less experience using cases in the classroom and additional resources are listed in the references section for those interested in learning more.

## **Prior to your course**

Before incorporating a case, it might be useful to review the objectives of your course and determine which ones might be achieved through a case. Having clear objectives for using your case will mean that you stay on track and that the students see the link between the case and what you are trying to get them to learn. If you don't have these, there is a greater chance that both you and the students will become overwhelmed with the complexity, or bored with the case, as it will appear disconnected to prior learning.

## **Selecting the right case**

Now that you are keen on using a case, you will have to find one that includes the content that meets the learning objectives you have set for the students. This can be a difficult task as there are limited cases written up for classroom use in leisure. One can often find cases from business or a sub sector of the leisure field, but unless it is targeted and linked to your classroom content, students may have difficulty engaging. If you do not find what you are looking for, consider developing your own cases or having students develop their own. Once developed, cases have a long "shelf life" and you will find yourself using them over and over again, or updating as you receive new information.

Once you do find what you are looking for, you should have some criteria set for selecting the case. First, the case should read at an appropriate level for the students you are working with. If you introduce a complex research case to first year students you are likely to have a difficult time getting them to discuss something they cannot understand. Similarly, advanced students will become bored with cases that have limited complexity and one obvious solution. Read the case from your learner's viewpoint and consider modifications to make it suit the learning objectives.

Second, cases should provide adequate information for analysis, or have other resources accessible to the student such that they can search for additional data as part of the case study method. Students can become disillusioned if they are set up for failure and cannot locate base line information for their analysis.

Third, cases should be engaging for the learner and use a storyline with useful discussion questions to target learning. If the case does not have discussion questions, make sure to create your own to get discussion going and indicate the level of analysis you are looking for. Learners often have a difficult time getting into a case unless they understand what you are looking for.

## **Introducing the case to the class**

Now that you have selected your case, you will need to set up your class different than you would a lecture. When preparing for class, make sure you fully understand the case and its potential outcomes. Decide on what role you will take in the classroom. Will you lecture to introduce the case and then ask for discussion? Will you provide the case in advance to students and launch right in to open ended questions when in the room?

These are only two scenarios that you could use and either is appropriate depending on the level of your students, the time you have available, the complexity of the case, and the goals of your session.

Regardless of your method, you should clarify your expectations of the students prior to the case analysis. Let them know how long you will spend on the case, what you are trying to achieve, what your and their roles are, and how you will facilitate discussion. If the case deals with sensitive or emotional content, make sure to establish some ground rules to ensure safety and confidentiality of your learners.

### **During case analysis**

Once you have delved into the case in the class, your role will be to moderate discussion and ensure feedback is provided. Here, you may want to make sure you are recording key observations and comments visually for learners to use later in a debriefing. If some are dominating the discussion, you may want to direct “air time” to the quieter members in the group. You may also want to consider breaking a large group into smaller teams for in class and out of class work on the case. This will enable multiple perspectives to emerge in the case analysis. When shared, different solutions to the same case can become fertile ground for learning about the complexity of a case.

### **Assessing learning from case analysis**

There are some common methods to assess the learning that students gain from cases.

#### **1. Class participation**

Learners are assessed a grade by the instructor or their peers on their contributions to the case analysis. Contributions can be for strong points raised during discussion, bringing outside information into the course, and for professionalism.

#### **2. Presentation**

Learners are asked to present, either individually or in a group, a solution to the case study. Grades can be assigned for depth of analysis, rationale for the proposed solution, responses to questions, consideration of alternative viewpoints, and strength of presentation skills.

#### **3. Reflection**

Learners can be asked to record their observations to a case study in short assignment or journal. Individual analysis can be assessed by the depth of responses to specific questions, the clarity of arguments, or thoughts on the consequences of different solutions.

#### **4. Written case analysis**

Learners can be asked to analyze a case using a standard case analysis format where they describe the case and context, outline the problem, identify alternatives, then select and justify one alternative. Or, you can direct the learners to explore a set of identified questions. In case analysis it is important to

ask learners to identify all of their assumptions up front. In other words, if there is information that was not provided in the case and it may influence their analysis, they should make sure to point out their understanding of the case early in their analysis. These are important contributions as many cases leave a lot of room for interpretation and students should not be penalized for interpreting information differently than you if it was not available.

Hopefully with sound pedagogical rationale and some basic tips on how to incorporate cases into the classroom environment, more leisure students will benefit from the type of deep learning that can be facilitated with the case method. Beyond the classroom, there needs to be an active movement to develop and share cases in the leisure discipline such that students are prepared for professional practice by linking theory to practice and developing a core set of transferable skills.

“Sitting astride theory and practice, the case both enriches the grasp of practice and at the same time links back to the world of theory and the world of principle” (Shulman, 2004; p 29).

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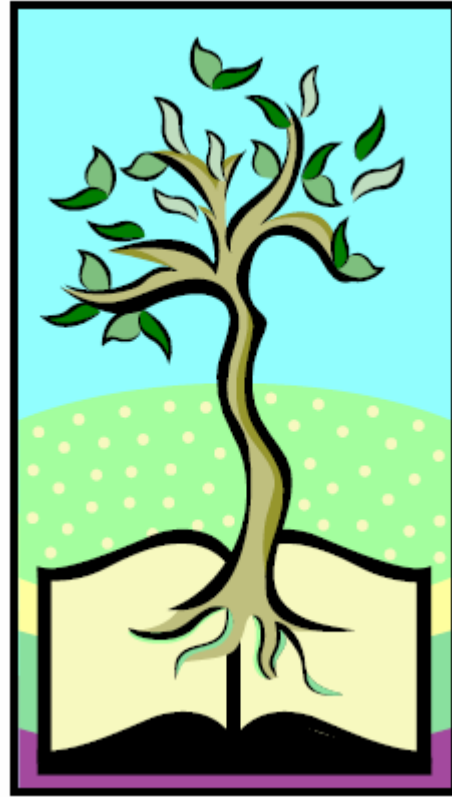
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