Develop and Deliver a Case Study

This document is a guide for developing and delivering case studies that are appropriate, engaging, and promote problem solving and critical thinking.

Course Planning Tips

If you have determined a case study is the best method to teach or reinforce a concept or information, be sure to take the time to plan it carefully, using the tips below and a previous case study as a model.

- Start with a simple case, first. Multiple cases can be used throughout a course so that students become more comfortable with open-ended, problem-solving exercises over time.
- Discuss the purpose and suggested methods for doing a case study with your students. Students may want examples of possible solutions, if multiple solutions are possible. Some models may be taken from similar case studies.
- Take sufficient time to introduce the narrative and establish the case facts.
- If doing a case study for the first time or piloting a new case, give students an opportunity to provide their reactions and feedback. Student feedback is often invaluable for diagnosing where an assignment may go wrong.
- If the case study is too complex, the material may frustrate students and shut down the very critical thinking skills the assignment may be trying to foster.
- A very controversial case could lead to extreme emotional reactions and extended discussion. A firm statement of the facts and rules of etiquette can help reduce tensions.

Discussion Tips

If you are conducting a case study in which a class discussion or debate is important, these discussion tips can be beneficial.

- Make sure the first question is simple, but open-ended. This helps set the expectation of open-ended answers. However, questions that are more direct may be used later to help students clarify details.
- Limit yourself to a few well-chosen questions so that students have time to explore each question.
- Use some questions to prompt students to explore or challenge their underlying assumptions about how they view case issues.
- Make sure all students participate by directing questions to quiet students in a class, requiring students to contribute to an online discussion, or some other technique.
- The discussion format should be flexible enough to allow some latitude. However, redirect students that wander off-track.
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- If possible, change seating arrangements so that students can form a discussion circle or be grouped with their teams. If seating is fixed, students can still move to be together and some may be able to meet in the hall.

Encourage Problem Solving

The primary aim of case studies is to provide real-life, relevant examples of sample problems and situations to encourage the students to think through causes, contributing factors, and possible solutions.

- Instead of answering questions directly, ask questions of your students so they enter into a dialogue about the problem.
- Encourage students to clearly define the problem first. Listing all the facts (or “knowns” and “unknowns”) helps students define the exact nature of the problem.
- Ask students what a viable solution would look like. This may help them brainstorm ideas.
- Encourage students to take a quick break if they are really stuck. Walking or doing something else may loosen their thinking and prevent coming to a solution too early or employing groupthink.
- Remind students to develop an action plan once a solution is found. There may be other roadblocks ahead for the plan.

References
