

Gina Vega

Letter from the Editor: distance learning and up-close teaching

Over the past year, I have attended numerous conferences and presented many case-writing workshops. At each conference and workshop, the same question has arisen: how do you teach with cases online? I want to begin to address that issue now and welcome your comments and suggestions for a further discussion of this important and timely matter.

As we know, distance learning has become more and more accepted, even encouraged, in schools internationally. It appeals to the non-traditional learner and the traditional one alike, although learning outcomes for the traditional-aged undergraduate may be dissipated by a lack of face-to-face interaction with peers and instructors. Distance learning is convenient for learners, as it is almost always asynchronous and allows students additional time to spend with family or at a demanding job. It is convenient for instructors who may not have to travel long distances or face difficult commutes in treacherous weather. It is cost-effective for school administration, as maintenance of web-based classrooms is much less expensive than maintenance of a physical plant. In some ways, distance learning is truly a win/win model for education.

But there are serious constraints inherent in teaching and learning remotely. Learners must be self-disciplined and have access to dependable technology. Instructors must be creative and flexible in their teaching and assessment methods. Administrators must commit to the ongoing expense of providing a solid web-based learning platform and appropriate equipment and support to faculty.

With the above in mind, let us consider the question of case teaching methodology. Cases provide a wonderful opportunity for us to connect with our students, because case teaching is especially adaptable to the needs of various learning styles of our students and the various teaching styles of instructors:

- Online courses are designed to be learner centric. Cases are also focussed on the learner, the learning objectives, and student engagement. So, instructors must be increasingly clear, both to themselves and to their students, on what they expect students to learn and the way in which students can provide evidence of this learning.
- Fast responders and more deliberate thinkers are on an even playing field when learning remotely. As a result, there can be more and improved interaction within the group when learning online than face-to-face, as there is room for all comments and responses in the asynchronous model. Quality of response can count for more than speed or quantity.
- Distance learning can be a lonely process, whereas case learning is often a team-based endeavor. Shifting the “alone in my room” aspect of distance learning to a “we’re all in this together” attitude is a challenge best addressed by setting up group learning blogs/discussion boards/chat rooms or whatever your learning management system (LMS) provides. Interim discussions with specific input deadlines can be conducted in small groups of three or four. Then, the conclusions drawn by these groups can be posted to a full-class discussion board for general feedback.
- You have now become more a moderator/facilitator than the fount of all wisdom and knowledge. Students will learn from one another, theories will emerge, and new ideas that you may not have considered will come to the surface. Learning in this way can be a vital experience that may be even more powerful than the traditional model. But you must be willing to give up some of your control and use your skills to develop meaningful questions for student consideration and creative methods of assessment.



Case teaching online is a time consuming process, make no mistake about it. But preparation of the lesson is not more time consuming than in a traditional classroom. Plus, the time delay in asynchronous classes allows you the benefit of thinking before you respond, making you feel less like you are working without a net and more like you are a thoughtful and wise advisor.

Do you have a special technique that you use to teach cases online? Do you have a specific question about case teaching online that our readers can address? Please share your thoughts with me at editor@caseweb.org or directly at gina.vega978@gmail.com. I'll compile your comments and suggestions, answer the questions that I am able to answer, and we can continue this conversation asynchronously! Please enjoy using the cases in this issue, try teaching them online, and let us all know how they work for you:

- Winstar Communications: corporate fraud and auditing procedures (A. Ng, L. Mertins, and C. Martin). A telecommunications company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. Errors were made during the auditing process and students are challenged to address them. *Auditing, telecom bubble, and professional standards.*
- Qihoo 360: building a “free” business model (S. Li Sun and Y. Zhang).Qihoo 360 has developed a successful free business model for internet protection services and its owner speculates on his future challenges after the company's IPO. *Business model, internet entrepreneurship, and disruptive innovation.*
- Destination unknown: Duncan Aviation in the global economy (E. Ibrayeva and T.C. Sebor). The largest family-owned MRO business in North America wants to go global – but where? *MRO, aviation, global business.*
- No crying for training (G. Zhu).A Chinese-born, American-educated consultant reflects on the impact of her training programs on Chinese employees. *Training and development, cultural differences.*
- Opportunity recognition in a declining industry: the consultant's role (G. Vega and E. Simendinger).

The reader is drawn through the process of opportunity recognition step by step until a new business model is developed.

Coopetition, business research, consulting

Happy reading!