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Rebecca Lutte

Brent D. Bowen  
bowenb6@erau.edu

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## ***ANALYSIS OF THE CASE WRITING METHOD FOR COLLEGE TEACHING***

Rebecca Lutte and Brent Bowen

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a quantitative analysis of students' perspective of the case writing methodology. The case method of teaching is widely used at all levels as an effective, non-traditional means of teaching. Case writing as an entire semester course, a new pedagogical style, has now emerged as an additional means of using the case method. The case writing methodology was implemented at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO) and Wichita State University (WSU). This paper will provide a brief overview of how the case writing method was applied as a full semester course. Three different student surveys were used as the data sources. The surveys were completed by case writing students at WSU and UNO. Survey results will be presented and conclusions will be drawn.

Case study has long been recognized as an effective tool in many academic disciplines such as law, business, and medicine. The case writing method is a new and unique aspect of case study that gives students an opportunity to enhance their experience with the case method. The case writing approach offers many benefits for the students. They are able to apply previously learned skills to real-life events. This approach also provides the opportunity to conduct research on topics that have not been addressed in other courses or simply in areas that students would like to explore further. They increase competence in writing, research, group dynamics, oral presentations, decision making, and reasoning.

Case writing as an entire semester course has been successfully implemented at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Wichita State University. The case writing course at WSU was first held in the Fall of 1991. At UNO, the course was first offered in the Fall of 1992 as a special topics course. Due to its popularity, the course continues to be offered at both universities on an annual basis. Case writing students for the Fall 1992 WSU and UNO class and the Spring 1993 and Spring 1994 UNO classes completed several surveys. The results of these surveys will be presented.

### **DEFINING CASE WRITING**

There are many definitions of a case. A case can be defined as a narrative description of a real-life situation involving one or more decisions (Sperle, 1933).

Taylor (1991) describes a case as a description of an organization, or an organizational situation, or a description of an industry. Regardless of how one defines them, cases are used to grab students' attention by allowing them to apply previously developed skills and knowledge to real world situations.

The case methodology has been popular in fields such as law and medicine for many years. The actual use of cases in a classroom setting developed between 1915 and 1925 at Harvard (Towl, 1969) for use in business courses.

Today, the case methodology also is being applied to aviation in the form of case analysis and discussion. To take the application of this method one step further, case writing has been offered as an entire semester course for aviation students. Actually, this is the first application of the technique as a basis for an entire course (Bowen & Ross, 1992). Case writing provides a unique opportunity to gain even more benefits than are derived from case analysis (Bowen, 1991). Many consider it to be more valuable than traditional lecture as evidenced both in the literature (Headley, D., Ross, & Headley, E., 1989) and through evaluations of teaching performance.

### **IMPLEMENTATION**

#### **OF THE CASE WRITING METHOD**

The case writing courses at WSU and UNO are upper-level, undergraduate courses in the aviation

curriculum. The purpose of the course was to allow students to use an interactive learning method as a means to further explore subjects related to their degree program and to enhance skills. Case writing courses at both institutions were taught using the same monograph. The monograph was developed as the sole text for a traditional 16-week course in case writing. For more information on how the class for this project was conducted, refer to the UNOAI 94-1 monograph, *Interactive Learning: The Case Writing Method as an Entire Semester Course for Higher Education* (Bowen, 1993) and the related teachers manual, UNOAI 94-2 (Bowen & Lutte, 1993).

The requirements of the course include two major assignments. Each student prepared an individual case and worked with a group of four to five students to prepare a group case. Students were given specific guidelines on how to prepare a case. A case was defined as a report written in narrative form that describes a problem or issue and suggests alternative solutions. All cases had to include two sections, the case and the case note. The case section included such items as the history, environmental background, case situation, and strategic issue. The case note included the case overview, case objectives, questions, general discussion, final comments, and references.

Class sessions were used primarily to introduce the case writing method, discuss requirements for the case, and offer guidance in case preparation. The majority of class time was used to allow students to work on the projects and discuss any questions or concerns about the project with the professor. Other activities the professor performed included a brainstorming session to develop topic selections, a process for assigning groups, organizing a session at the campus library to introduce students to additional resources that are available, and in class evaluations of presentations.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

Data were collected from multiple surveys given at the University of Nebraska at Omaha and Wichita State University. Students enrolled in similar case writing courses at each institution were asked to complete three different surveys. The results for each class were tabulated to develop the frequency tables presented.

The first survey is the Student Evaluation of Teaching Questionnaire form used at UNO. This form asks for students' perception of the instructors' ability to stimulate thinking, enthusiasm, responsiveness, preparation, ability to explain material, grading, and effective use of assigned materials. In addition, an overall rating of teaching is requested. Responses are based on a five-point agreement scale.

The second survey is the WSU Student Perception of Teacher Performance Analysis. Again, students at both WSU and UNO were asked to complete the questionnaire. This survey asked students to judge instructors in the following areas: competence in the subject matter, preparation, ability to communicate, ability to understand students, and fairness in policy and procedures. Students also rated the class on whether they judged the course worthwhile. This survey also used a five-point agreement scale.

In addition to the two teacher evaluation surveys, students completed the Student's Preferences for Learning Techniques survey. The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather quantitative data on student perceptions of the case writing method. This survey was developed by professors who are active users of the case writing methodology. The survey consists of a series of statements comparing case writing to other teaching methods. Responses are recorded on a five-point agreement scale.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Limitations to this study include specific limitations to the three surveys and general limitations that apply to all data. One limitation affecting all data is the level of student exposure to the case method. Researchers were concerned that some students in the sample may not have had adequate exposure to the case method. Although students who have never used cases can successfully perform in a case writing course, students who have used cases will be at an advantage. Another limitation is that the two courses cannot be taught in an identical manner by different instructors. However, to minimize the differences the same monograph was used at both institutions, instructors were well versed in the method, and the instructors communicated throughout the semester about the project.

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**Table 1**  
**Frequencies: Student Evaluation of Teaching — UNO Form**

The instructor ...	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
stimulated thinking	21 1	10 7	2 0	1 0	0 0
was enthusiastic about the subject	27 5	7 3	0 0	0 0	0 0
was responsive to student questions	26 4	7 4	1 0	0 0	0 0
was well prepared	24 3	8 5	2 0	0 0	0 0
had the ability to explain and clarify subject material	18 3	13 4	2 1	1 0	0 0
graded fairly	23 2	7 4	2 1	0 1	0 0
assigned materials that have been effective aids to learning	18 2	11 4	2 1	1 1	0 0

	Superior	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Unsatis.
Overall, how do you rate the teaching in this course?	22 1	8 4	3 3	0 0	0 0

Note: The first numbers listed for each response are totals from surveys taken at UNO in Fall 1992, Spring 1993, and Spring 1994. The second numbers for each response are data from a survey at WSU in Fall 1992.

Each individual survey has its own limitations and benefits. The teacher evaluation surveys provide limited information specifically regarding the case writing method. However, they do address the differences in instructors. Using the teacher evaluations allows for comparison of the different instructors to determine whether they were equally well received by the students.

#### SURVEY RESULTS

Using Table 1, the UNO form for student evaluation of teaching, the following observations can be made.

1. The majority of students surveyed at WSU and UNO rated the case writing instructors high (strongly agree or agree) in all categories.
2. Most students strongly agreed that the

instructor was able to stimulate thinking.

3. Thirty-eight of 42 students agreed or strongly agreed that the instructor had the ability to clearly explain the material.

4. Most students at WSU and UNO agreed to strongly agreed that the monograph assigned was effective.

5. In the area of instructor responsiveness, 30 of 42 students strongly agreed that the instructor was responsive to student questions.

Table 2, the WSU form for teacher evaluation, yields the following conclusions.

1. When considering whether the course was worthwhile, 36 out of 42 students responded with very much so or above average.

**Table 2**  
Frequencies: Student Perception of Teacher Performance — WSU Form

Instructors' ...	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
competence in subject matter	21 3	9 6	3 0	0 0	0 0
	Consistently prepared	Usually prepared	Prepared most of the time	Sometimes unprepared	Frequently unprepared
preparation for class	23 4	8 1	2 0	0 4	0 0
	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
ability to communicate effectively	20 1	13 5	0 3	0 0	0 0
ability to understand students	18 3	14 5	1 1	0 0	0 0
	Consistently fair	Fair most of the time	Usually fair	Sometimes fair	Frequently unfair
fairness in application of policies and procedures	29 6	3 1	0 0	1 2	0 0
	Very much so	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
Do you consider the class worthwhile?	21 0	9 6	3 3	0 0	0 0

Note: The first numbers listed for each response are totals from surveys taken at UNO in Fall 1992, Spring 1993, and Spring 1994. The second numbers for each response are data from a survey at WSU in Fall 1992.

2. The majority of the case writing students gave the highest possible rating for teacher performance in competence in subject matter, preparation for class, and fairness in application of policies and procedures.

3. Thirty-nine of 42 students rated the instructors' ability to communicate effectively as excellent to above average.

The next statements result from the case writing survey data as shown in Table 3.

1. Thirty-one of 37 students surveyed strongly agreed or agreed to the statement "Case writing helps me

understand complicated concepts."

2. Data for UNO and WSU reflect that the majority of students agreed to strongly agreed that they learned more through writing cases than reading and outlining a chapter, completing term projects, or class simulations.

3. Thirty-one of 37 students agreed to strongly agreed they would recommend case writing to other students.

4. The majority of students at both institutions agreed to strongly agreed that they had more interaction

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**Table 3**  
**Frequencies: Student Preference for Learning Techniques**

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
I learned more through writing cases than reading and outlining a chapter.	14 2	13 4	2 1	0 1	0 0	0 0
Case writing is best used in upper division courses.	13 1	10 3	5 2	1 2	0 0	0 0
I don't like writing cases.	0 0	5 1	5 4	12 2	7 1	0 0
Case writing is my favorite technique.	3 0	7 0	14 3	5 5	0 0	0 0
Case writing helps me understand complicated subjects.	7 0	17 2	3 5	2 1	0 0	0 0
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
I learn more through case writing than through term projects.	11 1	11 3	7 3	0 1	0 0	0 0
Case writing helps me remember concepts.	10 1	14 6	5 0	0 0	0 0	0 1
I have more interaction with the professor in case writing classes vs. lecture classes.	*6 3	4 5	1 0	2 0	0 0	0 0
I learn more through writing classes than through class simulations.	8 0	13 5	7 1	1 1	0 1	0 0
	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
I would recommend case writing to students who want to understand a subject.	11 0	14 6	3 2	1 0	0 0	0 0

Note: The first numbers listed for each response are totals from surveys taken at UNO in Fall 1992 and Spring 1993. The second numbers listed for each response are data from a survey at WSU in Fall 1992.

\* UNO data for this response are from surveys taken in the Fall 1992 semester only.

with the professor in case writing classes than lecture classes.

5. Only six of the 37 students agreed that they don't like writing cases. (No students selected strongly agree.)

#### ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The quantitative data collected addresses several of the limitations discussed earlier and provides insight into the students' perception of the case writing method. One of the limitations discussed was the variance in teaching the course due to the different instructors. However, using identical surveys and rating scales, the majority of students surveyed consistently gave the different instructors the highest possible rating in the areas of competence, preparation, fairness, and responsiveness to student questions.

An additional limitation was the concern for the students' experience level with the case method. Several students in the case writing courses had little to no previous experience with this method. Both the UNO and WSU standard teacher evaluation revealed that students were satisfied with the instructors' ability to communicate concepts clearly and effectively. Using the UNO evaluation form, students selected either the highest available mark or the second highest mark in the areas of ability to communicate effectively and ability to explain and clarify material. Using the WSU evaluation form, 38 of 42 students rated the instructors' ability to communicate effectively as excellent to above average. Students also gave high scores for the effectiveness of the assigned materials. These data show that in a class where some students have no previous experience in this method, instructors can successfully communicate the concept of case writing to students.

Another significant result is the level of inter-

action achieved by using this method. Most students surveyed at WSU and UNO indicated that they had more interaction with the professor in the case writing course than in other more traditional courses. Using this interactive method, the majority of students strongly agreed that the instructor was able to stimulate thinking.

The students' overall perception of the case writing method appears to be very positive. They indicated that case writing stimulates thinking, helps students to understand difficult concepts, and is a worthwhile course. Perhaps the best indication of the students' acceptance of this methodology is the overwhelming response from both institutions that the students would recommend the course to others.

#### CONCLUSIONS

According to the quantitative analysis provided, case writing can be successfully implemented as a semester course. The results indicate several advantages to using this new technique. It leads to greater interaction between professors and students and among the students themselves. Students accept this new learning style, even if they have had little to no previous experience with the case method. Students also indicated that they learn more from case writing than other more traditional means.

Professors are strongly encouraged to explore this new style of teaching. There are many opportunities to use case writing in the classroom. As has been shown, it is well received as a semester course. Case writing projects can also be assigned on a smaller scale. For example, professors may choose to have students prepare a mini-case or assign a full case as a mid-term or final project. Case writing is an effective method that all are encouraged to experience.□

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**Rebecca Lutte** holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Professional Aeronautics from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master of Public Administration with an Aviation Minor from the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She is an instructor at the Aviation Institute, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**Brent D. Bowen** holds a Doctorate in Higher Education and Aviation from Oklahoma State University and a Master of Business Administration degree from Oklahoma City University. He is associate professor and director of the Aviation Institute, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

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