

Using Case Studies

Richard S. Saver
Arch T. Allen Distinguished Professor
UNC School of Law;
Professor (Secondary Appointment)
Department of Social Medicine
Adjunct Professor, Dept. of Health Policy &
Management
saver@email.unc.edu

Caveats

- What has worked in law school (and mini-versions at medical school)
- Learning objectives and skills reinforcement will obviously vary in other settings
- But modifications/tailoring possible to fit instructor and discipline-specific objectives

The Typical 1L Class

- 70-90 students
- Not just lecture; already interactive with dialogue about cases and hypotheticals
- But still many students passively observe unless called on
- Limited group-work
- Limited simulations and tackling new problems in the classroom in a more comprehensive way

Learning/Skills Objectives

- Critical Thinking: Identification and Analysis of Key Legal Issues
- Identification and Use of Relevant Facts
- Synthesizing Different Rules (reaching back across units) in a Complicated Problem
- Persuasive Oral and Written Communication
- Collaborating With Team Members – strategizing, prioritizing, reaching consensus
- Creativity
- Flexibility/Ability to Respond to Other Positions

Typical Case Study

- Based on real legal event (litigation, settlement negotiation, medical staff disciplinary hearing, etc.)
- Teams of 4-5 students; each represents one party
- Instructed to come up with stream-lined overview of arguments
- 30-40 minutes in-class group deliberations
- Each team's "scribe" writes up summary outline of positions and sends to instructor
- Then, each team's "spokesperson" engages in oral argument round-robin style with opposing counsel. Instructor as presiding judge.

Typical Case Study

- Opportunities for rebuttal
- The big reveal: how the actual legal event resolved and discussion of why
- Unpack the case and discuss with class as a whole, including general feedback on student presentations
- Takes up entire class time (75 minutes)
- Done at key intervals in the semester. Same teams each time, but scribe and spokesperson roles switch to a new student

Typical Case Study

- Always want more time!
- Understanding that it is a “real-world” problem significantly increases student interest and engagement
- Low to no stakes grading-wise takes the pressure off
- “Fun” way to engage with the material
- Instructor rounding during group deliberations and instructor feedback on the outlines

Benefits

- Student Collaboration and Team-Bonding
- Participation/engagement of less vocal students
- Oral and written components offer different pathways for students to display their knowledge
- Simulation of what students will do in practice
- Feedback and reinforcement of concepts students may be unsure about
- Apply concepts in new setting and see how material all “comes together”