The case for cases in business communication courses

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I'm new to the University of Alberta, having come from the University of Western Ontario where I was Director of the Program in Writing, Rhetoric, and Professional Communication in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities. In my new position here I'll be working with faculty and students across the university as part of the Writing Across the Curriculum Initiative. I will also be working with students and faculty in the Department of English and Film Studies.

I am the author, co-author, or editor of five books and 29 articles, including Writing Instruction in Canadian Universities. My current research interests include the development of doctoral student writing, writing assignments across disciplinary fields, and rhetorical approaches to text encoding. Currently I serve as co-Vice-President of the Canadian Association for the Study of Discourse and Writing (CASDW) and am a member of the Executive Board of the Canadian Society of Rhetoricians.

Recent presentations
This page contains links to pdfs of slides displayed at presentations I've given.

Books
This page displays the covers and descriptions of books I've authored, co-authored, or co-edited.

Blog: Thinking About Writing
A new blog on writing-related issues

http://www.ualberta.ca/~graves1/index.html
The plan

- Situate interest in writing generally within assessment practices
- Identify some of the advantages of the case method for teaching business communication
- Read a case and talk about your sense of how your students would react to it and this method
- Provide some context about how this method fits with writing across the curriculum initiatives
Literacy of university graduates

- 11-14% of university graduates have inadequate prose literacy

http://www.td.com/community/literacy_matters_report.jsp
NSSE and Writing

- To what extent had your experience at your institution contributed to:
  Writing clearly and effectively?

- To what extent had your experience at your institution contributed to:
  Speaking clearly and effectively?
Writing and Learning

Writing plays an indispensable role in

- developing critical thinking skills,
- learning discipline-specific content, and
- understanding and building competence in the modes of inquiry and dissemination specific to various disciplines and professions

Georgia State WAC Program,
http://wac.gsu.edu/content/introduction/what_is_wac.shtml
Writing and Learning

[S]tudent engagement with the subject matter being taught increases significantly when they are more frequently asked to write about that subject, particularly in courses in their junior and senior years.

Cases as stories

- you remember stories and details and draw conclusions from them throughout your life
- Gram-Wow commercial
- Case studies provided students with specific, detailed, and controlled writing situations
Why cases?

- cases provide narratives based on real-world examples that dramatize the communication principles
- Professional communication assignments take the events of each case and require students to write a document using information from the case
- As one reviewer noted, “I like the writing activities. The quick application of the theory is good.”
Reality or something like it

- Each chapter introduces several specific individuals in different detailed scenarios where they are asked to produce a message or document to respond to a particular situation.

- As one reviewer commented, “yours are much more developed—[they] make the people seem real.”

- Cases are based on real-life communication situations that place students in situations very much like ones they will encounter outside the classroom.
Oral communication

- The case approach supports classroom discussions by giving students interesting situations to talk about.
- The case method encourages discussion at several stages—initial class clarifications, small group idea generating groups, and full-class tentative solution discussions.
CC: Canadian cases

- Canadian cases

- Cases describe interactions among individuals from a variety of cultural traditions, from both genders, and from many cultural backgrounds

- Canadian culture is multifaceted—it is, in important ways, shaped by a wide variety of cultures, both indigenous and immigrant
Scaffolding

- Cases provide writing or assignment scenarios that interest students while also supplying them with a structured situation so they can focus on accomplishing the assignment goals rather than the larger context for their writing (or speaking)
Scalability

- Cases can be brief or extended
- Longer cases provide more context and opportunity for extended writing assignments
- Longer cases can provide for more complex writing assignments
- Cases can be adapted and switched to match the interests of your students
The case: “hey chicky”

- Take a couple of minutes to read the case
- Read the assignment directions for students
- Exchange early reactions to the case with others sitting near you
- Group discussion
WAC Philosophy

▪ Writing is the responsibility of the entire academic community,

▪ Writing must be integrated across departmental boundaries,

▪ Writing instruction must be continuous during all four years of undergraduate education,

▪ Writing promotes learning, and

▪ Only by practicing the conventions of an academic discipline will students begin to communicate effectively within that discipline.
Writing Intensive courses

- WI courses incorporate revised assignments, sequenced assignments, peer review, and student assistance from a writing consultant. [Georgia State]

- Cases encourage all of these features to be present in a course with the exception of the consultant
Writing Across the Curriculum

- I work with faculty members to increase the ability of students to write well using these kinds of strategies:
  - Writing assignments in courses (formal, graded writing)
  - Writing to learn (informal writing)
  - Writing in the disciplines (special rules for writing in your academic area)
  - Writing intensive courses (curriculum designation)

http://www.humanities.ualberta.ca/WAC/