

CASE DISCUSSION: *WHAT IS IT LIKE? WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?* **

Case discussion is interactive, student-centered exploration of realistic and specific narratives that provide grist for inductive learning. The students engage in the intellectual, and emotional, exercise of facing complex problems and making critical decisions within the constraints imposed by reality, e.g. limited time and information, and pervasive uncertainty. Considering them from the protagonist's perspective, which calls on analysis to inform action, the students strive to resolve questions that have no single right answer. Their differing views and approaches produce a creative tension that fuels the enterprise and a synergistic outcome that both recognizes and exceeds their individual contributions. In their effort to find solutions and reach decisions through discussion, they sort out factual data, apply analytical tools, articulate issues, reflect on their relevant experience, and draw conclusions they can carry forward to new situations. In the process, they acquire substantive knowledge, develop analytic and collaborative skills, and gain in self-confidence and attention to detail.

A case discussion differs in some important respects from what is conventional in many college and university classrooms. The students engage in the text rather than examine it. They are active and animated: offering ideas, raising questions, building on each others' statements, constructing a collective analysis, re-framing the discussion, challenging the teacher, learning with and from each other as much as, or more than, from him or her. The teacher is also active, and frequently mobile: initiating discussion and drawing the class into it, inviting engagement in the issues, amplifying some students' remarks and pointing up opposing views, feeding the group's thinking back to it, pulling the threads of conversation together and tying them in to the course's themes; in short, structuring and facilitating the students' work rather than delivering information, giving explanations, or providing answers. The emphasis is on the students' reasoning and expressions, on their capacity to structure the problem and work out a solution. It is also on the process as well as the substance of inquiry, and a case discussion often ends with questions as well as conclusions.

Among the purposes of case discussion are to:

- Foster Critical Thinking
- Encourage Student Responsibility for Learning
- Transfer Information, Concept, and Technique
- Develop Command of a Body of Material
- Blend Affective and Cognitive Learning
- Enliven the Classroom Dynamic
- Develop Collaboration Skills
- Teach Questioning and Self-Directed Learning

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