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Interfacing between blended case teaching and international case competitions as undergraduate student inquiry and literacy in Marketing programmes

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Interfacing between blended case teaching and international case competitions as undergraduate student inquiry and literacy in Marketing programmes

Abstract

This practice example explores the inquiry-based relationship for students between case teaching and international competitions in Marketing. This work is based on the premise that undergraduate Marketing students in a College of Business should experience learning through and about inquiry and enhance their research literacy as a result. Although for many students research-oriented ways of engaging them with inquiry are fairly passive experiences, we believe student engagement in case study competitions offer a primarily active and exciting learning opportunity. In a broader sense, the framework offered by Healey & Jenkins (2009) which is explored in this example, is based on the argument that research-informed inquiry is a powerful way to reinvent or reinvigorate the undergraduate curriculum because the focus is on the student as a learner - in particular that the student can be viewed as a potential producer of knowledge - and by challenging what research and inquiry are in practice, provide interesting perspectives for the Marketing discipline to consider for future programme provision.

Practitioner Notes

1. Integral to how undergraduate inquiry is manifested in UG Marketing programmes is the interface between the role of cases in learning and teaching for developing students' knowledge and skills, graduate attributes, confidence and literacy, and how these are distilled through the international case competition context.
2. The impact that the competition has beyond the event itself also plays a key part. Central to UG inquiry is where competitions fit in with case teaching rather than viewing them as entities themselves in isolation.
3. Therefore the good practice example aims to explore - To what extent, and how, are case teaching and learning, including student engagement in international case competition, embedded in the curriculum as a form of undergraduate inquiry?
4. The work concludes with a consideration of the moving goalpost that is blended delivery in these post-pandemic times, and considers a series of questions on how staff and students can work together in the design and delivery of authentic blended cases and international competition development and support post-pandemic.

Keywords

case teaching, competitions, student inquiry, literacies

Introduction

This practice example explores the inquiry-based relationship for students between blended case teaching and international competitions in a Marketing discipline context. This work is based on the premise that undergraduate (UG) Marketing students should experience learning through and about inquiry and enhance their research literacy as a result. Although for many students research-oriented ways of engaging them with inquiry are fairly passive experiences, we believe student engagement in case competitions offer a primarily active and exciting learning opportunity. Until March 2020, case teaching happened in our context in the classroom. However, post-pandemic, supporting programme teams in planning for the delivery of blended case teaching and competition activity for the future is important. While there have been instances of shared experiences of moving case teaching online from a variety of case experts in different settings around the world, given the current context for higher education, where for many institutions, including ours, delivery has moved to a blend of in-person and online modes, considering how best this form of undergraduate student inquiry which is presented in this paper can be supported in a blended mode is a priority for the College, and is considered in the later stages of the paper.

Although the examples we offer in this work are in the Marketing discipline, there are many examples of international student competitions across Leadership, Food and Agri-Business and Supply and Accounting Management contexts where the same principles apply - students demonstrate an understanding of their case's underlying disciplinary issues, presenting their solutions for real-life business cases, while developing strategic recommendations for addressing key issues; we believe our findings are transferable across multiple disciplines.

The framework offered by Healey & Jenkins (2009) which is explored in this example, is based on the argument that research-informed inquiry is a powerful way to reinvent or reinvigorate the undergraduate curriculum because the focus is on the student as a learner - in particular that the student can be viewed as a potential producer of knowledge - and by challenging what research and inquiry are in practice, provide interesting perspectives for the Marketing discipline, and others, to consider for future programme provision. This can be applied to any discipline where student-led research, collaboration, teamwork and practice-based learning and related competences are critical. The Healey & Jenkins (2009) framework is underpinned by their own case studies of numerous examples from disciplines, from arts to science, from social care to medicine. Our Marketing practice example is offered to inspire colleagues to think about their own disciplinary area and consider how this inquiry approach for underpinning and supporting case teaching and international competitions could be adapted for their own context.

Drawing on a subset of the characteristics of excellence in undergraduate research (Rowlett *et al.*, 2012), subsequent sections in the work contain reflection on what staff believe are the conditions for nurturing high impact, authentic undergraduate inquiry in Marketing, and how engaging in case competitions can lay the foundations for student literacy success. These conditions are Faculty commitment (the College has over 170 full-time academic staff, many with extensive international business case experience in writing, teaching and training); Broad disciplinary participation (the four Schools offer UG inquiry opportunities in Management, Marketing, Accounting & Finance, and Retail & Services Management); Integration with other engaging and high-impact national and international opportunities with industry and the community; Staff professional development opportunities; and research through cross- and inter-country collaboration to enhance the use of all aspects of the case method in business education. However, building such high impact enquiry is not without challenges and these are explored later in the paper.

Integral to how undergraduate inquiry is manifested in UG Marketing programmes is the interface between the role of cases in learning and teaching for developing students' knowledge and skills, graduate attributes, confidence and literacy, and how these are distilled through the international case competition context. The impact that the competition has beyond the event itself also plays a key part. Central to UG inquiry is where competitions fit in with case teaching rather than viewing them as entities themselves in isolation. Therefore the good practice example aims to explore:

To what extent, and how, are case teaching and learning, including student engagement in international case competition, embedded in the curriculum as a form of undergraduate inquiry?

The work concludes with a consideration of the moving goalpost that is blended delivery in these post-pandemic times and considers a series of questions on how staff and students can work together in the design and delivery of authentic blended cases and international competition development and support post-pandemic, regardless of discipline. The rationale for this is because the College of Business is currently undergoing a transition to a new Faculty as part of an organization design in the new Technological University (TU). We believe that looking at good practice in blended delivery is the potential avenue for our future business programme provision and are now poised to bring this approach forward into the new structure. Such considerations can be applied to many other disciplines and programmes and we encourage exploration of these dynamics by all disciplines.

Context

The context for this work is the College of Business in Ireland's first Technological University, which came into existence in January 2019, merging three existing higher education institutions. Technological universities offer programmes that are vocationally and professionally oriented. The College of Business is one of Ireland's largest Business schools in terms of full-time and part-time student enrolment and has been in existence for over thirty years. The College offers undergraduate degree programmes to approximately 5,000 students across a range of Business disciplines, and UG inquiry for this context seeks to nurture applied student expertise and inquiry literacy. There is a strong legacy in case teaching and inquiry learning at undergraduate (UG level), and a desire for all the undergraduates to be involved in the inquiry process as early as possible in their studies. Using a case teaching approach is considered most suitable for developing such applied expertise. Bonney (2015) reported that the case teaching method is a highly adaptable style of teaching and by presenting content in the format of a narrative accompanied by questions and activities that promote group discussion and solving of complex problems, case studies facilitate development of the higher levels of cognitive learning. Similarly, they have been shown to facilitate interdisciplinary learning and can be used to highlight connections between specific academic topics and international real-world societal issues and applications.

As can be imagined for this Business College with its extensive history, moving into a new Technological University context has meant that there is significant change happening to the existing institutional structure and fabric, and such system-wide restructuring can have a profound impact for students and faculty. Against this backdrop of institutional change, the College of Business is continuing to hone its professionally oriented national and international programme provision for students and reflect on how it supports international case competitions and embeds UG inquiry to the curriculum for the future. The work of Johnson & Jordan (2019) is informative in this regard as they have proposed frameworks to help guide such small business schools on how best to structure their UG business provision based on experiential learning; they argue that business schools take on the additional role of providing professional education that leads to knowledge and skills required in the workplace.

The focal point for this paper is a BSc Marketing undergraduate programme which uses case-based learning as the core pedagogy for all students in their final year. All 100+ students are in dedicated teams of four or five students for every module (marketing, strategy, finance, consumer research and marketing analytics) and this shapes their entire learning. Each team works alongside five other teams in a group, presenting, debating and critiquing their case work. Therefore each module lecturer spends significant time with each team and group. While this involves significant time and is resource-intensive, it alone is not sufficient to develop international case competition teams to the level required. Dedicated case preparation in addition to the class-based learning is essential. In addition, the skills, competences and training for case coaches is equally important and challenging. Of particular significance, and simultaneously evolving, is the dramatic enforced alteration to online and blended case teaching and case competitions since March 2020. This work assesses the immediate impacts and attempts to chart a way forward for students, staff and the university.

Rationale

This example from practice explores a Marketing School's signature pedagogy (Shulman, 2005) at undergraduate level. It explores the inquiry-based relationship between case teaching and international student case competitions. The design perspective on the pedagogy of case teaching and learning is provided, with a focus on the interface between teaching cases, which are the fundamental teaching and learning strategy in Marketing programmes, and international case competitions (the student showpiece accomplishment). In the past ten years, students in the Marketing School have taken part in over 30 competitions around the world, and data is shared from both the student and staff perspective, especially recently, on the efficacy of the pedagogical support and from the unprecedented past year, what will influence the post-digital future direction of this work.

The theoretical underpinning for the study is research-based inquiry where a triad of practices are in place: firstly, students learn as researchers, secondly, the professionally oriented curriculum is designed around case inquiry-based activities, and thirdly, the division of roles between teacher and student is minimized. We believe and argue in the work that undergraduate students should consistently experience learning through and about inquiry from their programme induction through to their final year live consultancy project or dissertation.

Enhancing UG students' literacies in inquiry and case teaching

Conceptual ideas on inquiry-based learning are discussed in relation to published perspectives, with a focus on different forms in the definition of inquiry, supporting students through the case teaching and competitions process, and embedding high impact inquiry opportunities in the UG curriculum.

Definitions of inquiry vary widely. The various formulations of inquiry-based learning (e.g. Hutchings, 2007; Spronken Smith *et al.*, 2008) focus on students learning in an active manner with a focus on developing intellectual dispositions and sometimes research skills. Considering the various forms of problem-based learning and case-based learning further adds to this complexity of conceptions of 'inquiry' (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004; Spronken Smith *et al.*, 2008). Such inquiries vary in the extent to which both the questions asked, and the manners of inquiry adopted, are open to the students to decide.

Walkington (2015) argues that 'students as researchers' is an active pedagogy emphasising the process of undergraduate research and inquiry. Undergraduate research in this style may include ways of promoting research-teaching linkages by developing students' appreciation of research in the discipline. It can also involve using teaching and learning approaches which simulate research processes and using assignments which involve research or elements of the research process; giving

students first-hand experience of research-based consultancy e.g. through live projects; or in the context of this study, bringing research data into the curriculum through cases for students to manipulate.

A teaching case is a rich narrative in which individuals or groups must make a decision or solve a problem. Teaching cases is an active form of instruction that provides information, but neither analysis nor conclusions. Origins have been traced to Harvard Business School in 1920 (Garvin, 2003), as professional schools recognized that lecture mode of instruction was insufficient to teach critical professional skills, and that active learning would better prepare learners for their professional lives. Andersen & Schiano (2014) argue that case teaching immerses students in realistic business situations, which include incomplete information, time constraints, and conflicting goals. Used in the classroom, they create opportunities for students to think critically, analysing and synthesising knowledge to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Case writing uniquely facilitates reflection-in-action and the building of communities of practice – in our context this is the ECASA project (discussed overleaf). Therefore, case teaching is a distinctive set of practices and theories that guide business education in the college. Central to this pedagogy is an integral commitment to real-life marketing case studies. There is a desire to integrate all aspects of cases: researching, writing, teaching and learning, and competing in competitions. Termed the integrated case method (Büchler *et al.*, 2021), it seeks to leverage the benefits of all the above elements related to the use of the case method and seeks synergies for all participants including academics, organisations and learners. Locating international case competitions in a more integrated manner, as one element of the pedagogy, should ensure that the benefits and outcomes of international competitions are better understood.

There are a number of well established frameworks for student inquiry and literacy e.g. UCL connected curriculum framework, whose core principle is ‘Students learn through research and enquiry’. Other models that conceptualise the linkages between teaching and research are those by Levy & Petrulis (2012) and Brew (2013). We chose to focus on the model by Healey & Jenkins because as we found it useful for gives us a framework for discussing different pedagogies in relation to research and enquiry in the curriculum and for analysing our own practice.

While extant academic literature provides valuable insights about case teaching, learning, and international case competition activities, there is a gap in relation to how these can translate into forms of inquiry for undergraduate students. This study addresses this gap in practice and the literature by proposing a model to help guide programme teams in embedding case teaching and international competitions as a form of inquiry into undergraduate marketing programmes. The literature is investigated from two perspectives. Firstly, what academic staff perceive as the optimum conditions for supporting case teaching with international case competitions as high impact inquiry, and how they can support case teaching and international competition activity being delivered online for the future. Secondly, how to embed UG inquiry literacy opportunities embedded in the undergraduate curriculum.

Supporting undergraduate students in inquiry through case teaching

Much has been written about the concept and practice of student engagement and inquiry. Categorized as subject-based research and inquiry, many institutions have explored ways of engaging students through embedding research and inquiry in the curriculum. Healey & Healey (2019) believe that partnership is an experience which may take both student and staff participants outside their comfort zone. It may require staff to relinquish significant control and power to students, and for students to accept this and share responsibility for the outcomes. Accepting this shift in control and power requires courage on behalf of the students as well as the staff. Dianati & Oberhollenzer (2020) call their form of students-as-partners as a shared space where students

become co-creators of change. The authors' engagement with the European Case Study Alliance (ECASA) reflects this philosophy. ECASA is a four-university Erasmus+-funded project that aims to embed the co-creation of case studies in the business setting by adopting an integrated case method (ICM). Students and staff are active creators of case studies, embedding the case method in the ecosystem of universities, and enhancing the knowledge transfer between business and higher educational sector benefiting both student and staff (Büchler *et al.*, 2021).

As with any new process or skill, students who are selected and new staff joining an international case competition preparation period need structured and explicit support to learn how to engage in the case competitions. When running a training/induction programme for students these often include: an introduction to the concept and practice of international case competitions; purpose/overview of the case competitions; teambuilding time; discussing ways to avoid or overcome common challenges of the competitions; outlining student responsibilities and expectations for engaging in the competitions; logistical support and skills training (e.g. leadership, communication, teamwork); ongoing support for students during their international competition engagement.

Forms of ongoing support for students is important because it encourages authentic partnership as well as keeping the work on track. Supports may include: opportunities for written or conversational reflection (individual or collaborative among the student competition teams); regular meetings with staff - setting, meeting, and celebrating international competition milestones; development workshops (e.g. focusing on how to deepen or maintain the student teams or overcome international competition challenges). Summative or concluding resources or activities are often offered at the end of a competition and can include: giving a poster/presentation at a conference/event; reflection; feedback collection (written report or output); student publication opportunities (e.g. journal or blog). Likely the most valuable summative activity, one that will last a lifetime, is past competitors 'giving back' in a range of ways, from mentoring new competitors, acting as an ambassador for the university and programme, actively contributing on social media to international competitions and being a torch-bearer for the case method as a way of developing high impact competences.

Rowlett *et al.* (2012) have suggested that institutional commitment to undergraduate research as a high-priority activity for its staff and students is essential for creating a successful undergraduate research and inquiry environment. For inquiry to flourish, certain steps need to be place e.g. providing appropriate resources and recognition to staff and students engaged in research will increase the success and sustainability of undergraduate research initiatives. Staff members also must be committed to undergraduate research and inquiry as an important part of their roles and responsibilities. Students majoring in all academic areas, including professional disciplines such as marketing, should have opportunities to participate in staff-mentored research, scholarship, and creative activities.

We argue that within UG inquiry in the Marketing programmes, international case competitions provide creative, high-impact practices to maximize student development. Engaging in the competitions provides students with what Walkington (2015) summarizes as an emphasis on higher-level thinking skills to ascertain the following benefits for students:

- support their ideas and beliefs with evidence;
- make critical judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods by examining how others gathered and interpreted data;
- as a team evaluate the validity and reliability of their conclusions;
- synthesise and organise ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretations and relationships;
- work on projects that require integration of ideas from varied sources.

Embedding high impact UG inquiry opportunities in the undergraduate curriculum

Lopatto (2010) has stated that the positive effects of an UG experience on student learning, attitude, and career choice have passed from anecdote to systematic data. Linn *et al.* (2015) suggest there is now evidence to show that undergraduate research or independent scholarly inquiry, is a well-documented practice shown to consistently deliver student learning outcomes. Vaz (2019) argues that research on student learning and success in college has produced compelling evidence that high-impact teaching practices benefit students greatly. Kuh's (2008) ten high-impact practices include undergraduate research. We believe an example of *common intellectual experiences* can involve case competitions, often outside the core curriculum, for selected students.

Figure 1 shows an evolving model in the College of Business for embedding case teaching and competitions as undergraduate inquiry – it is adapted from Healey & Jenkins (2009). The vertical axis presents a continuum from a more teacher-focussed approach in which students are the audience of research to a more student-focussed approach in which students are active participants in research and inquiry. The horizontal axis classifies approaches according to the extent to which the focus is on the substantive content of research or on the research process. This model can be used to help individual staff and programme teams analyse their curricula and consider ways of strengthening students' understanding of and through case competitions as a form of undergraduate inquiry. Mondejar-Jimenez *et al.* (2010) argue that cases allow for a higher level of learning (analysis, synthesis, evaluation) and are relevant to the acquisition of students' skills and abilities that will help them navigate the changing competitive and complex labour market.

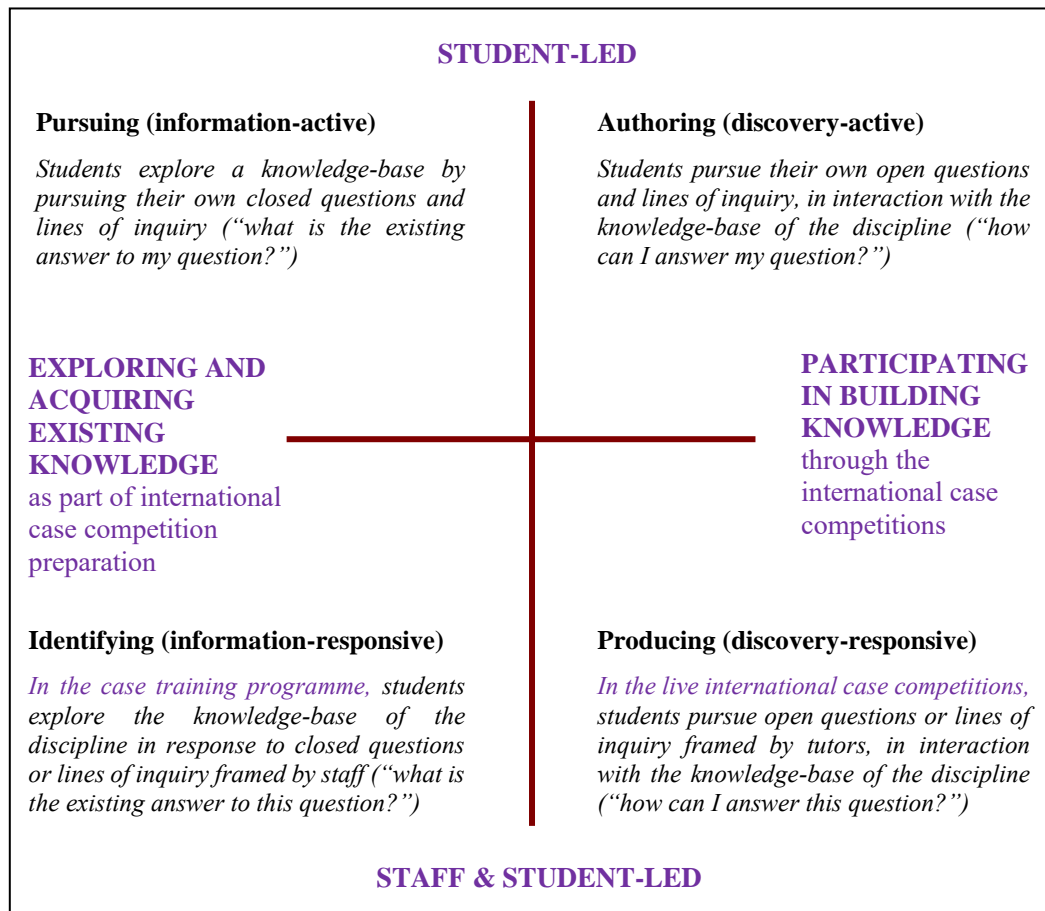
Davis & Wagner (2019) have investigated the extent to which disciplinary identity (or in this current context, the undergraduate student's connection to a particular discipline in Business) reflects motivations for participating in inquiry and varies by student discipline. Student's connection to their discipline is important and Marketing students in the College of Business are strongly embedded in their discipline from their first day. The programme which is the focus of this work, is not a general one with a marketing stream, typical of many undergraduate business offerings, but driven by the marketing discipline. The programme is located in a dedicated school, the School of Marketing, which boasts one of the largest cohorts of marketing academics in Ireland, and delivers a range of undergraduate, postgraduate and executive marketing programmes to over 1000 students. In addition, as the College of Business positions itself as being 'close to business and the professions', marketing students' learning is characterized by interacting with marketing industry professionals, via the professional body for marketing, guest lectures and through industry-led assessments. Such an immersion in the discipline creates graduates with knowledge, networks and insights into their chosen discipline. Pilz & Zenner (2018) suggest that among other benefits attributed to the case method is that it promotes networked thinking by learners; their study on business and management courses set out to explore whether networked thinking takes account of interactions and repercussions, making it crucial to decision-making within the complex system of rules that shapes current business reality.

International Case Competitions as high impact inquiry

The key issues explored here are benefits for student engagement versus the downside of this form of inquiry only being for small numbers of both students (and staff) – how best to transfer the learning from those students who are directly involved in the competitions to their peers in the wider cohort group, and how to share the experiences more extensively to other staff teaching cases on the programme?

Figure 1

*Case Teaching and International Competitions as Inquiry-Based Learning:
an Evolving Model (Adapted from Healey & Jenkins, 2009)*

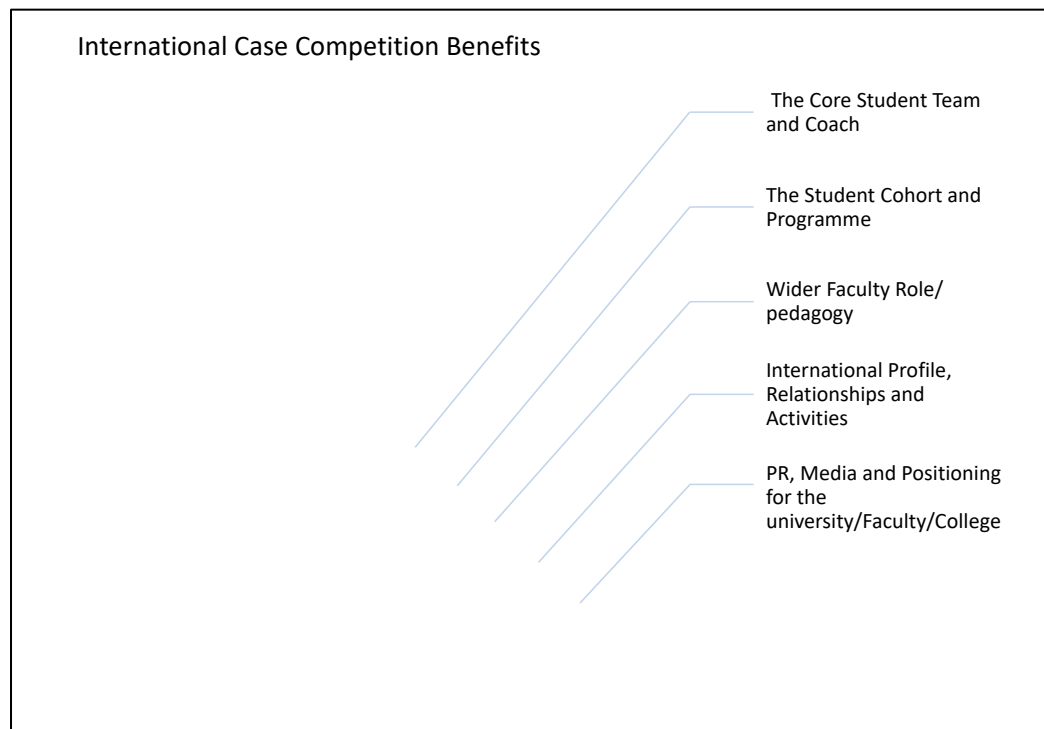


Sayani *et al.* (2018) state that higher education institutions are increasingly employing competitive formats such as case competitions in business education to enhance students’ learning experience, and as a result there is a nascent body of literature on case competitions. Much has already been written about the recognized benefits of student engagement in international case competitions, but an obvious criticism of case competitions is often the limited number of students and staff involved. At first sight, only a handful of students get to experience and benefit from this activity. However, we argue that the intense engagement of students is in reality more extensive, with a ripple effect (shown in Figure 2) cascading out from the core team involved with all students benefiting from their peers’ involvement. Given the intense nature of competition and the international dimension which allows for collaboration, and the development of partnership and research on case writing, teaching, and competing, staff teaching with cases benefit from invaluable professional development opportunities and bring learning ‘back to the classroom’. Finally, the nature of such competitions allows for positive news stories for the programme, college and

university, clearly positioning the learning philosophy of the College. The long-term PR value, in student advocacy and goodwill, while yet to be empirically measured, is undoubtedly positive.

Figure 2

International Case Competition Ripple Effect



In terms of how the business international case competitions link back to case teaching as a form of UG inquiry, Navarro (2008) reports that a deeper level of experiential and integrative exercises are required for students in their programme. By doing so, clear benefits can be observed for students when they enter the world of work, and the business school. Sachau & Naas (2010) found that business case competition experience enhanced past participants in their teamwork skills, managing workload, applying theory and solving problems. More recently, Marcel & Mahon (2019) argue that business school competitions are a prevalent component of graduate-level business education as they help students develop problem-solving skills, critical thinking, high-level communication (aid in the development of advanced communication skills), and applied experiential learning. Studies by Damnjanovic, Proud & Ruangwanit (2018) and Damnjanovic & Mijatovic (2017) both found the perceived benefits of case competition on participants included improved teamwork abilities, enhanced analytical skills, new knowledge acquisition, networking abilities, positive employment experiences, and an easier adjustment to the workplace. Case studies also provide business schools an avenue to improve collaboration between academic work and practice (Chanaron & Birchall, 2006).

Alongside soft skills development, Sayani *et al.* (2018) explored students' perceptions and experiences regarding affective, cognitive, and skills development factors and whether these perceptions and experiences determine students' participation in case competitions. Their results

highlight statistically significant differences between perceived and actual learning with respect to cognitive and affective benefits. Maier-Lytle, McGuire & Ehlen (2010) posit that competitions have become more apparent as co-curricular offerings for undergraduate business students, as they provide students with an opportunity to gain competencies. Indeed a study by Carter *et al.* (2019) examined the perceptions and expressions of learning of 18 undergraduate students who participated in case competitions through qualitative inquiry. The participants articulated learning outcomes based on their participation in a case competition, including enhanced communication, critical thinking, and analytical skills; viewing diversity as an educational benefit; and gaining a deeper understanding of business fields such as consulting. Their findings suggest case competitions are a viable tool for business educators to aid students in preparing for competitive work environments. Johnson, Richie & van Oudheusden (2019) in a cross-country comparison, noted the value of international business case competition participation on career and graduate school placement and success, and observed that international business case competition provided an invaluable experiential learning opportunity for participants. We argue that the opportunities provided by engagement in international case competitions is what Healey, *et al.* (2014) posit as research-based: undertaking research and inquiry. Here the curriculum focus is on ensuring that as much as possible the student learns in inquiry mode (i.e. the students become producers of knowledge not just consumers). The strongest curricular form of this is in those special undergraduate programmes for selected students, but such inquiry may also be mainstreamed for all or many students.

International Case Competitions in Marketing

The signature pedagogy of case teaching within business education has a strong heritage, built up over time from the foundation of the college. Shulman's (2005) work on signature pedagogies has specific relevance to this current work on case teaching and competitions. Case teaching as a form or style of teaching is common to specific disciplines, such as Marketing, or Marketing-related professions. He argues that undergraduate teaching is a profession that influences all others and that undergraduate education plays a special role in encouraging each student's engagement with a discipline. We believe that as a business school, the marketing programmes in our portfolio shape the marketing professionals of the future.

The surface structure of case teaching consists of concrete, operational acts of pedagogy, of showing and demonstrating, of questioning and answering, of interacting and withholding, of approaching and withdrawing. As a signature pedagogy, case teaching also has a *deep structure*, a set of assumptions about how best to impart a certain body of knowledge and know-how to these marketing students. It also has an *implicit structure*, a moral dimension that comprises a set of beliefs about professional attitudes, values, and dispositions. It is a discipline-specific approach to teaching that educates students to think, perform and act within their disciplinary frameworks. It forges a connection between programme coursework, practice, and policy-making in the field of Business Education. Across the entire range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, case teaching are used, in keeping with a position of being practice-based and research informed. It should be noted that while business case studies have their roots in the Harvard Business School in the early twentieth century, ensuring that it became synonymous as the 'Harvard method', case teaching and case competitions are used in many other disciplines such as engineering, biotechnology, information technology, science and social science.

While the focus of this work is on UG enquiry, we emphasise that a case pedagogy requires a unique set of teaching and learning skills for staff, significant resource in terms of staff student ratios and time as well as the purchase of case materials. Participation in case competitions, typically in an international context, ensures that this investment can be leveraged, developed and enhanced. The College of Business has invested significant resources in business case competitions to develop both

staff and students. In the past ten years, students have taken part in over 30 competitions around the world winning multiple awards. Each academic year, a case competition training programme is organised and developed with university partners for a four-day immersion in the case method, analyzing, presenting cases and discussing the case method with staff. To perform well in case competitions, the College has invested significant resources, funding the costs of entry, travel and accommodation for each competition.

Of equal importance to the development of the UG enquiry using case-based learning, is the development and deployment of case competition coaching among staff. As with many extra-curricular or peripheral activities, it is usually voluntary, and features staff with a personal interest or passion for the activity. Significant is the time spent by lecturing staff working with the selected groups; typically 100-150 hours of preparation is required per team. This incorporates tutoring and guidance on presentation skills, strategic analytical process, decision-making, and constant testing through replication of the case competition format (three or four hours of preparation for each team) and detailed feedback sessions. While peer learning and sharing among interested academic staff helps develop such competences, it is not sufficient to build capacity and budget holders and academic management need to formalise and recognise costs and benefits for staff involved in coaching. Equally, while we argue the benefits to students, staff and the programme, it can be challenging to recruit students to take part in what is essentially extra-curricular, time-consuming activity such as this as students, normally in their critical final year, are judicious in their choices of activities, regardless of the clear benefits.

In the past ten years, students have taken part in over 30 competitions around the world winning multiple awards (such as NIBS 2018, RRUICC 2014-2016). Each academic year, a case competition training programme is organised and developed with university partners (such as the University of South Carolina and the University of Edinburgh) for a four-day immersion in the case method, analyzing, presenting cases and discussing the case method with staff.

Working with students in the classroom is not sufficient to prepare a team for a case competition. Some business schools have a course dedicated to case studies at their university, whereas others allocate mentors work with students' through additional extra-curricular activities. Damnjanovic, Proud, & Milosavljevic (2020) report that an important practice is that some mentors who prepare students for competition usually invite consultants to help them to stimulate students to overcome lack of knowledge when it comes to assumptions and educated guessing about the topic through solving case studies. They go on to argue that although business schools frequently use business case competitions, only a sparse amount of scholarly and practical research has put an emphasis to this phenomenon. Their study was on the use of case method in undergraduate business case competitions examining the process of knowledge transfer from mentors to undergraduates and reverse knowledge flows after undergraduates 'close the academic-practice gap' (Rynes, Bartunek & Draft, 2001, p.348) at business case competitions. It is hoped that this paper addresses this apparent gap in the literature.

In the context of students-as-partners, Mercer-Mapstone & Abbot (2020) suggest a number of ways to capture students' motivation for involvement, which are relevant for the case competitions:

- outlining the experience of the partnership project;
- listing the benefits from involvement;
- identifying the challenges faced in the process and how they were overcome;
- measuring the impact of the project;
- gathering feedback on administration of the initiative or feedback on support throughout the initiative (e.g. induction, training programme);
- reflecting on recommendations for future partnership projects/ initiatives.

The direct impact of case competition participation in the School has been collated and formally evaluated by the programme team and fully support the cited benefits of engagement to students (Walkington, 2015; Sayani *et al.*, 2018; Navarro, 2000; Sachau & Naas, 2010 and Johnson *et al.*, 2019). Every student who has competed has richly described their improved learning, higher order skills and competences, networking benefits and the rich experiences. Critics would highlight that highly motivated students, often self-selecting for such activity and receiving intensive training and guidance, are a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, we argue that in addition to the direct benefits to these students, there are clearly evidenced benefits in a range of other areas as illustrated in Figure 2 above, and directly contribute to embedding case competition in the curriculum.

The decision to engage in case competitions now forms part of the audited and scrutinised annual quality assurance evaluation of the programme. As a recognised form of student and staff engagement, case competitions are evaluated by the academic and student committee. Such evaluation ensures that case-based learning received prominent attention and is incorporated into plans for development of pedagogy, and student plans for subsequent academic years. As the College places an emphasis on case teaching as the signature pedagogy, formal staff development includes celebrating and rewarding case competition engagement and staff pedagogical developments. Ten academic staff are now actively involved in case writing and research as a direct outcome of case competition engagement.

The high-performance/profile of case competitions mean that such activity becomes the reference point for academic staff on the programme – the sharing of knowledge from competition involvement is clearly documented and disseminated and is evidenced in the academic staff plans for teaching and learning with cases on the programme. As a result, the next cohort of students benefit directly from any previous teams' case competition engagement. Perhaps the best illustration of the embedding of case competitions in the curriculum is the use of competing current and former students in recruitment and promotion of the programme, the School and the College. This becomes a tangible manifestation and an articulation of the mission of the College, the positioning of being close to industry and the professions, the outwardly focused international dimension and places the case method as the signature pedagogy.

Exploring future potential for moving case teaching as inquiry into a blended environment

The pandemic has had an enormous impact on communities, businesses, and individuals across the globe, and not least among those affected are the participants in higher education. Since March 2020, Business schools have faced the unprecedented challenge of moving all teaching online (initially at speed, now in a more considered way). The impact of the pandemic in its first year was immediate and dramatically altered the examination cycle but coincided with the completion of the teaching year. This allowed a significant lead-time for the Marketing programme team to develop strategies for the September 2020-21 academic year. However, the response was predicated on the moving goalposts that were the constantly evolving assumptions, parameters, national and university regulations and rapid technological advancements. While all teaching and learning activities had to be recast, a particular challenge was presented for those using the case teaching pedagogy. To date, student feedback is very positive but the issues identified and to a great extent beyond the control of the team, remain. This past year, students were unable to socialise, work part-time or engage in sports and social activities, therefore the primacy of their academic programme in their lives is unusual. Further evaluation through student feedback, module evaluations and programme committee consideration will help understand this new mode of case delivery and learning and the potential for a combination of face-to-face and online delivery in the coming years.

The programme teams in the School of Marketing have reflected on the positives and challenges in this pivot online from the perspective of case teaching and supporting international case competitions. The challenges of scaling up under pressure to maintain the highest level of student-inquiry learning possible, how best to capture the lessons learned, and how this crisis may change the way cases are taught and learnt in the future all feature in this final section of the paper.

In a recent series of staff professional development webinars in the College about moving instruction online, key concerns from lecturers about online teaching of cases are: there is more to keep track of; it is challenging to feed off students' energy (not being in the physical classroom); it is difficult to get a 'read on the room'; how engaged will the students be online in their cases; and how best to support socialization in a virtual environment? There is an argument from the staff perspective that using online platforms can be a sterile method of teaching. However, this can be countered by coupling enthusiasm for the case material, the online learning experience with liberal doses of empathy for the students. Staff attitudes and mindset to delivering case teaching online are important - embracing the affordances of the technology to grow critical thinking and offer students opportunities to engage in critical intellectual discussions on the cases remains paramount. Staff have found discussion using the chat function to be, in many ways, deeper than what is usually experienced in a classroom. The social, cognitive, and teaching presence of the community of inquiry model by Garrison & Anderson (2000) is interesting for us to explore going forward as a thoughtful design of online education; it can offer practical ways of helping students learn through active participation and shared meaning-making in blended case teaching, particularly in supporting their discourse on the cases, and from the staff perspective in setting the right climate for the case teaching. The cognitive presence dimension of their model is especially pertinent for blended case teaching as it deals with the 4 stages of a triggering event such as the case itself, exploration through reflection and discussion, meaning construction as students discuss ideas, and application of knowledge both in the programme and outside the classroom.

Stenger (2020) advocates for a variety of tactics to keep students engaged online as those who feel included during online classes ultimately will have a more positive class experience. Ringel *et al.* (2020) advise that with a few simple shifts, virtual classrooms can be made more efficient, productive, engaging, and collaborative. Small-group breakouts online can give extroverts the space to talk through their ideas on the case and building in time for individual reflection gives introverts the space to think through what they would like to say about the various case scenarios. Schiano (2020) reminds educators that online teaching is still teaching, and many of the techniques used in the traditional classroom will translate to the digital one. The Marketing programme team approach to delivering online case teaching and case competition support as part of a conceptual and operational link to the different forms of UG inquiry includes what Spronken Smith *et al.* (2008) have differentiated as three 'modes of inquiry': structured – where lecturers provide an issue or problem and an outline for addressing it; guided – where lecturers provide questions to stimulate inquiry, but students are self-directed as regards exploring these questions; and open – where students formulate the questions themselves as well as going through the full inquiry cycle.

Any list of 21st century employment skills has "collaboration" predominantly featuring. The students' engagement in the blended cases focuses on getting the lived experiences from active practitioners while simultaneously reflecting on how lockdown has impacted our use of collaborative case teaching. Learning remains a social activity, but technology provides "new ways of communicating and collaborating...[allowing] learners and educators to interact with each other, peers, experts, content and other resources in ways that were previously unavailable (Good, O'Connor, & Luce, 2004, p.3).

Previous collaboration which was supported in a face-to-face setting through group work needed to be reframed for online interaction. Therefore, questions for us to explore in future study are - do we

continue to use the same tools and strategies? Have these been affected by our online learning experiences? We will be considering what has worked and what challenges arose, and will reflect on how we can increase accessibility and engagement for some students.

Practice-based implications of the study

By exploring how case teaching and international competitions in Marketing programmes have been incorporated into the curriculum and how they can evolve into explicit student forms of UG inquiry and enhanced literacy, practical implications from the programme team perspective are considered for moving case delivery and international competitions with their integral support and training into a blended environment. Of particular significance, and simultaneously evolving, is the dramatic enforced alteration to case teaching and case competitions since March 2020. This work assesses the immediate impacts and attempt to chart a way forward for UG inquiry for students, staff and the university.

Implications for good practice centre on programme redesign for inquiry-based case teaching, student support for international case competitions and staff training for the blended/hybrid environment, with the latter outlined below. Clearly the pandemic has had far-reaching implications for case teaching format and delivery. Changing patterns of delivery in undergraduate programmes have been reported by the Case Centre (2021), with online programmes having grown from 7% to 66%, with blended rising from 10% to 21%. As the implications of the inquiry-based case teaching approach compounded by the pandemic in this study became clear, the effect on teacher workload is significant - of making decisions on synchronous and asynchronous delivery, undertaking training to become more fluent in digital platforms for delivery, and the initial outlay of time in adapting their own preferred case teaching techniques for online.

Plans are being considered for staff training for moving instruction online (Figure 3). Technology-enhanced case-based learning and teaching is never a one-size-fits-all, and it needs a contextualized approach in which the needs of the target group, the sociocultural context, the means, methods, affordances and capacity of technologies is all balanced in a good design. We believe many staff concerns in online/blended case teaching, such as losing the ability to check in with their students, can be eliminated with good professional development.

Implications for student engagement also need to be considered. Translating highly interactive f2f case sessions to online can be challenging. Case engagement traditionally has been rich, interactive fluid discussions and replicating this in the online space requires motivation, energy and focus from students. It is also important to be aware of the barriers to student engagement here such as connectivity and preferences for not using cameras/mics.

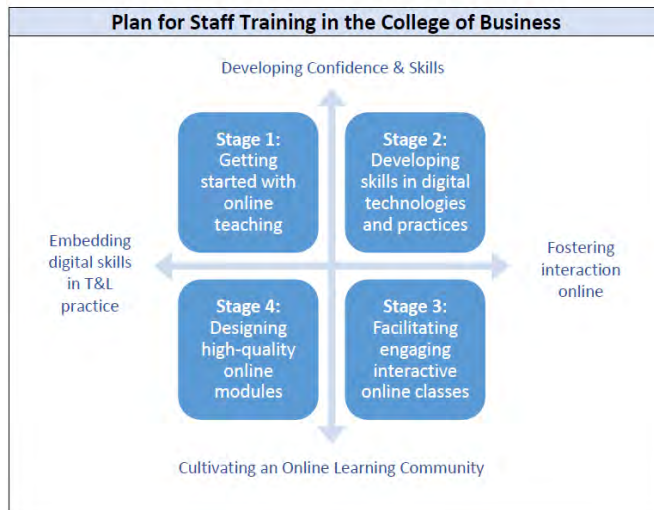
Conclusion

This practice-example has discussed case teaching and international competitions as a form of undergraduate inquiry in a Marketing programme. This work contributes to the existing scholarship on case teaching and international case competitions in undergraduate programmes as high impact practice by discussing broader implications for programme teams, and suggesting future directions for this form of inquiry in business-related disciplines.

Key findings from the literature that our study is in consensus with relate to Healey & Jenkins (2009) and Rowlett *et al.*, (2012). For the former, the framework can be used effectively to help individual staff and programme teams analyse their curricula and consider ways of strengthening students' understanding of and through case competitions as a form of undergraduate inquiry. For the latter, we fully concur on the need for appropriate resources and recognition to staff and students engaged

Figure 3

Potential Purpose and Structure of Staff Professional Development in Blended Case Teaching



- **Stage 1** is for those with little or no experience in online/blended delivery of case teaching – live training webinars have been identified as crucial here. Rather than producing simply a 1-page guide for staff, it can be better to have a cornucopia of annotated and curated resources on case teaching in a blended and online environment to ponder and choose from, so that staff can make informed choices based on their knowledge of the disciplinary nuances.

- **Stage 2** is for those who need to develop from the basic online skill-set that they already have. This involves encouraging their passion to build on what they already know about online case teaching, but also to rein in any unrealistic expectations, misapprehensions about simply moving existing approaches beyond the walls of the classroom. Evidence-informed reflective practice is crucial. Staff can be advised to keep quick notes - about what they did, why it seemed a good idea at the time, how it worked, what colleagues and students felt about the changed practice, and any influencing institutional factors. If the programme team can find 15 minutes to share, review and add to these notes, such reflections can be valuable for programme teams to inform how they can continue to deliver case teaching online.
- **Stage 3** is for those staff who have been identified already doing good online work and wanting to improve even further, having a blended case teaching resource and ideas hub available can be useful. Online case teaching is not just about recording voiceover slides and running webinars. Inclusive design, community building, good communication, feedback, and student support are just as important. This integrated approach recognizes learning as both a social and a cognitive process; consideration is needed on how can student groups be constructed and enabled to function with cases and competition preparation in the somewhat artificial space.
- **Stage 4** can be aimed at those designing new or redesigning existing modules for blended/online delivery. Staff begin with a firm grounding in the practices and principles that drive online case teaching success: key is to establish their online presence and manage their time as a facilitator of the cases; provide meaningful feedback at case milestones; leverage appropriate online tools; maintain engagement and cohesion in the student groups; and play both cognitive and social, or 'nurturing' roles to build relationships and foster a sense of community in the student cohort.

in inquiry and case competitions will increase the success and sustainability of such initiatives. Staff must be committed to undergraduate inquiry as an important part of their roles and responsibilities, and within our university context, there is a new workload model being developed to enable staff to engage in such initiatives and get recognition for this work. Students majoring in all discipline areas, including professional disciplines such as marketing, should have opportunities to participate in staff-mentored research, scholarship, and creative activities.

However from our perspective, a key consideration now is where do we go next in uncertain times in the future? We believe this is an opportunity to extend the case teaching inquiry approach to the rest of the College of Business. In terms of how this can manifest itself in a new Faculty and Technological University, we argue that best practice is at a tipping point – how do we retain all the value of face-to-face case teaching practice in uncertain times? Part of this involves challenging the post-pandemic broader perspective on blended delivery.

It is important to highlight a number of generalisable lessons that emerge from our work for other disciplines running or entering their students in international case competitions, which are summarised here. The programme team have engaged in reflections and a number of positives have been identified: first and foremost, we can teach cases online and continue to prepare the students for international case competitions – there are no international barriers, it is technically possible, and innovations can be built upon due to cross-cultural teams. As classes have returned once again in-person, staff are upskilling in the dynamics of facilitating case teaching in their virtual classroom and adapting their case teaching plan for blended delivery. They are considering how best to enable their students to take more responsibility on making decisions in the cases, so they can feel energized as they engage online. This involves careful choosing of cases that align with the programme learning outcomes as well as those that students can enjoy working through. Students can continue to benefit both cognitively and from an efficacy perspective from this form of UG inquiry but there can be downsides also, particularly for the international case competitions.

Shortcomings from the student perspective are: no access to the ‘big trip’ for the foreseeable future (the international trip abroad can be of benefit to students as they can network with their peers, deepen friendships, and gain confidence); no immersion in another context; limited social opportunities and activities; issues of time zones; human energy lacking from a physical competition – all can be challenging to replicate online. However, staff and students have shown resilience and will continue to look at what has been learned collectively from teaching and learning differently. The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery – a key message to uphold within the UG inquiry approach taken in the programmes for the future - whatever that future may be.

There is considerable potential for future work in this area; one dimension being to conduct a comparative analysis across multiple deliveries of the approach from a student and staff perspective, with pre and post testing with students to show how constructive alignment is happening in practice. With the rapid shift to online programmes in the past year, teachers have forced to quickly rethink how they can achieve the programme learning outcomes and how well the case teaching methods have been working. Cases continue to be a mainstay in the online business education classroom, and two areas of interest are the technology platforms for online case teaching and exploring the effects of the transition when the programme moved from fully face-to-face case teaching to a fully online delivery, and how best to return to a blended model and where the inquiry-based approach fits in this new learning environment.

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