

## Case Studies Working Group Summary

ULSF/CE Consultation, March 30-31, 2001

**Question: “What are the criteria for good case study methodology?”**

Uses of the case study:

- Tool for internal documentation (education)
- Tool for external use to help others learn from one institution’s experience
- Tool for external review/audit (evaluator)
- To identify areas of successes and document what people have done
- To tell a story

Issues and considerations discussed when thinking about case studies:

- Want to make certain that they meet various people’s needs (i.e. ULSF, faculty researchers, practitioners, etc.)
- Must consider the applicability of case studies to various cultures and geographical areas
- If criteria are created, they must be adaptable to various situations
- Language should be considered in document (i.e. does the term “case story” have different connotations than the term “case study”)
- How can we ensure that all voices of the university/college are heard in the case?
- Must develop trust of the reader
- Must develop the trust of those we are asking to perform the case study
- How can tools such as ULSF’s SAQ be incorporated into the case study?
- Many different types of case studies (educative, political, economic, technical, etc.)
- Is it possible to give step-by-step instructions to someone on how to complete a case study?

Caveats of the process:

- Problems with subjectivity and objectivity
- Often can’t report the “dirt” and the personal battles of the process because of politics
- Institutions who write up their own cases tend to focus on the best practices and leave any negative aspects out of the report

Elements of the Case Study/Story:

- There is a perceived need for a framework for telling the story
- There is also a need for critical analysis; thus the outcome could be some combination of case study and case story
- Emphasis should be on the process rather than the outcome
- Elements would include the following:

- a) How did the process start?
- b) Who initiated the process?
- c) A discussion of the heuristic approach
- d) What resources (time, human, money, etc.) were made available? From whom?
- e) How has the initiative been received?
- f) Who participated? Who did not?
- g) Is the story known in the university/college community?
- h) How has it been validated (formal and informal processes, i.e. change in mission statement, in catalogue, committees, coffee talks, etc.)?
- i) Analysis of validation (perhaps apply the 7 SAQ criteria/facets)
- j) Challenges: What roadblocks were encountered along the way? How were they overcome? What worked? What didn't work?
- k) Analysis of why the initiative succeeded and/or failed

Another topic of discussion:

Rationale and capacity for an “action research” methodology for sustainability in higher education.

Need: Stakeholder inquiry

Working group recommendations:

- Issue should be examined further and a more developed profile of a case study should be created
- A better understanding of how Action Research fits into the development of case studies is necessary
- A better understanding of the rationale for a case study should be created

Participants:

Peter Blaze Corcoran  
 John Glyphis  
 Tarah Wright  
 Dieter Hessel  
 Kim Walker

*Prepared by Tarah Wright  
 Edited by Wynn Calder*