

**WELCOME!!**

**A NEWCOMER'S GUIDE**

**TO**

**NACRA**

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### **NACRA and Its Origins**

NACRA (North American Case Research Association) is an outgrowth of the Southern Case Writers, one of a series of regional case writer associations created by the Intercollegiate Case Clearing House (ICCH) in the 1960s. As the Southern Case Writers grew and became more national and international in scope, the name of the organization was changed to the North American Case Research Association or NACRA. NACRA's mission has been and continues to be promoting and supporting quality case research, writing, publication, and teaching. The current membership is about 450. The organization includes mostly faculty from the business disciplines; however, in recent years, faculty from a variety of administrative areas such as health administration, education administration, public administration, and so on, have joined as well.

For many years NACRA was affiliated with the Southern Management and Marketing Associations and met annually in the Southeast with the Allied Southern Business Association (ASBA). In 1995, NACRA separated from ASBA and began holding its annual meetings at various locations throughout the United States. Future meetings will continue to be held annually in October or early November and sites will be varied across North America.

### **The Annual Conference**

NACRA's annual conference is similar to the annual meetings of other professional academic organizations. Its members meet once a year for the purpose of critiquing each other's research. Case research incorporates a case study accompanied by an Instructor's Manual (teaching note). After a case has been submitted, blind refereed, and accepted for the conference, the case is distributed to a small group of case writers whose cases have also been accepted. Usually these groups, which are formed around similar case subjects or topics, consist of five to seven people. For example, cases focusing on business ethics and social responsibility would be grouped together as would strategy and policy cases, healthcare cases, etc.

In addition to the round table discussions, there are always a number of papers presented dealing with some aspect of case research, writing, publication, or teaching. Sessions devoted to developing case ideas ("embryo" cases) may also be scheduled. Participants spend time developing and maintaining a network of contacts, an invaluable source of ideas and support for the case method.

### **Round Table Assignments, Case Presentations, and Case Discussions**

Assignments of individuals to tables are made with an eye toward providing a mix of experienced and inexperienced case writers. Each roundtable group will include a session chair and a recorder. Several observers may be present and take part in the case critiques and discussions. Group members have the responsibility of preparing by reading and critically evaluating all the cases in their groups so that during the meeting they can make constructive and useful recommendations for the improvement of the cases presented.

The case sessions usually begin with the session chair determining the time available for the presentation and discussion of each case, typically about 45 minutes. Then, a case writer will be asked to give a very brief overview of his/her case and its history. This is followed by the other case writers seated at the table giving comments and suggestions--both written and oral, on how that particular case might be improved for future use and publication. This process continues until all cases have been presented and discussed.

Some participants may become alarmed because the first case discussed often will consume more time than allotted to others. That happens because certain types of comments are applicable to several of the cases presented, but need not be talked about at length when they recur in subsequent cases.

### **Four Reasons to Attend a NACRA Conference**

One important reason to submit a case and to attend a conference is to improve your case. The round table discussions provide an opportunity for feedback that otherwise would be difficult to obtain. Another reason is that it provides a chance for the case writer to hone and refine her/his case research, writing, and teaching skills. By participating in a serious, constructive debate over cases, discussants will gain a variety of valuable insights that will assist in the development of the case presented and cases to be written in the future. A third and equally important purpose of the conference is the assistance case writers receive in making their cases publishable either in a case journal or textbook. A number of NACRA cases are published in one form or another every year. A fourth reason is that the case writer will meet a lot of terrific people--dedicated case researchers, writers, and teachers to whom they can turn for friendship and assistance for years to come.

### **The Case and Instructor's Manual (Teaching Note)**

The case, which must be research based and depict real life events, is simply a short history of a particular situation facing an organization and managers (or administrators) and employees within an organization. The Instructor's Manual (also called Teaching Note), is the intellectual contribution portion of the case. The IM relates the situation and events described in the case to the theoretical constructs within a particular discipline. It outlines the goals and objectives of the case, the courses in which the case has relevance, provides suggestions for using the case in the classroom and identifies alternative scenarios that may lead to reasonable solutions to the problems revealed or hinted at in the case.

There are many different answers for the question of what makes a good case. However, there are some common themes. Good cases should:

- 1) Tell a story. There should be a beginning, background, a middle, and a conclusion.
- 2) Be interesting and able to capture the interest of the reader.
- 3) Be accurate. Cases are histories of decisions and situations. They should report the reality of what happened in an unbiased and non-judgmental manner.
- 4) Generally have a decision focus. They should place the reader in a position of having to consider alternatives and make decisions. However, in some disciplines such as Business

Ethics, Business & Society, and Organizational Theory, cases that bring to light complex issues or lead to identification and application of theoretical constructs are highly valued.

- 5) Be self-contained. That is, sufficient information should be contained in the case, or previously assigned material in the course (or its prerequisites), so that students have the information needed to identify reasonable alternatives and make informed decisions.
- 6) Have real characters to identify with within the case. The characters in a case are often the source of a great deal of insight. It is difficult to separate real decisions from the people who are making them.
- 7) Generate conflict. There should be more than one viable option before the decision maker. It is the weighing of pros and cons of identifiable alternatives that generates learning. Conflict should not be created or invented; if it existed in the real situation, report it.
- 8) Be field researched. The detail needed to really understand a situation and all of the richness involved almost always requires interviewing the people who were in the organization at the time the research was conducted. However, in the Business Ethics/Social Responsibility area it is sometimes possible to rely solely on secondary data.

Once again it should be emphasized that from an intellectual contribution and pedagogical standpoint, the Instructor's Manual is the most important part of the case package. The IM links the field observation of the case to the scientific theory and structure of the appropriate discipline. It should describe the purpose of the case, the courses and situations for which the case is useful; provide identification and analysis of key issues in the case; and report on various teaching approaches. An Instructor's Manual is required by NACRA for a case to be considered for the workshop or publication.

### **Overcoming First-Time Jitters**

Always a concern to the NACRA newcomer is the intensity of the oral critiques of her/his case during the roundtable discussion. Do not be concerned. First, remember that the case was accepted because the reviewers believed that it had promise and could be developed into a publishable work. In some instances, participant comments and recommendations will require minimum revision. At other times, recommended changes can be substantial and time consuming. Usually, the "worst case scenario" is that the case writer will have to go back to the subject and develop additional information. Always remain aware that the overriding purpose of these group discussions is to put the case writer on a path that will make the case as good as it can be.

First time attendees might also experience some undue anxiety because they are expected to critique other cases written by more experienced case writers. However, they should be reminded that the usual readers of cases are students. If one of the roundtable participants is confused or left hanging, just imagine how the students will react. First-time presenter's ideas and opinions are important, do carry weight, and are of considerable value to even the most experienced case writer.

Most first-time participants may attempt to incorporate all of the comments and suggestions that surface during the discussion of their case, or decide they don't want to use any of them. Your case is your work and you can do with it as you please. However, don't be too defensive. Everybody's case can be improved. Generally, without some revision a case presented at the conference is unlikely to move forward and be published in a journal or in a book. But, as with most reviews, if you have a good reason not to change, then that reason needs to be stated as the case moves forward in the review process.

After you return home from the NACRA conference you should immediately begin revising the case and instructor's manual while the comments and suggestions are still fresh in your mind. When the revision is complete, submit the revised version to the *Case Research Journal* for publication.

Cases submitted to the journal may be eligible for the following case awards:

- The **C. R. Christensen Outstanding Teaching Case Award** is awarded to a case presented in the Education Track, revised, and submitted to the *Case Research Journal*. The award carries a prize of up to \$1,000 supported by donations and by a grant from the E. M. Kauffman Foundation. Cases to be considered focus on the teaching process, pedagogical issues, and intra/extra classroom incidents in the tradition reflected in the work of C. R. Christensen. The recipient is expected to participate in a discussion of the case at the C. R. Christensen Teaching Session, a plenary session at the annual NACRA meeting the following year.
- The **Philip D. Cooper Award** is awarded to the best case in Health Care Management presented in any track, revised, and submitted to the *Case Research Journal*. The award includes a \$200 prize supported by Victory Cooper in her husband's memory.
- NACRA's most prestigious award, the **Curtis E. Tate Jr. Award**, is awarded each year for the best case published (or accepted for publication) in the *Case Research Journal* for the previous year. The award includes a plaque and a prize of \$2,000.

### **Opportunities for Assuming a Leadership Role**

For those participants at the conference who wish to become more involved, NACRA has a number of officer and conference positions available. Look at the page in the conference program listing the officers, and inform one of them of your interest. A good place to start is to let the incoming program chair know of your interest in reviewing for next year's conference. The *Case Research Journal* editor is also always looking for new ad hoc reviewers.

NACRA's regional and national affiliated case organizations (CASE- formerly Eastern Case Writers; SECRA- Southeast; SWCRA- Southwest; Western Case Writers; SCR- Society for Case Research) provide additional opportunities to become involved, including serving as a representative on NACRA's board of directors. Many NACRA members also belong to one or more of these case organizations.

## **Publication Outlets for Cases**

Cases are published in a number of places – case journals, discipline-oriented journals, and books. A number of journals in business and other disciplines accept cases on a limited basis.

NACRA publishes *The Case Research Journal* quarterly, generally with 8 cases per issue. Cases are blind reviewed. The acceptance rate is about 15 percent. Cases published in the *CRJ* are available for classroom use through our publishing partners: Pearson Custom Publishing, Proquest's XanEdu, Study.net, McGraw-Hill's Primis, Southwestern/Thomson, and the Laurier Institute.

Other case organizations, including the Society for Case Research (SCR) and CASE, publish their own case journals.

Textbooks provide another outlet for cases. Textbook authors are constantly seeking new cases for inclusion in their books. A word of caution! If your case has been included in a textbook, that will eliminate it for consideration in any of the journal outlets for cases. A case which has been through the workshop review process with NACRA requires NACRA's permission for use in a textbook.

The VP of Case Marketing for NACRA has the responsibility of authorizing use of NACRA workshop or journal cases in textbooks and custom course packs. NACRA's policy is to share royalties 50/50 with case authors who are members at the time the royalties are received. Although case writing will never make you wealthy, prolific writers generate a stream of annual royalty payments. They also have the satisfaction of seeing their work used in classrooms across the country and internationally.

Welcome! We hope that you will soon share the professional satisfaction and enthusiasm of long-time NACRA members. We look forward to seeing you again.