Knowing when and how long to step back from a discussion is more of an art than a science.

Backward chaining is another technique used by case teachers. Inexperienced students may be prone to over-analyze and under-recommend. Asking for a thumbnail sketch of the proposed action first, and then backing into the analysis that led you there emphasizes dealing with the most important information first.

Excellent case teachers have a clear idea of what they hope to accomplish in each session , but they avoid interjecting their own viewpoints until the end of the case. Premature interjection tends to sour a good discussion because of the professor's added authority.

The last 10 minutes of any class might well be taken up with students' reflections on what they have learned from the case. The professor should list those points, and then tell them anything that remains to be learned as a part of the session objectives. Professors remind the students how these learning points are important in practice, and explain the reasons. They also indicate what areas in the discussion might have been developed further.

A Case For Cases

Teaching with cases is not a perfect teaching method. Nevertheless, if it is used wisely, its disadvantages (it only simulates reality) are far outweighed by its advantages (it challenges and develops active student participation and appropriate creative and critical thought processes). Cases expose students to a variety of "real world" situations and help to develop expertise and wisdom in an environment of risk. They help students see problems, issues and principles central to their professional role. For the professor, cases can be used to synthesize knowledge and events occurring in more than one real situation. Above all, cases demonstrate the responsibility of students as sources as well as receivers of knowledge.

Ten Criteria for Selecting Cases

1. Is it a true case? A true case is a record of an actual decision that has been faced. Hypothetical cases are rarely as effective.

2. Is there a decision-making dilemma? Easy or obvious decisions make for lousy cases. The best are those that require rigorous evaluation to determine their effectiveness.

3. Does the case tell a good story? Like all good stories, good cases must have an interesting plot. There must be drama, suspense and an issue worth investigating.

4. Are there sufficient details? The case should provide enough relevant information for students to identify with the situation and to empathize with the central characters.

5. Is it written clearly and coherently? It helps if specific names, dates, times and amounts are used. And it should be written in plain English. Optimum length is 12 pages.

6. Are there descriptive sub-titles? Outlining by sub-titles gives students an idea of the flow of the case, and it sets a framework within which data can be assessed. Analysis and interpretation will be more orderly.

7. Does it teach the skills you want? The best cases teach students decision-making processes that can be applied to other cases and other subjects.

8. Are assignment questions suggested by the case? The instructor should be able to identify key questions generated by the facts of the case.

9. How well does the case "age?" The relevance of a case may change with time. Even the best case may need polishing if it contains worn and outdated language.

10. Does the case suggest additional courses or uses? Potential uses of the case might identify other courses or topic areas for discussion.

A New Perspective on an Old Course: Government in a Global Perspective

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Change does not come easily to academe, and especially not to a "bread-and-butter" course like American Government. At KSC, more than 3,300 students enroll in American Government (PS 201) each year because the state requires all University System students to complete a course in American government.

To meet the staffing requirements of this course, each of our political science professors as a rule teaches one or more sections each quarter. The importance of this teaching responsibility is evidenced by the fact that candidates for positions in political science must demonstrate the ability to teach PS 201.

Not all political scientists, however, have the same academic training. As with most disciplines, political scientists specialize in graduate school. Some focus on traditional areas of government such as the legislative, judicial or executive branches. Others go into public policy or administration. Still others concentrate on comparative politics or international affairs.

As a result, American government courses at some colleges and universities are not truly core courses, but reflect the particular interests of the faculty who teach them.

Seeking Uniformity

At KSC, our effort to impose uniformity had been to require all PS 201 faculty to use the same text. This requirement met the need of a coherence in this course while allowing faculty the freedom to emphasize particular subject areas. Each year, the faculty would select the text for PS 201 for the following year—with some more pleased than others about the selection.

In 1991, another "horn" was added to the PS 201 dilemma. KSC's "new core" called for a global context for all core courses. That meant that a new theoretical, conceptual and contextual framework for the "old" course had to be developed.

The traditional framework for the American government course has been either an institutional or policy approach, or some combination of the two. Most current texts give only passing reference to the global context, and no texts place American government in a broader, comparative context.

Although some political scientists have suggested students take a second course in comparative politics for a broader, more global understanding of governments, the reality at KSC is that only one (PS 201) is mandated.

Creating a New Approach

To remedy this situation at KSC, I began a process that eventually took the form of an *Annotated Outline* for PS 201. (Although I am not a specialist in comparative politics, my master's degree is in comparative politics and international relations. As a result, my feet and head are in both camps—comparative and American government.)

Initially, the outline was put together for use by the faculty in preparing lectures, but classroom use of the material demonstrated the need for students to have the outline as well. Now, all students are required to purchase it.

One way to expand students' understanding of American government is to create a new theoretical framework that examines government from both a micro and macro perspective. Such a framework is found in the *Annotated Outline*. It combines information from three traditional courses in political science: Introduction to Political Science, American Government, and Comparative Government. From the intro course are taken "the properties universal to governing processes in all human societies and an understanding of the nature and consequences of the major variations in these processes among different nations." (Ranney) That provides the macro perspective. From the other two courses comes the micro perspective—offering specific examples of government in process.

Such an approach strengthens PS 201 because a student is presented with basic concepts of the American governance experience, which then serves as a vehicle for comparative analysis.

Today, the *Annotated Outline*, published through Harcourt-Brace Custom Publishing, serves as a unifying text for American government courses at KSC, for both large lecture courses (100+) as well as smaller seminar classes. Professors supplement the *Outline* with any additional texts they desire.

Looking to the Future

Perhaps because I taught American government in the traditional way for such a long time, I find the new approach very exciting. Presenting our government in a broadened global perspective seems to result in students gaining more clarity and a deeper understanding. But the *Outline* is still evolving. As we gain experience with the course, changes will likely occur. Having the *Outline*, however, allows us to take a very positive step toward changing a "bread-and-butter" course to reflect the new imperatives of the discipline, the college and the community.

American Government in a Global Perspective (Annotated Outline)

Part I: Forms and Functions of Government
Chapter I — The Modern State
Chapter II — Constitutional Government
Chapter III — Federalism

Part II: The Political Process
Chapter IV — Political Culture
Chapter V — Public Opinion
Chapter VI — Political Communication
Chapter VII — Elections, Participation and Voting
Chapter VIII — Political Parties
Chapter IX — Interest Groups

Part III: The Institutional Process
Chapter X — The Legislative Process
Chapter XI — The Executive Process
Chapter XII — The Judicial Process

Part IV: Human Rights
Chapter XII — Human Rights and Government