

## **2.6. INTERDISCIPLINARY: HOW TO DESIGN CASE STUDIES COVERING DIFFERENT LEGAL SUBJECTS OR DISCIPLINES**

***Cecile Ogufere (Lecturer),  
Regents University, London***

### **2.6.1 Introduction**

The following case study approach could be applied as a tool for interdisciplinary learning. It may be used in either common law or civil law jurisdictions. The interdisciplinary approach allows students to study a particular topic from different perspectives. In doing so, they can apply a critical analysis on the topic. The advantage of this approach is that students enter industry with a broad and deep understanding of current challenges around the world that are related to the topic.

Students taking either a law or non-law degree may be engaging in various other modules such as history, politics, psychology, sociology, among others. This learning brings diversity of thought to the interdisciplinary case study. Thus, to facilitate learning, teachers can initiate an interdisciplinary approach to pedagogic delivery.

The aim of the interdisciplinary module is to introduce the students to its basic concepts and the system that it operates in. For example, in the crime and criminal justice module students may be introduced to crime as a construct and the criminal justice system that it operates in, including the courts and other government agencies such as the prisons and security services.

Students are introduced to the topic of discussion on the virtual learning platform. They are provided with materials to read and pre-recorded lectures to watch prior to attending face to face classes either on campus or online. Some of the lectures are downloaded from other websites while others are created and recorded by the teacher. Students apply their learning to a scheduled case study for discussion. Students then bring other theories and practice in each and across disciplines into the case study discussion.

At the end of the module the following learning outcomes are expected and students should be able to:

- communicate arguments/reasoning, both orally and in writing in domestic and international settings.
- explain theories, concepts, and facts in the field/s of study relevant to the task.
- use established discipline-specific knowledge for practical purposes.
- identify and contrast perspectives from different disciplines.

### **2.6.2 The Teaching Delivery**

The students are provided with an hour of an interactive in-class lecture which is supported by the pre-reading materials on the virtual learning platform. Students also have access to a key textbook. This is further supported with data from various government and intergovernmental websites. Students are encouraged to research academic journals for further information.

Some of the materials that are placed on the University's virtual learning platform are pre-recorded lectures and videos for the class to watch prior to attending the live, in-class sessions. Students would also be expected to read one or two chapters from the key textbook as well as read some literature on the topic for discussion.

In order to create an inclusive environment for international students, it is wise to draft a few seminar questions that recognise and encourage comparative approaches to the module in their respective jurisdictions. For instance, I have asked the students, to research what agencies are involved in the criminal justice system in their countries. This comparative approach also provides a way for students to engage in critical analysis of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, this forms part of the international dimension of the module.

The seminar questions form the basis of class discussion. This is done in the form of debates, group discussions and simulations but more often case studies are used to provide an overall understanding of the topic. I find that this approach works well for first year students as they get to know each other. This teaching style also builds up confidence for shy students who would not otherwise take part in class discussion. The caveat here, is that one must be careful not to let a few students do all the talking and dominate the class. Good class management would allow all students to have their voice heard without necessarily embarrassing anyone.

At the end of each session, students are encouraged to take notes of what they have learned and write reflections on the topic. They are also encouraged to ask questions so that any grey areas and misunderstanding can be clarified. This way, they will have the foundational information to refer to when engaging in the assessed case study towards the end of the course.

It is good practice to introduce the topic for the following week using a power point presentation or some other teaching delivery during the last hour of class time. This introductory session allows students to guide their reading for the next session. This is especially important for those students who like to engage in advanced research around the topic. It is also wise to leave some time towards the end of the session to discuss issues surrounding the assessment such as researching and critiquing sources as well as referencing.

### 2.6.3 Final Assessment: Interdisciplinary Case Study

The final assessment of the module uses a real time interdisciplinary case study to synchronise the students' learning of the module and related learning from the other

disciplines. Students are therefore provided with a descriptive outline of the current situation which they build on using knowledge acquired from other disciplines. This tests the students' ability to precipitate the facts from navigating appropriate sources. Students then take an analytical approach to the case study.

In line with the expected learning outcomes together with other background knowledge acquired throughout the module, students provide discussion on the issues related to the contemporary case study. Students should benefit from engaging with real world issues which is becoming a key requirement from prospective employers.

#### 2.6.4 Feedback to students

##### *Informal*

Students are provided informal feedback during class discussion. This helps them brainstorm ideas and delve into their collective memories on what they have learned from the module together with other modules. The interdisciplinary approach enables them to pool together their thoughts on relevant studies from the various subjects. The teacher's role is to ensure that the students understand the requirements from the assessment brief and to guide them into meeting the learning outcomes.

##### *Formal*

Students are provided formal feedback on the virtual learning platform against the Turnitin assessment. Marks are given for accuracy of facts, analysis, research (number of citations), and overall presentation of the essay. Overall, students can integrate knowledge attained from other modules and prior learning into the case study.

#### 2.6.5 Feedback from students

In the past, students have indicated that the interdisciplinary case study approach has really helped to synchronise their learning. They explained that this helped them with their revision and exam preparation as well as their wider understanding of real-world issues.

*Level of difficulty:* ★★★★★

*Duration:* ★★★★★

*Main teaching objectives:* Transfer and application of theoretical knowledge to practical situations, learning about formal requirements, preparation for professional life by gaining practical experience