Note for Students on Case Preparation and Analysis

Generic advice:

1. Start by reading the assignment questions. Few professors open by quoting one of the questions precisely, but the study questions are usually a very good guide to what the faculty believe are the key issues in the case.

2. Read the case straight through. Underline and make margin notes, but don’t worry about taking detailed notes or doing calculations on your first read-through. It is important to first develop a feel for how the case flows and what types of information and/or data is provided.

3. Work through the questions again, going back through the case and exhibits to find facts, data, or quotes to support your answers to the questions. You should be prepared to do a decent introduction in response to any of the questions.

4. Pick one or two issues you find particularly interesting and do some additional analysis on that topic. It is perfectly fine to discuss these questions with your study group, or to share your analysis with them. Everyone should prep the case, but the more in-depth analysis can be shared.

5. Raise your hand!! Most professors keep a watch list of people who have not contributed much to the case discussion. If people on the watch list raise their hands, they tend to get called on more quickly than those who speak a lot. If they don’t raise their hands, they get cold called. Both students and professors generally prefer the first scenario.

Personal goals:

- Some insurance in case of a cold call, as well as providing a service to your section mates. In most cases, a poor introduction puts a damper on the discussion. No one (including the professor) enjoys a weak introduction.

- Positioning yourself to make a substantial point should the topic(s) you have chosen for #4 turn out to be an area of discussion for the class. However, if the discussion does not naturally flow to your well-prepared topic, it rarely makes sense to force the point.

Participation problems may be caused by the following:

- Trying to prepare equally for all of the questions, so that none get studied in-depth.

- Becoming overly anxious about participation, and thus raising your hand whenever you have anything remotely relevant to say. This leads to high call counts, but low average impact. Most professors weight “quality” or “impact” more highly than quantity.

- Never raising your hand.
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