CASE STUDIES

for First-Year Experience Students

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Dedicated to our former students whose struggles, dilemmas, and achievements provided the content for these case studies. And to all future students, who we hope will struggle less and achieve more by learning from the experiences of those who came before them.

Preface

TO THE STUDENT

The transition from high school to college is one of the most challenging periods in your life. Moving from a familiar environment where you had a support network of friends and family to a new environment is unsettling at best. Understandably, the challenge faced by each individual varies; however, different groups of students do face some common concerns. For instance, the problems faced by residential students ("I am living with a stranger!") are different from those of commuter students ("How do I ever find a parking space?") or nontraditional students ("How do I balance my family life and school?"). Your situation is also similar to that of other students because you have to perform academically (read effectively, take lecture notes, and prepare for exams), enhance your social skills (deal with the variety of people you will meet and work with), and manage and take responsibility for your own life (balance the many demands placed on you, set priorities, and improve your time management skills).

Although each individual is unique, you and your fellow students will face common challenges in adjusting to college and achieving your goals. In college, you will be faced with the responsibility for and the consequences of the choices you make. You will face challenges of an academic, social, and personal nature, and the choices you make may have long-term consequences.

Although experience can be a very effective teacher, learning by trial and error is not always the best approach. Indeed, too many students are overwhelmed by the many issues that surface and have either left school or done significant damage to their academic record before they have mastered these issues. Case studies provide an excellent means for you to evaluate situations similar to those that many other students face during this period and allow you to evaluate options and arrive at workable solutions. We have prepared these case studies

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based on the experiences of actual students. Even if you don't experience a particular situation, you can gain valuable insights for your own life from analyzing these cases. Case studies encourage you to become actively involved in your own education.

Often, the challenges that you face will not have simple solutions; they will involve many different players and options. As with most real-world problems, these cases require a systems approach that examines all aspects of the issues, and frequently there is no one right answer. You will have to evaluate the situation, generate solutions, and determine which of these solutions is the most effective and workable. There are few issues in your life that do not involve other individuals, and thus solutions to most problems are not simple. A good way to effectively cope with these situations and issues is to analyze real cases and thereby develop your critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Our hope is that by using this approach you will learn by doing and be better prepared to address the academic, social, and personal challenges that you will face in college. From the discussion of these case studies, we hope you will learn what you need not merely to survive but to thrive in college.

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

The transition from high school to college is one of the most challenging periods in the life of a student. For the new high school graduate, moving from a familiar environment where he or she has a support network of friends and family to a new and challenging environment is unsettling at best. Although each student is unique, there are common challenges faced by many students in adjusting to college and achieving their goals. Case studies can be an engaging way to take advantage of both the commonality and the uniqueness of students in guiding them to a successful college experience.

Case studies were introduced for classroom use at the Harvard Business School almost a century ago. The case study approach has been gaining popularity with instructors, and the recent focus of higher education on student learning has resulted in greater emphasis on and appreciation for this method. The concept behind this approach is to use classroom discussion to analyze problems and develop potential solutions. Also, the case study approach involves students in active learning. As we move from "teaching" to "learning," it becomes increasingly apparent that case studies are one of the most effective ways to involve students in their own learning. The students move from being passive recipients of information to becoming active participants in the learning process.

Although case studies can be an important tool in most areas of education, they are especially useful in the first year of college. The challenges that students face often do not have simple solutions. They are complex situations involving many different players and options. As with most real-world problems, they require a systems approach that examines all aspects of the issue, and frequently there is no one right answer. Students will have to evaluate the situa-

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tion, generate solutions, and determine which of these solutions is most effective and workable.

Over the years, all instructors have seen students struggle with many similar problems. Most first-year students will face such challenges starting with their first day on campus. An excellent way for students to cope with these challenges is to analyze real cases and thereby develop their critical thinking and problemsolving skills. Our hope is that by using the case study approach, students will learn by doing and be better prepared to address the academic, social, and personal challenges that they face during their time in college.

This collection of case studies is the culmination of the efforts of three First-Year Experience (FYE) instructors. Each of us has extensive FYE experience and brings a unique perspective and expertise to this project. We believe that although experience is a very effective teacher, learning by trial and error is not always the best approach. Indeed, too many students are overwhelmed by the many issues that surface, especially during the first college year. Using case studies provides instructors with an excellent means for allowing students to evaluate situations similar to those that many of them will face during their college career and allow them to evaluate options and arrive at solutions. Thus, case studies provide a tool for involving students in their own learning and for strengthening their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We have prepared these case studies based on the experiences of actual students. However, the names and certain other details have been changed to maintain confidentiality. Although many first-year students may not find themselves in the specific circumstances of our case study students, evaluating what advice to provide and learning from the analysis of these case studies will improve their college experience. Furthermore, students are often reluctant to discuss personal problems in a public forum. Case studies provide a situation where they can discuss issues relevant to them, while maintaining their anonymity ("My friend has a problem . . .").

While developing these case studies, we made a decision to select situations that could be presented in a few pages. This allows instructors the flexibility to use them either as homework assignments or in class without prior student preparation.

We know many instructors who are looking to use case studies more extensively but who do not have access to an adequate number of cases. It is our hope that this collection provides a solution to their dilemma. Just as the situations your students will face cannot be neatly categorized, neither can the real-life situations presented in this book. However, in general terms, cases 1 through 13 are academic situations, cases 14 through 32 are personal situations, and cases 33 through 40 involve social situations, skills, and interactions. We hope that both you and your FYE students will benefit from the discussion of these case studies and that they will indeed learn what they need to thrive in college.

John Riesen, Professor of Animal Science John Szarlan, University Counseling Services Suman Singha, Associate Dean for Academic Programs

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Shock for a First-Year Student

Sally was in shock! Like all students, she had come to the university with expectations concerning her academic performance and social life. Now it was just the fifth week of the semester, and Sally had received her first chemistry grade. A 55! That was the lowest grade she had ever received. After seeing her grade, Sally's first thoughts were "I don't know if I can do this. Maybe I'm not smart enough. I can't study any harder! Maybe I should just quit. I just don't know what the professor expects from me!"

Sally had been popular and well liked in high school by her teachers and peers and had been active in various clubs and school activities. Academically, she had been a B student.

Her older brother was three years ahead of her and had made the dean's list in two of his six semesters. Although Sally's parents had given her close guidance until she had come to college, she did not feel she could talk easily with them about her grades or what she should do. After all, it was a considerable strain on her family to be paying for two children in college at once. Moreover, they seemed to expect her to follow in her brother's footsteps and do well in college.

Sally estimated her current course grades as follows:

Course	Credits	Estimated Grade
Chemistry	4	F (55)
English	3	C +
Mathematics	3	C -
History	3	D+

ASSIGNMENT

Individuall	y com	plete tl	ie fol	lowing.

Inc	dividually complete the following:
1.	State the major problem(s) in this case.
2.	List the issues or factors contributing to the problem.
3.	What advice would you give Sally to improve the situation?
W	ork in groups of three to four and discuss the following:
4.	What were the problems most commonly identified by group members?
5.	What is Sally doing to contribute to the problem?
6.	List actions that might improve or resolve the situation.
7.	What would be the difficulties with implementing each action?
8.	Which action would you recommend be tried first and why?
9.	Does anyone in the group know of someone in a similar situation? If so, what has been or is being done to resolve that situation?

What Is This Guy Talking About?

give up! I don't have a clue what this guy is talking about!" Peter was frustrated and disgusted. It was halfway through the semester, and he had a 62 on his first exam. The exam had been based principally on lecture material. However, Peter's lecture notes were of limited value.

What made Peter feel even worse was that he went to every class. He tried to concentrate on the lecture and follow what the professor was saying, but he found the lectures fragmented and disorganized. There didn't seem to be a logical progression of facts. Instead, concepts were introduced but never developed. Facts were presented in a seemingly random order, often without relating directly to a concept. At other times, a concept would be introduced, but supporting facts would be presented much later in the lecture without a clear association established to the concept.

"I never had this trouble in high school," was Peter's lament. He would read the text and try to understand the material. The textbook, however, seemed complicated, filled with so many facts that it was difficult to understand. Peter had hoped that the lectures would help him understand the textbook.

ASSIGNMENT

Individually complete the following:

1. State the major problem(s) in this case.

2.	List the issues or factors contributing to the problem.
3.	What advice would you give Peter to improve the situation?
	ork in groups of three to four and discuss the following: What were the problems most commonly identified by group members?
5.	What is Peter doing to contribute to the problem?
6.	List actions that might improve or resolve the situation.
7.	What would be the difficulties with implementing each action?
8.	Which action would you recommend be tried first and why?
9.	Does anyone in the group know of someone in a similar situation? If so, what has been or is being done to resolve that situation?

What's the Use?

hat is going on?" thought Latisha. "I review the material frequently by asking questions. I know the answers. I take the practice tests in the study guide. I know the answers. My friends quiz me. I know the answers. I teach the material to other students. I take the exam, and I get a D or an F!

"What makes things worse is that when I review the test, I know the right answers, but for some stupid reason, I put down the wrong answer. No wonder I feel anxious when I start to take the exam; I'm trying so hard not to screw up. I usually start okay, but after I miss a question or two, I get confused and begin to doubt my answers. The confusion makes me feel like getting up and running.

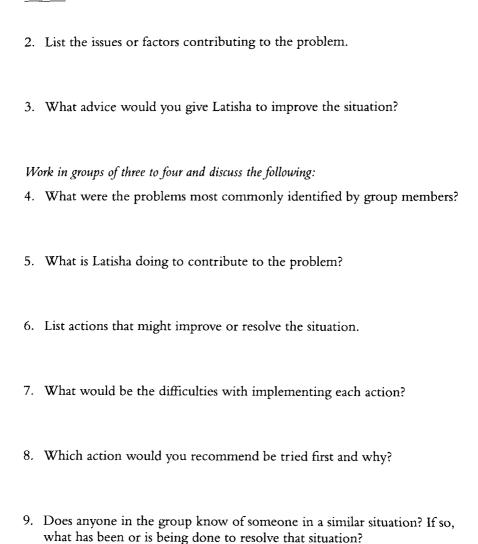
"For me, the worst is when I go blank. I feel like I'm staring at a chalkboard that has been erased. I know that somewhere in that chalk dust lies the correct answer, but there is no way my spinning mind can figure it out.

"It's no wonder I'm beginning to feel anxious when studying for an exam that is still two days away. What's the use of knowing the material? I still fail the exam!"

ASSIGNMENT

Individually complete the following:

1. State the major problem(s) in this case.



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Picky, Picky, Picky

The book closed with a thud. Ahmed had finished another chapter of biology. As usual, he understood little and remembered even less of what he had read. There were so many facts that it was hard to identify the important ones. As usual, Ahmed had highlighted almost everything. There were so many little details. Who would expect him to remember all that material?

About three weeks later, Ahmed found himself two days away from his biology exam. He tried to study the text; each page was a sea of yellow highlighter. With 70 percent or more of each page highlighted, the facts seemed to blend together, resulting in confusion. "Too many details," Ahmed thought, "no one would ask about these picky facts."

A week later, Ahmed looked at his exam grade. "Another F! What is going on? This is the third test I've failed! What am I doing wrong?" Ahmed was confused and frustrated. He was reading all the material, just like he had in high school. In fact, he was studying even more than he had in high school. Yet the exam contained a lot of information he didn't know, and his grades were terrible.

ASSIGNMENT

Individually complete the following:

1. State the major problem(s) in this case.

List the issues or factors contributing to the problem.
 What advice would you give Ahmed to improve the situation?
 Work in groups of three to four and discuss the following:
 What were the problems most commonly identified by group members?
 What is Ahmed doing to contribute to the problem?
 List actions that might improve or resolve the situation.
 What would be the difficulties with implementing each action?

8. Which action would you recommend be tried first and why?