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Where to Start in an Executive DBA Curriculum? The Case for Case Research

ABSTRACT

A required case research course in the USF Muma Executive DBA program teaches students how to conduct case research and requires them to produce a publishable discussion case. We describe its evolution, from 2015 (Cohort 1 of the DBA program) through 2017 (Cohort 3). Based on our assessment of this course during its first three years, we propose that case research is particularly well suited to first year executive DBA students' skills and interests, and that a discussion case is a uniquely suitable first research product for this population of students. We discuss implications and opportunities for further investigation.

KEYWORDS: case research, case method, DBA curriculum, executive DBA

INTRODUCTION

A Doctorate of Business Administration (DBA) degree program, designed for experienced managers, is an attractive alternative to a traditional PhD program. In the last ten to fifteen years in the U.S. and to varying degrees and over longer periods in Europe, Asia, and Australia, many DBA doctoral programs for practicing professionals have launched. In May 2017 the Executive DBA Council (EDBAC; see www.executivedba.org) listed 53 such programs worldwide (Appendix 1). A useful comparison of DBA programs in Australia, the UK and the U.S. is provided by Banerjee and Morley (2013).

The traditional PhD student usually has a full-time immersive experience as an apprentice to a senior scholar. In contrast, most DBA students continue to work full time while pursuing their doctorate. When designing the executive DBA curriculum, each program must answer the following question, given that its faculty and students are situated in a particular educational, community, functional, and industry context:

> *Which first coursework/learning experiences and content (of which there are many possible starting points) are most useful for guiding an accomplished manager onto a research path that will lead to publishable work with impact on practice and scholarship?*

The answer to this question is fundamental to the identified needs of these students (Gill and Mullarkey 2015) and to the practice of engaged scholarship as outlined by Van de Ven (2007). A collegial environment in which experienced managers learn about and apply research methods is an excellent setting for scholarship that "*develop(s) and exploits (s) new forms of knowledge production that facilitate and leverage interactions between practice and theory to develop scientific as well as practical knowledge*". (Mathiassen and Nielsen 2008, p. 3).

Based on several years' experience with the USF Muma College of Business DBA degree program, we argue that an excellent starting-point for many DBA students, working in many different functional, industry and community roles and contexts, is a course that:

1. Introduces students to two related topics (further discussed below):
    a) principles of case research (as laid out by influential scholars such as Graham Allison, Kathleen Eisenhardt), and Robert Yin)
    b) student-centered discussion-based learning ("case method," pioneered by Harvard Business School, Gill 2011)

2. Requires students to conduct a field-based case study that produces two documents:
    a) A discussion case for use in an organization's internal training program and/or in undergraduate, MBA, graduate, or executive education classes.
    b) A teaching note, which (in addition to providing various resources that help an instructor decide whether to adopt the case for use) includes a Theoretical Foundations section.

In this paper, we report on a three year longitudinal case study of a DBA Case Research Course in the USF Muma College of Business DBA degree program. We describe each of the first three cohorts, their experience with the DBA Case Research Course, and learning outcomes (including contributions to knowledge). Our analysis leads us to propose that rigorous case research (utilizing both primary and secondary data sources is a particularly fruitful way for executive DBA students to study complex, relevant business problems and to produce knowledge that engages both scholars and practitioners. We further propose that case research conducted by these experienced managers has the potential to impact contemporary decision making in organizations, as well as to contribute both to scholarly theory and to business school curricula.

Many experienced managers are already directly or indirectly familiar with case based learning. In the U.S., many managers have discussed cases in professional development programs hosted in the workplace, in executive education programs, and/or in MBA programs – many of which emulate the Harvard Business School's (HBS) case method approach (in whole or in part). Furthermore, accomplished executives have previously confronted the nuanced challenges of complex problems that involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting interests (Van de Ven 2007, p. 9); these are exactly the types of problems that case research is particularly good at exploring (Yin 2013). This suggests that, compared with many traditional Ph.D. students, executives in a DBA program enter doctoral study uniquely able to quickly appreciate the benefits of discussion-based learning and to design and execute a case study.

Their past experiences as successful managers and their significant professional networks give executive DBA students an ability to identify interesting case study opportunities, in their own or their peers' organizations. In our experiences, thus far with the first three Muma College DBA cohorts, we have found that many of our students do have exceptionally strong access to the people, problems, decisions, and data that are essential for conducting a relevant, rigorous case study. Provided with an introduction to case research, guidelines on interviewing and protecting human subjects, and a template for a discussion case, many of these DBA students quickly became adroit case researchers. Many (though not all) students report that the case course gave them a helpful opportunity to start conducting case research, and that they found the process to be intellectually rewarding.

The rest of our paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss how rigorous case research and production of discussion cases can be mutually-informing activities. Second, we describe the USF Muma College of Business DBA degree program history and curriculum. Third, we discuss our first few years' experience with the DBA case course, using illustrative examples of students' case research experiences and their feedback. We describe both success stories and some challenging aspects that we continue to work to resolve. Fourth, we conclude with our lessons learned thus far for USF and we offer some thoughts hour our DBA case course could be adapted to support other DBA programs that aim to nurture the development of impactful scholar-practitioners.

RIGOROUS CASE RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION CASES

Case research combines primary and secondary empirical research to investigate complex real-world issues, problems, and/or decisions involving multiple stakeholders. Forms of case research vary, with multiple possible case study designs (see Yin 2013; Gill 2011). Most sources suggest three principal ways to publish case research:

- <u>Case Study</u>: rigorously written description of a case situation, outcome/s of the situation, and explanation in light of a theoretical perspective identified by the researcher.
- <u>Example Case</u>: practitioner- focused description of a case situation, outcome/s of the situation, and one or more generalizable lessons learned from the case. While the research may be informed by a theoretical perspective, this document is written in practitioner-relevant terms.
- <u>Discussion Case</u>: description of a case situation in story form, usually from the point of view of a specific protagonist and involving a critical decision. The protagonist considers several plausible options available, and the reader is expected to place him/herself in the protagonist's "shoes" and decide what to do.

Rigorously conducted case studies that conform to interpretive, positivist, critical or post-critical research principles that explore or test theory are published in peer-reviewed academic journals. Many case researchers also translate their findings into decision-focused discussion cases designed for use in MBA and other programs, and/or into articles that get published in practitioner-focused publications such as *Academy of Management Executive, California Management Review, Harvard Business Review,* or *MIT Sloan Management Review* (see Yin 2013 for a discussion of the significant growth in citations and impact of case research from 1980 to 2010). Indeed, if a case study is published only in a traditional theory-focused journal, it does not realize its full potential.

To develop a discussion case the author can use an approach that is rather ad hoc and casual or quite methodical and rigorous. Using an ad hoc approach, it is possible to create a case suitable for a particular learning objective based on a conversation with a single manager, combined with a minimal search for corroborating information. An author using this approach can produce a reasonable first draft within just a few days. At the other end of the spectrum, a researcher may view the case study as an opportunity to gather data necessary for the preparation of both a discussion case and a theory-testing or exploratory research paper.

"Double-impact" case research is recommended as a way to get optimal synergy out of each case study that is conducted (Gogan, 2015). Each case can be disseminated through publication as a discussion case, or, as a practitioner oriented example case. In addition, each case can be considered for presentation at an appropriate academic conferences and for publication in scholarly journals. As a first step onto a research path to study a phenomenon, a case study that yields a discussion case that can be taught can also yield practitioner-focused articles and theory-development papers that use the case research to add knowledge through a multi-method approach in the domain.

In the USF Muma College of Business, Gill and Mullarkey designed a DBA course on case research that required the doctoral student to write a discussion case as the course project deliverable (following Gill 2011). This course required students to develop a field-researched description of a managerial situation in a narrative story form. Each discussion case features a protagonist, who needs to make a decision about a problem or opportunity. Written through the protagonist's perspective, the case becomes a vehicle through which business students can "try on" a managerial role, placing themselves (metaphorically) in the protagonist's shoes. This provides the basis for students to discover, through their own analysis and instructor-facilitated discussion, how to approach problems of this type, analyze alternative choices available to a protagonist, and offer actionable recommendations. Many potentially viable solutions are possible, and other "solutions" would be ineffective or even harmful in a given business context.

When a program of research starts with a discussion case, theory-development papers can come after the case has been discussed in various forums – provided the researcher has adhered to practices that allow for him or her to assemble a valid and complete archive of the gathered data (in field notes, recorded interviews, and various other data sources such as memos, proposals, project plans and so on). Although a discussion case can be produced via an ad hoc/casual approach, it stands to reason that, during the data-gathering phase, a methodical/rigorous approach will give the researcher more options (in terms of subsequent publications) than an ad hoc approach.

An advantage of starting a program of research with a discussion case is that the researcher stands to learn a great deal from leading or observing the discussion in a classroom environment – either at the organization or at an academic institution. A record of case discussions (often captured by taking photos of the board notes the instructor uses to capture students' ideas, as well as through written student assignments and observation notes), combined with the researcher's identification of the theoretical frameworks and/or conceptual models integral to the case study can help unlock the potential of a case and inform a subsequent theory-development paper.

Discussion cases published in some high-quality journals, such as *Case Research Journal,* published by the North American Case Research Association and *JIT-Teaching Cases*, a sister publication of the *Journal of Information Technology*, are distributed via the two top case distributors worldwide – The CaseCentre and Harvard Business School Publishing. Broad distribution creates the potential for broad discourse about the situations described in the cases. In turn, these discussions can be very useful in shaping a widespread collective understanding and/or by revealing highly contentious aspects of a phenomenon.

In another scenario, a case researcher may conduct studies in geographically local organizations, and publish the resulting discussion cases in journals that have an explicitly local focus, such as *Muma Case Review,* which primarily publishes cases set in Florida – many in the Tampa Bay area, where USF is located. A locally-focused discourse can be very helpful for both the host institution and companies, non-profit organizations, and government agencies where the research was conducted. In turn, relationships between the university and local business and government leaders become stronger in a virtuous cycle of ongoing interactions.

Some journals require that an author submit a teaching note (TN) to accompany a discussion case. The TN is reviewed but not published; various mechanisms ensure that only bona fide instructors have access to it. *Case Research Journal* and its main distribution partners (CaseCentre and HBS Publishing) further require that the TN contain a Theoretical Foundations section. Experienced "double-impact" case researchers (Gogan, 2015) recognize that this section of the TN provides the initial theoretical seeds from which an analysis of the case study data can grow to produce papers that contribute to theory and are published in well-regarded peer-reviewed journals.

THE EXECUTIVE DBA: PRIORITY TO PRACTICE

As a practice-focused doctoral program, the executive DBA was introduced in response to "rising criticism about the relevance of PhD research to practice and the changing context and content of knowledge in the new economy." (Banerjee and Morley, 2013, p. 173). The criticism was triggered in 2005 by two provocative and influential articles:

- Bennis and O'Toole (2005): "How Business Schools Lost Their Way."
- Ghoshal (2005): "Bad Management Theories Are Destroying Good Management Practice."

In a 2012 blog [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-07-09/have-business-schools-found-their-way], Warren Bennis acknowledged that the academy was of two minds on this issue, given the many critiques of the Bennis and O'Toole article (along with many kudos). With consensus not yet achieved as to whether business schools produce strong or irrelevant research, the conversation continues. Many researchers express concern about an apparently growing disconnect between the published academic research emerging from many business schools, versus managers' expectations for research that offers stronger practical insights and actionable guidance (Adler and Harzing, 2007; Shapiro, Kirkman, and Courtney, 2007; Geuens, 2011; Dostaler and Tomberlin, 2013). Influential papers argue that any management study should be methodologically rigorous and offer strong relevant practical implications (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005; Tushman and O'Reilly 2007; Bartunek and Schein, 2011); however, a systematic literature review reports that only about half of the papers in top management journals did discuss actionable implications for managers (Bartunek and Rynes 2010).

Denise Rousseau (2006) defined the "research-practice gap" as a "failure of organizations and managers to base practices on best available evidence." As a partial remedy to this problem, Rousseau called for management research to adhere to principles modeled on evidenced-based medicine (in which critical reviews are conducted of studies on a particular treatment approach to identify whether the weight of the collective evidence strongly supports a particular treatment as practice). Rousseau's central premise is that researchers need to translate their study findings into practically-relevant guidance for managers and future managers (not necessarily paper by paper; what matters in the evidence-based approach is to distill the findings from many studies into actionable guidance). Recent work by Feldman and Worline (2016) defined and discussed practice theory and offered a primer on how to do high-quality practice research grounded in the much-studied resource-based view (RBV) of strategic management.

Further arguing that management research should influence management education on a continuous basis (and thus directly influence future managers), Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) advocated an approach labeled "evidence-based management education." While Rousseau and others place the burden of translation on researchers' shoulders, other scholars suggest that business school professors can benefit from engaging students in discussions of the implications of specific research findings, in mutually-informing interchanges (Burke and Rau, 2010), and specifically through case discussions (Christensen and Carlile, 2009). Many DBA programs do strongly encourage student discussion (based on the belief that students' significant prior managerial experience is a resource to be cultivated and exploited in the classroom). Currently, to the best of our knowledge, no other executive DBA program offers a required case research course in which students conduct a field-based case study and produce from it a discussion case.

The executive DBA is designed as a professional doctorate -- similar to a JD or MD, each of which has a strong practice focus (Lee, Brennan, and Green, 2009). Many DBA programs (including USF-Muma College) emphasize interdisciplinary work (Gill and Mullarkey 2015), with a thematic emphasis on complex problems (sustainability, IT-enabled change, opportunities and challenges of global interdependence, etc.). Whether organized around themes or not, most DBA programs emphasize practice-based research. However, the rationale for this approach varies. One stance is that practice-based research findings can be translated into the classroom more quickly and improve teaching (Banerjee and Morley 2013, p. 190). This view implies that the DBA student aims to become a business school instructor (as executive-in-residence, adjunct professor, or clinical professor). A second view holds that doctoral-level study confers direct benefits to the student-manager, who brings his or her new know-what and know-how back to their current organization or applies this knowledge in a new business endeavor. These views are not mutually exclusive and it appears that most DBA programs either directly or indirectly subscribe to both.

One key difference between a tradition Ph.D. and an executive DBA program is highly relevant to the question posed at the outset of this paper – how should the executive DBA program introduce research methods? Most Ph.D. programs are organized around disciplines and an apprenticeship model. A PhD student who is interested in electronic commerce or digital transformation might be supervised by a strategy professor interested in eCommerce competitive dynamics, or by a marketing professor interested in how data generated on tablets and smartphones are integrated into customer relationship management systems, or by an IS professor who does work on how born-digital companies make use of cloud computing for their own operations, or how Amazon or a start-up "e-tailer" cost-effectively ensure usability and appeal as they distribute content across devices and operating systems. Once the student decides on a dissertation topic and approach, the supervising professor will help to identify other scholars within his discipline of expertise, who would serve on the student's dissertation committee. The committee's aim is to guide the student on a path that leads to publications in high-quality journals in that one discipline.

Many executive DBA programs take an interdisciplinary focus, based on the rationale that experienced managers should conduct research on complex challenging problems which cut across functions and disciplines (Lee et al. 2009). Inevitably, most interesting problems in practice involve multiple disciplines and a complex set of variables that affect possible outcomes. A DBA student with an interest in eCommerce might, by the end of her first year in the program, get to know professors in strategy, operations, marketing and IS in hopes of forming a dissertation committee reflecting multiple disciplines.

Many DBA students do not intend to enter academia; their goal is to acquire new skills and perspectives that can help them succeed as managers, entrepreneurs or community leaders. Some DBA students are considering a possible shift to a clinical professorship, where production of both teaching materials and practice-focused articles is appropriate. A few DBAs are career-changers who hope for a tenure-track academic appointment (while many DBA program materials state upfront that this is not the aim of their program, some students discover their interest in this path during their first year of doctoral study). In that last case, the dissertation committee would ensure that such a student produces at least one paper in one of the disciplines represented on the team, while still encouraging the production of some practitioner publications, since this is presumably the strength of the program. In the U.S. the path can be a bit more complicated for the DBA student. She may enter the program subscribing to the program's philosophy and aims (of becoming a more effective leader, manager, and/or entrepreneur), yet discover an interest and hints of an aptitude for research, teaching or both sides of academia. Some three-year DBA programs, such as Case Western Reserve University, offer a fourth crossover year to provide this student a path to a Ph.D.

As we will discuss, starting students with a case study can help reveal – both to the student and the case course professor – which path a student might take. Also, many doctoral students – whether Ph.D. or DBA – struggle to find a topic to investigate and to identify one or more research methods that play to their strengths. The Case Course professor can help provide guidance to ensure that a student's second and third years in the program take him to the desired destination.

USF MUMA COLLEGE AND THE EXECUTIVE DBA PROGEAM

USF, a large, public university in the State University System of Florida, has more than 49,000 undergraduate and graduate students in 14 colleges. The most popular colleges by student population are USF Health, Arts & Sciences, Muma College of Business, and Engineering. The Muma College of Business offers a full range of undergraduate and graduate business programs – including several fully AACSB accredited BA, BS, and MS programs in Management, Marketing, Accounting, Finance, and Information Systems. The college offers an MBA, Executive MBA (EMBA), Ph.D. (Accounting, Finance, Marketing, or Information Systems), and Executive DBA.

The DBA program is a three year six-semester lockstep cohort-based 72 credit-hour program. Each cohort starts in the Spring Semester. Students come to campus for 10 weekend residencies (Friday and Saturday classes; optional Sunday meetings with faculty) per year; five per semester (Spring semester is February-June and the Fall semester is August-December). Between residencies, students work independently to pursue their application of research methods to the conduct of research and interact online with faculty and peers. In the first three semesters of the program (Spring, Fall, Spring) the curriculum focuses on research methods. During most residency weekends, two courses meet (for example, the Case Course would share the weekend with a Quantitative Research Methods course with each course having four contact-hours each day). The final eighteen months (Fall, Spring, Fall) focus on guiding students to prepare and defend their proposals, conduct the research, and defend the dissertation, guided by a faculty dissertation committee for each candidate.

In spring 2017 the Executive DBA program was in the first half of its third year in operation, with 85 doctoral students across three DBA cohorts. Cohort 1 had 23 students, Cohort 2 had 35 students, Cohort 3 has 28 students. Profiles of students in each cohort are available at http://www.usf.edu/business/graduate/dba/students.aspx

The DBA Case Course

The USF Muma DBA Case Course requires each student (alone or in pairs) to conduct a field-based case study (relying on one or several interviews plus corroborating data from other sources) to investigate a current, complex managerial decision that is important to a given business situation. Based on the data gathered in that study, the student is then required to produce a decision-focused discussion case. In a discussion case a protagonist must decide on a course of action, with multiple possible options under consideration. The protagonist's decision is not disclosed in the case (although it is often disclosed to adopting instructors when the accompanying teaching note is written). DBA students are encouraged to conduct the case study in their own organization where they have a unique access to people, data, and the nuances of the decision being made and its potential impact on the organization. In some cases, a student chooses to be the protagonist in the discussion case (we refer to this as a "selfie" case).

Requirements of the Case Course evolved over the first three cohorts. When the DBA program was launched with Cohort 1 in Spring semester 2015, students were required to use a prescribed template, comprised of the following sections:

- <u>Case Introduction</u> ("opening scene" in which a named protagonist, on a given date, is considering a particular challenging situation)
- <u>Industry and Company Background</u>
- <u>Background on the Phenomenon of Interest</u> (for example, for a case about choosing a cloud services provider, this section defines various forms of cloud computing – IaaS, PaaS, SaaS, the competitive landscape as described in Gartner or Forrester reports, and key typical CIO challenges as described in articles in *InformationWeek, CIO* or other practitioner publications).
- <u>The Specific Situation</u> (again using the cloud computing case as an example, this may unfold in several sections: a description of the company's IS department, a description of the decision to launch a new service which would be hosted by a not-yet-selected cloud service provider, selection process and criteria, and a report on the investigation of three finalists)
- <u>Case "Closer"</u> (on the same date that was provided in the Introduction, the protagonist briefly recaps and considers the importance and – if applicable – the urgency of the decision he or she needs to make).

In 2016 a teaching note (TN) was added as an optional deliverable for Cohort 2 students (for those students who planned to submit cases for roundtable discussion at NACRA or another case writer's conference, a TN was required, consistent with requirements of those conferences).

In 2017 the TN was added as a course requirement for all students. A TN is comprised of the following sections:

- Case Synopsis
- Target Course and Learning Objectives
- Research Method
- Suggested Background Readings
- Theoretical Foundations
- Suggested Student Case Preparation Questions (and sample answers)
- Suggested Teaching Plan
- Wrap-up
- Epilog

Next, we describe the Case Course experiences of the first three USF Muma College Executive DBA cohorts.

USF Muma DBA Cohort One, 2015

The inaugural cohort of USF DBA students, in Spring semester 2015, consisted of 26 students (three subsequently withdrew during the program). The median age was 48, with an age range from 38 to 72. Cohort 1 students had a median of 24 years of professional experience across all major business disciplines (management, accounting, finance, technology, and marketing), and a diverse set of industry experience, including banking, health care, manufacturing, professional services, and defense.

In addition to the Case Course, during Spring 2015 Cohort One students also took Introduction to Research Methods, Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods, and a research topics course on Complexity and Rugged Landscapes. The DBA Case course key deliverable was the student's production of a "publication worthy" discussion case. The course was taught by its designers, Grandon Gill and Matt Mullarkey, both of whom had extensive experience teaching case-based capstone courses to undergraduate MIS students and graduate students in the Muma College MBA and MS programs. Gill and Mullarkey had each previously authored both research cases and discussion cases, many in conjunction with business leaders in the Tampa Bay business community. They had published several articles outlining their approach (Gill and Mullarkey, 2015; Gill and Mullarkey, 2014) and the DBA Case Course case development and writing approach was developed based on Gill's prior work on case publication (Gill 2012; Gill 2011). The course content focused on:

1. Where case studies fit in the broader set of research techniques and methods
2. The relationship between complexity and case studies
3. The structure of different types of case studies
4. The case writing process
5. Developing discussion cases for publication.

By the end of this third course in the first semester of the DBA program, DBA students were expected to be able to:

1. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the case method as an approach to research.
2. Identify the different types of case studies
3. Determine an appropriate decision around which to base a discussion case
4. Research and write a discussion case for publication
5. Develop a draft teaching note to accompany the case.

The course was taught using a combination of readings, online video lessons, online submission of drafts of discussion cases, online peer review of drafts, and five (four hour) days of synchronous in-person interactive resident classroom activities. It was designed for several possible outcomes: student produces a publishable case but chooses not to pursue publication; student produces a publishable case but chooses to restrict its use only for internal company purposes; student produces a publishable case and does pursue publication (in a refereed conference proceeding and/or refereed journal). The course was delivered from mid-March to mid-June of 2016. The schedule for the course is excerpted in Appendix 2.

From the start, our Muma College DBA students have been respected as colleagues and collaborators. These students are effective leaders who had ample access to other leaders and data, in their own and other organizations. They bring exceptional opportunities for rigorous and relevant case research and for producing high quality discussion cases, some of which were expected to contribute to case based courses at the Muma College of Business and other business schools. Gill and Mullarkey introduced the course to the DBA students with a conversation about this opportunity.

The Cohort One discussion cases were due by the end of June 2015. By then, one DBA student had left the program. 18 students submitted satisfactory publication-worthy discussion cases, one student submitted a technical note (this student had a confidential area of case research that could not be otherwise submitted), and six students submitted draft discussion cases that needed additional work to be considered publication-worthy. Of the 18 students with publishable discussion cases, eight students actually pursued publication (several outlets), six chose to utilize the case only within their organizations as a type of white paper, and four chose not to pursue publication.

Many of these student-practitioners experienced challenges during their case research journey -- either producing a sufficiently strong case or subsequently pursuing publication. Regarding the six cases that required additional work: some students struggled to balance their time between the demands of their job and the demands of high-quality case research, and a few students struggled to craft a discussion case that would not closely resemble other available cases on the topic. Of the 18 students who did produce publishable cases, many did not choose to pursue publication because their organization did not authorize them to do so (a common problem in banking, healthcare, and defense). After their hard work on the case, this was a disappointing outcome. Other students decided that the topics they had studied in their case research were not what they wanted to pursue for their dissertation research. As a result of taking other research courses in the DBA program, these students discovered other topics and/or other research methods that interested them more. Lastly, some students felt they just did not have enough time to pursue publication while working on their other courses.

One successful case researcher was DBA student Rob Hammond, who wrote a discussion case entitled “How to Grow Revenues in an Uncertain World”. In this selfie case, published in the *Muma Case Review* (Hammond 2017), the protagonist explored a key decision surrounding whether to invest in new or existing products, given market fit. After producing this discussion case, Hammond chose to conduct empirical research on successful and unsuccessful product launches. In turn, this study generated insight that led Hammond to a third study that examined how existing sales teams deal with new product launches. That line of inquiry lead to an example case, “Today, I Fired my Salesforce,” which was published in *Muma Business Review* (Hammond 2017). Thus, Hammond’s first discussion case propelled him toward his dissertation -- his multi-method research path led to his distinction as the first USF Muma DBA student to successfully propose and defend his doctoral dissertation ("Avoiding the Carnage: A Guidebook Through Sales Transformation") in April 2017 – more than one semester ahead of schedule.

Chris Olson’s discussion case addressed strategic integration of two businesses at his organization, where he was the CFO. Olson reported that his primary case research within the company, combined with secondary research to support his investigation, supported a very useful conversation within the company. The discussion case, published in *Muma Case Review* (Olson 2016), took the perspective of the company’s CEO, and could only have been written by someone with access to the top leadership team, and nuances associated with the very real, challenging options facing the team. Olson appreciated the requirement that he document the company’s analysis of options and he saw the reflection on the possible outcomes considered by the leadership team as a significant benefit of the case writing exercise. The case itself is suitable for teaching mergers and acquisitions, marketing, branding, change management, and human resource development strategies to undergraduate and graduate students in entrepreneurship, management, and marketing. Olson did not subsequently continue to study this topic in his dissertation research.

Troy Montgomery was an internal consultant to his organization, which also faced a challenging decision. Montgomery's study considered multiple viable options (Montgomery 2017), and he subsequently created a discussion case aimed at both a scholarly publication and for use as a white paper to support his consultation with stakeholders in the company. The case proved useful during the consultation, and it described a teamwork method that be applied in other consulting activities. Montgomery pursued publication of his case, in part to further his dissertation research path, but, primarily, in order to establish his thought leadership in his consulting career going forward.

Some students met the basic course objectives yet did not produce publishable discussion cases. One such student began her case research within one organization, but accepted a job in a different organization during that semester. As a consequence, her access to the people and data in the previous employer was terminated. In a course that runs just mid-March to Mid-June, this sudden loss of access affected the quality of the discussion case that she submitted for purposes of meeting the course requirements (with strict confidentiality restrictions). It was not publishable, and, in addition, this student decided she would need to pursue an entirely new avenue of research for the dissertation.

A "selfie" case can be a very productive approach to case research with impact on practice and, in some cases, impact with a unique contribution to knowledge. But, selfie discussion cases are not without their potential pitfalls. One Cohort One student began his case research intending to produce a "selfie" case. However, this particular student was so engaged with his lived experience and his myopic perspective on causes of a particular situation, and so fixated on particular solution options, that he was unable to produce an objective analysis based on empirical evidence. During the case course he came to realize this (and eventually he grew into a more astute and capable researcher), but the case that he produced was not publishable. We see this student's experience as a good example of how the case course's learning objectives can be achieved and a doctoral student can improve his competency as a researcher, despite producing an "unpublishable" case. First and foremost, the DBA Case Course is a learning experience where the doctoral student learns and then executes the research method "by doing". Writing a case that demonstrates an understanding of the research method first is the requirement of the course. Creating a case that may lead to publication is the secondary benefit to the doctoral student researcher.

Based on end-of-semester evaluations, Cohort One students assessed the Case Course as the best experience they had in their first semester of the DBA program (both quantitative ratings and open comments on the student evaluation survey indicated that the Case Course was received with greater enthusiasm than *Introduction to Research Methods*, *Introduction to Quantitative Research Methods*, and *Complexity and Rugged Landscapes*. The evaluations indicated that these students particularly enjoyed "putting the classroom work into practice," and the majority of respondents indicated that their case research had resulted in a work product that they were proud to share within their organization and with peers. A smaller group of very enthusiastic students indicated that their case research either impacted or shaped actual decision(s) made in the case organization. The overwhelming recommendation of students was to keep the DBA Case Course in the first semester of the program.

It is premature for us to draw a causal link between the Case Course and overall student performance in the USF DBA program, since in Fall 2017 most of the students will complete work on their dissertations. As of August 22, 2017, 22 of the 26 (who started) Cohort One DBA students were scheduled to graduate on time in December 2017.

USF Muma DBA Cohort Two (Class starting Spring 2016):
Cohort Two consisted of 36 students (evidence that demand for this type of doctoral program is high, even with four executive DBA programs in Florida; see Appendix 1). This time the course was co-taught by Matt Mullarkey and Janis Gogan. Gogan, Professor of Information & Process Management at Bentley University, was recruited because she had published many discussion cases, which were used in business schools around the world. Gogan had a longstanding relationship with the North American Case Research Association (NACRA), which publishes *Case Research Journal* and holds an annual conference in which authors of discussion cases give one another extensive feedback on early drafts of their cases and accompanying TNs. Within the discipline of IS, Gogan had served as a Senior Editor for *JIT-Teaching Cases* and served for many years as a reviewer for *JIT, JMIS*, *MIS Quarterly*, *MISQ-Executive*, and other journals. She was co-chairing the 2016 Practice-Based Research track of the premier IS conference, the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS).

DBA Program Director (Grandon Gill) met Gogan when they were doctoral students at Harvard Business School; they stayed in touch through participation in NACRA conferences, case research forums, and a mutual focus on information systems scholarly research. Since Muma DBA students were encouraged to present at several conferences during their doctoral studies, Mullarkey and Gogan agreed that the NACRA conference (held each October) was an excellent opportunity for those students who were willing to submit cases to the conference and able to travel to Las Vegas that year to present their research. A challenging aspect in 2016 was that the NACRA submission deadline was June 6, whereas the Case Course did not require final case submission until the last residency weekend, June 10-11.

Another change to the course was that Cohort Two students were permitted (not required) to work in teams of two co-authors. In an ideal co-author relationship for a conventional case, the partners conduct interviews together. This arrangement was considered useful because:

a. each student could focus on particular lines of inquiry,
b. students without organizational access could partner with those who had access to people and data, and,
c. because richer interviewing could result from a division of roles (interviewer, observer/note taker).

This latter aspect (division of interviewing labor) can be particularly valuable when collecting observational data about the case setting (for example, the observer may notice artwork on the wall of an interviewee's office, whether the desk is messy or tidy and other clues about the interviewee's style, sources of pressure, comfort in the workplace, and aspects of the organizational culture). Later, when the researchers produce their individual post-visit field notes, there is an opportunity for co-authors to learn from one another as they compare their thoughts and observations. Moreover, co-authorship captures the benefits of a case analysis that is interactive and which can surface alternative perspectives on the data. At the same time, because many Cohort 2 students (and professional doctoral students generally) had quite demanding work and travel schedules—including several who traveled abroad on a frequent basis -- it was not feasible to require co-authorship.

In both Cohorts One and Two, several DBA students were initially skeptical about the value of case research. Several were confident that only controlled experimental research could be trusted. They believed all case research was fraught with potential for researcher bias or influence. Others students were uncomfortable with the exploratory and interpretive nature of the data collection. And, in some cases, student researchers were very uncomfortable with the idea of interviewing colleagues while still an “untrained” or “novice” researcher. Ultimately, all reflected in their post-case submission of the value of case research and all demonstrated proficiency in using this research method. Still, at least two Cohort Two students remained skeptical as to its applicability for social science research. Interestingly, both students worked in occupations in which they spent much of their time working with quantitative data.

As with Cohort One, most Cohort Two students did not have great difficulty identifying good case study opportunities. Most focused on their own workplaces. Six students wrote selfies (author is protagonist). Students varied in the number of attempts they needed before they were able to effectively frame the case situation (by describing a specific turning-point or moment when an important decision needed to be made). Many students struggled to identify options available to the decision maker that were neither clearly “right” nor clearly “wrong” (not much discussion ensues if a case does not provide evidence that leads students to debate the pros and cons of three to four different options). Many students struggled because they wanted to tell an entire story, with a beginning, middle and end (selfie authors especially struggled with this aspect). They eventually came to understand that a good discussion case does not reach a conclusion; it needs to present a situation in need of resolution – but not the decision actually made or the action taken to resolve the issue.

Some students struggled with the requirement that a discussion case author is not permitted to editorialize by stating an opinion as if it is a fact (for example, a case author is not permitted to state that a company provides “highest quality” products; instead, evidence of high quality is required from internal documents or from external sources such as consistently high *Consumer Reports* ratings).

Between residency weekends 1 and 2 (April and May), Cohort Two students were required to give three other students feedback, using the online university course management system. We came to see that student peer reviews this early in their DBA program were of limited value , because students were quite polite and supportive – very few provided any substantive feedback (other than to point out misspellings or minor typos). Also, a few students missed the submission date for their draft, and when that happened, the content management system was not able to assign peer reviews to some students. Mullarkey and Gogan decided they would either have to be more directive for providing online peer feedback assignment, or, consider another approach – such as face to face feedback during a resident weekend.

The experience with Cohort Two helped the instructors gain an appreciation for those aspects of the course design that worked well and those that needed further improvement. For example, working in pairs was great for some, but not all teams. One co-author team produced a case that was not authorized for release. One of the two co-authors had originally proposed an alternative idea that we believe would have worked out very well as a discussion case had they chosen that opportunity instead.

Authorization to publish was also an issue for other students often due to confidentiality concerns at the case organizations. In the first residency weekend (before students committed to a particular case situation), Mullarkey and Gogan advised students to discuss confidentiality issues before committing to a case. Instead, some students assumed they would be able to publish the discussion case in disguised form. In reality, however, two cases in financial services contexts involved unique, identifiable organizational traits that could not be effectively disguised. The same was true of at least two cases in military/defense contexts. The USF Muma DBA Case Course requirement is that a case submitted as the final deliverable for the Case Course should be of publishable quality; however, students are not actually required to pursue publication. Still, although these students successfully completed the course, they were clearly unhappy that their hard work could only be savored in private. Mullarkey and Gogan, too, were disappointed since every case involved an interesting decision in a challenging real-world context and two of the four unauthorized cases showed exceptional promise for publication and contribution to case research.

The student course evaluations were again very encouraging. Other indicators also pointed to the value of the case course. Ten of 34 Cohort 2 students submitted completed discussion cases to the NACRA conference, despite the challenge of producing both a case and its TN for NACRA before the last residency weekend for the Case Course. Four co-authored and two single-author cases were presented in five different NACRA roundtable tracks: Digital Technologies & Processes, Governance/ Ethics, Marketing & International Business, OB/HRM, and Strategy. Two teams wrote museum management cases: a) Douglas Carter and Darren Spencer's case asked whether a university president should accept a "gift" of a nearly-bankrupt museum, and, b) Vjollca Hysenlika and Loran Jarrett described challenges confronting the new director of a children's museum on how to encourage repeat visits and support child development. A case by Marlo Murphy-Braynen and Abdoulie Jammeh, examined a tough ethical situation confronting a senior manager. Two cases dealt with challenging HR situations: a) Denise Gravatt and Valerie Mockus explored a difficult mentor-protégé relationship in the context of a highly specialized surgical service, and, b) Christina Norton described an organization with two distinct types of consultants and a performance evaluation system that fit neither group well and whether it could be tweaked or completely replaced. Lastly, Clinton Daniel wrote about a CIO deciding whether to select Amazon, Google, or Microsoft as a cloud services provider.

The USF DBA students had high praise for the NACRA conference and the colleagues they met in the five track roundtables. Likewise, well-published NACRA case mentors were extremely positive about the quality of the cases and the work performed by doctoral students in their first semester in the DBA program. The evidence suggested that our professional students were able to capitalize on their prior knowledge of complex business situations and their access to people and data, to conduct high quality case research and produce useful discussion cases.

Like many USF Muma DBA students, Clinton Daniel was extremely successful in his professional information systems domain. Unfortunately, his professors judged the first draft of his case to be so rough that he needed to start over. One faculty member used MS Word's Track Changes feature to show students how alternative wording might present their ideas more clearly. The default color for Track Changes is red, and Daniel (along with many other students commenting on feedback they received this way), was "shocked" by the "blood" all over his paper. Despite their ability to make many tough decisions and the grit to have risen rapidly in their careers, many DBA students were observed to be sensitive, defensive, or vulnerable about their writing skills. The instructors worked one-on-one with Daniel (and several other students in the same situation) to a) alleviate the concern that he would be unable to recover from the edits required by the initial submission, and, b) to gain a greater appreciation for the work required to present research conducted in a manner consistent with a scholarly approach.

At the NACRA conference in October 2016, Clinton received a much nicer "shock," with news that he won second place in the NACRA competition for best student-authored case. Moreover, since the NACRA conference, he and Gogan (now his co-author) worked together to improve the case (Daniel and Gogan, 2017) along lines suggested in the conference roundtable. By May 2017 it was in second-round review at *Case Research Journal*, and in July it was accepted for publication; by August 2017 it was available at Harvard Business School Publishing (www.hbsp.harvard.edu) The experience this DBA student received would not have been possible without the required case research course. Not only did Clinton Daniel and other students learn to author a publishable case, they also learned to value early critical feedback, to persevere through multiple drafts, and to identify potential co-authors when appropriate, to collaborate for publication success. Each of these skills is important for any doctoral candidate, and each skill was developed as a direct outcome of the DBA case course.

Twenty-seven USF DBA students attended the Engaged Management Scholarship (EMS) Conference in September 2016 (hosted by Dauphine University-Paris), of which, 13 were Cohort Two students. Six Cohort Two students shared their research from the Case Course in poster sessions. Two students - Denise Gravatt and Valerie Mockus (both also attended NACRA) - joined a panel to share with other DBA students their thoughts on case co-authorship challenges, learning opportunities and successes. After setting their case aside following the NACRA conference in order to focus on other coursework, by summer 2017 these two co-authors were working to transform their case into "graphic novella" (cartoon) format – similar to a Harvard Business School case -- "*iPremier*" by Nolan and Austin.

At least three Cohort Two students used their discussion case as a launch pad for their dissertation research. Christina Norton moved forward with plans for additional studies on performance evaluation for knowledge workers. Ramil Cabella, who wrote a case set in a pharmaceutical company, translated some of his findings into a poster presented at the EMS Conference, and then moved forward with a Spring 2017 qualitative research study on the career path to senior leadership of foreign born pharmaceutical executives in the U.S. Richard Tarpey, who initially wrote a discussion case dealing with a challenging aspect of a hospital's nurse scheduling practices, extended his research with a design science action research study to re-design the existing artifact. He was scheduled to make a presentation of his multi-method research (including his case research) at the Southern Management Association conference in October 2017.

USF Muma DBA Cohort Three

USF Muma DBA Cohort Three had 27 students in the DBA case course. Once again, the course was taught by Drs. Mullarkey and Gogan. The fundamental structure of the course remained the same with the exception of the approach to the peer review process. Based on feedback from the Cohort Two student-authors who participated in the 2016 NACRA conference, as well as the professors' concern that past DBA student online feedback was "too polite," Mullarkey and Gogan modified the DBA Case Course design for the third iteration of the course. By design, Cohort Three students would experience several NACRA-like roundtable review sessions to learn how to evaluate a case and teaching note from the perspective of an instructor/author, create a two-page case proposal, conduct the necessary field research, and write a discussion case and its teaching note.

In weekend 1 (April) Cohort Three students discussed a case that Gogan wrote many years ago and which is no longer in use, about a hospital's Y2K project, which was in danger of going off the rails as the millennium approached. First, we discussed it as if in an MBA classroom, in 1998. Next, the DBA students, organized in 6-person roundtables, discussed strengths and weaknesses of the case as if critiquing it in a NACRA authors round-table. We observed that the DBA students were much more forthcoming about weaknesses when someone other than a peer was involved. Following the roundtables, the instructors lectured about key phases in researching and writing a case and its teaching note.

Before the May residency weekend, students submitted 2-page case proposals, using a format similar to that required for a NACRA Start-Up Cases Workshop (see www.nacra.net). In this NACRA-style format,

- Page 1 answers a few background questions and presents the case Opener (Protagonist, on X date, is considering Y challenge while sipping coffee, gazing out window, jogging etc.).
- Page 2 provides a brief outline of the rest of the case, and discusses the Target Course/Learning Objectives and Theoretical Foundations sections of the TN (see Appendix 3).

Mullarkey and Gogan organized students into new roundtable groups for the purpose of giving one another feedback on these case proposals. The instructors observed that Cohort Three peer suggestions were much more useful than those observed in the Cohort One and Two online reviews. In a collegial environment, these student authors gave and received useful feedback. The experience indicated that the April roundtable discussions of strengths and weaknesses of a professor's case and teaching note helped students to recognize the type of quality feedback they were expected to share.

While in Cohort Two some cases were written in pairs, most Cohort Three students chose to write their own cases. However, when the instructors identified authors working on similar topics and brought it to their attention, some of those students shared notes on the theoretical foundations, frameworks, and conceptual models for their TNs and considered the possibility of working on two-case comparison papers for publication in scholarly journals. For example, two students wrote on issues related to college accreditation and two students wrote on fund-raising issues in higher education. Several other potential pairings were also evident. This particular approach offers students an opportunity to target academic conferences, as a first step toward a theory-enhancing paper for a traditional academic journal and/or a practitioner piece offering insights from the comparison. In a particularly interesting example, two authors wrote proposals for cases dealing with succession issues in small family businesses. One described the aging owner of an agribusiness who needed to, but was avoiding, talking to his daughter about succession planning, while the other described a family owned restaurateur trying to decide, in the aftermath of a devastating fire, whether to sell or rebuild the property. In each case, children, grandchildren, other relatives, customers and suppliers, were important stakeholders in the decision at hand and the two cases benefited from student-author comparisons of theoretical frameworks for evaluating stakeholders and succession planning in family enterprises.

As these collaborations begin to bear fruit, they are providing opportunities to help future DBA cohorts recognize that a case study can give rise to multiple possibilities for the presentation of study findings in various publication outlets (with guidance from experienced case researchers). This flexibility, which is inherent to case research, is causing the USF Muma faculty team to consider how to best drive home the point that case research offers many different publication paths.

Before the third and last resident weekend (June 2017) Cohort Three students provided online feedback as peer reviews, to facilitate the construction of final drafts. Again a challenge was encountered as some students missed the case submission deadline, with implications for the peer reviewing assignments (similar to what happened with Cohort Two). However, for those who gave and received feedback, we observed much more useful comments than in prior cohorts. Again, the evidence in the quality of the peer review feedback was that the face-to-face roundtable experience was valuable and helped students develop useful peer review skills.

We initially planned to have another roundtable experience in the June residency weekend. We hoped all students would submit their cases on time and also have time to read a few other cases so as to give roundtable feedback. Instead, with about half of the students submitting the night before (instead of the posted deadline a few days before, which would have given everyone time to read several cases), we decided to select a few interesting cases. On Friday we discussed one of these cases and on Saturday we discussed two of them, before wrapping up with discussion of lessons learned and next steps on their research-to-publication paths.

Another aspect of the course that was modified for Cohort Three was the addition of an experience with and the discussion of structured interview techniques for the purpose of the protagonist interviews. This was discussed in the roundtables in the second resident weekend and proved beneficial in the conduct of this research. A critique of this module within the course is that the students felt they would have benefited from this instruction in the first resident weekend before many conducted their first protagonist interview.

The NACRA 2017 submission deadline was June 19 and our final residency weekend for the course was June 10-11. We were pleased to see that five of 27 USF Muma DBA students had papers accepted for NACRA 2017 which will be held in Chicago in October (see www.nacra.net):

- one each in Accounting/Finance/Economics and Digital Technologies and Operations tracks
- two each in Entrepreneurship/Small Business/Family Business and Business Policy and Strategy tracks

At least four USF DBA students submitted “Startup Cases” (using the two-page format shown in Appendix 2) for the pre-NACRA workshop that pairs new case researchers with much-published senior mentors.

Of the remaining 18 DBA students, 2 discussion cases were unpublishable due to confidentiality, 6 were deemed sufficient for the course but not publishable “new knowledge”, 1 was targeted for a two-case discussion outlet, 1 was targeted for an example case outlet, and 8 were submitted to the Muma Case Review for review and, potential, publication by August 2017.

The Muma DBA Cohort Three clearly benefited from the revised approach to peer review, roundtable discussion of cases, and a wider range of formats for communication of the case research. The wider variety of publication formats allowed increased the diversity of cases. However, it may have also inadvertently lead to greater challenges for the professional students to complete the case on time with a level of quality and impact needed to pursue publication. There appears to be a clear trade-off in this regard with respect to the more “templated” approach exercised by the course with Cohort One students, for example.

Overall, student reflection on the value of the DBA case course to their understanding of the conduct of research was universally positive. Mullarkey and Gogan observed a significant improvement in the value and quality of the peer reviews. And, the publishable cases were of a consistently high standard for the conduct of case research.

SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES, SUGGESTIONS

An executive DBA program aims to help experienced managers become even more effective managers and leaders, and to transform them into practice-based researchers. Leaders who are curious, reflective, and eager to learn to conduct social science research are ideal DBA candidates. Many applicants are drawn to a DBA program because they want to give back to society by helping to train and guide future business leaders. With a DBA, some of these individuals can successfully pursue a clinical professorship (in which research requirements are lighter and teaching load is heavier). Other students, in the process of learning how to read and evaluate empirical research, and in mastering the basics of at least one quantitative and one qualitative research method, will discover their inner scholar and consider making a major career change; each year, a few USF Muma DBA students have discovered this interest. Some of these students reached this insight through discovering the joy and challenge of case research and discussion.

We want to nurture those individuals, because they hold great promise for improving business education. As experienced leaders, they will continue to have strong credibility in the business community, and as scholars (provided they master one or two theories and research methods at a sufficiently elevated level to publish in high quality academic journals) they could be in a great position to move business education forward, by conducting rigorous research that sheds light on highly relevant managerial challenges. However, those individuals who apply to our program knowing that they want to pursue a traditional tenure-track academic career are advised to apply instead to a Ph.D. program that will require them to master several theories and research methods relevant to their chosen discipline, and to acquire other skills necessary to produce and publish scholarly research in the pursuit of tenure track faculty positions.

Based on the USF Muma experience thus far, we propose that a course about case research, with a discussion case deliverable, is a essential starting-point for most executive DBA students. USF Muma DBA students learned that a case discussion gives participants an opportunity to appreciate the layers of complexity surrounding an important managerial decision. The DBA case course also introduces students to several important research basics: how to select a topic that matters grounded in tough decisions organizational leaders must make, how to conduct secondary research on a topic, how to conduct primary research that includes interviews, how to gather and present empirical evidence from multiple sources, and how to idnetify and present credible, triangulated case evidence.

We further argue that a Case Course leverages DBA students' strengths, while helping them develop new skills or rebuild skills learned many years ago in college but not exercised in recent years. A person who has been a high-level manager for more than 12 years brings to the table many managerial and persuasive skills, some analytical skills, and valuable tacit knowledge (particularly about interpersonal relationships and leadership). However, most of these students have not dealt with theory for a very long time; indeed, many have not previously read or evaluated an empirical study. Many have weak writing skills and their quantitative skills may also be quite rusty. Having executive DBA students jump into case research and writing helps them leverage their strengths (persuasive skills, contacts, tacit knowledge about business norms, etc.), and to develop research and writing skills. Having completed the course, they are better positioned to learn about and conduct other forms of practitioner-relevant research.

In the first three cohorts of USF Muma DBA, many doctoral students were highly motivated to write and publish case research, and many want to see their cases discussed in classrooms and in the workplace. Students were thrilled to attend NACRA, the Engaged Management Scholarship Conference, and other conferences, where they benefitted from other practice-based researchers' insights. Those students who successfully published their cases (as sole authors or sometimes as co-authors, including USF faculty) have been particularly enthusiastic about the course. Some students also enthusiastically reported that conducting a case study in their own organization, and discussing the case with their colleagues at work (as well as with other USF Muma students and faculty) yielded insights that they were able to translate into improved organizational or managerial effectiveness. Some students want to continue doing case research as part of their dissertation work and some students see case publication as a vehicle for establishing thought leadership (as an analyst, consultant, expert witness, other knowledge worker).

The USF Muma experience also revealed challenges. Many DBA students find it challenging to keep up with the demands of multiple courses and their professional work at the same time. Thus, enthusiasm during the Case Course did not always lead the student to persist in polishing their case to the point of actual publication. We also observed that some DBA students, who work in executive roles with strong positional authority, experienced discomfort when receiving criticism of their analytical, writing and/or presentation style early in the course. Their sensitivity to criticism was a surprise (for both givers and receivers of the feedback), but most of them were able to accept and grow from it.

Another important challenge is helping students discover an applicable theory to serve as the theoretical foundation for their discussion cases and a potential platform for their subsequent dissertation research. In requiring students to develop the theoretical foundations section of the teaching note, we hoped to get them thinking about how theory and practice complement one another. However, in their first semester in the program they have had very little exposure to theory, so many struggle with this aspect of case research. We observed that many professional doctoral students at this stage in their training tended to gravitate to broad general theories (such as Systems Theory), at too high a level of abstraction to be a useful theoretical foundation for a particular case. One solution would be to allocate more time to one-on-one meetings with students (or possibly with groups of students with shared interests), in which the instructors would guide them toward appropriate theories. An alternative approach to this first case research publication course is to help each student master the mechanics of case research, while letting them rely on their intuition (honed over 12+ years as a manager) to study a challenging managerial issue and create an interesting and relevant discussion case. A third approach, is to introduce the concepts of theoretical framing and conceptual modeling in to the research methods course doctoral students might take just prior to the Case Course.

There are other opportunities to further modify the Case Course design and delivery. One idea under consideration: replace the first two residency weekends (currently shared with another course) with one intensive, immersive residency weekend (not shared with another course). In this scenario, students would be introduced to all of the fundamentals: read and discuss a case from a student perspective; review and evaluate a case and teaching note from an author/adopting instructor perspective; learn about case research fundamentals such as background research, interviewing, and triangulating on multiple data sources; consider the advantages and disadvantages of being a sole author versus co-authoring; identify a case opportunity and write a draft case opener; search for a suitable theoretical foundation. Students would then have a longer time span to conduct their case study and write the discussion case and teaching note. Potentially this weekend would take place in January or February – right at the start of the first semester, instead of half-way through the semester. Organized into groups representing 4-8 cases, there would be several one-hour conference-call group check-ins to review progress, and a final weekend residency would take place in late May. This schedule would give students time to make revisions before submitting a product of their case research to a suitable conference such as NACRA or EMS.

Another opportunity for improvement arises from the fact that the required Qualitative Research course is currently offered in the second year of the USF Muma DBA program. In 2017 many Cohort 2 students (whose first year was 2016) told us that they now have a much greater appreciation of some of the research topics that we introduced in the Case Course. These students urged us to consider offering Qualitative Research closer in time to the Case Course. There is obvious synergy between the two courses; case research is often purely qualitative and nearly-always includes a qualitative component (Yin, 2013). One scenario might be to also launch the Qualitative Research course with an intensive weekend, a month (or sooner) after the Case Course weekend. Alternatively, a boot-camp style introductory week in January could combine the DBA orientation, intake assessments, a 2-day Case Course immersion and a 2-day Qualitative Course immersion.

SHOULD EVERY EXECUTIVE DBA PROGRAM START WITH A CASE COURSE?

If a case research course includes a strong advising component, students can use their first discussion case as the first step in a program of research on a topic integral to their path to a practice-centered dissertation – be it examining the evolving role of the CIO, exploring the challenges of managing contingent workers, crafting a safe and effective cloud computing strategy, investigating which technologies needed for autonomous vehicles are disruptive versus complementary, or any number of other important and challenging topics. After a discussion case is submitted for publication, the supervising professor can help the student capitalize further on this work by helping him/her plan other studies to further investigate the focal topic or test the foundational theory. Some students will have gathered sufficiently rich and interesting case data to write and publish a single-case study paper that extends or challenges extant theory. Other students will find opportunities to collaborate with professors or fellow students to produce case-comparison papers (such as comparing cases in which the phenomena are similar but the case settings differ).

Some students will be so captivated by case research that they will produce a dissertation based entirely on this research method, while other students will choose to follow up by conducting one or two studies that use other methods – such as surveys or experiments – to continue to investigate the phenomenon of interest. Thus far, we have reported on one successful USF DBA Cohort One student (Rob Hammond) for whom the case was clearly that first step. A limitation is that we have not yet systematically compared the dissertation journeys of all of our Cohort One students. Since we have not yet gathered and analyzed evidence sufficient to make strong claims about the value of the Case Course (or any of the other research methods courses required in the USF Muma DBA program) for informing each student's dissertation journey, a useful next step would be to conduct such a study.

Scholars have argued that as a practitioner-focused research product, a discussion case should be included in a tenure application packet (Dostaler and Tomberlin, 2013). Under what circumstances should a field-researched discussion case be included in a three-paper DBA dissertation? Our stance relies on a coherence argument: if a particular discussion case serves as the first step in a coherent program of research, and if it is accepted for publication at a peer-reviewed journal, then it can serve as one of the three dissertation papers. The dissertation committee might also require that the student submit its teaching note for review (we would not expect that note to be published in the dissertation, but the dissertation introduction or conclusion would presumably discuss the case in light of a theoretical foundation).

Alternatively, what if a student produces a one-off case, with no follow-on research on that topic? We congratulate the student on having learned to do case research, and we encourage him to polish the case for classroom or corporate use as applicable. However, we would not likely be convinced that the case belongs in that student's dissertation. Students who are not yet ready to commit to a dissertation topic should nevertheless benefit from the Case Course by coming to appreciate why case research is especially appropriate for holistically considering multiple interacting variables that influence how or why phenomena occur or unfold. In other DBA courses they will learn about other qualitative and quantitative research methods, and they will discover that some methods are far better suited for the area of inquiry central to their pursuit of their dissertation and research with impact. Frequently, even in these cases though, the initial foray into case research proves effective in generating insights and contributing to the multi-method approach needed to examine complex business phenomenon.

Students in executive DBA programs appear to be ideally positioned to capitalize on their access to interesting business problems, decisions, people and data. Most of the students in our program have demonstrated an ability to quickly learn how to conduct a case study on an interesting business challenge, complemented by insights and skills these students accumulated through years of experience. We find that a required Case Course in which students conduct a field-based case study and produce a publishable discussion case is a mutually rewarding primary research, hands-on "learn by doing" activity for both the DBA student and the instructor. Based on this experience, we believe that many other DBA programs would benefit from introducing a Case Course into their curriculum.

APPENDIX 1Executive DBA Council, Member Schools Worldwide

Source: www.executivedba.org as of 12 May 2017

1. Abu Dhabi U College of Business, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2. Antwerp Management School, Antwerp, Belgium
3. Athabasca U Faculty of Business, Edmonton, AB, Canada
4. Baruch College, City U of New York Zicklin School of Business New York, NY, USA
5. Benedictine U College of Business Lisle, IL, USA
6. Business School Lausanne Chavannes, Vaud, Switzerland
7. Case Western Reserve U Weatherhead School of Management Cleveland, Ohio, USA
8. CENTRUM Catolica Pontificia Universidad Catolica Del Peru CENTRUM Lima, Peru
9. City U of Hong Kong College of Business, Kowloon, Hong Kong
10. Claremont Graduate U, The Drucker School, Claremont, California, USA
11. Cranfield U, Cranfield School of Management, Bedfordshire, England
12. Creighton U Heider College of Business, Omaha, Nebraska, USA
13. Deakin U, Deakin Graduate School of Business, Victoria, Australia
14. DePaul University Kellstadt Graduate School of Business, Chicago, Illinois, USA
15. Drexel U, LeBow College of Business, Philadelphia, PA, USA
16. Ecole des Ponts ParisTech, Ecole des Ponts Business School, Champs-sur-Marne, Marne la Vallée, FR
17. ESC Rennes School of Business, Rennes, France
18. Florida Institute of Technology Nathan M. Bisk College of Business Melbourne, FL, USA
19. Florida International U Alvah H. Chapman Jr. Graduate School of Business, Miami, FL, USA
20. Franklin U, Ross College of Business. Columbus, OH, USA
21. Georgia State U J. Mack Robinson College of Business, Atlanta, GA, USA
22. Grenoble Ecole de Management Doctoral School Grenoble, France
23. Hong Kong Baptist U School of Business Hong Kong, China
24. International School of Management, **Paris**, New York City, Shanghai, New Delhi, São Paulo, Cape Town
25. International U of Monaco Monte-Carlo, Monaco
26. Jacksonville U Davis College of Business Jacksonville, Florida, US
27. Liverpool John Moores U, Liverpool Business School Liverpool, UK
28. Maastricht School of Management Maastricht, The Netherlands
29. Missouri U of Science and Technology Department of Business and Information Technology, Rolla, USA
30. Oklahoma State U Spears School of Business Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA
31. Nottingham Trent U Nottingham Business School Nottingham, Nottingham, England
32. Pace U Lubin School of Business New York, New York, USA
33. Paris-Dauphine U Paris, France
34. Philadelphia U School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Philadelphia, PA, USA
35. Rollins College Crummer Graduate School of Business Winter Park, FL, USA
36. Sacred Heart U, John F. Welch College of Business, Fairfield, Connecticut, USA
37. St. Ambrose U College of Business, Davenport, Iowa, USA
38. Temple U ox School of Business, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA
39. U of Alabama Huntsville College of Business, Huntsville, Alabama, USA
40. U of Calgary Haskayne School of Business, Calgary, Alberta, Canada
41. U of Dallas Satish and Yasmin Gupta College of Business Irving, Texas, USA
42. U of Florida Hough Graduate School of Business Gainesville, FL, USA
43. U of Manchester Manchester Business School Manchester, United Kingdom
44. U of Maryland U College The Graduate SchoolAdelphi, Maryland, USA
45. U of Missouri-St. Louis College of Business St. Louis, Missouri, USA
46. Universite' Nice Sophia Antipolis Institut d'Administration des Entreprises Nice, Alpes-Maritimes, France
47. U of North Carolina at Charlotte Belk College of Business Charlotte, North Carolina, USA
48. U of Reading Henley Business School Henley-on-Thames, Oxfordshire, UK
49. U of South Alabama Mitchell College of Business Mobile, Alabama, USA
50. U of South Florida Muma College of Business Tampa, Florida, USA
51. U of Southern Queensland School of Management and Marketing Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia
52. U of Wisconsin-Whitewater College of Business and Economics Whitewater, Wisconsin, USA
53. Virginia Tech Pamplin College of Business Blacksburg, Virginia, USA

APPENDIX 2
Spring 2015 Cohort 1 Case Course Schedule
Source: ISM7931.003S15 Syllabus

Dates of Activity	Description of Activity	Estimated Time (Hours)	Online (Y or N)
March 8	**Introductory Lecture and survey activity**	**2**	**N**
9 March-11 April	View case-writing online lectures & read Chapters 1-7	7	Y
9 March-11 April	Watch JITE:DC Discussion Case Template videos	1	Y
9 March-11 April	Watch case writing checklist videos and fill out form	2	Y
9 March-11 April	Prepare 1 page case summary	6	Y
9 March-11 April	Prepare case for discussion	2	Y
April 11	**Discuss case and classroom activities**	**4**	**N**
12 April-1 May	Begin case draft	24	Y
12 April-1 May	Prepare 2 cases for class discussion	4	Y
May 1 & 2	**Discuss cases and classroom activities**	**8**	**N**
3 May-10 May	Complete case draft	8	Y
11 May-21 May	Peer review four other case studies	8	Y
21 May-5 June	Revise cases based upon peer reviews	8	Y
21 May-5 June	Prepare 3 cases for class discussion	6	Y
June 5 & 6	**Discuss student authored cases**	**6**	**Y**
	Total estimated out-of-class hours	*66*	

Specific due dates can be found following the syllabus description. Detailed descriptions of all activities can be found under Modules List

APPENDIX 3:
Example of Two Page Submission Format Used with Cohort 3

NACRA 2017 Start-Up Cases' Workshop
Case Working Title
Case Author 1, Affiliation
Case Author 2, Affiliation
(etc.)
Corresponding Author
Affiliation, address
Email, telephone

Target Course: Indicate Graduate or Undergraduate and title of course where case would be taught; pick one course, even if you think it might be taught in multiple courses.

Industry: indicate industry (banking, retail, health care etc.)
Data Sources: Highlight all that apply:
Library Research Interviews Consulting Personal Experience
Prior Cases: Highlight all that apply:
I am a complete "newbie" when it comes to writing cases.
I have presented cases at NACRA before.
I am a case-method teacher.
I am not really a case-method teacher but sometimes I include cases in my courses.
I have never prepared a teaching note/instructor's manual to accompany a case.
I seek advice on a non-traditional case (e.g., interdisciplinary, multi-media, etc.)

Draft Case Opener
Most cases open with a paragraph or two, which introduce the protagonist (main character in whose shoes students will virtually place themselves), the organization, the time-frame (e.g., a Friday afternoon in July 2015), and point to the case focal issue (it may point directly or only hint at the focal issue; this is a choice for the case writer to make). The opener should capture the reader's imagination and make them want to read more! Since the Opener is very important yet also must be concise, include it here on page 1 but go no further on this page.

Sample Opener (partial) from "High Noon at Universal Pipe: Sell Out or Risk Everything?" by Arieh A. Ullmann. *Case Research Journal* 31(1), winter 2011, p 83:

"It was mid-November 2004, and as Dave Butler, CEO of Universal Pipe, Inc. (UPI) packed his overnight bag for the flight early the next morning, he was thinking about the upcoming decisive meeting with the Japanese majority owners of UPI in their mid-town Manhattan office. The continued existence of the company was at stake. The fate of UPI, one of the larger US PVC pipe manufacturers, and its employees, depended on him."

On page 2 provide the following:
Summary of the rest of the case, including industry and/or company background, description of the setting and the challenge, description of data that needs to be made available to students in order for them to do a meaningful analysis of the case, and proposed exhibits.

Synopsis of the following instructor's manual sections: Case learning objectives, envisioned case issues, relevant theory or managerial framework/s to be applied.

Questions/issues you would like help with at the Start-Up Cases' Workshop.

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