



## Teaching Notes: Communicating the Teacher's Wisdom

Teaching notes are an essential companion on an instructor's journey toward excellence in case method teaching. There is nothing automatic about case teaching; it requires careful planning and thorough preparation. Teaching notes capture and communicate the wisdom inherent in that process and constitute high-value intellectual capital for the teaching community.

Teaching notes play five important roles that justify the time and effort required to produce them:

\* *Increase Teaching Effectiveness* - By making the why, what, and how of our teaching more explicit, teaching notes enhance our capacity to lead more productive learning discussions. The guidance provided by teaching notes increase the probability of classroom success, thereby enhancing the return on the investment made in developing the case study and preparing to teach it.

\* *Save Time* - Teaching notes are not a surrogate for preparation, but they greatly enhance the efficiency of the preparation process. They provide the instructor with a running start. As one professor put it: "I spend 6 hours preparing; without teaching notes, another 3 hours would be required."

\* *Build Confidence* - By reducing the unknown and providing a map, the risk of venturing into the untried waters of a new case is lowered. The resultant increased confidence is particularly helpful to teachers new to the case method or to a particular case course. One new instructor stated: "I would have died without teaching notes. The teaching group discussions were helpful, but the teaching notes were essential."

\* *Guide Casewriting* - Case studies are prepared to serve "as the basis of discussion." They are crafted as discussion vehicles, which is what creates their special literary genre. To fulfill this educational mission, they need to be prepared with the probable discussion dynamics in mind, both process and content. These dynamics are at the heart of teaching notes and therefore interact with case writing in an iterative fashion. One experienced case teacher put it plainly: "A

---

*James E. Austin, Chapman Professor of Business Administration, prepared this note.*

Copyright © 1993 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. To order copies, call (617) 495-6117 or write the Publishing Division, Harvard Business School, Boston, MA 02163. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, used in a spreadsheet, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the permission of Harvard Business School.