Identifying Elements of Case Studies for Global Health Case Competitions and Learning Experiences
Mohammed K. Ali, MBChB, MSc, Rebecca L. Baggett, MA, MPH, Suzanne D. Mason, Amanda W. Stinger

Background
The Emory Global Health Institute’s (Institute) Global Health Case Competition (EGHCC) is an innovative student learning program that brings together students from multiple disciplines to address a critical global health challenge in both a competitive and collaborative environment. The EGHCC borrows its format from business school case competitions where student teams formulate recommendations for a business case, but the EGHCC is unique in that it requires an interdisciplinary approach to solve real-world global health challenges. The Institute’s Student Advisory Committee (SAC), a multidisciplinary group of engaged students representing every school at Emory University, and its Faculty Advisors have developed and written the case subjects for each of the three competitions the Institute has hosted.

2009 Competition
The inaugural Emory Global Health Case Competition, held in spring 2009, was initiated and coordinated by the Emory Global Health Institute’s SAC. Forty Emory students comprising eight multidisciplinary teams presented their best strategies for alleviating severe childhood malnutrition in Ethiopia.

2010 Competition
In 2010, the Institute expanded the competition regionally by including three teams from guest universities located in the Southeastern United States. This resulted in 12 multidisciplinary teams developing recommendations for the mock government of Gujarat, India on how to reduce tobacco-related health and economic burdens while recognizing that tobacco product manufacturing was one of the state’s largest industries.

2011 Competition
In 2011, the Institute and its SAC took the competition national and included 12 guest multidisciplinary teams from: Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Princeton University, Rice University, Texas A&M University, University of Alabama at Birmingham, University of California at San Francisco, University of Pennsylvania, University of Southern California, Vanderbilt University, and Yeshiva University. These teams, along with eight Emory teams, developed programmatic priorities for the East Africa Regional Office of the UN’s High Commissioner for Refugees, which had just suffered from a 40% budget cut and was responsible for the welfare of 800,000 refugees living in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda.

2012 Emory Global Health Case Competition
The 2012 Emory Global Health Case Competition is scheduled to take place on Saturday, March 31, 2012 on the Emory University campus in Atlanta, GA, United States. The Emory Global Health Institute invites universities that are members of the Consortium of Universities for Global Health and the Global Health Education Consortium to participate in the competition. Emory’s goal is to host six-member multidisciplinary teams from 15 guest universities, with the goal of attracting 90 guest students to participate.

The Emory Global Health Case Competition will offer a context for out-of-the-box thinking and a forum for global health strategy development across disciplines and campuses, as well as better prepare participants to collaborate with peers as they enter diverse professions.

We hope to see a team from your university in Atlanta in March!
Visit www.globalhealth.emory.edu for information about participating in the 2012 competition!

Methods
After the 2009, 2010, and 2011 case competitions, members of the Institute’s Student Advisory Committee developed and administered a survey of participants to determine how future global health case competitions could be improved. Response rates were: 45% for 2009, 71% for 2010, and 56% for 2011. Among the surveys’ topics were questions regarding the appropriateness, complexity, and multidisciplinary requirements of each competition’s case subject. In 2010, SAC members conducted telephone interviews from a select group of that year’s survey respondents (40%) to gather additional qualitative data regarding case subjects.

Results
Surveys and interviews regarding the selection of case subjects yielded the following results:

- Case subjects should cover topics commonly considered global health challenges and that are emotively appealing to participants;
- Case subjects should have succinct, defined themes that allow efficient investigation in a short space of time;
- Case subjects should include multidisciplinary complexity to actively engage participants from diverse backgrounds; and
- Case subjects should include a high level of complexity that requires teams to weigh trade-offs while developing their recommendations and to ensure that there is no obvious evidence-based response.

Additionally, well-written cases should:

- Summarize the major considerations for participants in a preface and/or postscript;
- Incorporate detailed and current information about the context, stakeholders, decision rights/authority, and resources available; and
- Include appendices with relevant data, images, and references.

Experience from business school cases suggests that interpreting cases is part of the learning exercise. Because of this, ambiguity and prioritization of issues are important in stimulating teams to defend the recommendations that they make.

I am convinced that participating in the Emory Global Health Case Competition has had a lasting impact on the group of students that Emory hosted from Rice University. For many of us, this was the first time we had been asked to apply such a diverse set of tools to such as complicated and meaningful problem. We were empowered by the freedom we were afforded in both defining the problem and in developing a solution – so much so that the hardest aspect of the competition was refining creative ideas, not generating them.

Josh Ozer
Rice University ’11
2011 Emory Global Health Case Competition Participant