The case study has been a linchpin of the Master of Science in Information Assurance (MSIA) program at Norwich University since its inception in September 2002. Our students have been required to enter their studies with the agreement of their employer or of another suitable organization for weekly research into the strategic planning, management of critical functions, and integration of information assurance (IA) into their selected organization. The weekly research papers form the basis for more extensive analyses and recommendations in the end-of-seminar papers which must be presented not only to faculty for grading but also to the case-study management for review.

Students and their case-study managers have overwhelmingly reported that the case study is a valuable learning tool. My perspective in establishing the practice was always summed up by the dictum, “Reality trumps theory.” Reading and discussing the management of IA are valuable and essential components of advanced study; they are significantly enriched by requiring students to confront different perspectives rooted in practical application of theory – and the complexities and contradictions that result from coping with novel and unexpected situations and business requirements.

The organization-based case-study (OBCS) has caused problems for student and for our program, however. Applicants have sometimes been unable to obtain the agreement of suitable organizations for the case study and have been refused entry into the MSIA; and existing students have sometimes found resistance or refusal to their requests for information in their study organizations. Sometimes the resistance occurs because the people who signed the OBCS agreement have moved on to new positions or new employers; sometimes the reluctance develops when managers begin to realize that all is not well with their security posture and decide that they don’t want to hear any more recommendations. In a few cases, the resistance has been based in growing concern about confidentiality (even though we make great efforts to protect case-study confidentiality such as explicitly telling students not to identify their subject organizations or name the actual people interviewed).

We have good news for our existing students and for new applicants: as of September 2008, we are modifying all our assignments to reflect a new _Industry-Specific Case Study_ (ISCS) that should resolve the difficulties encountered by some of our candidates and current graduate students. The ISCS applicant must respond to the following questions satisfactorily for admission:

1. Why are you choosing the industry-specific case study? And what factors motivated you to reject the organization-based case study?

2. Define the particular industry upon which your work will be focused. Why have you selected that particular industry?

3. What do you expect to be able to accomplish with 18 months of study and writing
about information assurance in this particular industry? How will an industry focus help you reach personal and professional goals?

4. **What do you expect readers to be able to do when they read your end-of-seminar reports?** What new attitudes, knowledge, or skills might a reader take away?

5. **What information resources have already helped you determine the suitability of this industry for your case study?** List at least three (3) specific resources including at least one source of contacts with industry experts that you are confident will be useful to you during your 18 months of research. (Such resources include, but are not limited to, personal contacts with industry experts, journals, trade publications, Web sites, organizations, blogs). **Note: Wikipedia is not an authoritative source and may not appear as a resource in this proposal.**

The weekly papers and end-of-seminar papers for students taking the ISCS option will be more like White Papers than consulting reports. Our intention is that many of the final papers will be publishable – you might be seeing excerpts in this column over the next few years.

More information about the new ISCS option is available on the Web at <URL>. Please don’t hesitate to write to me if you would like more information about the ISCS and the MSIA or if you would like to volunteer for a roster of industry experts willing to talk to our graduate students.

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