CRJ Conversation: Editorial Team

Editor's Note: The following is a transcript of a conversation between me and CRJ's three associate editors: Karen Boroff, Randall Harris, and Ram Subramanian. I found this tremendously insightful but was not surprised. CRJ's associate editors are all experienced case authors; each has won awards both at the NACRA conference and from CRJ; and they work tremendously hard to guide authors from initial submission to publication. By acting as the bridge between the authors and reviewers, they reconcile both perspectives and help CRJ achieve it's high standards. Even though all four of us work together, getting together to have a discussion like this was a rare treat.

Eric Dolansky: Let's dive right in with a big question right off the bat. What do you wish that all authors knew before submitting their work to the Case Research Journal (CRJ)? What are the common issues and concerns with the initial submissions that you receive?

Randall Harris: That's an easy one. The most common issue for me is the decision focus. That is by far the most important part of the initial review, to examine the decision focus. Tying into that, the second most common issue is the theoretical alignment of the instructor's manual with the case study. Those are the top two.

Karen Boroff: Randy, I'm going to have to agree with you totally on clarity about the decision, and that the decision is active in the beginning and the end of the case, because sometimes there's drift in starting a decision and then some other mission creeps in. Clarity, I think, is really important. As you said, I also, as I look at the case really quickly, ask: can the case answer the discussion questions? So it's the case, and that the discussion questions can be answered with the case facts.

Ram Subramanian: I took a different perspective. What they're saying is true, but I'm taking it step further by saying: I'm looking for gatekeeping issues. So, for example, in publishing, we're always told that when you are submitting something to a publication, first become familiar with the publication. There is the page limit, and if it's an academic journal, the citation method, etc. So, I'm saying if you can become familiar with CRJ by reading a couple of cases, it tells us two things. One, from the author's point of view, it takes care of the gatekeeping issues so that there is not the equivalent of a desk rejection. It is sent to the reviewers, who can then focus on the quality of the content, to the editor, and to the associate editors. To us it sends a message that the author is serious, has done the homework, and therefore credibility goes up; we can focus on what the case and the instructor's manual (IM) are about. I'm looking at it more in terms of gatekeeping. Of course, the things that Karen and Randall said are absolutely true. But I think that comes after the initial documents you submit.

Randall: That sounds great, but I think a lot of the material that I receive has already met those gatekeeping criteria. So that's a compliment to our editor.

Eric: Thank you. What advice would you give to authors then, once they've gotten that revision? They've sent something in, they received the reviews and the feedback you've given them, and a revise and resubmit decision. What would be most helpful to fill in any gaps in CRJ authors' knowledge or their process at that point? I want to add one thing that came up in a separate conversation, which was about persistence. Meredith Woodwark pointed out that persistence is extremely important in publishing in general, but also publishing in CRJ. If you could add to your answer: how do you keep up that motivation to keep going, even when you're not getting an acceptance after two or three rounds of review?

Karen: One of my doctoral faculty members, way back, said he was asked, "what happens when you get an R&R?" He said, "the first day, I get mad. The second day, I have to get over it." I tried to model that by getting angry, getting mad but then getting over it. Try to take very small steps on addressing each and every concern, making index cards or whatever you think is a proper tool. I'm still a little old fashioned, so I do cards on every comment that was made. Try to do five or six comments a day. If there's a tougher one, set it side for now, to think and really reflect on it. Ultimately the person who gave the reviews really wants you to get this thing published. So just get busy. You said the word persistence: absolutely, and I think the recipients of the feedback have to take some amount of solace in that we've all gotten reviews where revision pile gets bigger and bigger with everything we have to do. It's not like we get it the first time, or the second or third time, but you're in a cadre of scholars who are trying to make this case the best thing that we can give to our students.

Ram: I'm going to say don't read it the first day you get it, because it's going to depress you. Maybe leave it for a day or two. The initial reaction is always to be defensive: how can somebody tear apart your work? But then, if you read it carefully, I think it's important to get a sense of the tone of the letter. Does the tone suggest that there's a possibility to see the light at the end of the tunnel? And then, as Karen said, try to break it down into various comments and see how you're going to address them. But I also think it's important to see whether more than one reviewer picks up on the same shortcoming. And then, of course, if there are contradictions, it makes sense to reach out to the editor [or associate editor] to see how the authors should address these contradictions. But I think the key is to come up with a plan of action. As Karen said, I've had submissions where the feedback is sixteen to eighteen pages, with seventy different comments to be addressed, but I think persistence is key. It's okay to be defensive in the beginning, but a couple of days after that you have to get past being defensive and then look at how you're going to address it. I also think it's important to have a supportive focal organisation. Reach out to them: I'd keep the connection going, because you're going to ask them for more information.

Randall: I want to put on my 'author hat' for a second and talk about my process as an author. The first thing I do, and I agree both with Karen and Ram, is I put it down. I will read through it once, and then I'll set it aside, and it will probably take me a day or so to just let it simmer. I don't try to focus on detail, I just let it process. The second thing I do after that is meet with my coauthors. That's critical, because at that point my coauthors have had the time to read and review what's been said. Then we meet, and we talk about the general overall feel of the review.

For me personally, what I start with is a macro view. What are the main issues that need to be addressed? The big picture issues may be overarching in scope, and that ties back to decision focus and to the theoretical focus alignment between the IM and the case; those are the larger picture issues. Then from there we really get into the data sufficiency issues. This can be, "okay, we need to go off and do another round of interviews with a particular focal company." For example, do we need to go back and talk to somebody, or do we need to dig into this secondary source to find additional data to create a table?

Then the third level is the substantive comments that we get back from the reviewers. Each of the various points, we'll go through those one by one. But in general, if we have agreement between the various authors, that's critical. We all agree on an overall approach. Have we been able to address the larger data sufficiency issues, whatever those are: missing data, additional input, additional perspective, additional voices? And then the third level is just the substantive comments and the micro comments, and usually we can break those up one by one. For example, a coauthor and I will go back and forth, and the things that they can't or don't want to answer, they'll hand to me. That's one of the benefits of working in a team, that you have an additional perspective. I strongly recommend working with other experienced authors when you're working on a case, particularly for CRJ.

Eric: Thank you. Let's rewind to the beginning of the process. What can authors do early in the case research process, when developing their ideas and developing contacts with companies or individuals, to make it more likely that they will eventually be successful in publishing in CRJ?

Karen: I'll start this one. What I hear, in discussions with alumni business practitioners about something they have confronted, I then try to make an oral case of that in my class. This is to see whether or not that issue that I find intriguing has any legs. If it appears that students are waking up to this, then I think, "okay, it might have some merit." Then my next step has to be either myself or others go to the NACRA conference with a start-up case, and get a lot of feedback on our own case, but also listen to the rhythm of others.

I haven't written a case on it, because it's a little glum, but I was speaking to a funeral director. We were at a fundraising event, and I was listening to him. I don't know anything about the funeral industry, so I was asking him, "what's it like? What are the big issues?" I'm thinking that there are so many baby boomers: "you must be just busy with all of us dying, right?" And he says the business is in a downturn. "People don't have two-day wakes, they only have a one-day wake, so our throughput is cut by 50%." Now it sounds a little 'mercenary' to talk about bodies as throughput, but that's reduced as people are choosing cremation. They're not having the furniture industry made caskets. He went on and on about how bad it was, and the students loved it. I haven't had the agility to get that in a case. But test the case orally, talk about it aloud in class, and see if anything lights up, and then go to that.

Randall: I agree with Karen. The first and foremost issue for me is: is it interesting? Is it something I'm willing to spend a year of my life on? You know, living, working, breathing it. Is it compelling? That really gets back to the question about students, and students are very honest about what they find interesting. Usually, if it's gripping for me, it's gripping for my students, but not always.

The second issue that I really focus on is the decision point. Where's the decision in this data set? Where's the critical juncture, where everything comes together? Those points are hard to find; it takes time and persistence to really identify a critical decision point, especially when you're doing field research.

The third one is equally important, and again we go back to data sufficiency. Is there adequate data that we can collect on this company that will enable us to publish at CRJ level? Are we going to be able to get access to at least rudimentary financial statements? In my field financial data is critical. There may be other issues related to it, like whether we can speak directly to the key protagonist and the individuals that surround the decision point in the case. Those are the three key issues that I try to identify and definitively answer before I invest massive amounts of time.

Ram: I do two things more or less simultaneously. One is that I talk about the idea in my class and see how students react. I'm looking for two reactions: do they find it interesting, and am I likely to get different points of view with respect to the recommendation? By this I mean it shouldn't be an obvious solution. Then what I do is I try to write down the problem in a single sentence and I give that to my colleagues, giving them a bit of the context. I ask them, "does it make sense? Is it interesting?" If they do say it's interesting, then I ask them: "okay, what else would you want to know to be able to use this in your class?" Or, "if you are the decision maker, what do we want to know that helps?" I think writing out the problem in a single sentence is very, very important, because often something is clear in my mind, because I've been involved with the company and I've been talking to the people, so sometimes I could be excited about the idea. But when I cannot write about it in a single sentence, it may not come through clearly on the other end. Back to what Randall said: if I'm going to spend a whole year or so with this, I should be interested in it and there should be some potential at the end of the road. If it is not as interesting to others as it is to me, then perhaps I have to rethink the whole project. I think that doing a lot of this heavy lifting in the beginning helps ease the way, in addition to what the others said: making sure I have good contacts in the company, making sure I have the financial information, all of these are important.

Eric: Thank you. I'm going to talk about CRJ specifically in the next few questions. CRJ is known for having a developmental approach, the same as NACRA as an organization, as well as working with authors to get their cases through to publication. In terms of responsibility for that development, how does that split up in your mind between the authors, the reviewers, and the editorial team, to get this case where it needs to be to meet the standard of publication in CRJ?

Ram: From an author's perspective, I've been involved with NACRA for a long time. I want to say I started when I was five years old, but I've been there for a long time. So, I know that CRJ takes a long time to get something published. When I work with coauthors, many of them are unfamiliar with CRJ and they think it is something that can be done very quickly. It goes back to the persistence issue that was brought up in the beginning. If we are sending something to CRJ, we should be prepared for multiple revisions and the whole thing taking a substantial amount of time. From the reviewer's point of view, I think it's important to come up with actionable comments. Don't just say something is poor; make it actionable to provide meaning. What can be done to fix this? In looking at the cover letters that we write: how supportive are we? We have to strike a balance between being supportive, but not giving authors too much confidence and hope, because we don't know if it's going to come through in the end. I read what others, like the other associate editors and the editor, have done before me, Randall and Karen in particular, to see how you frame your cover letter. I think it's also important that I strike the right tone, as the associate editor, in writing the letter to the authors and foreseeing contradictions among reviewers and telling the authors what to do in such a situation.

Randall: Nothing makes me happier than seeing a case that I have worked on, as associate editor, published in the CRJ. I take great satisfaction from seeing that occur, and I want to emphasize that it is a labour of love to be part of this process. It's something I'm very passionate about. Ram brought up a very important point: it's not always possible to reconcile comments from various reviewers, and so one of the issues that I face as an associate editor is, in some cases, refereeing the review process. I think from that point of view, I would see myself as the official on the field trying to officiate the playing field, and to provide a way through the review process for the authors.

It's not always possible to get complete agreement, but at least in those cases I hope that as an associate editor I'm able to provide clear guidance where there may be confusion. That's I think what I see as being a 'reviewer referee.' I think the thing to do as a reviewer is to really provide substantive feedback. I want to echo something else that Ram said, which is: give substantive comments. Say "here's what you do to fix this, here's a substantive way to approach this issue." It's frustrating though. As a reviewer, at least provide some options about how an issue can be addressed.

I think the things we've already discussed are critical: persistence, letting the ideas sit and percolate and trying to integrate them into your own thinking, and then being able to provide feedback. Sometimes you're not able to accomplish something that either the associate editor or the reviewer has asked for. Be able to articulate why it's not possible, or maybe it is something that you have a substantive disagreement with. Remember it's possible to disagree without being disagreeable. This is a rare talent right now, and something I hope that we can all work towards from all sides. As an author, if you are engaged in the process, that gives you the opportunity to disagree respectfully if needed. I don't have any issue with disagreement based in facts, because sometimes you just can't find or get the data. It may also be: 'no, I disagree with this approach, and here's the reason why,' and I think that's entirely within the scope of what's possible in a CRJ review.

Karen: Ben Franklin said, "he who won't be counselled can't be helped." I start off with: here's the counsel we're going to give you now. The author has to be a receptive sponge to the counsellor. Sometimes I have found the reviewers are quite disparate in their evaluation of the case. Whether that is from quick reading, perhaps not totally familiar with the theory that undergirds the case, or from a spirit of generosity that may be prevailing because someone is submitting something. I find the disparate reviews to be problematic. We're trying to balance when someone says 'nearly ready,' and someone else says 'major overhaul.' So, you try to be upbeat about this, and give them possible ways to navigate, but I know that the author must be thinking, "someone said this was a great case already!" So how do you temper the generous spirit that might be there? I wish, though, that at least the reviewers could give the high bar: "you have to do this," or "it's unlikely it's going to meet standards." Tell me the fatal flaws and tell me the big picture. Don't tell me, "you forgot an apostrophe." The author will fix that and think, "okay, I did my grammar," but there may be some heavier lifts, and I do wish reviewers could perhaps be a little bit more insightful.

Eric: When you mentioned the review process taking some time and multiple rounds, and we talked about persistence: what is it about getting published in CRJ that makes it worth it for authors to go through this process? Why should authors choose CRJ as an outlet, if they can get something out so much faster, potentially, through other publishers?

Ram: I'm addressing this as an author, not as an associate editor. I want to get published in CRJ because it's the most demanding, most thorough, often frustrating but always challenging, review process. The important thing here is that the reviewers are both experts in case writing and they're also potential adoptees of the case. If you get something published in the CRJ, it's like winning the Oscar and the People's Choice Award. It's both "your peers like what you do," and it's also popular because they're likely to use it in their classes. I think the payoff at the end is substantial and meaningful. It's arguably the best there is in case writing. The other thing is that the case gets included in the Harvard database, so that increases the impact. The AACSB talks a lot about impact in research, and we can document that by case sales, by who's using it, and so on.

Randall: Iron sharpens iron. By becoming part of CRJ, and being a part of the NACRA organization, I have become a better case writer, a better researcher, a better teacher, and a better colleague within the academic community. In other words, I have benefited greatly in all my professional roles by being a part of the NACRA organisation and by publishing in CRJ, as Ram has said. I'm publishing in the premiere journal of case research. Why would I want to spend my time doing anything other than the very best that I'm capable of doing? For me, I see it as a benchmark that goes way beyond personal satisfaction. My opinion is that everyone that comes into contact with me in my professional role benefits from the training I've received at NACRA.

Karen: The ultimate user, you know, is the student and who is in front of them? Faculty. The majority of us are not teaching at Yale or Harvard. We're not teaching there, so the IMs at CRJ help get us up to speed very quickly on the theory. Otherwise, we just have a bunch of war stories that we tell that are not nested in some greater critical thought that has gone before us. The IMs that CRJ demands I find pretty powerful, and even as a reviewer for a conference, because of someone else's relevant theory in a case, I am learning something more, even though I may not use that case. Randall talks about how it's made him a better scholar and a better teacher. I have to echo that, because when I start any module, I will pull things from the news headlines that have hooks to the theory because of that notion of applying the concept to something. The rigour that CRJ gives me, in the IM, helps make that link that much stronger.

Randall: Let me pick up on what Karen just said and amplify it. What's happening right now in our world is actually a product of the theories that have been produced by our universities. In other words, the theories that drive a lot of the thinking and a lot of the decision-making in our world are tied to the thinking that's occurred in the 'ivory tower,' so to speak. As Kathleen Eisenhardt talks about in her work, case research is the canary in the coal mine. What we are observing in real time is the social phenomena of business under a lot of duress, and it's challenging our theoretical view of the world.

As a result, case research serves a critical function, right now, in observing business on the front lines. In this environment, I think it's going to be increasingly incumbent upon us to be the eyes and the ears of observing these phenomena as they emerge on the ground floor. So, I want to go just a bit further than what Karen said and say we're serving a critical function at a critical junction in our history. We are going to need to talk more about this in the future.

Eric: Agreed. What do you see in the case or an IM that will make you happiest? This doesn't have to be about an initial submission, this can be in something at any point that you're working with it. On the other side, what immediately will set off a red flag or an alarm bell when you see it in the case or an IM?

Ram: I'll start with the red flag: a really ambitious IM which tries to cover a whole bunch of courses, almost as though the author is trying to throw as many darts as possible, hoping something sticks. "This case can be used in this course and this course and this and this." That is disturbing, because it's going to be unlikely that it's going to cover all the courses. In my field, having a case that looks at both strategy formulation and implementation. Now there's nothing wrong with doing it, but it simply becomes more cumbersome, more difficult, typically longer, and less focused. So, I think the alarm bells would be set off by a case author not being experienced enough and trying to do too many things in a single case. The contrast, that will make me happy, would be an interesting decision, something that's novel and at first glance the case looks like it has the right structure. Going forward it may need revisions on a number of things, but at first glance the decision looks interesting and the structure of the case and IM look promising, in that they seem to contain all of the right sections.

Karen: For myself, the red flags, is what used to be called relevant theory, and now is theoretical linkages. A hot button I have when I go to relevant theory or theoretical linkages and see a lot of hyperlinks (I'm not sure whether the 'linkage' word has people doing that). I get a sense that because we went through Covid, and we had these online classes, and we've used dozens of links, there was no distillation. When I see that I'm thinking "oh, the person didn't do a deep dive, hasn't really thought about the theory, right or wrong." That's a hot button for me, and I think that it's just clumsy, you're not articulate, and not linked to the learning objectives. It just appears to be no substance on the theory, or not a deep dive in theory. What makes me happy is a contrarian viewpoint: that a person sets out this way and then "wow, but there's this and oh, I didn't see that coming."

Randall: I think the one word I would use would be 'serendipity.' When I read the first sentence of a case, and I'm immediately drawn into another world. There's nothing that brings me greater satisfaction than reading a case like that. Within one sentence to one paragraph, I get taken away and transported into something novel. As Ram was talking about, something interesting, unique, and that absorbs me deeply into a topic that I may not know anything about. When I start, it takes me on a journey through something probably gnarly and difficult and controversial, and then leaves me with probably more questions than when I started. That is something that just brings me a great deal of joy. And then the instructor's manual actually goes and attempts to frame it in a way that I can teach it right out of the box. It's really helpful when it's been thoroughly thought through. It may not be fully answered, but at least the various points of view are explored in depth. That's a very difficult thing to do, by the way.

Making it look easy. That's the serendipity that I'm talking about and it's hard to do it that way. But that's the thing that brings me a lot of joy when I'm reading a case and an instructor's manual.

Ram: Early on in my case writing and teaching career, I came across Professor David Collis of the Harvard Business School. He wrote a whole bunch of cases. He wrote one about Birds Eye Foods and the frozen food industry, he's written about Walt Disney, and I would urge prospective case writers to take a look at his teaching notes. He doesn't write a teaching note as simply an analysis of the issues, he writes it as though he's teaching it in a class, meaning he anticipates possible pushback and possible detours that need to be taken to get the meaning across. I've tried to emulate that in my own IMs. The other thing is when you attend an Ivey workshop, for example, they spend a lot of time asking you to create a timeline of events and thinking about where you're going to cut the case, meaning where you're going to position the case in time. So sometimes as a reviewer, I will ask if the case should be set before or after the point in time that the author has currently done, because there would more tension associated with the decision. Sometimes, if you set it before the current decision point there is going to be more tension. Likewise, maybe something could have been positioned after the event. When the author has made the right cut, then that obviously is delightful and makes me happy to read the case.

Karen: One of the early NACRA conferences I was at, Bill and Peggy Naumes were there. Bill said "everyone thinks, we case writers, we go online at night, we write a story and that's it." And I still remember that because of how difficult it is to write the case and the IM. We did not merely go home and put down couple of words, or a haiku poem or something. It takes a lot of work: you said something interesting that I wonder about, Ram. You said the person writes their teaching note as if they're giving the class. I wonder if somewhere in the iteration of CRJ we might have video case instructor's manuals, where someone has given the case, and we then have that as part of the actual instructions we have access to. You protect privacy, of course, but that may also help instructors develop practice in the classroom.

Randall: Which leads to a very good tip that I can offer for our readers. It's colloquial, but here's the tip: eat your own dog food. In other words, teach your cases. Teach the initial draft of the case, teach the revised version of the case, teach the case after you've revised it for CRJ, teach the case after it's gone through a second revision, and pull your students into every stage of the process. Use your students to critique, to analyse, to give you feedback, to find punctuation errors that you may not have found, and so forth. Involving your students in the process will strengthen your case tremendously through all the various stages of the process.

Eric: I agree 100%. Even just by teaching it you will see what's working well, and what's not working as well. Now I get to say nice things about the three of you. So, all three of you have been coauthors on Curtis E. Tate, Jr. award-winning cases. You are coauthors on the three most recent 'Best Case – Gold'-winning cases at the NACRA conference. What makes an award-winning case? What makes a case that does not just meet the standard of CRJ to be publishable, but is that extra step? How do excellent NACRA conference cases differ from published CRJ cases? First, how do authors that are very ambitious create a case that could win an award, and second, if they're starting with the NACRA conference, what's different about what NACRA is looking for in terms of acceptances and awards versus what CRJ is looking for?

Karen: Well, Ram said it best. Are you interested, first of all, in the case for fifteen months or two years. Personally, I think we've all been jazzed up about a case that might have earned something. It starts inside us. Are we happy and are we going to do the best we can on something that we have loved, has intrigued us, or has caused us to have a 'wow.'

Ram: I've never been on the judging panel for either award, so I don't know how judges think, but my expectation is that there's a big difference between the criteria for NACRA and the criteria for CRJ. This is not uncommon, because in most academic fields the conference acceptance threshold is very different from that of the journals. At the end of the day, the idea has to be interesting. For NACRA, in terms of the interesting idea and the basic structure, that would attract attention from the judges. I've had a case that won the NACRA award, but when we went to CRJ it's almost as if we're back at the starting point. It went through rigorous revisions, so it's very, very different. In the end it did win the Curtis Tate award, but only after substantial revisions. So, I think promise and potential in the case of a NACRA award but a much higher, more difficult yardstick when it comes to the Tate award, because you're competing with other cases that have already gone through the review process. They're outstanding, so you are competing with other outstanding cases. I think in the end judges look for what the case is likely to do in the classroom as one of the criteria. But again, I would love to know that, because I would love to write cases that win these awards. Just like they say in Hollywood, though, 'they don't know,' which is why they probably go for sequels.

Eric: Yes.

Karen: I think NACRA tends to be more generous and in the review process, for faculty that are starting out, so there's more allowances in the document itself. At NACRA I'll hear, more times than I want, "well, this could be a great A-B-C-D [multi-part] case." Sometimes you have to just work on making it a great A case. I just think that NACRA is a little more forgiving, which may make the author, myself included, think early on, "just do a couple of things and you're there." Well, you're not.

Randall: Okay, I'm going to try answer this question.

Karen: Good.

Randall: So, a NACRA case will check all the boxes. A CRJ case doesn't just check all the boxes, but everything fits together. Then an award-winning case doesn't just do both of those things, it transcends it. In other words, an award-winning case and IM checks the boxes, everything fits together, and it transcends that framework and does something unique. That, I think, is probably the extra ingredient found in an award-winning case.

Eric: That works very well; thank you. Submissions to CRJ are at a low point. Why do you think CRJ is not attracting more submissions? And do you have any ideas what can be done about this?

Randall: I've given this question a lot of thought. First, with regard to the lowered CRJ submissions, I think it is a function of two factors. The first of these is, for our North American authors, that we do not find ourselves a part of the Australian Business Dean's Council (ABDC) list. I won't go into detail about that here; I've been involved in that for many years, but the lack of entry onto the ABDC list has created a hurdle for North American authors. That's going to be difficult to overcome in the short term.

The second point is we are now looking at a demographic transition in our faculty in North America. Our greatest generation and our baby boomer generation are retiring or have retired already. We're at a critical juncture as far as the recharge cycle, and what's happened, as a result of those two factors, is that our membership and our conference attendance is increasingly global in nature. Now because there's a great hunger, on a global basis, to do what we do at NACRA, making that transition into this new environment is going to be critical, which is why I'm working closely with the newcomer and startup sessions to develop the next generation of authors. I think those are the overall macro factors that are driving it.

Karen: I agree.

Ram: To echo what Randy said, I think there is lots of interest. For example, my birth country is India, and there's tremendous interest in India about cases. But the struggle is with respect to the structure. Most don't know, for example, simple things like that a case has to be open-ended, a case submission has to have two things (the case and the IM). So, all of that requires learning, and I think outreach would help in that learning. Many people outside North America would love to get work published in CRJ because to them, an American or North American journal has a worldwide reputation. Getting something published is very, very important to them, in terms of their own career progress and in terms of how their peers react to their work. So, I think outreach, like Randall said, and helping in a newcomers' workshop would help. Otherwise, it has to go back to the prestige of publication: is it on some kind of a list? The ABDC list is, Randall said, always going to be an issue, but I think if you can do outreach in terms of the structure, we can get a lot more submissions.

Karen: Maybe you don't need the lists if there's some other way: we could have a Scopus footprint, or other ways to attenuate the ABDC. If we could somehow find another way to get to serve the need for ranking, whether it's the number of authors who've been cited in our IMs, or some way of showing usage, because if we're not going to get on the ABDC list then we have to look at another means. The other forces that are acting against us are students who don't read as much. So, either we continue with the ten or twelve-page cases that may not get used, or we pivot to something that fits the readership style, at least for freshmen and sophomores, to try thwart that threat. The selling point, that I think that we sometimes overlook, is that the cases help us to have a shared experience. That is important. Students come from all different places and backgrounds, but the case gives us that shared experience to try to develop leaders for tomorrow. Sometimes we don't emphasize that enough.

The other thing that concerns me a little: organizations or companies are more concerned about compliance, so they don't want to get the authorization for their cases, and they fear for this and that. So that's a struggle, to try to get authorization. If I create my own database, I own it, I can do that kind of research instead of a case. That's a bit of an issue, and there's an increasing sensitivity sometimes of airing your dirty linen. We've had a host of interesting potential cases, at the university level, with the whole

Mideast conflict. Is anyone going to write a case on that? Or are we too fearful to take it on, because of the compliance issues or the other sticky issues?

Ram: On a related but different note, I think we are missing the point here: as NACRA and CRJ, if our role is to promote the case method then why not have case methodology articles in CRJ? I'm thinking, like, deconstructing a well-received case. With deconstruction, I mean two things. One, interview the author as to what challenges the author faced when they wrote the case, and two, accompany it with a couple of expert reviews. What is good about the case? Why does the case work? Maybe in each issue there is one deconstructed classic case. I think we are missing the fact that we should also be promoting best practices, and this opens up the possibility of including other things in the journal.

Randall: This comes back to a previous point that I made. The current global environment screams out for case research. The challenges that businesses are facing on a global level are unprecedented (and I know that word has been overused a lot lately). However, case research is ideally positioned to at least begin to look at and examine the current global environment. So that picks up on things that Karen and Ram also talked about. It's imperative that we continue this work. It's going to be critical going forward. Large scale, empirical, database-driven research is not going to be able to understand and address these issues. It's not capable of it. It's the wrong tool. Case method research is the right tool for the current environment.

Karen: Right. Case method speaks to the behaviours of people who did things. Students will also want to know 'what happened,' but you really can see how somebody behaved and how people reacted. I think that touches the human heart more than empirical research.

Eric: Thank you. Those are all excellent points and went in a deeper direction than I had imagined they would, so thank you very much for that. The final question for our discussion today: let's say you're at the NACRA Conference. You're speaking with someone who has a case there. Maybe it's their first time there, maybe not. They've never sent anything to CRJ before, and they're considering taking their NACRA case and sending it to CRJ. And because you're between sessions, you only have one minute with them. What do you tell them in that one minute?

Ram: If you decide to send it to CRJ, it's great and something to be proud about. But you are in it for the long haul. It's very unlikely it's going to get through on the first submission. You are going to go through revisions, but remember that at each step of the way, the reviewers and the editor are really supportive, they want to see improvement in the case, and they want to see it published, so they are willing to work with you. If you're prepared for that, then I think it's something that you should consider strongly.

Karen: I say go to many sessions as you can, and do not sit at lunch next to people you know. Meet some folks who you don't know, and chat about your case. Get some 'cold' input from that, and on the way home, whatever you're doing, go back to the big lessons you learned that now are going to make your case, that you're working on right now, that much better.

Randall: And I would say: don't quit because you don’t think you can do it, and don't let them tell you that you can't write cases. Neither of those things are true. Keep going.