

Conference News

VOTES, BRIBES, AND VIDEOTAPE. STUDENT TEAMS TAKE ON FIFA'S LEADERSHIP SCANDAL DURING THE ILA STUDENT CASE COMPETITION

by Chelsea LeVander, ILA Intern; Senior Communications Major, University of Maryland

Teams from Gonzaga University and Alvernia University emerged as the winners of the 2015 Student Case Competition held at ILA's annual global conference in Barcelona last October. Gonzaga took home the prize for the undergraduate division, and Alvernia won in the graduate division.

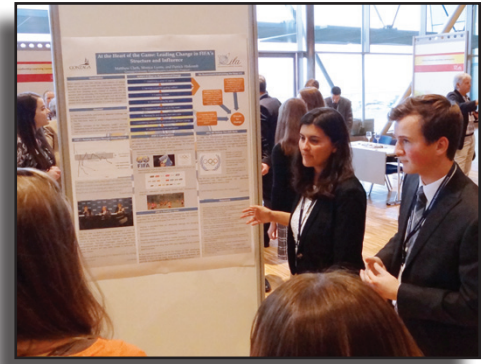
Organized by ILA's Leadership Education Member Interest Group (LEMIG), the yearly Case Competition brings together teams of students to face-off in an event where they analyze and develop a specific set of strategic recommendations that address key issues in a real world case involving contemporary leadership issues. At stake is a \$1,000 cash prize per winning team and bragging rights for the next year. At the closing plenary of the conference, amidst suspense and applause, the LEMIG reveals the winning team from each division, inviting them on stage to receive their award and accolades from conference attendees.

The case, "Votes, Bribes, and Videotape," was written by ILA Member Todd Murphy, Associate Director at the Center for Leadership at Northwestern University. According to Murphy, the case was about "[t]he arrest of seven top FIFA officials in Zurich this past May [which] brought calls for the resignation of President Sepp Blatter and renewed demands for reform within football's [soccer's] pre-eminent global governing body." The challenge for students was to decide whether reform should be called for and why. Students needed to explain the dynamics and leadership of FIFA at the time and then recommend things that could be done to "minimize the harm done and maximize the reputation and responsibilities FIFA has to its constituents."

This case proved particularly challenging due to the fact that major decisions were being made and events were unfolding throughout the competition period. With the conference taking place in mid-October, the timing of the case required teams to keep current and stay watchful. LEMIG Chair,

Elizabeth Stork, noted that "competition was fierce with close scores on the poster presentations in the competition's first round."

Gonzaga's winning undergraduate team consisted of three members —Monica Lyons, Matthew Clark, and Patrick Holcomb — and was advised by Gonzaga's Director of the Comprehensive Leadership Program, Josh Armstrong. When asked about his team's experience at the conference Armstrong shared, "ILA's annual Case Competition has been an important learning experience for undergraduate leadership students at Gonzaga for the past three years. It is an excellent opportunity to take leadership content and apply it to real world challenges.... A student recently told me that this case study competition was one of the academic experiences that he was most proud of."



Team Gonzaga presents their poster, "At the Heart of the Game: Leading Change in FIFA's Structure and Influence"



Team Alvernia pose by their case competition poster, "Leading Across Borders for a Sustainable Future"

Gonzaga's team has every reason to be proud. They were judged to have given a "very impressive" academic presentation with "convincing theory and examples." Their analysis demonstrated knowledge of the issues even up to the last minute as FIFA kept making the news.

Competing without a faculty advisor, Patti Brenner, Tracy Brown, and Brian Petersen won the graduate division for Alvernia University. In addition to delivering a well-organized presentation, the Alvernia team "clearly identified issues

and used theory to support practice," according to Stork. Speakers were energetic and passionate about the case and, "formulated an action plan that addressed more than 20 leadership principles."

For all students, participation in the Case Competition is an amazing opportunity to further develop communication and leadership skills, expand their network of leadership colleagues, and make the most out of their ILA conference experience.



Brian Petersen

Petersen reflected on his team's ability to successfully communicate and coordinate, despite challenges that arose. "Each member brought to the team different technical strengths and different perspectives on the case. Through communication and effort we were able to include everyone's ideas and work together through our analysis, design, development, and implementation of the process."

Matthew Clark of Gonzaga and Patricia Brenner of Alvernia remembered the networking opportunities they took advantage of at the conference. "We were able to go out to a few meals with students and professors from other universities at the competition and learn about different opportunities from them," says Clark. Brenner noted, "Before the conference even began, I participated in the pre-conference workshop titled: *Beyond Barcelona: A Pilgrimage to the Mountaintop, Monastery of Montserrat*. This was truly my 'calm before the storm' as I had the opportunity to meet conference attendees and felt very welcomed."

Walking away from the competition, members of the winning teams shared a sense of accomplishment and pride as they felt they had personally contributed to the larger leadership community.

"The biggest 'wow!' moment for me was sitting in on sessions or keynotes and feeling like a peer rather than a student," recalls Clark. Similar in sentiment, Brenner shared, "[One] memory that stands out is my participation in the Emerging Scholars Research Consortium. My mentor, Ronald Humphrey, was very encouraging and helpful.... This experience fostered confidence in myself as a future researcher and scholar."

Witnessing the application of theory and classroom material in the real world was another key take away shared amongst the winners.

Gonzaga University's Monica Lyons wrote, "Meeting with influential leaders around the world and listening to them talk about the same leadership theories I've discussed in class is a testament that leadership can be seen everywhere. It was encouraging to see successful leaders still applying the leadership theory I've learned in my comprehensive leadership program." Clark added, "I felt like I had a grasp on all of these leadership theories I've been studying for the last three and a half years, and being able to see them in practice and have conversations about leadership with professionals was incredible."



Monica Lyons

Team advisor Josh Armstrong echoed the importance of real world application for eliciting special learning moments. "I am always surprised by how students engage with theory in ways that would not have occurred to me.... We believe it is very important for the students to own the entire process, so they see their success as a result of the hard work they have put in."



Josh Armstrong

If you are thinking of forming or supporting a team for this year's competition in Atlanta, heed the following advice from Brian Petersen, "hold on tight to inspiring visions, be open, and respond appropriately to feedback."



Runner-up Miznah Alomair from Chapman University shares her team's poster with attendee Omer Badawood of King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia

Participate in the 2016 Student Case Competition

Students, start forming your teams now for ILA's 2016 Student Case Competition. Details on this year's registration deadline are forthcoming, but traditionally teams must be formed before they receive the case in September. Interested in serving as a judge? Contact the LEMIG leadership team at leadershipeducation@ila-net.com.