

ECCC Competition Report - Alexandra

Where do I begin when talking about the ECCC? When I tried out back on November 1st it felt like the competition was light-years away. I couldn't wait to get started working on cases and training for the event. I remember being introduced to Lafi in December, but then the weeks slipped away as did the members of the team. Before I realized it I found myself prepping a warm up case just 3 weeks before the event. The three other members of the team were late recruits given that everyone else had apparently dropped out. I had no idea what to expect... So I just went with it.

We had a team meeting on the Saturday before ECCC where 3/4 of us met up with an engineering student who competed in ECCC the year before. A close friend of mine who also competes in case comps came to the meeting to offer us some general advice. It was at this point that we realized we were very underprepared going into the competition. Nether Keerthana nor I had ever done case competitions before and could very much have used a few training sessions with some commerce students ahead of time. At this point we learned that we would be staying in the hotel during the week, and that the competition was literally Tuesday to Sunday straight. This was a bit of a surprise since neither of us had been given much information to draw from. So again, we just went with it.

We often found that we had not been provided with sufficient or clear information about the competition before and even during the event. I had a hard time determining where the communication breakdown occurred but we often felt we didn't really know what was going on. One interesting thing that happened was at the first cocktail when we were meeting teams, we learned that other teams had coaches! We found this a bit odd since none of us had been told we could retain one. If we had known ahead of time perhaps we could have brought one. Oh well. Just go with it.

When I learned that my team members felt equally as out of the loop, I decided just to dive in and have faith that it would all work out.

I guess this was probably the theme of the ECCC week for me: have faith. We were a team of 4 very diverse people who had never really met before, let alone worked together. We had heard stories that the engineering and commerce students would yell at one another in the prep rooms, but we pledged that this wouldn't happen. We are all hard working, smart individuals, but I think the most important thing that we possessed was the ability to trust in one another. It sounds weird to say since we had literally just met, but somehow it just worked out. One thing I think worked to our advantage was that rather than spending too much time worrying about practicing in the short window before the competition, we just got to know each other. Staying in the same room at the competition also made a huge difference for us because it allowed us to reflect at the end of the day and bond as a team. Coming out of the first day we were in first place - we led McGill by 6 points. This was an amazing way to bond as a team after the first day. Then we got absolutely crushed in the second round. The case had specifically detailed that it had an emphasis on marketing and so we focused on that. But it is important to remember that since it is ECCC the engineering judge will still have a rubric for engineering elements so you have to be creative in the way you sell the engineering portion.

Having been beaten down after the second round, we reflected, went out with the other teams and let off a whole lot of steam. The next morning we woke up a bit groggy but we were prepared to pour our hearts and souls into the third case. I would be surprised if anyone worked as diligently and productively as us in those 10 hours. Probably the most fantastic thing about the grind of the third day was that by the end we couldn't stop laughing at each others' jokes because we were so tired. I think more importantly than anything else it is important to have a team with chemistry. This is really what made my time at ECCC memorable.

With regards to recruitment I found myself thinking that next year's team would benefit from having the following:

1. Commerce: the team must have case experience. This helped us so much. It was always the commerce students who took care of the slide deck. At least one member should be in third or fourth year finance. Other member should be in marketing. As these were usually what the cases required. Our team consisted of two finance students, which worked fine because they were adaptable. But two of the cases did require a significant amount of marketing. Ability to do cash flow and ROI calculations is definitely a plus. Jordan was very strong with this.

2. Engineering: it would be good to have one team member with solid works background. But do not emphasize this too much because neither Keerthana nor I knew it. I know one team during the competition who had one engineer spend the whole day on a render that crashed before the presentation...then they had nothing to present. The most important aspect for the engineering side is that the engineers are able to communicate with the commerce students and that they have some base knowledge of business and the broader application of technology. The final case was less about coming up with a technical fix and more about understanding the broader framework within which the case was placed. Industrial engineers are also a strong with for this competition.

I would say aim to make the team as multidisciplinary as possible. But the most important thing hands down is team chemistry. All of the judges made the comment to us about how important that is, and we agreed. We had the chemistry by total fluke, but in the future if you're able to try out the commerce and engineering students together I believe that would really be best

Main Take away for ECA

1. Hold tryouts early but not too early because then it gives people a chance to drop out
2. Have an info pack at tryouts: cost of enrolment (\$350), dates (these need to be blocked off as you will be staying at the hotel), rough timeline (first practice case due dec 1, second practice case due jan 1,etc)
3. If at all possible have the commerce students and engineering students try out together. It's really important that you build a team for the competition not half a team.

Thank you very much for your support for this event. It was a highlight of my time at Concordia!

- How has this experience enhanced your engineering skills/knowledge?

It helped me to better understand how my engineering skills will fit in with real world challenges. It was interesting to realize what the gaps in my education are and what will be expected of me from business counterparts. It definitely has made me more aware of the importance of being able to convince others of engineering decisions that need to be made and how best to communicate those challenges to non-engineers.

- What are the lessons learned and how can you improve upon these lessons?

I learned that it is very important to trust in my team. There is not enough time to audit everything that your team members do, so you have to be willing to trust that the work that they've done is quality and sufficient.

- What does this competition mean to you? (each person's input)

This competition was about taking a step back from technical requirements and better understanding what the overall challenges were. Often the case asked very specific questions, and the engineers wanted to jump right in with a technical solution. Often the best solution is one that the team came up with together and was a good balance of soft skills and technical needs.

- What would you like the ECA to improve upon next year?

I was not aware when I tried out that there was a \$300 fee involved. I probably would not have tried out if I had known that that was the case. Given that I support myself, \$300 was a lot of money to put out of pocket especially given that I only found out at the beginning of January about it.

The communication could also have been improved significantly - we only found out AT the competition that we could have had a coach. This would have been nice to know ahead of time. Luckily most of our team was experienced so we were able to pull it together, but I am not sure I would have been very happy about that had I been a bit younger and less experienced.

There were many details going into the competition that were unclear - I only found out from my team members three days before the competition that we were staying at the hotel and that I would have to miss 3.5 days of class. Again, these were all details that I was ok with, but it would have been more professional to have received this information much farther ahead of time.