Senior Research Seminar Strategic Consulting Projects

The Projects

In teams of three, students work with local businesses and non-profits as consultants to create effective strategies. A strategy is a theory about creating a competitive advantage and the students base their strategic recommendations upon solid research. The strategic recommendations are accompanied by implementation plans and methods to assess the effectiveness of the strategy.

Win-Win

At the University of Puget Sound, we try to be responsible members of this community. While the student consulting projects are a learning experience for our seniors in Business and Leadership, we hope to add value to your organization, helping you be more successful. The student reflections from past semesters clearly indicate that helping a real organization become more successful is one of the most rewarding experiences of their college careers. Not only does this benefit your organization, it strengthens the students’ work experience and their confidence. We appreciate your active participation in this project and look forward to assisting you in moving forward.

Student Background

The student consultants are seniors in the School of Business and Leadership. While there are three slightly different majors in the school, all the students have taken courses in accounting, finance, marketing, management, law and ethics, statistics and economics. They have also taken advanced electives in the school; each student will have a deeper knowledge in a specific area of business. The students are not experts in any of the functional areas: The University of Puget Sound is a liberal arts institution, which means that we focus on a broad education that emphasizes critical thinking, research and communication.

Timeline

*Task* *Fall Term* *Spring Term*

Students receive team assignments. first week of Sept last week of Jan

Students write case about your organization, which includes

 detailed research and analysis about your internal and

 external environments. Students lead class discussion. end of Sept-mid Oct mid Feb-early Mar

Draft reports written. Prof. Claire provides feedback. mid Nov mid Apr

Students present recommendations in written and oral forms mid Nov-early Dec mid Apr-early May

Feedback to Prof. Claire from you early-mid Dec early-mid May

Confidentiality

Students sign confidentiality agreements regarding their client organizations and all the organizations studied during the term. Strong classroom norms are developed surrounding the importance of ensuring confidentiality. If there are things you share with your team that you are not comfortable having the team share with the larger classroom community, please let them know that.

Assessment

Feedback from you is essential. In addition to listening to your overall assessment of the project, Prof. Claire will ask you to provide a grade. Prof. Claire’s standards are that a B is what is expected of business seniors working on their first consulting project. C’s are appropriate for projects that were not a waste of time but did not meet your expectations. D’s and F’s are projects that were a waste of time, involved a disrespectful team of student, or were wildly off base. Prof. Claire needs to know if a project is headed down the D and F

paths (or even C) as strongly worded conversations seem to be quite effective. A’s are reserved for projects that exceed your expectations—projects you’d be willing to pay for. The grade you assign will become 10% of the students’ final grade for the project. Your feedback provides input for other portions of the grade.

Getting the Most from your Consulting Team

The following suggestions are based on Prof. Claire’s experience with student consulting projects. They may be helpful to you:

* Although the students work for free, more successful projects result when the clients treat the students the same way they would treat paid professionals: Have high expectations and be clear when you are not pleased with the direction the work is going. Go over their heads when needed.
* The student consultants work with organizations to create successful strategies. For many businesses, this means helping them become more profitable. Not all organizations, however, have the same goals. Be clear with your team about how you measure success for your organization and what outcomes you wish to achieve.
* Communicate. The students use electronic communication extensively. You may not. Let the students know how you prefer to communicate—and how often.
* Communicate in a timely fashion. Please try to call or e-mail the students back within a couple of days. If communication has become too frequent or if you feel the requests would be better in written form, let them know. Weekly meetings with the students yield the best results.
* Have one contact person. The teams should have one primary contact person for your project and it is best if you provide one primary contact person for the team.
* ***Share information freely***. This includes both information specific to your company and industry information.
	+ One of the lessons these projects try to teach is that all the disciplines (marketing, accounting, etc.) are intertwined. The students cannot create an effective marketing strategy for your organization if they do not understand the budgetary constraints. Information you will need to share (if you have them) are your business plan, your financial statements for the past three years, product/service and marketing information, and growth plans.
	+ For many projects, students have no prior knowledge of your industry. Please do not play the what-can-you-find game. These projects should be moving your company forward, so share your knowledge—particularly of industry organizations and trade magazines that may provide valuable data.
* Think about who you would like to be present at the final presentation. Some organizations choose to have only the owner/manager present, others include employees, others include investors or other stakeholders. It is your choice about who to include. We can provide a meeting space to accommodate your presentation or you may have it at another location. In most cases, you will want to allow an hour for the presentation so that any questions that arise can be answered.
* Please schedule your final presentation well in advance. At a minimum, we are coordinating the schedules of the students (three), Prof. Claire, and at least one person from your organization. The students will initiate the conversation, but if you have some dates in mind, it is helpful.
* Let Prof. Lynnette Claire know your concerns along the way (253-879-3576, lclaire@pugetsound.edu). Her role is to coach her students and to provide support to the projects. She cannot do this as effectively without your feedback.

Being Involved

If you are interested in participating in this project after considering the above information, please contact Prof. Lynnette Claire (253-879-3576, lclaire@pugetsound.edu). She will meet with you to discuss your goals, and assess whether those goals are aligned with the course goals and students’ abilities. We strive for a variety of projects and industries each term. We facilitate strategic consulting projects most terms: fall (Sept.-early Dec.) and spring (late Jan.-early May).