MBA797 Consulting Project
Assistant Professor Jim Wolfe

1. Course Objectives
MBA797, Consulting Project, is a laboratory course devoted to understanding the consulting industry and the planning, formation, and delivery of high quality consulting products. The narrow view of consulting is limited to the field of private-sector management consulting and those firms which are dedicated to its practice. A broader view acknowledges that mastery of the skills and practices required in planning, executing, and delivering a quality consulting project is useful to anyone considering a career in management, whether in the private, public, or nonprofit sectors. This class takes the broader view, while also looking at consulting industry firms.

The goal of this course is to provide an introduction to consulting as it is practiced worldwide and across industries. Students will achieve this goal by undertaking a consulting engagement for a real-world client. Readings and class discussions will prepare us for this assignment, and support our work. Our primary learning objectives are to better understand:

- The basics of the consulting industry – size, players, dynamics and history
- Consulting management – the lifecycle of consulting projects and tips for success
- Consulting deliverables – the mechanics of what constitutes “quality” consulting
- Customer satisfaction – blending together good project management and quality output to achieve the highest possible quality product & customer satisfaction

After completing MBA797, you should be able to:

- Discuss the industry coherently with those in consulting (and outsiders as well)
- Write a good proposal to obtain a consulting assignment
- Judge and edit consulting work product to achieve a high standard of quality
- Select, hire and work with an external consulting firm
- Make an informed decision about whether a career in this industry is for you

2. Course Overview
- Nature of class sessions – Over the 14 weeks of class we will devote the first half to readings, discussions and preparation; the second half to completing a real world consulting assignment. To give you maximum exposure to comprehensive views on this industry we will organize every class session to feature a short case, guest speaker, or class exercise. Outside speakers will be frequent, but because of the late scheduling I will not know in advance which speakers can join us on certain days.
- Consulting Assignment – We will select consulting clients during the first 3 week of class. You will have the entire semester to: complete an agreement with your chosen client on the scope of your assignment; conduct interviews; complete outside research; and to prepare your client recommendations and presentation.
• **Work Product Deliverables** – Your client presentation will be in two formats: a PowerPoint and a written prose document. The written assignment should be limited to 20 pages, double spaced, 11 pt. type minimum. Unlimited exhibits or attachments. Please note that you must also turn in your client engagement letter for grading.

• **Presentation** – Your team will give an oral presentation to your client. Hopefully these can be done in class; other arrangements will be made if we run out of time.

• **Research Paper** – In addition to the consulting assignment, each student must prepare one individual research paper on a topic selected from the list provided. Papers must be limited to 12 pages, double-spaced, 11-pt type. No exhibits or attachments. Research papers are due on the date indicated; they should be delivered via Blackboard so they may be shared with the entire class.

• **Exams** – there are no examinations. One Mid-Course Report (prepared individually) is required on your progress to date; feedback on the client; and feedback on your team.

3. Expectations

• **Attendance** – Come to class; we do not have much time together. Please note that class participation is not a trivial part of the grade. Since attendance is expected, you do not need to notify the professor if you need to miss a session – if you miss a class, you miss it. But you should notify your team members as a matter of professional courtesy.

• **Team work** – you are expected to be a valuable contributor to your team. Grading is based upon a combination of individual work and contribution to the team. Peer evaluations will be used at the end of the course.

• **Readings** – our readings are somewhat limited (again, because of the late schedule). Additional readings will be referenced for those who want to improve their overall mastery of the subject, and to improve their client work product. Our goal is efficiency, not exhaustion. Rely on your team members and the research papers by others in class.

9. Books


• Optional readings recommended for individual research papers are listed below.

8. Grading

Grading will be weighted:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual Research Paper (one topic)</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Peer Evaluation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consulting Assignment (team project)</td>
<td>60%</td>
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<td>Engagement Letter</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-Course Report</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written Deliverable</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>PowerPoint Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>Client Feedback</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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9. Schedule Overview (see complete reference data on readings in Section 13)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings and Guests</th>
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| 1. Mon – Aug 29 | **INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW**  
Discussion on course topics, objectives, pros/cons of career in consulting, resources at Mason and introductions | Block Chapters 1 & 18  
McKinsey Mind – Introduction, Chapter 8 |
| Mon – Sep 5 | **Labor Day – NO CLASS**               |                                                          |
| 2. Mon – Sep 12 | **Team Meetings**  
Organize teams & select company preferences | Teams will convene to select companies for semester projects. Prof Wolfe will not be available Monday; I will be available to meet others days of the week. |
| 3. Mon – Sep 19 | **THE INDUSTRY**  
Industry size, dynamics, players, sectors, solutions, and trends; Global expansion opportunities, opening of new offices, cultures, new products, online and growth | Block Chapters 2 & 3  
Final client company selections. |
| 4. Mon – Sep 26 | **ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES**  
Typical firm structure, project portfolio, career paths, and knowledge management | Student Research Papers |
| 5. Mon – Oct 3 | **MANAGING THE TEAM**  
Leadership, turnover, utilization, profitability, and assessing performance | Block Chapters 6, 7, 8 & 9  
McKinsey Mind – Chapter 6  
Student Research Papers |
| 6. Mon – Oct 10 | **THE PROJECT LIFECYCLE**  
Types of projects, the engagement lifecycle, the fly-by meeting, and sample deliverables | Block Chapters 4, 5 & 10  
McKinsey Mind – Chapters 3 & 4  
Student Research Papers |
| 7. Mon - Oct 17 | **WRITING PROPOSALS**  
The buying decision, proposals, and initial hypotheses | McKinsey Mind – Chapters 1 & 2  
Student Research Papers  
Midterm Engagement Letter Due |
| 8. Mon – Oct 24 | **INTERACTING WITH CLIENTS**  
Designing a work plan, interviews and documentation | Block Chapter 11  
McKinsey Mind – Chapters 5 – 7  
Student Research Papers |
| 9. Mon – Oct 31 | Progress review with team Individual Team Meetings | Progress review with team Individual Team Meetings |
| 10. Mon – Nov 7 | Progress review with team Individual Team Meetings | Progress review with team Individual Team Meetings |
| 11. Mon – Nov 14 | Meetings as and if needed Final report preparation | Meetings as and if needed Final Report preparation |
| 12. Mon – Nov 21 | Final Presentations (scheduled at mutual convenience of clients, team, and instructor) | Meetings as and if needed Final Report preparation |
10. Meeting Times

Class: Mondays, 4:30 – 7:10, Enterprise 277. During the dates scheduled for Team meetings you may use the classroom, or meet any other convenient place. If you would like to meet with the instructor, please use the classroom. Office Hours: Mondays, 1:30pm – 4:00pm, room 215. The best way to reach the professor is with email. Please use your GMU email account to avoid spam filters.

11. Individual Research Paper

- **Purpose** – this individual exercise will afford you the opportunity to demonstrate competency in practicing one of the critical elements in consulting – writing and delivering a work product for a consulting engagement. It is a skill building opportunity.
- **Requirements** – you will be asked to research a topic, write a cogent summary, and deliver it in person to the class. You will deliver a written report via BlackBoard by the start of the class.
- **Assessment** – the evaluation criteria for the written proposal will be: (i) content – addressed all key issues, (ii) reflected insights from readings, (iii) provided a convincing argument; and (iv) writing mechanics.

12. Written Engagement Letter

For the midterm, you must turn in your engagement letter proposal. The format may be in a slide deck or PowerPoint, or in a draft business letter. Please turn in a printed copy.

Your proposal slide deck can be no more than 10 typed pages (excluding any additional attachments or appendices). The font size should be at least 12 pt or larger to ensure readability. Your proposal should creatively and carefully cover the following topics:

**ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER INCLUDING IN YOUR ENGAGEMENT LETTER PROPOSAL**
*(the order, style, emphasis and content of these elements can vary)*

**INTRODUCTION:** Expression of appreciation for the opportunity to serve the company, and indication of the strengths of your consulting team.

**BACKGROUND & UNDERSTANDING:** Demonstration of the group's understanding of the client's situation and the reasons consulting assistance is needed.
OBJECTIVES & SCOPE: Identification of the goals and objectives of the project and targets to be met. This section would also include a definition of the boundaries of the work to be performed.

APPROACH & WORK PLAN/PROCESS: Description of the team’s overall work approach and the deliverables (reports, briefings, training sessions, etc.) the client will receive. Typically the work plan would include a description of each task and a chart showing the sequencing of tasks and the timeline for implementation.

TIMING & FEES: Indication of when the job will be done, how many hours it will take, and how much it would cost *(IF WE WERE CHARGING, WHICH WE ARE NOT)*, the nature of the fee structure (fixed fee based on hours; fixed fee based on overall project, contingent fees, etc.), and what the payment schedule would be (lump sum, staggered payments, etc.). Two other items are generally included in this portion of the proposal: cancellation fees and cost of follow-up/implementation work.

CONCLUSION: The final section of the proposal would include closing remarks including a statement of thanks to the client for providing this opportunity to submit a proposal. This section would also include a statement about “next steps” and a signature block, to be used in the event the client accepts the proposal.

ATTACHMENTS/APPENDICES: There are generally two types of materials, which are included in this section of the proposal: (1) general firm information and (2) specific client/project materials.

An example of an attachment that fits the first category is a firm brochure and/or statement of qualifications. This brochure would help explain why your firm is qualified to perform the work based on the firm’s previous experience and special expertise. General firm information might also include resumes of senior staff assigned to the project with emphasis on their experience and if appropriate their work on any similar projects.

The second type of appendix information (specific client/project materials) might include charts, tables, diagrams, etc. that the consulting team feels are necessary to support the proposal.

*Note: Any appendices/attachments included will not be counted as part of the 10-page proposal limit*
13. BOOKS ON CONSULTING (FOR YOUR FUTURE REFERENCE)

The following books are not required reading, but may prove helpful for those individuals who are interested in learning more about consulting.


