EDWARDS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
THE WILSON CENTRE FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL EXCELLENCE
UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

MBA 992.3 – Management Consulting Project

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Course Overview

This course is designed to lead students through the management consulting process, including developing and presenting a consulting proposal and then completing the consulting project. Students will learn how to specify business research questions, propose appropriate methods of researching the questions, analyze the results of the research, and present conclusions and recommendations. Real external business clients are expected for each consulting group (may be one or more students in a group, depending on the size of the consulting project), including a students' employers, but exceptions may be made for students who wish to research their own business enterprise. The most common types of business research requested by clients have been marketing research studies, business plans, feasibility studies, and industry opportunity surveys.

Pre-requisites: MBA 803.3 Business and Society; MBA 841.2 Entrepreneurship and Business Planning; MBA 807.2 Financial Statement Analysis; MBA 825.3 Financial Management; MBA 805.2 Managing Organizations – Value through People
MBA 833.2 Marketing for Organizational Decision-Making;
MBA 837.2 Marketing Research for Decision-Making
Permission of the Director of the MBA program is required.

Mode of Instruction

The approach will be to learn by doing a management consulting project. Projects can be carried out by individuals or teams of 2, 3, or 4 students, depending on the size and complexity of the project. Each individual and/or team will complete a project for a business client.

The Wilson Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence will administer and deliver the Management Consulting Project course. The Wilson Centre will solicit real consulting projects from business, government and not-for-profit organizations, for which the clients will pay a fee for project completion. After an initial workshop on management consulting, MBA students will choose their projects, meet with the clients to develop a work plan, and then complete the projects, all under the direction and guidance of Wilson Centre faculty. There will be flexibility in project choice and completion time. If approved, a student can solicit and complete a project for their employer, an organization of interest, or their own personal business interests. Full-time students will normally begin their projects in January to be completed by the end of August; however, all students have the flexibility of starting and finishing their projects on a schedule that works best for them and their client.

Course Activities

Introductory Lecture: The management consulting process, guest consultants
Just-in-Time learning: students will have to get up to speed on the particular tools they need to complete the work plan. This might include statistical tools, computer programs, or other business analysis techniques.
Project Work: developing the proposal, carrying out the work plan, analyzing the results, drawing conclusions, formulating recommendations and drafting the final consulting report.

Proposal - Due April 30
The proposal must include the following:

<u>Consulting Project Proposal Outline</u>
1.0 Introduction - description and scope of project, project objectives, research questions
2.0 Background and Literature Review
3.0 Methodology - detailed description of how the project will be carried out.
4.0 Time Frame - deadlines for each phase of the project.
5.0 Project Budget
6.0 Work Team - background and qualifications of each team member.

The proposal will be reviewed by the faculty advisor and the client (likely a presentation to the client) who will have the opportunity to request changes. Once the proposal is accepted, it becomes the consulting contract.

Completed Project - Due August 30
The completed project must include the following (there can be variations, depending on the type of project):

<u>Final Consulting Report Outline</u>
Cover Page
Executive Summary
Table of Contents (must include List of Tables, List of Figures, and Appendix Titles)
1.0 Introduction
2.0 Background
3.0 Methodology
4.0 Analysis of Results
5.0 Conclusions
6.0 Recommendations
References
Appendices

Mark Allocation
Students are graded on the proposal, the final report, how well they deal with clients and other members of their research group and the level of professionalism displayed during the consulting process. As much as possible, the final report should be a collaborative effort between the student research team, other MBA student colleagues, members from the business community, the instructor, other faculty members, and the client. However, strict confidentiality must be maintained for clients so students must have permission before they discuss their projects with others. Students will be required to assess their own performance and that of their team members. This assessment will be used by the instructor in setting final grades.

Project Ethics Approval

Each student project will require university ethics approval before it can commence. Applying for ethics approval is a two-step process. Step one is providing the university ethics officer with a one-page project description, which will be used to determine whether a full ethics review is required. If the university ethics officer determines that there are no ethical issues involved, the project can proceed without going through the full ethics review. If it is decided that a full ethics review is required, step two is completing and submitting the required forms to the university ethics committee for review. The project can commence once the university ethics officer provides a letter of approval.

Academic Dishonesty

Students are expected to have read and understood the rules regarding academic dishonesty which are posted on the University of Saskatchewan website at:
http://www.usask.ca/university_council/reports/09-27-99.shtml

MBA 992
Consulting Project Completion Process

1.0 Pre-Commencement

- Review the terms of reference and complete a preliminary assessment of the research questions, methodology, and informational requests.

2.0 Organize First Meeting with the Client

- Introductions.
- Finalize the terms of reference - exactly what is the problem, what are the research questions and the objectives of the consulting project? The importance of this step cannot be over-emphasized. Sometimes you will be dealing with a client that may not have given this enough thought.
- Discuss optional methodologies for researching the problem.
- Arrange contact people in the client organization (phone #'s, e-mail addresses, possible meeting times, etc.) Make it clear to the clients that their involvement is necessary, especially at the proposal stage.
- Arrange to have background information supplied by the client.
- Discuss possible time frame for completion of the project.
- Discuss expected out-of-pocket expenses for the project, i.e. travel, telephone, printing, etc.

3.0 Draft Project Proposal

Section 1.0 Introduction

- Very clearly describe the client business or organization, the client's opportunity/problem (why is the research being done?), and the research questions and study objectives. Description of and the clients' agreement with the study objectives is critical. You do not want to be at the final draft stage of the project and have the clients tell you that they wanted something different. Therefore, make sure that the client is in agreement with the list of research questions at the proposal stage. The proposal can be used as the contract between yourselves and the client so you might consider including a page that requires the client to sign, which indicates that they have accepted the proposal as the contract for the research project. An example is provided below.

Proposal Agreement

This proposal represents the contract for the work to be completed for
_______client name_____.

We, ___client name___________ agree with the scope and objectives, the proposed time frame, and the estimated budget in this proposal.

____________________________ ____________________________________
Student Signature Client Signature

____
Student Signature

____
Student Signature

- The scope of the project must be limited to the time available. It is expected that each 992 student will invest approximately 150 - 200 hours into the project. Therefore, make sure that you set the scope to a workable size. There is a tendency for some clients to ask for everything to be done in one project.
- The introduction section becomes the basis for the whole report so it should give the reader a clear idea of why the report is being prepared and what questions are being addressed.

Section 2.0 Background and Literature Review

- Provide background information on the client and industry.
- What has led up to this opportunity/problem, what has caused the opportunity/problem, why is it an opportunity/problem, etc.
- Let the reader know where the organization has been, where it is now, and where it wants to go.
- Any other similar studies done for this client or others? If so, describe what they did, how they did it, and what their results and conclusions were.
- Any Statistics Canada or other information that can be used to illustrate the problem?

Section 3.0 Methodology

- Explain clearly how the research will be done.
- What analytical tools will be used, statistical testing, computer or mathematical models, etc.
- If a survey instrument is to be used, it must be provided in the proposal, in detail. For each survey question you must provide an explanation of exactly what information is being sought and why it is important for the study. Also clearly describe how the responses to the survey questions will be summarized (statistics) and how the results will be presented (graphs, charts, tables, etc.).
- Describe the population and provide an explanation of sample size selection and sampling technique.
- If a focus group will be used, describe the process, participants, questions and objectives.

- If key informant interviews will be used, explain who will be interviewed and the questions to be asked.
- For the methodology chosen, provide a complete description of the analysis of results that will be performed and how the results will be presented. Remember that you are working towards a clear set of conclusions and recommendations for the report.
- If the project is a business plan or feasibility study, provide a brief summary of the standard process used.

Section 4.0 Time Frame

	Date
Project Initiation Meeting	
Draft Proposal Completed	
Final Proposal Accepted	
Data Collected (Survey Completed)	
Analysis of Results Completed	
Draft Report Completed	
Final Report Submitted	

- Your MBA 992 consulting project can be started at any time but it must be completed by August 30 if you intend to graduate in the fall. There are no other time restrictions except the ones you and your client put on the project. You will **not** receive a final grade for 992 until the project is completed, regardless of whether you have planned to graduate at the end of the semester. The project must be completed in good form before you receive a final grade, after which you are eligible to graduate.

Section 5.0 Project Budget

- Include the estimated costs of the project that will be charged to the client.

Section 6.0 Project Team

- Provide CV’s and indicate work responsibilities, if appropriate.

4.0 Review of Draft Proposal

- The 992 instructor and the client will review the draft proposal.
- Changes will be requested to make the research project as useful as possible to the client.
- This is the client’s chance to finalize the scope and nature of the project. Make it very clear to the client that this is their last chance to change the focus and direction of the study. Once the proposal is accepted, you will be following the work plan described and the client cannot expect to make changes later.

5.0 Final Proposal Presented

- Includes agreed upon changes by project team members, instructor, and client.
- The final proposal becomes the contract for the project.

6.0 Apply Research Methodology

- Collect and analyze secondary and primary data as outlined in the methodology section of the proposal. The results must be very clearly outlined for the reader, in a form that the reader will understand.
- Consider conclusions and recommendations based on the results and discussions with the client.

- After you have analyzed results, the instructor and the client should be involved in the discussion of conclusions and recommendations. When the final report is presented to the client, there should be no surprises. The project should be a collaborative effort between the student researchers, the instructor, and the client.

7.0 Draft of the Project Report

- Sections 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0 of the proposal should become the first three sections of the project report with very minor changes (i.e. change from future tense 'will' to present or past tense). There is often no need to re-write (just edit) these sections so keep that in mind when you are drafting the proposal.
- Consider presentation form - charts, graphs, writing style, etc. Always consider what is best for the client. Do not underestimate the importance of presentation. Your final report must be professionally completed with **zero** grammar errors, good sentence structure, and a writing style that is easy to follow.
- Writing style should be "clear, clean, and crisp". Do not use words that readers will not understand (or if you do, make sure they are defined for the reader). If you use acronyms, make sure they are defined the first time they are used. Do not use 20 words when you can use 5 to make a point.
- The draft report need only be stapled, not bound.
- Include an executive summary (see proposed table of contents). The executive summary must include 1) opportunity or problem to be addressed and objectives, 2) very brief description of the methodology, and 3) summary of results, conclusions, and recommendations.
- Detailed items can be included in appendices, such as the survey instrument, comments from open-ended questions, financial models or other data.

8.0 Presentation and Review of Draft Report

- Present draft report to client and discuss findings and conclusions.
- Instructor and client review draft report.
- Changes will be requested, however, they should be minor at this point if you have been in regular contact with your client throughout the research process.
- Always write the draft as if it were the final document. Do not submit a report to the client or instructor that is not final. That means there should not be grammar errors, everything should be included, and everything should be in good form.
- Students will be graded on the complete research process as opposed to just the final report; however, MBA 992 is not completed until the final report is presented to the client.

9.0 Final Report

- Complete final report based on agreed upon changes to the draft.
- Bind final report and present to client. The binding will be done by printing services and the covers will be provided by the instructor.

10.0 Formatting and Editing

- Use the standard numbering system for report - do not include sections that are not numbered. The standard numbering system is: 1.0, 2.0, etc. for the main heads, 1.1, 1.2 etc. for sub-heads, 1.1.1, 1.1.2, etc.
- The table of contents must include reasonable detail as well as a list of tables, a list of figures, and a list of appendices, as applicable. Each appendix should have its own cover page.
- Use full justification, do not indent paragraphs, use line spacing of 1.5, and use font size 11 or 12.

- Include a header and footer in the documents. The header should include the project title and the client's name. The footer should be **MBA 992 Edwards School of Business and The Wilson Centre for Entrepreneurial Excellence, University of Saskatchewan**.
- Page numbers should be bottom right hand corner.
- The first page of the report should include the project title and below that include; prepared for: (client name)   prepared by: (student names)
- Every table and figure in the document must have a number and a title and be referred to in the List of Tables and List of Figures.
- Use footnote, not endnotes.
- Use references, where applicable. In the text body, the reference should be at the end of the sentence, like this (Painter, 2007). A separate reference page should be included just before the appendices, which lists the full references. For example;

Painter, Marvin J. (2007). "A Comparison of the Dairy Industries in Canada and New Zealand" *Journal of International Farm Management*. Journal of the International Farm Management Association. Vol. 4, No. 1, Pages 1 – 20. June 2007.

Statistics Canada (1999). The Assets and Debts of Canadians: An overview of the results of the Survey of Financial Security. Catalogue no. 13-595-XIE

Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (2006). *Agricultural Statistics*. Department of Agriculture, Government of Saskatchewan, Regina, Saskatchewan.

- The Executive Summary must provide the reader with a summary of the report. There is no specified length for the executive summary since it is not an abstract. If 5 pages are required to give the readers a proper summary of the report, then use 5 pages. If it can be done in 2 pages, then use 2 pages. Remember, many busy people read executive summaries only so make sure you use it wisely.
- Since this will be a business report, use point and bullet form where appropriate. For example, suppose that you have derived 5 major conclusions from your research and you have a recommendation to go with each conclusion. Business readers would like to see in your document **Conclusion #1:** followed by **Recommendation #1:**, and so on for all five. This approach is very organized and easy to follow. It also allows the reader to later refer to conclusions or recommendations by number.
- Each team member should be involved in the editing. Before you submit a draft for review, it should be edited by all team members. Do not submit a draft that is not in final form.