

Reflecting on Outreach and Relationship Building Through MBA Consulting Projects: A Liaison's Perspective

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Introduction:

Existing literature establishes that consulting projects integrated within the pedagogical framework in B-schools are a high impact-practice. Research and case studies in business education have shown that student consulting projects allow students to apply skills developed in classes to solve a real business problem (Phillips, 2010). How can librarians support students and faculty as they embark on a real-life consultancy project? One pragmatic avenue is the involvement of a business librarian prior to the inception or at the outset of a student-led consulting project. Canziani and Tullar (2017) suggest that librarians assume a participative role in consulting projects by providing guidance during the information seeking stage of a consulting project. However, the supportive role transcends the confines of mere information seeking. During my initial tenure at my current institution, a fortuitous opportunity presented itself when I was enlisted to provide support to a consulting project. This has since developed into an established practice, where my participation as a key constituent of consulting teams has become the norm within the business school. This piece focuses on one approach to supporting MBA consulting residencies as a way of relationship building.

The MBA consulting project

Consultancy residencies like the one offered by the Cameron School of Business (CSB) extend many advantages to both students and their respective programs (Christ, Arsenault and Gault 2015). The CSB Executive MBA program is fully online and has an Applied Learning residency course (MBA 518) designed for business professionals to expand their leadership skills by participating in one week-long international or domestic business consultancy project. The residency's consulting contingent is usually composed of a group of 6 to 23 student-consultants. Over the course of one week, MBA students convene at a local or international location to collaboratively address a real business problem. The projects are often interdisciplinary in nature; thus, the leading faculty may come from any of the disciplines within the B-school.

Genesis of the Engagement

I commenced my new role, marking a career transition, in March 2020 amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic. Initiating and cultivating relationships as a new liaison can be daunting, especially during a pandemic. However, a pivotal moment arose when I asked for and was greenlighted to join an MBA faculty meeting in the spring of 2021. This marked the beginning of a cascading effect on relationship building and support within my liaison areas. The response was overwhelmingly positive, leading to an immediate request for my involvement in the May residency program. Subsequently, a series of recurring requests followed, including invitations to join consulting teams. Typically, requests to support a consultancy project originate from the project's faculty lead, who provides key details such as the proposed date, project requirements, and the client's identity. Based on this information, I create a draft LibGuide, which is later shared during the information session. Upon confirmation of the project's scope statement and my adherence to the non-disclosure agreement, the LibGuide is shared with the students. Further, I actively participate in the first pre-planning project meeting to provide an

overview of the guide and address any questions students may have. Once the students arrive on campus or at the location of the project, I join them at the initial meeting, which typically includes the client, the faculty, and any staff advisors involved in the project. A sample schedule is provided in Figure 1.

SCHEDULE	
Monday, 8/21	7:30 8:15 Informal breakfast and introductions at Cameron Hall 8:15 9:00 Transfer to client (3811 International Blvd NE Ste 300) 9:00 11:00 Meet with [REDACTED] 11:00 11:45 Transfer to Wagoner Dining Hall 11:45 1:00 Lunch Wagoner Dining Hall 1:00 4:30 Group work 4:30 5:30 Individual time 6:00 Dinner at Circa 1922 (8 N Front St, Wilmington, NC 28401)
Tuesday, 8/22	8:00 Meet at Cameron Hall 8:30 9:00 Transfer to Port of Wilmington 9:00 11:00 Tour of Port of Wilmington 11:30 12:00 Transfer to The Shore Dining Hall 12:00 1:00 Lunch The Shore Dining Hall 1:00 5:00 Group work at Cameron Hall
Wednesday, 8/23	8:30 11:00 Group work at Cameron Hall breakfast provided 11:00 12:30 Lunch in Cameron Hall 12:30 5:00 Group work 5:30 Individual dinner 7:00 Wilmington Water Tours (212 S Water St, Wilmington, NC 28401)
Thursday, 8/24	8:30 11:00 Group work at Cameron Hall breakfast provided 11:00 12:30 Lunch in Cameron Hall 12:30 2:00 Group work in Cameron Hall 2:00 3:30 Practice presentation in Cameron Hall 3:30 5:00 Group work in Cameron Hall
Friday, 8/25	8:30-11:00 Final touches and second practice presentation breakfast provided 11:00-1:00 Lunch in Cameron Hall 1:00-2:00 Individual time 2:00-4:00 Formal presentation at Cameron Hall 4:00-6:00 Individual time 6:00 Closing dinner at City Club (23 S 2nd St, Wilmington, NC 28401)

Figure 1. Sample Schedule. O. Chapman

May 2 – 7, 2021	B2B/CSR/Logistics	Hybrid/Prague, Czech Republic	541614/Logistics and Integrated Supply Chain
Jan 10-14, 2022	B2B Marketing/Distributors	Wilmington NC, USA	541614/Physical distribution
May 16-20, 2022	Corporate Housing	United Kingdom, England	721310/Rooming and Boarding
May 8-12, 2023	Manufacturing/ESG	Prague, Czech Republic	322230/Stationery Manufacturing
August 22-26, 2022	Manufacturing/Career marketing promotion/Assessment Metrics	Wilmington NC, USA	3333/Industrial Machinery
August 21 -25, 2023	Foreign Market Analysis/ Custom Product Exports	Wilmington NC, USA	339100/Medical Equipment and Supply

Figure 2. Brief Consultancy Project Details. O. Chapman

The Multifaceted Impact of Consulting Project Involvement

The extensive and varied opportunities resulting from my engagement have been substantial. These include, but are not limited to, co-supervising a Data Lab Manager at the B-school, serving as an ex-officio member of a committee representing all business departments, expanding collaborations, engaging with students and faculty, obtaining new databases, participating in consulting projects both locally and internationally, and much more. Griner et al. (2015) expressed a similar experience with their engagement on a study abroad program. They stated, “The potential for collaborations between librarians and faculty to develop highly impactful international courses is tremendous (p. 204).” These activities reflect a broad range of involvement and relationship building within the B-school and the larger academic community.

Conclusion

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Ultimately, the participation of a business librarian in an MBA consulting project enriches the project's quality, depth, and rigor. We offer our specialized knowledge and expertise in information retrieval, research, and ethical considerations which can assist student-consultants in providing clients with well-informed and efficient consulting services. This collaborative approach not only ensures the integration of academic rigor and practical applicability but also fosters relationship building.

References

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