

Multidisciplinary Environmental Sustainability Problem-Solving Course, Spring 2011

Crosslisted as BUSI 698 & CONS 680

INSTRUCTORS: Dr. Karen Lips, Director of CONS, and Melissa Carrier, Executive Director Center for Social Value Creation

In teams of 4 to 6 students, MBA students from the University of Maryland's Smith School of Business collaborate with MS students from the Program in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development (CONS) to solve complex problems or research new initiatives in Environmental Sustainability. This is a new course that marries the business skills learned in the MBA program with the environmental knowledge of sustainability issues developed in the CONS program to produce students with critical thinking skills, creative problem-solving abilities, and the ability to communicate with leaders in both fields.

THIS IS A REAL CONSULTING PROJECT

Obviously, each project is different, catered to the needs of the clients and their companies. The projects deal with the challenging issues companies face across various business structures with regard to Environmental Sustainability. Students confront issues in traditional business areas (e.g., finance, marketing, strategy, management and organization, logistics and transportation, human resources, and information technology) as well concerns related to environmental impact and sustainability (e.g., environmental impact, carbon trading, recycling, waste production, green supply chains). Our unique approach encourages students to work in partnership across disciplines, a process which produces a fuller understanding of the beliefs and values held by multiple stakeholders and which will stimulate novel insights and solutions. As a result, student consulting teams devise innovative solutions that address novel and emerging legal, financial, and ethical challenges needed to address environmental sustainability issues. All consulting projects last through the entire 14 week semester (approximately 600 hours).

THEY'RE MORE THAN STUDENTS, THEY'RE PROFESSIONALS

We know you wouldn't open up your company to just anyone, but you can trust that you'll receive outstanding service from our students. Before joining our program, MBA students worked with top companies in diverse industries, including information technology, telecommunications, banking, government, accounting, and consumer products. They're talented, they have an average of five to seven years of work experience. They were handpicked to study in the nationally recognized MBA program at the Robert H. Smith School of Business. CONS students are similarly talented, forming an international group with diverse backgrounds and cultures, each with several years of professional experience working with non-profits, non-governmental organizations, governmental agencies, and other national and international environmental groups. Last year our teams worked on two projects related to public-private partnerships, one client was a large international development organization, and the other was a US Federal Agency.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION

For more than 20 years both the Smith School and the CONS program have partnered with organizations, big and small, to provide consulting services based on the latest tools and management theories. Student teams work under the direct supervision of nationally prominent faculty members. Due to the highly selective admissions process in both programs, you may be assured of a multidisciplinary team of bright young professionals.

CLIENT ROLES & COMMITMENTS

The project must have an executive-level champion. The champion may assign another individual, often a direct report, to be the contact person with the students. This contact person should have sufficient 'clout' to open doors to other knowledge centers inside and outside the organization. The client's contact person should not be a clerical or administrative staff member. A backup contact person should be identified to prevent continuity loss should the primary contact leave the project for any reason (transfer, reassignment, extended travel, etc). The primary contact person in the client organization should be available to commit three to five hours per week assisting the student team during the course of the project. This will normally take the form of meeting attendance, phone, and e-mail communication. Student access to this person is vital to the project success; therefore they should be assigned or designated with availability in mind.

The executive champion and relevant peers should expect to spend two hours or so with the team and faculty advisor at an initial meeting confirming project scope and expectations. Subsequent meetings at the executive level will be two-fold, a mid-project progress report and final oral presentation at the end of the semester. Total senior management commitment time is typically 20 hours over the 14-week project term.

The teams receive a \$300 budget to cover travel, copy costs, etc. The client organization agrees to cover any project expenses exceeding \$300.

TIMELINE: 2011

Clients and projects confirmed	Smith School & CONS Program	By November 15 th
Project description, outline of proposed deliverables, champion & contact names, background company info	Client (with assistance from Smith School & CONS Program as needed)	December 15th
Student teams finalized	Smith School & CONS Program	December 15th
Spring Semester begins	UMD	January 24th
Students determine team assignments	Students/Faculty Advisors	February 5 th
Clients contacted for initial meeting with team	Students/Faculty Advisors	By February 12 th

Initial meeting between client, student team and faculty advisor	All	By February 18 th
Letter of engagement due to client	Students	By March 1 st
Mid-project presentation to client	All	By April 1st
Final presentation to client; Final report Due	All	By May 13 th

For more information, please visit: <http://www.rhsmith.umd.edu/mbaconsulting/> and <http://chemlife.umd.edu/cons>