Business Consulting – BA 795

Contact Information:

**Faculty Instructors:**
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**Business Consulting Administrative Coordinator:**
- Emon Downhour
  - Department: Graduate Business Career Management Center
  - Office: EBA 336; M-F 8:00-4:30
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When contacting us – please add “BA 795 – ‘project name’” as the Subject of the email. We will respond as soon as possible, but it may take as long as 24 hours as we are also working on other projects. Please re-contact us if you do not receive a response within 24 hours.

**Class Days:** Thursdays
**Class Times:** 7:00 – 8:50
**Class Location:** EBA 437/ EBA 256
**Office Hours:** By appointment

**Course Description:**

BA 795, the MBA Culminating Experience, is designed so that students apply knowledge and skills that they have learned in the MBA program and professionally to a specific “consulting” project. Participating organizations pay a fee to the College of Business Administration (CBA) to take part in this program. The CBA uses this program as a way to extend and maintain good relationships with these organizations, increasing the market value of the MBA degree from SDSU. We believe participation in this endeavor, though may be challenging at times, will be a rewarding and fulfilling experience.

**Required Text:**


**Goals and Learning Outcomes:**

MBA students will graduate having a solid foundation in theoretical concepts and managerial skills needed to lead business organizations; an ability to analyze environments in which managers make and implement business decisions; and an ability to formulate, communicate, and coordinate strategies to solve business problems and pursue opportunities. BA 795 contributes to these goals through its student learning outcomes: After completing this course, you should be able to:
1) Summarize the organizational managerial context of the business decision.
2) Determine the appropriate information needed to arrive at business recommendations.
3) Determine the methodologies needed to obtain the required information from both primary and secondary resources.
4) Implement the appropriate methodologies in a semester-long research project.
5) Analyze the collected information to arrive at sound managerial recommendations.
6) Write a sound research report for presentation to management.
7) Orally present the research results to management in a well-organized, professional presentation.
8) Be a productive member of a research team tasked with solving a decision problem.
9) Mitigate interpersonal problems that exist in the research team setting.

**Professionalism:**

Various components of BA 795 comprise the “Culminating Experience” requirement that all graduate degree candidates must satisfy. This is a project oriented course and everyone is expected to contribute significantly to all elements of the project’s components and act professionally in all aspects related to the assigned project. This includes, but is not limited to: maintaining confidentiality of the information provided by the client, keeping scheduled meetings with clients, and giving the expected level of efforts needed toward the conclusion of the project. If requested by client, each team member may be required to sign a confidentiality agreement. All work that are submitted to the client, teammates, and the instructors should reflect the best possible efforts, and be free from typographical, spelling and grammatical errors.

**Time Commitment:**

The operational standard used by the CBA for this type of course is roughly 12-15 hours per week, which is 150-180 hours during the term. This time will be spent either in class, working directly with the client, or on some project-related activity. Typical projects require 400-600 hours of consulting time to complete and it is not unusual to see projects that require many more hours to complete. Each student should plan to budget 100-150 hours of project time (in addition to class time).

**Contribution:**

The course requirements are structured similar to a consulting firm, and as such, all members of a team are expected to contribute their fair share to the project. Peer evaluations will be collected twice over the term to assess the work of each team member. Although rare, it is possible for a team, on the vote of a majority of its members, to “fire” or drop a teammate (after consultation with the supervising instructor). Before a team “fires” a member, a written notice of the team’s evaluation of the member’s work must be presented to the individual involved and to the supervising instructor so that an attempt can be made to remedy the situation. After the written notice to the team member and allowing for sufficient time for correction, the individual can be “fired” without additional written notice.

We meet only a few times as an entire class during the term. However, we reserve and utilize the scheduled class time for BA 795 class activities. *This time is used for scheduled team meetings with the instructors, as a time that all team members can meet without time conflicts, and as a time to conduct research related to the specific project. Do not schedule other activities (such as work, attending other lectures, conducting work for other classes or attending group meetings for other classes) during the scheduled BA 795 time. This is a mandatory condition for participation in BA 795; failure to fully attend class sessions and meetings may result in a significant lowering of final course grade.*
Project Manager:

Each team will have a project manager who has overall responsibility for keeping the team on track and coordinating the work of the team. Another important task of the project manager is keeping the team’s faculty advisors and the client apprised of the status of the project through progress reports. At specific milestones, project managers prepare short progress reports outlining what has been accomplished to that time and what the team expects to accomplish during the next reporting period. Those expressing interest in being a project manager typically get first choice of projects.

Role of Faculty Advisors:

Each project team will work with two faculty advisors; a BA 795 instructor and an additional faculty member. The role of faculty advisors is to act as "sounding board" for the project plans and proposals, and to provide limited guidance in the project’s execution, akin to a senior partner in a consulting firm. Please note that the projects are intended to be designed and implemented by you and not by your team’s faculty advisors. Faculty advisors must approve the project team’s letter of engagement (LOE), overall research plan and final written report. To avoid confusion, maintain regular communication with each project’s faculty advisors (in person and by e-mail), get approval at agreed to stages, and always submit professional quality work when seeking their input or evaluation. If in doubt, ask!

Assessment:

Course grades will be assigned in accordance with San Diego State University policy (see Graduate Bulletin). Course grade will be based on four components with the following weights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final report content and style (based on application of appropriate business practices and value to client)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial background research, problem statement, research plan and methodology</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project management (meeting deadlines, teamwork, weekly client updates)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final presentation</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advisor evaluation of student performance</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In addition, content from the text, Designing and Managing a Research Project, is included in the in-class assessment exam. Results of an individually written project report and the assessment exam will affect the final project grade up to plus or minus one letter grade. Individual grades will be based on a combination of peer review and instructor evaluation of all of the above components. In instances of identifiable differential performance among team members [based on peer review and level of commitment], the team grade will be adjusted accordingly, by as much as several letter grades. Peer evaluations are confidential and are to be shown to no one except the course instructors. Evidence of collusion on peer evaluations will negatively reflect in the final assigned grade. Elements that may be addressed in the individual student evaluation process include quality and quantity of input, timeliness and work ethic. It is not unusual for unequal final grades to be assigned to members of the consulting team. In part, this reflects the importance of the peer evaluations and overall commitment to the consulting project. It is our expectation that each final report may require at least minor modification before being cleared for final presentation to the client. Reports requiring major revision or rewriting may be reduced by one letter grade.
Assessment of Learning Component:

The CBA wants to be proactive in enhancing the quality of SDSU’s MBA program. Part of this process involves examining, in a careful and systematic way, whether students are learning what the faculty believes that they should be learning. To this end, the Graduate Committee (comprised of representative faculty from each department and the Director of Graduate Programs), has developed a plan to assess the achievement of a number of important goals. The MBA program goals are to: (1) develop the solid foundation in theoretical concepts and managerial skills needed to lead business organizations, (2) develop an awareness of the legal, ethical, and technological environment in which managers make and implement decisions, (3) develop an awareness of economic and cultural environments in which managers make and implement decisions, and (4) acquire the capacity to formulate and communicate strategies to solve business problems and pursue opportunities. The CBA has mandated to assess student learning outcomes and use the results to enhance the quality of the MBA program. Summary of the results of this assessment is reported to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Accredited Colleges of Business, like SDSU, must report on assessment of learning to maintain accreditation. During the third and fourth weeks of class, there will be two mandatory individual assessment activities. The result of these assessment activities could result in the final BA 795 course grade being adjusted upward or downward by one half of a letter grade.

Activity 1 – Individual written report (2-3 pages single spaced) that refines the objectives for the project, assesses relevant environmental factors, and develops potential data considerations for conducting the project.

Activity 2 – In-class assessment exam, including coverage of course text.

Students with Disabilities:

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and cannot be provided till you receive a formal letter from Student Disability Services.

Writing Center:

The Writing Center is intended to “help students improve their writing within specific disciplinary contexts and …” Services provided include individualized sessions, group sessions for graduate students on thesis/dissertation writing and consultations for international and multilingual students. The Writing Center is located in the Love Library, Room LA 1103. It is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, and its free services are available to all students. Additional information can be found and online appointments can be made at www.writingcenter.sdsu.edu.

Turnitin:

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. You may submit your papers in such a way that no identifying information about you is included.
**Academic Honesty Policy:**

It is expected that in all matters relating to this course you will act in an ethical and professional manner. Cheating or plagiarisms undermine the learning objectives of a paper, exam, quiz or any other graded work. Acts of cheating, plagiarism and dishonesty are not acceptable behavior and are not tolerated. For your information the following definition of academic dishonesty is being applied:

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (submission of an assignment purporting to be the student’s original work which is wholly or in part the work of another person) or dishonest conduct during an examination (including possession of tests or notes not authorized by the instructor, or of devices prepared specifically for the purpose of cheating; communication with another person other than the instructor by any means; looking at another person’s paper; violation of procedures prescribed to protect the integrity of an examination). Other examples include but are not limited to:

- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
- Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own
- Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
- Replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
- Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class

Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. Those caught will be reported to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities, which may lead to suspension, expulsion, and probation. For more information refer to: [http://its.sdsu.edu/docs/TURN_Plagiarism_AcadSen.pdf](http://its.sdsu.edu/docs/TURN_Plagiarism_AcadSen.pdf)

(In one notable case, an international student writing a report for a class copied and pasted passages from books and websites. Although he included some citations (he did not intend to “plagiarize”, the passages were incorrectly presented (e.g., without proper quotations and attributions). The course instructor considered the report to be plagiarized and referred the case to the University authorities, which resulted in him graduating six months later and the loss of his internship with a prestigious company!)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic by Week</th>
<th>Deliverables</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Class Meeting – Introduction, project process and team formation. (EBA 437 – 1900 – 2100)</td>
<td>Project protocol, project assignments/team, teams meet and select project manager; project manager of each team to email supervising faculty (instructor and co-advisor) with team members contact information and to contact the co-advisor to set up an introductory team-meeting prior to kick-off date. Prior to class – Read Chapters 1 – 5</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>“Kickoff meeting” – Team members meet with the client(s) at Parma Payne Alumni Center - formal attire required</td>
<td>Each Team will submit a written report based on secondary research on the client’s background information, industry and/or project using on-line data sources (by e-mail to supervising faculty before 1700 on Tuesday, 1/26).</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Class meeting – Discuss secondary information sources, letter of engagement (LOE) and research methodology. (EBA 437 – 1900 – 2100)</td>
<td>Assessment task: Each Team member must submit an individual written report about the project taking into account the discussions at the Kick-off meeting and secondary research. This report is used to measure cognitive and communications skills of each student. It should be submitted to co-advisors via Blackboard and by email before 1700 on Tuesday, 2/2 (click on individual client background report under Plan B tab). This report will be evaluated and students with communications deficiencies will be notified if remedial instructions are required for graduation. Prior to class – Read Chapters 6 – 10</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Team meeting 1 (location to be posted, schedule with Emon) – discuss with supervising faculty progress on research activities and future research plans.</td>
<td>Submit LOE draft, research plan, timeline, and tentative budget request by e-mail to supervising faculty before 1700 on Tuesday at 2/9.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Class meeting – The Assessment of Learning Exam: Case Analysis (EBA 437 – 1900 – 2100)</td>
<td>Assessment task: This exam is developed, proctored and graded by the CBA Graduate Committee – the results of the evaluation will be provided by the committee to each student. Continue fine tuning the LOE</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Teams work on projects – Research time.</td>
<td>Plan the “Alpha Report” (review samples for content and format). Submit copy of signed LOE to Emon before 1700 on Tuesday, 2/23.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic by Week</td>
<td>Deliverables</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td><strong>Class meeting</strong> – Discuss Final Report format. (EBA 437 – 1900 – 2100)</td>
<td>Prior to class – Read Chapters 11 – 15</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td><strong>Teams work on projects</strong> – Research time.</td>
<td>Submit “Alpha Report.” This is the first section of the final report and includes background, project objectives and methodology to supervising faculty. Time logs 1 and Peer Evaluation 1 (e-mail to Emon) before 1700 on 3/8.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td><strong>Team meeting 2</strong> (location to be posted, schedule with Emon) – discuss with supervising faculty progress on research activities and future research plans.</td>
<td>Progress Report 1 (e-mail to client, copy supervising faculty before 1700 on Tuesday, 3/15). This one-page write up should provide a progress report relative to stated objectives and discuss the next phase of the research.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td><strong>Class meeting</strong> – Seminar on Final Presentation by professional coach. (EBA 437 – 1900 – 2100)</td>
<td>Schedule final presentations date/time with Emon – obtain client and co-advisor approval before calling Emon.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td><strong>Spring Recess</strong></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td><strong>Teams work on projects</strong> – Research time.</td>
<td>Submit “Beta Report.” This is the revised Alpha plus the results portion including all “dummy tables” (to be filled when results are completed). Revised “front end.” table of contents, list of tables and appendices. Use placeholders where needed. E-mail to supervising faculty on or before 1700 on Tuesday, 4/5. This “revised draft” should indicate changes to Alpha material using Word tracking tool/or highlighting.</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td><strong>Team meeting 3</strong> (location to be posted, schedule with Emon) – discuss with supervising faculty progress on research activities and future research plans.</td>
<td>Progress Report 2 (email to client, copy supervising faculty – same format as Progress Report 1) Prepare and submit initial draft of the Final Presentation slides to presentation coach by 1700 on Tuesday, 4/12. Each Team should schedule a meeting with the presentation coach to practice presentation/ review slides.</td>
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<td>Week</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>4/21</td>
<td>Follow up meetings with professional coach (location to be posted).</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>4/28</td>
<td>Meeting with supervising advisors – if needed. (location to be posted, schedule with Emon)</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>5/5</td>
<td>Final Client Presentation – Page Pavilion (as scheduled with Emon).</td>
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<td>5/6</td>
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