BA525
BUSINESS PROJECT CAPSTONE
COURSE SYLLABUS

Capstone Program Director
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TIME AND LOCATION OF REQUIRED CAPSTONE WORKSHOP:
1st Thursday of the project’s first term, 4pm-5:30pm

TIME AND LOCATION OF REQUIRED MID-PROJECT PRESENTATION:
1st Thursday of the project’s second term (you will pick a 30 minute time slot)

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This six-credit capstone course provides students with an opportunity to work on real business problems with companies of their choice in a 3-4 student team over a 5-6 month period. MBA and MFSA students work as a consulting team with a client and advisor in a business environment to develop solutions that will be put to use by the client. Student teams develop their analysis and recommendations over the two terms and complete the project with the delivery of a final report and presentation to the client senior management. Students are encouraged to help find the type of project and company that they believe will provide them with the best capstone experience.

COMPETENCIES
Each MBA and MSFA student is expected to declare his/her area(s) for competency development and to engage with the team. Specifically, BA525 will access your teamwork, critical thinking, writing skills and presentation skills.
PRENOTIFY when you are within 1-2 terms of starting the Capstone. This short survey will inform the Capstone Director in what term you intend to start the Capstone and who your team-mates will be (if you have team-mates).

http://portlandstate.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_bE1LFs1lipZPlo&SVID=Prod

BA525 Prerequisites:

MBA: MGMT511 (Foundations of Strategy), FIN513 (Financial Management), MKTG512 (Marketing Strategy), BA524 (Leadership Immersion, may be concurrent with first term of Capstone) and at least 37 hours in the MBA core.

MSFA: MGMT511 (Foundations of Strategy), FIN551 (Corporate Finance), FIN 553 (valuation).

BA525 Capstone D2L site – student resources for the Capstone are available on the Capstone D2L site. Once you have prenotified, you will be given access to the D2L site. You should receive a confirmation about this within 3 days of prenotification. If you do not, contact the Capstone Director to get access.

Faculty Advisors – A Faculty Advisor will be assigned to each project before the start of the term. Bios for Faculty Advisors are posted on the D2L site.

BA525 Course Objectives:

1. Provide students with a real and challenging business problem that allows them to demonstrate the skills learned during the program.
2. Provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership skills including their verbal and written communication skills via a final report and presentation.
3. Demonstrate the quality of the MBA and MSFA programs by providing results that the clients can use to improve their companies.

Projects

Most companies participating in the Capstone are Portland area companies. About 60% of the Capstones are with established medium and large companies. The other 40% are split between non-profits and start-ups.

1) Developing your own project with a company or organization in the community – an option for all MBA and MSFA Students. Here, students find and gain approval for the project. Keep in mind that your project needs to be approved a month before the term starts, and like any Capstone, will need to have 3-4 students on the team.
   a. You will want to first review the Capstone Student Project Guidelines, PSU Graduate Business Project Application and Prior Capstone Projects.
   b. Your team should decide what type of project you would like. The list of Prior Capstone Projects can help you formulate some ideas.
   c. It is a good idea to have 3-5 prospective clients in discussion before settling on one
   d. Once you have discussed and agreed upon a project description with your prospective client, he/she will submit the application to the Capstone Director.
   e. The Capstone Director will then connect with the prospective client to make sure the project is reasonable and likely to be successful.

You should engage with the Capstone Director early to answer questions and get any advice.
MSFA students starting in the Spring term: if you develop your own project, you can pick one team-mate. Your approved project will be placed onto the project list to be offered to other MSFA students.

If you (or one of your team-mates) is an employee at the company. We have found that having an insider (student) as an employee at the client organization can be strength or a weakness. The potential for one person to dominate the direction, contribution and learning is substantial. If your target company is one that a student is an employee, have an early conversation with the Capstone Director about the situation. Sometimes we approve this type of project, and sometimes we do not.

2) Choose a project from the Project List. The project list is the primary source for many Capstone teams. These projects are developed through PSU’s contacts with area businesses and organizations.

An option for MBAs starting any term and MSFA starting in the winter, summer and fall terms.

- As we approve projects, we will update the Project List posted on the D2L site. We post the projects as they are approved, starting 60-90 days before the start of the term. The specific dates are listed on the Important Dates document on D2L.
- Securing a project from the project list is a first-come-first-served system. If you have 3 or 4 qualified team members (have the minimum requirements for the Capstone as specified above), then simply send an email to the Capstone Director. In most cases, you will then be assigned to the chosen project. However, if the Capstone Director feels there is not a good match between the project needs and the skill set of the students (e.g., MSFA students and a marketing project), then the Capstone Director will ask you to pick another project.

For MSFAs starting spring term

About 3 weeks before the start of the term, you will receive the project list (with descriptions). At that time, you’ll be asked for your top preferences. We will then put together the teams in consultation with the MSFA Director. We will do our best to support your top choices of projects. However, some of you may not get your top selections. To be clear, we will be asking for project preferences not who you want as team-mates. This is to ensure that there is an appropriate mix of skills, experience and language capability.

Note that an approved project with 3 team members will be posted available for one other student to join. If a project does not have 3 or 4 students by the start of the term, the student(s) will need to find (or be assigned to) other projects.

3) Use Your Own Start-up concept as the subject of your Capstone. The Launch in 9 program is the venue to develop such a concept. The first step is completing MKTG 501 Lean Start-up Strategy in the fall term. Then, the projects that are approved to be a Capstone are done in the winter and spring terms. For more information on this option, please seek more information for the Launch in 9 program.

Team Formation

For MBAs starting in any term and for MSFAs starting projects in the fall, winter and summer

Most teams consist of 4 members (optimal). Some teams will have 3 students. Rarely will a 5 person or 2 person team be approved. The team size depends on the project scope, the mix of student backgrounds and the number of students enrolling each term. Most students form teams before the start of the semester.

The BA525 Faculty recommends a diverse team.

- For MSFA students, it is preferable to mix with MBA students (when possible) who have had broader exposure to the various disciplines that will be used in most capstone projects.
- For students who are not located in the Portland area: each team must have at least 2 students who live in the same area as the client. Capstone work requires regular in-person interaction with the client.
• For **International students**: it is expected that all students will be in the country until the project is complete. Past experience has shown that students who return to home are unable to contribute to the project at an adequate level. Consult with your Faculty Advisor at the beginning of the project if there is any question that this may be an issue for you.

Faculty advisors are typically assigned just before the start of the term.

**If you have 4 team members.** You are qualified to secure projects via any of the project acquisition methods described in this syllabus.

**If you have 3 team members.** You are qualified to secure projects via any of the project acquisition methods described in this syllabus. However, your project will be placed on the project list advertising an opening for one student.

**Individuals or teams of 2.** We suggest that you ask around your cohort and classmates as to who starts the Capstone next term. As we get closer to the start of the term, I will email those students who have prenotified to give you some contacts from which to form a team. If you still do not have a team by the team the semester starts, we dedicate time at the end of the Capstone Workshop to form teams from those students who are without teammates at that point.

Note that **any approved project with 1, 2 or 3 students** will remain posted on the project list, and will be available to individual students. Your obligation in that circumstance is to interview interested students who contact you. If there is a reasonable fit, you are expected to add the interested 4th member to the team. The Capstone Director reserves the right to place a person, but we rarely need to do this.

**Required Attendance**

**Workshop:** BA525 has a required workshop. The class will meet the first Thursday of term from 4-5:30pm. Please refer to the bulletin to confirm the class times and get the location. The goal of the class will be to better prepare you to have a successful Capstone experience. Key areas of focus will be consulting skills, market research and project management.

Students who do not have a full team or project by the start of the semester: At the BA525 workshop, the BA525 faculty will work with you to form a team and pick a project. The team and project selection will be based on a host of factors including team skill set, project timing and expressed preferences. All student teams will be matched with a project and team within a week after the meeting.

*You only need to attend the workshop at the start of the project, not at the beginning of the second term.*

**Required Tutorial(s):** There are tutorials posted on the D2L site. They are focused on Project Management and In-Depth Interviews. These two disciplines are essential for a successful Capstone experience. Complete these tutorials **BEFORE** the initial Workshop.

**Mid Project Presentation:** This will be the first Thursday of the project’s second term. Each team will make a 15 minute slide presentation to a group of Faculty Advisors. Your role is to summarize the scope, the research plan, the research completed to date, what you have learned, and your next steps. You will provide a 1-2 page executive summary prior to the presentation. The presentation should be 6-10 slides. Each team can choose who presents. The entire team does not have to present.
Project Deliverables Overview. Each team investigates, analyzes and presents a series of actionable recommendations aimed at addressing the client’s problem. Example documents are posted on the D2L site. To facilitate these efforts, a series of deliverables are associated with each project:

Personal Objectives. This assignment is due at the beginning of the project, generally by the project kick-off meeting with the advisor. The idea is for you to publish to your team-mates what you hope to gain from the Capstone experience (aside from graduation) and what areas of competency development in which you intend to focus.

Scope document. This document outlines the type of analysis and deliverables to address the client’s problem. Students should plan on finalizing the scope typically within about 2–3 weeks (4-5 weeks into the term) after the first client meeting. It serves as the ‘contract’ between the team and client to specify project boundaries, deliverables, research plan and an estimated project schedule. The document is typically 6-8 pages. Topics typically included in the Project Scope

Background. Context for the project.

Project objectives. What you project will accomplish.

Overview of Work Plan. Projects should be broken up into phases such as initial education and secondary research, primary research, synthesis, and completion. Projects have natural work segments which are best structured as phases. Each phase should have major tasks, milestones and deliverables. Most times, phases should overlap. It is better to have smaller deliverables such as research summary, preliminary financial model, etc. (than one or two giant deliverables at the end).

A word about research. The first revision of a Research Plan should be included Project Scope document. The Research Plan should cover both secondary and primary research. It should be synchronized within the structure of your work plan (i.e., phases). Note that there is a higher emphasis on secondary research initially as you get familiar with the client’s business. The secondary research informs the primary research. Most projects have at least 20 “in-depth” interviews with employees at the client company, customers, distributors, suppliers, other stakeholders and other experts knowledgeable about the business.

The Research Plan will become its own document that will updated as you learn more during the first couple of months of the Capstone project. It should, for example, include your learning objective, hypothesis and interview guides. These are documents that you should have the Faculty Advisor review.

Schedule. The team should use a project management tool outlining the time line, milestones, deliverables and owners for the major tasks. A summary schedule (often a Gantt chart) should be included in the Project Scope.

Communications. The Project Scope should include the specific expectations of status reports (generally weekly) and a schedule of regular meetings with the Faculty Advisor and the client.

Team Assignments. The Project Scope should clarify the roles of each team member. The roles should be connected to the major task areas.

Project Coordinator. Each team is asked to identify a group member to serve as a Project Coordinator (“PC”). This is a key role, as the PC plays a critical role in making sure the team has a clear plan with which the client and advisor agree (the Project Scope). This role generally takes about 1/3 of the PC’s time. S/he helps establish the schedules, milestones and communication that keep the team moving forward. The PC is the primary communicator between the team, client and advisor.
S/he will also serve as a general contact with the Faculty Advisor for scheduling and other administrative issues such as scheduling meetings, discussions, etc., or sending drafts of reports. The PC is responsible for disseminating information from the client and advisor to the rest of the team (although not exclusively).

**However, each team member should have a direct relationship with the Faculty Advisor and the client.**

**Past experience indicates that successful teams have a strong PC who is respected by the team members. A PC must have strong communication and organizing skills.**

**Midterm Project Evaluation**

**Presentation.** You will make a 15 minute presentation to the Faculty Advisors the first Thursday of your project’s second term. More specifics about the requirements and the sign-up to be conveyed as you get closer to the mid-project review.

**Team-Project Feedback.** Submit Part 2 - Capstone Mid-Project Review to your Faculty Advisor a couple of days before the mid-project presentation. It is used to gather feedback on the progress, team dynamics and client involvement, and your progress on your professional development.

**Completion Plan.** Submit this to your Faculty Advisor a couple of days before the mid-project presentation. This plan outlines in detail the steps and timing your team will take to complete the project. An outline of the written report and an estimated presentation date are part of this plan.

**Evaluation.** Your faculty advisor will complete a mid-term evaluation. While the first term is not graded, he/she will provide you with the feedback in the context of what the grade would have been. This feedback is useful to make any corrections.

**Draft of Final Report.** A draft should be submitted to your Faculty Advisor about 3 weeks prior to the final presentation. This will give you enough time to address comments.

**Presentation Dry Run.** A ‘practice’ run through the client presentation is expected at least a week, and preferably two weeks, prior to the final presentation. Your team is encouraged to ask interested parties and faculty members to attend this presentation to provide constructive feedback. Make Powerpoint hard copies (2 slides per page, double sided is best) for the audience. Don’t forget to number the pages!

**Presentation Guidelines described toward the end of the syllabus.**

**Final Presentation & Report.** A presentation and report are the final deliverables for the client. These deliverables cover the project problem, objectives, methodology, findings, analysis, and recommendations. The presentation is typically at the client site, is 60-90 minutes in length. About one-half of the presentation time is generally allocated for questions and discussion. The write-up is typically 15-20 pages and includes a table of contents, an executive summary and a bibliography. Additional details and exhibits often extend the total length of the paper to 30-50 pages. In some cases financial models or survey results are delivered to the client via a spreadsheet.

**Final Team-Project Evaluation.** Each team member will be asked to complete an end-of-project evaluation of the team, project and client. This will also include a final assessment of what was learned and what impact to your competency development occurred. In some cases, the findings of these evaluations may result in a final debriefing with the team and Faculty Advisor.
Credits:
A total of 6 credit hours are taken over the two-terms:
- 3 credits each term. Most students opt for this. All Launch in 9 students must opt for 3 credits each term.
- All 6 credits in one term. This can be done by registering for either 6 credits in the first term or the second term.

This choice of credit hour distribution does not affect the two-term commitment to the project. Be prepared to spend about 8-12 hours per week during both terms of the project.

If you choose a 6 credit option, you will get one grade. If you choose the 3 credit option, then your final grade will be applied to both terms. Your transcript will reflect this choice. If you choose the 6 credit option, the grade will appear once. If you choose the 3 credits for each term, the course will be listed twice.

Grades
Grades will be based upon the evaluation of the project by the client, the team and the Faculty Advisor. Student members of each team will be asked to evaluate the project and the contribution of each member of the team, including his/her own contribution. Team members may get different grades from each other if the relative contribution of individual team members is unbalanced.

Grading criteria includes:
- Start-up and organization
- Mid-project progress and presentation
- Communication and project organization
- Teamwork
- Critical thinking and analysis
- Actionable recommendations
- Final deliverables – written report and presentation

Your Faculty Advisor will discuss the details and weighting of each of these components. Refer to the grading rubric.

Course Timing, Interim Grades and Expected Effort:
It generally takes the **full two terms** to complete the project. Grades will be given when the project is completed. An interim grade of “IP” will be given at the end of the first term (and second term if the project is not yet complete).

**Each student should expect to spend a minimum of 150-200 hours on the project.** A team of four students should therefore plan on spending over 600-800 man/woman hours on a project. This translates to 8-10 hours per week.

Other Expectations:
- Demonstration of leadership skills developed during program.
- Meetings with the client and advisor at least once or twice per month.
- Production of a professional final report and presentation of results.

The Faculty Advisor & the Team:
Each team will be assigned a Faculty Advisor. The role of the advisor is to mentor and guide the team through the business project experience. While the team is expected to develop and complete the analysis for the client, the advisor serves as a sounding board and facilitator as needed. Each advisor will set his/her own guidelines for working with the team and explain his/her requirements during the first meeting. The team is expected to provide a regular progress update, at a minimum, twice a month by e-mail. And the advisor’s approval is required on the following written documents:
• Project statement of work and project plan
• Drafts of final reports and presentations.

The scheduled meetings with the advisor include:
1. A kick-off team meeting to acquaint the team and advisor and to orient the team to the class approach, best practices and expectations.
2. A first meeting of team, advisor and the client at the beginning of the project;
3. A meeting at least once a month to assess progress and issues;
4. The mid-project presentation
5. Presentation review 1-2 weeks prior to client presentation;
6. A meeting at the final presentation and
7. Other times as necessary. Realistically, most teams have several interactions via phone, email, interactive classroom meetings, etc.

**Technology Use**
We encourage you to use the variety of technology available to facilitate the group process. In the past, students have found the following types of sites useful.
• Google Groups
• Yahoo Groups
• Skype for conferencing
• Wikis for project tracking and development (often linked to Google or Yahoo groups)

We strongly encourage you to set up a Yahoo or Google group site to manage files and work plans.

**Communications**
1. All written communications to the client must be in good business English (appropriate language, punctuation, sentence structure, etc.).
2. Teams must provide project progress reports on a weekly or bimonthly basis (frequency to be agreed upon with the advisor and client). The BA525 Workshop and Tutorial reviews best practices for developing an effective status report.
3. Reference the team name in the Subject Area of your email to your advisor (e.g., Boeing Project Group).
Some Best Practices
Following are characteristics of successful projects:

- Do preliminary research on the company and its industry so you have a foundation of knowledge before your first client/team/advisor meeting.
- Develop a well-balanced team before taking class.
- Select the best person on the team suited to be the Project Coordinator for the project.
- Determine regular times to meet, whether in person or on a phone conference.
- Discuss and agree on each team member’s commitments and issues.
- Establish a good working relationship with the client.
- Determine project scope and deliverables within the first few weeks of project.
- Aggressively plan and execute primary research to gain a deep understanding of the business and issues at hand.
- Develop a system to gather, summarize and share primary research (interviews) among team-mates.
- Set communication and meeting expectations with the client and advisor.
- Use the advisor and other faculty to assist and review materials and ideas during the project.
- Collaborate with the client, faculty and others to obtain the highest quality information necessary to create conclusions and recommendations.
- Address any problems proactively
- Finish work with enough time to review and revise.
- Provide professional looking report and presentation. Remember, all communications regarding this project (written work, presentation, emails and meetings) should conform to concise business practices and formats.
- Be proactive in addressing problems. The Capstone is a complex project. You can expect there to be issues. A strong team confronts issues proactively and takes steps to deal with issues. Be proactive in surfacing problems with your Faculty Advisor. If you wait too long to confront problems, then the team and the quality of the project will suffer.

Client Donation: The SBA asks the client for a voluntary donation for the BA525 Capstone projects. SBA feels that it is important to establish value for the work that you do on the project. The tax deductible donations go to the PSU Foundation and are used to help support the Capstone program. This is a voluntary contribution upon the successful completion of a project.

- For larger, more established company, $5,000 to $7,500
- For established company, often mid size, $500 to $3,000
- For non-profit or startup with limited resources, might be PR, something else in kind or up to $500.
- Student start-up projects are not expected to make a donation…

Project Confidentiality/Conflict of Interest. A project will normally require access to information that is considered proprietary by the client. Students may be required to sign confidentiality agreements as part of the project. This may include a covenant not to compete with the client. Students with jobs or other business interests in the client's industry must take special care to avoid any possible conflicts of interest and should notify the client and advisor of any potential conflict. Team members should not abuse their special position as students in order to obtain information from the client's competitors that would not normally be given to the client directly. Any information of this type must be withheld from the client or altered in a way that will prevent unfair loss of competitive advantage to the source.
Project Costs. Students do not receive pay for project activities, but are typically compensated by the client for out-of-pocket expenses, if they meet the requirements below. It is the responsibility of each project team to appoint a treasurer and to reach a definitive understanding with the client about project expenses and reimbursement policies. Typical expenses include travel required by the project, communications, research materials, telephone, presentation materials, and direct costs associated with primary research. Basic guidelines for reimbursement for expenses:

1. All expenditures must have prior approval from the client.
2. A receipt must be obtained for each expenditure (credit card slip is not adequate).
3. No reimbursement will be made for meals or beverages.
4. Mileage reimbursement for approved travel is at 35 cents per mile.
5. Copy of long distance bills with approved project-related calls circled should be provided.
6. Bills must be submitted to the client by the team and done in a manner that is acceptable and efficient for the client.
7. Include language on the handling of expenses in the Scope Document.
Business Project Policies

Conflict of Interest
1. No project should be initiated where there can be any potential for a conflict of interest with a team member’s current employer or any other associated organization.

Communications & Meetings
1. All students must have an e-mail address and use this process to communicate with the Faculty Advisor and other team members.
2. All students must prenotify on the BA525 class site (“prenotify” means to let the BA525 Faculty know that you plan to start a project. You do this by clicking on the “Prenotify” link on the BA525 Home Page and completing the form).
3. Teams are responsible to maintain contact with the Faculty Advisor via e-mail and scheduled meetings. A minimum of one meeting per month is required.
4. Meeting Procedures. Teams will be responsible to make arrangements for a room when meeting with the Faculty Advisor. Rooms can be reserved through Faculty Services, 5th floor SBA building, 725-5099. Rooms are scarce, so the further in advance requests are submitted, the higher the likelihood of obtaining a room that will meet the schedules of all interested parties. The Faculty Advisor’s office may be used if no rooms are available, but the office is small, with limited seating space.
   - All meetings with the Faculty Advisor and/or Client should be confirmed via e-mail at least 24 hours in advance even when they are previously confirmed.
   - Team members are responsible to keep notes of all meetings with the Faculty Advisor and Client. These notes are to be turned in and will become part of the project file.

Teams & Evaluations
1. There will be no individual student projects; team size is set at four members. Deviations from this will depend upon client and project and will be determined by the BA525 Faculty.
2. Teams are encouraged to consult with the Faculty Advisor on any issues or problems that arise during the process of completing the project. Consulting other faculty members with specific areas of expertise is also encouraged. For example, if your project involves supply chain management, seek out advice from a faculty member with in-depth knowledge of this field.
3. In order to receive a final grade in the course, all students are required to complete the mid-term and final project evaluations.
4. If mid-term evaluations reveal a deficiency, a written action plan must be submitted to rectify the problem.
5. Team members are required to dress professionally for all meetings with their Client. Specific requirements will depend on the apparent “dress code” that individual Clients follow.

Advisor Review & Client Interaction
1. Formal material submitted to a client must be reviewed by the Faculty Advisor prior to submittal to the client.
2. The Faculty Advisor is to be promptly notified if problems develop regarding Client’s responsiveness to the team’s needs. The Faculty Advisor will work with the Client to resolve any problems.
3. The Faculty Advisor is to be promptly notified if problems arise within the student team.
Detailed Activities:

Phase 1: Project Assignment & Scope – within the first month:

1) **Select a Project Coordinator** who will act as the primary interface with client and advisor. Some teams have split this responsibility between two people – one who manages the intra-team coordination and a second that manages the client + advisor communications.

2) **Set up meeting with the Advisor prior to the first client meeting. Have a kick-off meeting with the Advisor. The Advisor will connect you with the client.** This is often done just after the Capstone workshop. Make sure to set-up regular meetings with your faculty advisor (once per month at least)

3) **Contact the client. Set up the initial meeting with the client** (and the advisor).
   a) Introduce yourself to the client ahead of the initial meeting. Provide bios and background information. Include names and contact information and a brief background. Include photos if possible.
   b) Get background materials from the client prior to the initial meeting. Make sure that you have done background research on the organization, and the issues facing their industry.
   c) Construct the client agenda to gain additional background on the client’s business and the project topic. This will help you construct a strong Scope document. It’s a good idea to send ahead any questions that you may have. Test what you think is in scope and out of scope of possible. Make sure that you establish regular meetings with the client.

4) **Scope Agreement is due ~2 weeks from the initial Client meeting:** This document outlines the type of analysis and deliverables to address the client’s problem. The Project Scope serves as the ‘contract’ between the team and client to specify project boundaries, deliverables, research plan and an estimated project schedule. The document is typically 6-8 pages.

   - Submit to your Faculty Advisor for feedback/review.
   - Once approved by your advisor, share the same with your client and obtain approval.
   - See examples of Scope documents on the BA525 Website.

   The Scope agreement is crucial as it helps to keep both the client and the team within the scope of what should be delivered at the end. If scope changes mid-way, make sure that your advisor, client and the entire team are notified and agree on the change.

Topics included in the Project Scope:

**Background.** Context for the project.

**Project objectives.** What you project will accomplish.

**Overview of Work Plan.** Projects should be broken up into phases such as initial education and secondary research, primary research, synthesis, and completion. Some projects have natural segments to analyze which are best structured as phases. Each phase should have major tasks, milestones and deliverables. Most times, phases should overlap. It is better to have smaller deliverables such as research summary, preliminary financial model, etc.

**A word about Research.** The Research Plan is either part of the Project Scope document or a separate document delivered 1-3 weeks after the Project Scope document. Discuss the timing of the Research Plan with your Faculty Advisor. The Research Plan should cover both secondary and primary research. It should include your learning objectives and hypothesis. The Research Plan should be synchronized with the structure of your work plan as described in the Project Scope. Note that there is a higher emphasis on secondary research initially as you get familiar with the client’s business. The secondary research informs the primary research. Most projects have at least 25 “in-depth” interviews made up of employees at the client company, customers, distributors, suppliers, other stakeholders and others knowledgeable about the business.
**Schedule.** The team should use a project management tool outlining the time line, milestones and deliverables and owners for the major tasks. A summary schedule should be included in the Project Scope.

**Communications.** Specific expectations of status reports (generally weekly) and a schedule of regular meetings with the Faculty Advisor and client

**Assignments.** The Project Scope should clarify the roles of each team member. The roles should be connected to the major task areas.

**Phase 2: Project Research & Analysis**

1. Develop and submit the **Research Plan.** Even if an initial Research Plan (as described above) is part of your scope, you will need to revise and update it as you learn more.
2. Develop a detailed work plan of research tasks, responsibilities and timing to complete the project.
3. Implement work plan and adjust as needed as information is gathered. Consult with Faculty Advisor periodically on progress and any issues that arise (you should have regularly scheduled meetings with your advisor).
4. The team, through the Project Coordinator, will be informing the Faculty Advisor on project progress, issues, and other project aspects on a regular basis. Meetings with the Faculty Advisor should be held at least once a month. The frequency and formats will vary with each Faculty Advisor.
5. Be proactive on your **primary research** (interviews inside and outside of the client, surveys, focus groups, etc). Primary research has a long lead and will be the majority of your efforts for 2-4 months. Strong primary research enables the synthesis/analysis based on insight and meaningful recommendations.
   a. Use the primary research plan to help formulate and track primary research activities. This should contain categories of target primary research targets (e.g., customers, competitors, suppliers, etc), specific contacts within that category and status.
   b. Synthesize the primary research to yield key insights. You will have done quite a bit of primary research by the start of the 2nd term. How do you extract the important information? Hopefully you have had a system to summarize key learnings along the way. It is useful (though not required) to synthesize the research key learnings into a single draft document that can be the basis of a mid-project discussion with the advisor and the client. This draft document can then be integrated into the final paper.

**Phase 3: Project Deliverables**

1. You have a set of deliverables due at “mid-project” – which is at the start of the second term.
   a. **Team-Project Feedback.** Submit Part 2 - Capstone Mid-Project Review to your Faculty Advisor. It is used to gather feedback on the progress, team dynamics and client involvement, and your progress on your competency development.
   b. **Presentation.** You will make a 30 minute presentation to the Faculty Advisors. More specifics about the requirements and logistics will be conveyed as you get closer to the mid-project review. Your role is to summarize the scope, the research plan, the research completed to date, what you have learned, and your next steps. You will provide a 1-2 page executive summary prior to the presentation. The presentation should be 6-10 slides. Each team can choose who presents. *The presentation is scheduled for the first Thursday of the second term.*
   c. **Completion Plan.** This plan outlines in detail the steps and timing your team will take to complete the project. An outline of the written report and an estimated presentation date are part of this plan.
   d. **Evaluation.** Your faculty advisor will complete a mid-term evaluation. Although the first term is not graded, he/she will provide you with written feedback which is useful to optimize the remaining 2-3 months.
2. 2-3 weeks prior to the project completion, deliver a **draft of the final report** to your Faculty Advisor.
3. 2 weeks prior to client presentation, schedule **presentation review (“dry run”)** with advisor and selected parties.
a. Invite interested parties to your dry-run presentation to get feedback on your final presentation. This typically includes your Faculty Advisor and other advisors that you have used.

b. Provide a hard copy of the slides at the dry run.

4. Deliver **formal presentation** and **final written report** to client and Faculty Advisor. The report and presentation format will vary according to project needs. Consult with the client and Faculty Advisor as to what will work best for your situation.

   a. Establish the final presentation date early, giving at least 3-4 weeks lead time to accommodate schedules and room reservations. If the presentation is being held at PSU, then Faculty Services on the 5th floor can help with room reservations.

   b. 1 week prior to final client presentation, send a formal invitation *reminder* to the client and Faculty Advisor, identifying who will be present in addition to the team.

   c. Have hard copy handouts of the presentation.

5. **Final Team-Project Evaluation.** Each team member will be asked to complete an end-of-project evaluation of the team, project and client. Each student must also submit to the Faculty Advisor **Part 3 - Final Capstone Reflection and Peer Review.** This will include a final assessment of what was learned and what impact to your competency development occurred. In some cases, the findings of these evaluations may result in a final debriefing with the team and Faculty Advisor.
Presentation Guidelines

The presentation is often the most critical component of your Capstone experience:

_The presentation is your opportunity to “sell” the results and recommendations to your client._

Their opinion of your findings and recommendations will be strongly influenced by the manner in which you present your report. Thus, you should the presentation as a performance: your goal is to engage your audience and hold their attention. The quality of your final presentation is an important component of the grading criteria for your Capstone grade -- and it is good practice for your career. Here are some tips and guidelines that will enhance the quality of your formal presentation:

- Dress the part - You are professional consultants. Dress appropriately, e.g., no jeans.
- Practice, practice, practice - This will improve your self confidence, help you avoid the “ahs” and long pauses inherent in too little preparation.
- You should plan your presentation to last no more than 30-40 minutes followed by Q & A.
- Do not read your presentation - you can use note cards to outline the major points. Don’t try to memorize your presentation.

Slides - these are important!

- Strike a balance between too few and too many. The rule-of-thumb is at least 2-3 minutes per slide.
- Avoid cluttered slides that have too many words. Charts, graphs, bullet points are preferred.
- Slides should be well designed and consistent throughout the presentation, so that you can fill in the details for your audience as you speak.

Flow of presentation

- Introduction should include introducing members of your team, the objectives of the project and methodology.
- The flow will probably be similar to your written report. Organize your presentation in a logical sequence with an orderly flow from one topic to another. Avoid too much detail as this will bore your audience and they will disengage. Stick to the major points of your research, conclusions and recommendations. Some of your detail probably will be covered in the Q & A.
- You need to have an effective closing that captures the spirit of your recommendations.

Ultimately, you are the experts! You know more than anyone else in the room about the project. Congratulate yourself on a job well done and one that provides value to your client’s organization. Presenting yourself as self-confident and articulate will help persuade your client that they should implement your recommendations.
Report Guidelines

Typical elements of a Final Report are described below. NOTE THAT YOUR FINAL REPORT MAY HAVE VERY DIFFERENT ELEMENTS DEPENDING ON THE CLIENT’S SCOPE OF WORK.

In general, your final document is likely to be 15-25 pages for the main body of the report/plan. Your exhibits, supporting documents, charts, etc., should be placed in the Appendix of your report and be referenced within the body of your report. Any questions, just ask!

The document needs to be designed for easy reading. That means using structured business writing with tables, bullets, etc.

Common problems with final reports:
- Sections are not well integrated; there are redundancies of content.
- Narrative is different from one section to another - need to write in one voice.
- Written as a long narrative, without the structure of a business document (sections, bullets, tables, graphs)
- Grammatical and verbiage problems - paper needs to be edited by the strongest writer or reviewed by PSU writing lab.
- Submitted to Faculty Advisor with insufficient time for review and turnaround. Allow 3-4 days for review, with a full draft coming about 3 weeks before the final report is due.
- Citations/references - Use the APA accepted format (author, date), with complete references listed in the Bibliography.

General outline - varies with Scope

Cover Page – The cover page should clearly state all members of your group alphabetically, the client’s organization, and the date.

Table of Contents – include sections of the report and page numbers. The appendix must be ordered in the sequence referred by the narrative.

Executive Summary – limit to 2 pages, ideally 1 page. No more than one paragraph summaries of each area covered in the body of your plan. Include the primary recommendation. The purpose is to provide a quick overview for easy reference and to create interest and “excitement” for the reader to continue into the specifics of the report. The executive summary should be written after the body of the report is completed.

BODY of the report:

The subheadings here depend on your scope and relevant research. Generally you want to tell a story, moving from the macro (usually secondary research) to the micro. General subheadings include:

I. Introduction - overview of the client’s organization and statement of project scope/research question.

II. Research Design - briefly describe what you did to address the research question: Research Methodology, including types of research. With primary, state type of research, e.g., interviews, with sample size (N=). Include any caveats/limitations of the research, such as convenience sample, generalizability of findings, etc.

III. Findings - Describe your major findings by topic areas (e.g., external environment, industry overview, SWOT, etc.)

If you have more than one area to discuss, subdivide by subheading, e.g.,

Example of subsections for a marketing project might include:
o Target Markets Focusing on Client’s Strategic Issue sources
o Competitor Analysis (3 top competitors, SWOT)
o Product/Service Characteristics (description) & Pricing Strategy
o Promotional Plan (Promotional mix and budget)

IV. Recommendations - this is the MOST IMPORTANT piece of your report. What should the client do and why regarding its pressing strategic issue? Prioritize the recommendation. This can be prioritized by importance (supported by an analytical selection method) and/or by time frame such as short term (one year or less), intermediate (2 - 5 year) and long range (5+ year) goals.

The recommendations must be specific, measurable and actionable. Think of the recommendations as a recipe for the client. You should have strong arguments that support your recommendations (e.g., “this recommendation was identified by our respondents as a key area for future growth potential”).

Make sure that your are HONEST in your assessments - provide the bad news along with the good. Be tactful but candid in your assessment, even if it’s something you think the client will not like hearing.

V. Conclusion - Brief recap of the report and recommendations that ties everything together.

VI. Bibliography – all sources cited in your report.

VII. APPENDIX - this is where the details belong, such as
- Financial Plan
- Research details if appropriate
- Tables, graphs, charts, etc.
- Supporting documentation