

1999

# A proposal for leadership consulting

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**A Proposal for Leadership Consulting**

**By**

**Jess Timmerman & Raegan Williams**

**Senior Project**

**Jepson School of Leadership Studies**

**University of Richmond**

**Richmond, Virginia**

**May, 1999**

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## ***Introduction***

In the course of the past two decades, the study of leadership has increasingly found its proponents in a variety of contexts. From academic circles to non-profits and corporate industries, leadership studies is rapidly becoming a topic of paramount import. As this evolution occurs, students of leadership studies find themselves highly sought-after for positions in a myriad of fields. Increasing, too, is the need for students of leadership studies to find and develop additional links to industries and corporations traditionally reserved for students of other academic areas.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the leadership curriculum in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, students are often well prepared for careers in for-profit, non-profit, and governmental organizations. While leadership students typically find a welcoming niche within non-profits and governmental agencies, generally speaking they have a more difficult time finding appropriate placements in for-profit organizations. It is within management and leadership consulting firms that many Jepson students find they have a strong fit after graduation. As each class of Jepson students matriculate, more are beginning to find their first jobs in consulting firms and are thereby spreading the word about Jepson in corporate circles. This fact, coupled with the increasing interest of consulting firms in a leadership curriculum make a tie between these two entities very possible.

While the education given to leadership students is comprehensive, it is not designed specifically to teach students the skills necessary for them to succeed in consulting. Additional information and experience in the area would inevitably enhance students' educational experience and give them the competitive edge over students from other highly competitive academic areas. The development of a consulting curriculum within the leadership school will be a significant instrument through which Jepson students will be able to gain the competitive advantage when they begin to seek a job in the area of consulting. The approach laid out in the following proposal highlights only a few of the possibilities for a program such as Jepson. What is important to understand is that it is not the specifics of the proposal, rather it is the idea itself that is most significant. The information provided to us by top management and leadership consulting firms only reaffirms the need for such a program included in the curriculum of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies.

## *Literature Review*

This senior project attempts to develop and understand the practice of consulting as it relates to leadership studies. Although there is considerable literature on the practice of consulting, no research has been done on the relationship between the academic study of leadership and the field of consulting. The majority of the following project will attempt to address these issues under specific categories. These categories include the nature of consulting, the links between leadership education and consulting, and the ways a leadership studies education can better prepare its students for the field of consulting.

### *~ The Nature of Consulting ~*

Consultants are individuals who, in either teams or as individuals, enter an organization to analyze problems and make recommendations for improvement. Many firms hire outside consulting firms in an effort to bring in a third-party not directly involved in the practices of the organization. In so doing, the consultant is able to take an unbiased approach to problem-solving and analyze and examine issues that many individuals within the organization either do not understand or are too involved with to make a significant difference. "Consultants provide both time and skills. They typically have the ear of senior management...they can move through an organization unfettered by corporate politics or by the myopic measures of job performance that so often put [employees] at odds with the greater goals of their companies" (Porter and Ciancarelli, 60). For example, in today's society as the trend is rapidly moving to information technology, many organizations are hiring the expertise of consulting firms to provide

technological know-how to implement solutions. Moreover, as it relates to the field of leadership, many consulting firms are moving to act as a proponent for change of people in the organization. Change management and redefining organizational structure has taken a lead role in the nature of the consulting industry as firms realize that they must hire individuals with the capability to effectively lead change and generate dynamic solutions for the individuals of an organization.

“First and foremost, the consulting function serves as an agent for change. It is an interactive exchange of information and ideas between insiders and outsiders, usually undertaken by a client to seek viewpoints and actions that differ from today’s situation... Second, consultants inherently lack accountability as they perform their work for the client” (Cannon, 2). In years past, consulting firms would enter an organization and propose ideas to solve the organization’s problems. Then, they would leave the organization, leaving behind questions like: What do we do now? And, How do we implement these ideas? Virtually no risk was involved for the consulting firm as they left the environment after providing possible answers. Today, companies are demanding more for the incredible amounts of money that they spend on high-priced consulting firms. For example, not only do the organizations want solutions, but they also want direction as to the ways to achieve these solutions.

Some consulting firms offer more assistance than others provide. “The consultant is never more than a facilitator or agent for change. In almost every instance, the client is

seeking improved performance...The consultant performs as an agent for change in a wide variety of ways and with different degrees of involvement in the client's business" (Cannon, 3). Ideally, organizations are able to generate solutions with the help of consulting firms. This is a central issue to the nature of consulting as well as leadership studies. The change leader – in this case the consultant – enters an organization and provides that organization the needed tools to solve problems. Some of the core leadership competencies taught at the leadership school are central to the services consulting firms provide – Leading Change, Conflict Resolution, and Leadership in the Formal Organization to name a few. By providing an atmosphere that encourages experiential learning, Jepson offers a unique way to integrate these competencies. However, one improvement to the curriculum would be to set in place the opportunity for students interested in pursuing consulting to make the connects and disconnects between and among the strong courses Jepson provides.

When a consultant enters an organization and proposes change, there is bound to be serious resistance. On personal requirements for consultants, they "also need mental toughness. Good salespeople have it, and anyone who experiences adversity on a daily basis and survives to come back has it" (Tepper, 53). Many firms expect results, but are not willing to take the proposed risks to get from point A to point B. They question the consultants and expect answers. Many times, leaders of an organization hire consultants with the thought that they know what the true problems are and expect consultants to provide roadmaps to achieve results. Consultants always need to listen to the leaders of

organizations, but not necessarily at what the leaders are saying. Instead, they need to listen to what is not being said and examine avenues that have not been explored. For the most part, leaders of organizations think they know what the problems and issues are; however, there could be far different dilemmas plaguing an organization. Strong listening skills and analytical skills are of paramount importance to a consultant. The consultant has to read between the lines; to listen to a CEO and not take everything literally. Clients frequently perceive things differently, and only the perceptive, questioning practitioner is able to find the truth” (Tepper, 103).

~ Links between leadership education and consulting ~

There are certainly strong connects between leadership studies and the field of consulting; however, research has not been conducted formally exploring the relationship between the two. Within the research and articles examined, it is implied that leadership and the world of consulting go hand in hand – it has not, however, been explicitly stated.

The headline for the cover story of *Management Consultancy* magazine reads, “Prediction – Pathfinders for the Year Ahead.” In this article, Vik Luck of Price-Waterhouse Coopers was quoted as saying “for both our clients and ourselves, the mantra ‘a company’s most important asset is its people’ has never been as resonant. Companies who seek to successfully globalize their operations must also manage their workforce on this scale. Executive leadership styles are evolving from a ‘command and control’ approach to a style that focuses on a clear purpose, a clear vision, common values and

innovation” (Ambasna-Jones, 10). The focus on defined purpose, vision, and values relates directly to leadership studies and the competencies stressed at the Jepson School. Consultants, too, must provide an analytical framework for their clients stressing the importance of this purpose, vision, and use of values to the success of an organization.

One of the biggest connects found between the field of consulting and leadership studies is evident in Cohen’s How to Make it Big as a Consultant. In this work, Cohen stresses taking risk and being creative to becoming a successful consultant. In regard to leadership studies, creative problem solving and originality are a must. Some of the key issues Cohen feels must be addressed to be a good consultant are:

- *Self-Confidence*
- *Risk*. Never be afraid to take risks.
- *Responsibility*. If you are assigned a task, you are responsible for its successful completion.
- *Leadership*. A leader accepts responsibility. This means that the welfare of those that you lead must always come before your own well-being. Therefore, while your primary duty is the accomplishment of your organization’s mission, the welfare of your subordinates comes second, and your own welfare last.
- *Success*. Success does not come from working hard. Success comes from playing hard. Therefore, if you want success, you must position yourself so that the duties that you perform, no matter how difficult or challenging, are

considered play to you and not work. If you do this, not only will you gain success, but you will have fun doing it.

- *Individual Ability.* Every individual has the potential to do great things. To reach this potential it is necessary to discover your special abilities and qualifications. This means that you should always attempt new tasks and accept responsibility for untried assignments whenever they are offered.

*Duty.* Whatever your occupation, you have a duty to the society of which you are a member. If you are a soldier, your duty is to protect that society. If you are in business or industry, your duty is to create and manage jobs, wealth, and products of that society. Therefore, failure will be harmful not only to you, but also to society, just as success will be beneficial not only to you, but also to society.

As can easily be seen, these ideas that make a successful consultant are also recurring motifs of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. Taking risk, being responsible, being self-confident, being held responsible, having a duty to perform, and of course leadership are all important issues that we strive to meet daily at Jepson.

*~ Leadership studies can better prepare its students for the field of consulting ~*

Consulting revolves around bringing about an effective change within an organization. As it pertains to the leadership education at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond, leading change and transformational leadership is taught as



the foundational theories supporting a leadership education. In addition, having the ability and desire to work in a diverse cross-section of humanity is a must. The pedagogy at the Jepson School is also vital to the development of skills working across and within groups, similar to skills needed as a consultant. Moreover, throughout their exposure to the leadership program, Jepson graduates are required to extensively conduct presentations and make their own links between theory and practice. While at the Jepson School, work is conducted with people from a myriad of backgrounds at the University of Richmond. In a similar regard, consulting teams may be comprised of finance, marketing, business strategy, or international components. Because of a leadership student's ability and skill to work well within group environments, he or she is prepared to handle projects within the consulting industry.

Leadership and ethics and the high esteem Jepson students place on ethics is also central to the consulting industry. For example, in The Consulter's Manual, Greenbaum discusses ethics as a driving force behind consulting:

1. Honesty is essential in all aspects of the consultant-client relationship - billing, expenses, indications of capabilities, and advice to the client organization.
2. Confidentiality is paramount in a consultant-client relationship. Consultants should never share information within the client organization or with others outside the client company.

3. Consultants should adhere to a strict standard of exclusivity, never putting themselves in the position of working for two companies that can affect each other by virtue of the consultant's efforts.
4. When doing research, consultants should never misrepresent themselves for the purpose of obtaining information that they otherwise would have been unable to secure
5. Never hire client personnel. This cannot help the relationship between the consultant for which one wants to gain a reputation.

Another aspect of leadership studies students that can better prepare them for the field of consulting is the collaborative problem solving and team based approach that is continually stressed in the Jepson School. In Steele's book Consulting for Organizational Change, we see that teamwork is most important to the success of the consultant.

"It does not take a great deal of subtlety to realize that how a consultant team collaborates will have an impact on what kinds of change they are able to effect in a client system. This follows from the well-accepted observation that interpersonal practices influence how effectively a group of people are able to work on a task. As Bennis et.al. (1973) summarize, we know that the nature of a relationship influences its productivity, its likelihood of being satisfying to the parties involved, and the innovative quality of what is being produced" (109).

Warren Bennis – a premiere leadership scholar – reinforces the focus on interpersonal relationships and a collaborative approach to solving problems as a consultant

Moral responsibility is a primary theme and recurring motif in the leadership studies curriculum. Cody stresses the idea that leadership should be an integral part of the consulting practice. He notices that there is a trend moving toward leadership in organizations, incorporating social responsibility into the organization's goals. "It must also be acknowledged that consulting has not matured to the point where its leading organizations can afford to "put something back in the pot" and make the social investments a business citizen should" (161). Now, many organizations are realizing this industry trend and are beginning to seek out consulting firms that can provide expertise in this area as well. No longer are consulting firms simply providing answers to increase the traditional bottom line, but now they are also working to improve the various bottom lines of an industry.

Recently, our national and global culture has begun to realize the importance of leadership in everyday life.. Organizations are utilizing their own corporate resources to unlock to door to success. *Management Consultancy* is an industry magazine showing the most recent trends occurring within the consulting field. Again, no explicit links have been made between the academic study of leadership and the consulting world; however, the implicit connections are evident.

Leadership studies stresses the importance of teamwork and the respecting and encouraging diversity. In "Agents of Change: Consultants make things HAPPEN," *Purchasing Magazine* highlights some of the industry leaders in the consulting field.

Echoing the voice of the leadership school about fostering 'buy-in' from constituents, Matthews of Andersen Consulting was quoted as saying, "So few companies want to put their own people on a job with us. But in most cases we won't take on an engagement unless the client puts the same number of people on the team as we have. Otherwise, we won't get sustainability, we won't get transfer of knowledge, we won't get an understanding of the process, and we won't get ownership" (Porter and Ciancarelli, 61). Change management is a unique facet of business at Andersen Consulting, and many firms are adopting it as a core consulting competency. Effective change, according to Matthews will only surface if every member at stake feels a vested interest in the project at hand. Respecting diversity, teamwork, and encouraging stakeholders to feel as though they have a vested interest in the change process is stressed in the Leading Change course here.

Finally, an article in *Management Consultancy* magazine entitled, "When I grow up, I want to be a Consultant...and I want you to show me how" stresses the importance of this project proposal as an essential component of giving consulting career candidates a competitive advantage over other applicants. "Training must be an integral part of a continuous professional development program, encompassing career development, knowledge exchange, competency development, coaching, centres of excellence & practice groups for thought leadership, appraisals, and recognition." The article goes on to state "The process [of effective training] begins with our graduate training and development program, which bridges the gap for new joiners between university and the

world of work” (Perrin, 10). A leadership consultant curriculum will aide in bridging the gap between undergraduate education and the workplace – a gap essential to forge if students are to be effective career consultants.

*~ Literature Review Conclusions ~*

Certainly, a relationship exists among our academic focus, the philosophy and pedagogy in the Jepson school, and the recent trends in the consulting industry. So many of the key concepts of the consulting industry are evident in the leadership education we receive at Jepson. Based on the literature review, we can begin to deduce that the leadership studies education provides a foundation for students to enter into a career in consulting. The question becomes, “What else can a leadership studies program do to build on this foundation and expand the knowledge and abilities of their students in preparation for this field?” One potential answer is the development of a leadership consultant curriculum. It will provide a capstone experience for graduates interested in the field of consulting with hands-on, real-life experience to make the transition easier between undergraduate work and real-world experience.

## ***Research Methodology***

The research methodology for this study is a modified form of action research. Action research is defined as “a process for gathering research knowledge about organizations and performance” (Marguiles & Raia, 56). Action research can take on many forms and many forces surrounding action research should be considered. Action research is not very well understood, and unless you have direct experience with this form of research, it is rarely understood at all (Marguiles & Raia, 56). During our research, data collection techniques that will be used include qualitative interviewing, document analysis, and observation (site visits).

To help guide this action research project, some guiding questions were developed to serve as the framework for gathering information.

1. Are there links between leadership education and consulting?
2. How can a leadership studies program better prepare its students for the field of consulting?
  - What essential components should be included in a course designed to prepare leadership studies students for the field of consulting?
  - What knowledge, skills, and abilities do consulting firms seek in candidates for the field of consulting?
  - What factors attract leadership studies students to consulting?
  - What factors attract consulting firms to leadership studies students?

- What type of general training is given to new hires at top consulting firms?
- What type of leadership training is given to new hires at top consulting firms?
- What type of consulting firms are best suited for leadership studies students?

*~ Action Research Steps ~*

The steps taken to conduct our action research was relatively simple. The research was composed of qualitative interviewing, observation through site visits, and document analysis.

Step One – By working through the Career Development Center as well as the Alumni Center, contact names and addresses were generated.

Step Two – A letter explaining the project was then mailed to the contacts, and a follow-up phone call was placed.

Step Three – Appropriate calling times for teleconferencing was established, and research was conducted from there.

Step Four – The site visit at Renaissance Worldwide came from the qualitative interviewing process, and proved to be most useful, as it painted a better picture of the consulting field in general.

### *~ Qualitative Interviewing ~*

Qualitative interviewing consists of gaining knowledge about a particular field through description and words. Essentially, researchers look to gain the expertise of the interviewee throughout the process. The description and words sometimes makes qualitative interviewing challenging, and statistical numbers are more difficult to generate.

Personal interviews were primarily conducted over the phone, as many of the offices are not in the Richmond area. Informal interviewing occurred on site. Initial phone contacts were made to set up later interviews as well as to respond to any questions that our contacts had (Marshall & Rossman). During the phone interviews, it was explained that the information provided would only be used for the development of the senior project in an effort to put the interviewees at ease (Miles & Huberman). The interview questions were asked in a non-threatening manner that helped to move the interview away from a question and answer format to one of conversation (Miles & Huberman). Finally, a copy of our final product was forwarded to the contacts so they may realize how much they contributed to our efforts.

### *~ Observation through site visits ~*

Observation consists of attending site visits and working one-on-one with experts in the field. In some cases, site visits are primarily interactive, only increasing the knowledge gained by the researcher. Moreover, site visits provide the researcher the opportunity to



broaden the amount of feedback for answers to questions. In simple interviewing, a researcher may gain a biased perspective on a topic; however, with observation through site visits, the researcher is able to enhance the knowledge gained by comparing and contrasting the information with other colleagues and constituents on-site. Essentially, observation through site visits afford the researcher the chance to take a more active role in the process.

Participant observation was utilized when available in an effort to gain more insight into the field of consulting. Participant observation demands “firsthand involvement in the social world chosen for study” (Marshall and Rossman, 79). Immersion in a setting allows the researcher to hear, see and begin to experience reality as the participants do (Marshall and Rossman). The project was neither conducive to this immersion model nor were the interviewers able to take an active participant role. However, the technique was invaluable to the process of research and learning as the interviewers lacked direct experience in the field of consulting and needed to learn more before developing a leadership consulting course.

#### *~ Document Analysis ~*

Document Analysis consists of examining research, literature, and collateral materials about the topic. In the field of consulting, documents, models, and articles are published quite often. As it relates specifically to leadership studies, these documents may be more

implicit than explicit, but the material included, when critically analyzed, can give knowledge unlike any other method within action research.

As a final method of data collection, the various consulting firms and individuals were asked to contribute as much literature as possible to the project research process. This included consulting training models, published articles, recruiting information, and so on. Little information was actually received, however, as each firm develops its own programs and no training was industry-wide. After receiving this information, it was reviewed and compared and contrasted to the literature, analyzed for significant findings, generalized about in relation to those findings, and finally applied the knowledge received to the course of the senior project.

*~ Limitations to our Methodology ~*

A method of research is just the first step in creating change and learning. “Basically, action research reflects a spirit and philosophy of inquiry and experimentation. This philosophical foundation provides a strong link to learning. Although action research is designed to facilitate the learning process, the validity and longevity of learning outcomes depends on the strength of the belief in inquiry, on the importance of information in determining action, and on the relative positiveness of attitude toward change” (Marguiles & Raia, 76).

The methodology provided the framework and solid foundation to build a leadership consulting program at the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, but ultimately, it is a passion for implementation of the knowledge that made the difference in the completion of the project. As with any type of methodology, there are associated strengths and weaknesses.

There is a conflict of interest inherent in the relationship between the researcher and the interviewee, where the interviewee does not necessarily understand the urgency from the researcher. Also, while the researcher would like to take the time and care necessary for research planning and action during the interview, the interviewee is more interested in doing something right away so as not to take away too much time from other commitments (Marguiles and Raia, 78).

There is also a need for “inferential research” in the action research process. This assumes that when “certain techniques and strategies are employed under certain conditions, certain changes are likely to occur” (Marguiles & Raia, 78). One will not be able to determine for several years whether certain changes will occur in the students who elect to take the course on leadership consulting. One cannot assume that because a certain strategy was employed, the outcome will always remain the same.

A final limitation to the action research and methodology was that action research tends to be broad in scope and attempts to “purport too much” (Marguiles & Raia, 79). This

results in making action research difficult to conduct. Many times, audiences greet action research with skepticism and uncertainty, proclaiming that the research is not justified.

“Action research is a process which can be used to solve immediate and present problems; it can add vital information to the social sciences; it can be used for theory extension and theory building; it can be used as a strategy for change and as a method for studying change.” It may be methodologically impossible to achieve all of these objectives (Marguiles & Raia, 79). The problem here is that we are not capable as social scientists of reaching the full potential of our action research (Marguiles & Raia, 79).

The methodology chosen for researching consulting firms in an effort to develop a leadership consulting curriculum will provide for us the basic tools we need to conduct our research and develop a course with an accompanying experiential component. While the researchers were not be able to attain a complete portrait of the consulting industry, they certainly had enough resources available to more than adequately develop this program. Additionally, utilizing action research has provided a foundation for others to extend the research and pursue similar endeavors in the future.

## ***Presentation of Data***

*~ Are there links that you see between leadership education and consulting? ~*

Mike Mendellson, vice president of Renaissance Worldwide, Inc. sees significant links between leadership and management consulting. In the change management consulting field, Mike says, individuals are called on daily to perform tasks and competencies taught in the Jepson School. High atop these skills are critical thinking and quick adaptation to change. "If a consultant is not able to think critically about the problems facing an organization he is not going to be able to find appropriate solutions for change. Consultants must also be able to adapt and modify these solutions to fit a variety of scenarios. Change is at the core of everything a consultant will do in his career." According to Cannon, "the consultant is never more than a facilitator or agent for change," at his best, the consultant must be able to quickly analyze a particular context and then make recommendations for change accordingly. Due to the nature of the consulting industry, consultants rarely have the opportunity to stay in one company or context for an extended period of time. The consultant must, then, according to Jason Sartori, a consultant at Renaissance and 1997 graduate of the University of Richmond, "be able to think quick and have the ability to understand first hand all of the intricacies of an industry."

Chuck Metzger, an adjunct professor at the Jepson School and a career consultant with Mercer Consulting, Inc. sees links between leadership and consulting not only for his own career, but also for that of his students. According to Chuck, consultants must be

organized, proactive in their pursuit of work, creative and innovative, comfortable and willing to speak out, and must have solid speaking and facilitation skills. Each of these qualities, Chuck says, he finds integral to the Jepson curriculum. Students graduating with a degree in leadership studies, given the quality and content of their instruction, are well prepared for a life as a consultant. Chuck finds most Jepson students have been educated in areas essential to the consultant and are largely “comfortable in dealing with issues in front of large groups of people.” Further, he finds, Jepson students are “neither reticent nor afraid” in the areas of presentations and personal relationships.

Another link between leadership education and consulting is the prevalence of group work. All consultants at Renaissance work on projects together in groups. Often, these interactions bring not only better results but also compounded frustration. Only through experience are people able to learn about these frustrations and how to work through them, says Mike Mendellson of Renaissance. Working effectively in groups is essential to the life of a consultant. According to both consultants and managers of firms, group interaction is the essential component to an effective consulting team. Knowing this, Trey Jones, the head of recruiting and human resources for Renaissance, specifically seeks out candidates who have had significant group experience in the past and who have had some experience in group development theory. Speaking from past experience, Trey says, “the people who I have hired who had less group experience have had a much more difficult time adjusting to the rigors of working almost solely in a group setting.” According to Trey, “it is important to Renaissance to hire people who will be able to

adapt to changing climates and who will be a good fit with the rest of the consultants at the firm. That is the reason for the lengthy recruitment process. It is at this time that we are able to assess just how much experience the recruit has in fitting in with the rest of the team - both in a work setting and in a social setting. Recruits learn these skills in school by working together on group assignments and, in general, being well-rounded students.”

Mark Nevins, vice-president for Human Resources at Booz-Allen & Hamilton Consulting, looks for new-hires who are, above all else, intellectually adept in both leadership and consulting. These intellectually skilled individuals are most able to “not just lead people, but to drive compelling thinking, to find solutions, and to get people on board” with ideas. Good consultants are able to “deliver impact to clients” while they build healthy relationships with their own team. Further, hiring those individuals skilled in both leadership and consulting are investments for the entire organization because they bring “intellectual capital to the firm” while acting as “good corporate citizens.” Further, Mark feels that leadership and consulting are “compliments to one another,” the few people skilled at both are the “best equipped to handle the challenges of a changing corporate environment.” In educating both undergraduates and career consultants about leadership and consulting, “a development strategy and a university which focus on the pragmatic, the action-oriented, and the relevant will be most effective and most valued” to the respective institution. The link between leadership and consulting, Mark says, is “effective lifelong learning” that creates “value and credibility in the eyes of the culture.”

Julie Cors, a 1998 graduate of Jepson, sees obvious links between leadership education and consulting. Speaking of her own recruiting process, Julie mentions that she saw “many more connections between Andersen’s Change Management competency group than with any of the other groups.” Reasons she cites for this include her direct course work in classes such as Leading Change, Critical Thinking, and Leading Groups as well as her experiences during group work. Julie is also grateful for the experiential component of the Jepson curriculum as it provided her the opportunity to “see leadership in action. Even though I did not do an internship in consulting, I was able to see how the theories applied in a work setting.”

*~ Are students at an advantage who have had previous experience in consulting? ~*

From a recruiter’s perspective, Trey Jones of Renaissance relates that he would view a candidate with previous experience in consulting as significantly advantaged over the candidate with no experience in the industry. “Hiring a student right out of an undergraduate institution is always a risk. Most of our new hires come to us with both several years of consulting experience and an MBA degree. We see our undergraduate hires as investments ... Any consulting experience for undergraduates, whether it is pro bono work as a part of a consulting team or an internship with a consulting firm, puts them well above the majority of recruits and is a significant advantage in the recruiting process.” Trey relates that he would like to see more undergraduate institutions offering a consulting concentration as a part of their curriculum. Speaking specifically about the Jepson School, Trey notes that some consulting recruiters who have never heard of the



Jepson School and who do not know as he does “of the excellent education offered there” might be less willing to hire a recruit out of that program. “Seeing recognizable experience such as a consulting concentration or curriculum would help to lend credence to a program that is not yet nationally known.”

Each of the consultants interviewed feel as though any consulting experience, through some organized group in undergraduate education, places the student at a distinct advantage over his or her peer group. Experience is the key to success as a consultant says Trey of Renaissance. “It matters little where the student acquires his experience. When I look at a resume of an undergraduate recruit, I look first for those key experiences that will tell me which core competencies that person possesses. I am looking for things like significant group work and critical incidents where students were challenged to work beyond their expectations. Experience in consulting before graduation would provide all of these competencies and better prepare recruits for their work after graduation.”

Mark Nevins of Booz-Allen & Hamilton agrees, asserting that those new hires who come into his firm with solid experience are “better equipped to handle to challenges that lay before them.” He looks for recruits to have experience in working successfully under the stress of deadlines and who are “able to not simply survive, but achieve in chaotic environments. This is the true nature of the consulting field.” The individuals most capable of living up to that challenge, according to Mark, have the following qualities:

- they are able to ask the “really critical and insightful questions;” they are genuinely curious about the answers to those questions; and they use “this Q and A to build a framework for addressing client problems;”
- they have the capacity to see any situation or issue from multiple points of view simultaneously: from the “strategic to the tactical; from high-level objectives to the daily workplan;” from the point of view of the consultant as well as the client. This skill is essential for getting the best answer, for figuring out how to influence others, and for getting change to happen.

The preceding two qualities, according to Mark, can be taught. “We actively look for people with these skills when recruiting,” expecting the new hires not only to come in with the skills, but also to perfect them during internal training and experience. The third quality, asserts Nevins, one “probably not teachable,” is that good consultants should:

- take a fundamental joy and satisfaction in helping others to success - the clients, the teams, and the firm. “While consultants are known to have big egos, the best consultants can put these egos on the back shelf at the critical moments to enjoy success as teams.”

Students who have experience in consulting, then, will be “well on their way to attaining these essential qualities that will help them in being better consultants” for both themselves and for their firms.

Jason Sartori, though not a graduate of the Jepson School, feels the start of his career in consulting has been challenging given the dynamic nature of the consulting industry.

Nearly two years after starting with The McClain Group (now Renaissance Worldwide, Inc.) Jason is beginning to become accustomed to the ever-changing, fast-paced lifestyle of the change management consultant. While Jason feels he was more than prepared intellectually for his job, he complains that he lacked the experience most of his peers had coming out of graduate programs and other firms. Jason explains that the year he began he was one of only two people starting directly out of an undergraduate institution while the other seven individuals had previous consulting experience. Jason, while not intimidated by the others, feels he needed “at least six months of hard work to catch up to the level of the others.” Had he experienced the consulting field before graduation, Jason asserts with confidence that he would have had the competitive advantage over the other young graduate who started with him.

Julie Cors feels as though her education at the Leadership School has provided her an incredible breadth of knowledge that has afforded her a competitive advantage over her peers. Specifically, Julie notes the frequency of group work and the experiential opportunities the Leadership School encourages help her in various capacities at Andersen. “It was astonishing to me to walk into training the first day and meet so many people who had little or no experience working in group settings in their respective colleges.” Though she was very prepared for the group work, Julie felt overwhelmed by the new setting of a large consulting firm. “Although I felt very prepared coming into Andersen, it would have been nice to have gained specific experience in the consulting field while I was at Jepson.”

*~ What are current models of programs linking leadership and consulting? ~*

Again, since there does not exist any formal material between the academic field of leadership studies and the work of consultants, no explicit leadership models exist. However, numerous programs at academic institutions around the country have been developed to provide their students ample opportunity to explore the career path of consulting. However, they are not designed with leadership studies as the primary backbone.

Cynthia Chilton, a senior at Vanderbilt University helped develop and worked with a student consulting model at her university. She was interviewed and the model was examined for its strengths and weaknesses (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/sos/Home.htm>). “The internet site is the product of many months of planning and coordination,” Chilton said. “Our organization wanted to make the site as explanatory as possible and very easy to use. That way, if they want our services, is readily available.”

“Founded in the Fall of 1996, Student Organization Solutions (SOS) is an innovative on-campus group which offers consulting services to any Vanderbilt Association or organization. SOS was created due to an expressed desire for more organizational change within student groups; the Student Government Association, and others, felt that inexperience and lack of training led to apathetic student groups. Following models set by “peer advising” groups at other schools, such as the University of South Carolina, several students began to offer consulting services to other campus organizations. Today, SOS remains a prosperous part of Vanderbilt’s campus. Funded by the Student Activity Fee, SOS has the resources, vision, and desire to make a significant and positive change to any and every campus group.”

When reviewing the Vanderbilt University “Student Organization Solutions” (SOS) club’s website, their organization and thought process is clear and evident. They explain the services they provide as well as a brief history of their organization. In addition, the constitution is made public. To direct their efforts, SOS also generated a mission statement for their consulting group. For students interested in becoming a part of the SOS, information regarding membership and applications are available on-line. Finally, the materials they use, the consultants they seek, and contact information is easily accessible.

The “materials section” presented on-line is similar to those reviewed in the literature review of this proposal. Generally, it consists of topics such as “The 7 Steps of Consulting” as well as some of the structured competencies of the club. The Vanderbilt SOS club strives to enhance the consulting knowledge of its members as well as integrate learning into real world experience. They focus on developing the ability to work well in group settings as well as leading effective change and communicating with others.

Leadership is also mentioned in the Vanderbilt model, although only one article explicitly related to has been put online. The club organizers do give a framework for providing guidance in general leadership issues such as the development of a mission statement and motivating group members. It is inferred that leadership development and experience are

the ultimate goals of this club; however, leadership does not appear to be the most important aspect.

Overall, the SOS club of Vanderbilt University is similar but quite different than the model proposed in this project. SOS consultants are “trained to deal with numerous organizational issues.” The two primary services to clients are:

1. Organizational Consultation
2. Training Workshops and Presentations

While the Jepson School consulting group would maintain the importance to organizational development and change, our niche would be on the leadership side of change management and organizational development.

Many of the services offered at Vanderbilt would cross-over here at Jepson. For example, the Jepson Consulting team would offer services similar to Vanderbilt:

- Developing effective vision, mission, and goals,
- Ways to motivate team members, and
- Effective meetings and communication.

The SOS club at Vanderbilt University is a nice example of a student-led consulting organization, although changes will need to be made here at Jepson to integrate leadership theory with practice. Moreover, the club’s need and success emphasizes just how effective a similar program here at the University of Richmond could be.

## *Interpretation of Data*

### *~ Do links exist between leadership education and consulting? ~*

According to our research, links do exist between leadership education and consulting. Each of the subjects interviewed found meaningful, though sometimes very different, connects between the two areas. The frequency of comments relating to the necessity of critical thinking to the consultant provides the strongest link. As students in the Jepson School move through the curriculum, they not only take a course in critical thinking, they are challenged and expected to apply the skills of logical and critical analysis to each assignment they complete. Leadership majors, given the nature of the interdisciplinary major, must find connects between leadership and many different contexts. In order to achieve this, they must be adept in quickly and effectively analyzing the context before them and finding similarities to the theories they have learned in leadership courses.

Similarly, consultants face a dynamic, ever-changing work setting where the only factor they can expect to remain constant is the speed of the change. Consultants must take the basic theories of consulting and apply them to a variety of contexts as they move within and between industries for work. Effectiveness at this competency demands finely tuned analysis and critical thinking skills as the consultant gains valuable knowledge through experience.

The second obvious link between leadership and consulting stems from the actual growth of knowledge. In both leadership education and consulting, a great emphasis is placed

upon learning, both through formal training and through experience. Leadership scholars recognize the “cutting edge” nature of the field that requires continual learning for keeping up with the academia. The academic study of leadership, however, is not enough to satisfy the need to stay current with research. Rather, students of leadership in almost any setting are encouraged, at times required, to practice the concepts about which they are learning in order to make connects between the classroom and the “real world.”

Consulting, too, being a dynamic environment requires career-long training. Consultants at all firms contacted mentioned not only a formal indoctrination training, but also continual education throughout the career. Training is viewed as a necessity to stay in touch with the advancements and changes in the field. Additionally, training is an opportunity for new hires and transfers to learn about the specific industry within which they will be working before they are sent to join the group. Mark Nevins and others mentioned that the best training came through experience, though. As consultants spend more and more time on projects, they are better prepared for the next assignment they will face.

Another significant link is that of group dynamics and group functioning. Both leadership education and consulting focus on the importance of group work in the completion of the tasks at hand. The Jepson School has, as a part of their mantra, a dedication to group work. Classes such as Leading Groups aids the student of leadership in learning about the theories of group and organizational behavior and group projects in



every leadership course test that knowledge. This very topic of group work is not only the most dreaded and feared component of the leadership education, it is also the most rewarding. Through group work, students learn the valuable lessons of time management, social development, and group norms and culture. Often students also learn first hand the downside of group work - the energy and extra time required to work in groups, the frustration of group members who do not perform, and the anguish of a group project put off until the night before the due date. While these are all hard lessons, they are lessons best learnt while students are still in school. Group work in undergraduate education prepares students for the working world more effectively than any other tool.

Consultants and consulting firms see the value of group work and all of the companies interviewed utilize groups in the majority of the work completed. While group sizes range from three to three hundred, the basic theories of group process apply everywhere. Consulting firms tended to agree that new hires who have had valuable experience in the area of group work are significantly better prepared for life as a consultant than their counterparts without this valuable knowledge.

*~ Is one benefited by gaining consulting experience prior to the work setting? ~*

According to the research, students who have experience in the consulting field prior to graduation enjoy a distinct competitive advantage over their peers who have had no similar experience. During recruiting, those prospects with experience are viewed as

more on the level of consultants with who have an additional degree from a graduate business school and those with actual work experience. New hires who have some type of experience in the consulting field, whether in the form of an internship or an academic class, are more likely to be recruited over those without a similar experience. The addition of a consulting component to the curriculum, according to a number of the human resources managers interviewed, might actually aid the University and the Jepson School of gaining more of a national reputation as it would add a recognizable component to a largely ambiguous major and school.

## ***Recommendations, Conclusions, & Results of the Project***

- *Possible Program Models*

### *~ Full Curriculum Model ~*

This model would encompass a two + semester time frame. In the first semester of the junior year, students would be selected through an application process into a leadership consulting program. Students would willingly commit two semesters plus one summer to this program. In the second semester of the junior year, students will take a course (1 hr of credit, pass-fail) on leadership consulting. The Jepson School has ample resources to begin this program with highlighted faculty such as Gill Hickman, Joanne Ciulla, Chuck Metzger, and John Rosenblum. Jepson could also exercise the option of working across departments to utilize resources in the Robins School of Business. In addition, outside consulting professions can be brought to the course for specific lectures. Topics covered in this course would include:

- the consulting industry
- the leadership consulting field
- tools of the consultant
- various industrial models and theories of consulting
- the instruments and how to use them
- consulting for change
- how to find an internship in consulting (students will have summer job by end of course)
- the competencies of consulting

At the successful completion of the consulting course, students will have much of the background information on consulting and will be able to practice the skills at a consulting firm. Students will be able to choose any consulting firm with which to have

an internship, with the internship occurring during the summer between the student's junior and senior year. This will count as a requirement of the program but also as the required Jepson internship. When students return for the senior year, they will enroll in a two credit hour consulting seminar. With a faculty advisor, students will form a consulting team that will do pro-bono work for campus organizations, small, or non-profit companies that can not afford to hire a consulting firm. Leadership consulting services provided will include change management, mission and vision development, and organizational design and change.

The three credit hours students would earn between the course and the seminar could count toward the three optional hours required in the Jepson curriculum. The Jepson School might also look at leadership consulting as a possible Leadership Studies concentration.

#### *~ Consulting Club Model ~*

In this model, students of any year would be able to join a Jepson-sponsored Consulting Club. The Consulting Club would bring in consultants and industry specialists as well as utilize the many resources in the Jepson School to speak on topics relating to consulting and consulting competencies. The workshops sponsored by the club would serve not only to help educate students, but also to enhance relationships between the Jepson School and consulting firms. As a second component of the club, members with seniority

would be invited to join a Jepson consulting team that would go into the community to do pro-bono work for companies and non-profits.

One option with the “Consulting Club” model is the debate of whether or not the club should be University-wide or be comprised of Jepson students only. If it is decided that the club remains an exclusive group of Jepson students, funding will come from the Jepson School only, as mandated by the University. However, if the club opens to the larger university in general, more funding could be appropriated, thus increasing the opportunities of the club. Of course, with a University-wide program, the focus of the “Consulting Club” may risk moving away from being leadership-based to a more inclusive organization. As with any other campus organization, the “Consulting Club” should develop internal structure to include a constitution, founding members, officers, and procedural organization.

- *Final Recommendations*

Given the research conducted throughout this senior project, it is recommended that the Jepson School faculty and administration seriously consider adding a consulting component to the already established curriculum. In so doing, the Jepson School will be better preparing its students for a job in the competitive field of leadership and management consulting.

Though two models have been presented in the course of this senior project, it is recommended that the school adopt the “Full Curriculum Model” for implementation during the next one to two academic years. Consulting firms are eager to recruit talented and determined undergraduate students for employment with their respective firms. Through this senior project, strong ties have begun to be established. These ties should be nurtured and utilized in the forthcoming developmental years. Not only will these ties provide an ample resource upon which to build a successful component of the Jepson curriculum, but it will also afford students opportunities for internship placements.

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### *Appendix – I, Interview Questions*

1. Are there links between leadership education and consulting?
2. How can a leadership studies program better prepare its students for the field of consulting?
  - What essential components should be included in a course designed to prepare leadership studies students for the field of consulting?
  - What knowledge, skills, and abilities do consulting firms seek in candidates for the field of consulting?
  - What factors attract leadership studies students to consulting?
  - What factors attract consulting firms to leadership studies students?
  - What type of general training is given to new hires at top consulting firms?
  - What type of leadership training is given to new hires at top consulting firms? '
  - What type of consulting firms are best suited for leadership studies students?

## ***Appendix – II, Letter to Firms***

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

As senior students of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies at the University of Richmond, Virginia, we are charged to create a senior project as a capstone to our development in leadership education that will make a meaningful contribution to the field of leadership.

Through our coursework, we have studied organizations that are beginning to use leadership concepts to enhance their business performance. At the forefront of the changes are consulting firms that provide the link between these new, progressive concepts and traditional business practices. There, too, exists a link between consulting firms and the Jepson School of Leadership Studies. Having matriculated only five classes of students, the Jepson School finds many of its graduates in positions within key consulting firms. After studying this dynamic link between educational institution and business, we feel that one of the best ways to integrate leadership theory with practice, a core value of the Jepson School, is to create a means of educating leadership students for jobs in the consulting industry.

Specifically, we hope to use information gathered through research of premiere consulting firms in the development of a consulting curriculum for the Jepson School. Through our preliminary research of the consulting industry, we hope to gain a greater understanding of what consulting firms are currently doing in the area of leadership studies. This research will culminate in the development of a year-long curriculum for students interested in consulting as a possible career path. Further, we intend to forge an *active* partnership between the Jepson School and these key consulting firms that will allow students to gain a broader understanding of leadership. In addition, the program will provide consulting firms a line of communication with a qualified pool of candidates interested in a future career in consulting.

Enclosed you will find information on the Jepson School of Leadership Studies as well as a general list of information we are seeking from you. We will be contacting you within the next week to solicit feedback about our project as well as to gauge your interest in the plausibility of this idea.

We hope you will find this project as worthwhile as we do; we look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jess W. Timmerman  
enclosures

Raegan L. Williams