

ILLINOIS **small
business**
development center
at Illinois State University

The Field Studies Course is the capstone project for all Management and Quantitative Methods (MQM) majors in the Entrepreneurship sequence. The course is designed to provide business students with an opportunity to apply all of the skills they have developed during their time at ISU to a real world business situation.

Small teams of four to five senior-level students provide consulting services for a local firm. The group works directly with a contact from the firm and is advised by one of the University's College of Business professors as well as the staff of the Illinois Small Business Development Center (SBDC) at ISU. Students sign confidentiality and conflict of interest statements before working with any client companies. The project lasts the full semester and culminates in a presentation of recommendations from the students to the client and professor.

The semester begins with the students compiling an environmental analysis of the industry relevant to their client company. This process familiarizes the student team with the industry and current trends and practices occurring within it. After the environmental analysis is completed the students meet with their client to decide on the scope of the project. Client companies may propose any type of business related project as long as it contains specific deliverables from the team. Some common projects include developing marketing plans, feasibility studies, and conducting customer surveys.

Once the scope of the project has been defined, the students embark on the bulk of the project. Students work mostly from campus, but keep in regular contact with the company – usually every other week. Except for the initial meeting and final presentation (described below in the list of client responsibilities) students are usually able to travel to the client for any necessary meetings and to view the facility (if applicable). Towards the end of the semester, the students will schedule a time for the final presentation of their recommendations to the client, advising professor, and Illinois SBDC at ISU staff.

Client Responsibilities

- Complete the Field Studies Application and Request for Counseling form and return it to the Illinois SBDC at ISU.
- Attend the informational meeting at the beginning of the semester. (Date, time, and location will be provided upon acceptance of Field Studies Project.) At this meeting the advising professor and Illinois SBDC at ISU Director will go over the project in greater detail and discuss the confidentiality statement signed by all of the participating students.
- Be available to the students to answer questions throughout the semester and provide the team with additional information relevant to the project as necessary. (This usually amounts to less than one hour of work per week for the client.)
- If applicable, cover the costs of telephone or postage fees associated with conducting surveys.
- Attend the final presentation of recommendations at the end of the semester.

Field Studies Selection Process

Projects are selected by the Director of the Illinois SBDC at ISU from the applications received before the beginning of the semester. Unfortunately, each year some good applications cannot be selected because there are more projects than student groups. If an applicant requests, the Illinois SBDC at ISU will hold an application until the next semester to be entered into that semester's candidate pool.