

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: What is Carson Business Solutions?

Carson Business Solutions is a new student consulting program launching Fall 2020 out of the Carson College of Business in Pullman.

Q2: What is the mission of Carson Business Solutions?

Our mission is two-fold. For businesses, we serve as a free resource to companies across the state, helping them refine their customer value proposition, drive business innovation, and develop new opportunities for future growth. For students, we offer the valuable opportunity of working with a real business to solve a real problem or develop an opportunity.

Q3: The notion of “experiential learning” sounds similar to the “Next Carson Cougar” initiative. Are the two related?

Yes, they are. The Next Carson Cougar launched in Fall 2019 with new core business courses aimed to raise the bar on education and learning in the Carson College. As students move through the program, we want to expand their opportunities for experiential learning, enabling all Carson students to engage with real businesses. Carson Business Solutions helps us achieve that goal more quickly than originally planned.

Q4: Where did this idea come from?

The Carson College at WSU Vancouver has a similar program called Business Growth Mentor and Analysis Program. BG MAP, which began in 2011, has generated more than 120k hours of free consulting, generated more than \$16M in new local economy revenues and earned high acclaim from regional business leaders. We will collaborate the Vancouver team and leverage as much as of their work as we can in building Carson Business Solutions.

Q5: How is BG MAP different from Carson Business Solutions?

First, BG MAP is a Vancouver-based program focused on business and industry in the Portland/Vancouver metro area. Carson Business Solutions will reach across the state, offering services to businesses anywhere in Washington.

Second, BG MAP is focused on one of two key consulting tracks; business growth and marketing. In addition to business growth and marketing tracks, Carson Business Solutions will also offer an information systems/e-commerce project track. Ultimately, Carson Business Solutions will offer businesses the opportunity to engage with teams from *any* Carson academic department.

Q6: Why is the Carson College of Business launching this program now, in the middle of a pandemic?

As difficult as COVID-19 has been for businesses and our students, it has taught many of us that the time is ripe for innovation. There are real needs and new challenges that have come to light because of the pandemic. We believe this is a very opportune time to reach out to business across our state and partner with them to drive growth and innovation.

Q7: How are students selected to participate in Carson Business Solutions?

As we launch the program, we will engage students from the Entrepreneurship Capstone course [ENTRP 492 – Small Business Strategy] to serve our client company participants. All Entrepreneurship Majors are required to take ENTRP 492 to complete their program, so we're confident we'll have an engaged population to serve businesses.

Q8: What services will Carson Business Solutions offer businesses?

We recognize that each business has unique strengths, opportunities and challenges; similarly, our students have different interests and skills. Each participating company will have the opportunity to engage with a student team focused on one specific area: business growth, information systems, or marketing.

Q9: How large are the student teams that will partner with businesses?

The ideal student team size is 4-5 students. Small enough to be nimble and efficient, large enough to offer significant collective work to a business. Student teams are designed to be cross-functional in nature. Ideally, the teams will consist of at least one student from each of the following functional areas: finance/accounting, management/strategy, management information systems (MIS), and marketing.

Q10: How does the program director monitor the work product of the student teams and ensure their suggestions come from a place of sound business judgement?

One key component of the program is the student team's coach. Each team will have a coach that will serve as a resource as they go through the program, testing and challenging their ideas and providing overall support. We will leverage our own faculty, volunteers from our boards of advisors, and current and retired business executives who desire to give back via the opportunity to coach our students through the program.

Q11: How will you get the word out?

We will share the launch of the program broadly across many channels. Initially, we plan to partner closely with cities and towns across the region and state to help us identify businesses who may be strong candidates for the program. We believe chambers of commerce and other

small business development organizations will be key partners in helping us network and scale the program.

Q12: How much does it cost to be part of the program?

The program will offer student consulting services to businesses at no cost. Pro bono.

Q13: How can the university afford to launch a program like this when budgets are tight?

We are fortunate to have several key sponsors who believe in our mission and want to see more students experience learning in this way. Out of their generosity, the program has been founded.

Q14: Do students get paid for their work in the program?

No. Carson Business Solutions is part of the Capstone academic requirement for all Entrepreneurship majors. Students are not compensated for their work. We do encourage them to include the consulting project experience on their resumé as well as seek referrals from the client company they engage with.

Q15: What do you require from the companies you consult for?

We seek to partner with businesses who have a real problem to solve or opportunity to develop. We look for business leaders who embrace innovation, appreciate new perspective and are willing to test new ideas and models. To participate in our program, a company should be 2-3 years old, have a least 2 employees and be willing to provide a complete set of financials (2 years of balance sheet and income statement). Finally, we hope the companies we engage with will implement the ideas and strategies the student teams recommend.

Q16: How do participating companies know their data will be safe?

Carson Business Solutions requires each student and instructor to sign a formal, legally binding non-disclosure agreement (NDA). We will not share any company's financial or other data with anyone outside the project team.

Q17: Who is leading this new program?

Garth Mader, Assistant Clinical Professor in the Department of Management, Information Systems and Entrepreneurship, will serve as Director of Carson Business Solutions. Garth comes from industry, having spent the last 20+ years in executive leadership roles at Nordstrom and most recently Amazon. In 2018, Garth joined the Carson College as a volunteer class advisor and student mentor and began teaching full time in 2019. Garth is highly engaged with his students and is passionate about launching this new program for the Carson College of Business.

Q18: How many businesses do you hope to engage with in the 2020-2021 academic year?

Based on planned enrollment in ENTRP 492, we plan to engage with approximately 24 businesses in the coming academic year, 12 each semester. Over time we plan to identify courses in other Carson departments that could participate in Carson Business Solutions and integrate them into the program.

Q19: Where will Carson Business Solutions be located?

Carson Business Solutions will have office space at The Commons, 225 SE Idaho St, Pullman, WA 99163 – the same location as our Center for Entrepreneurial Studies. This will be a space where potential clients can meet with the program director and student teams will meet and collaborate. [During the pandemic, Carson Business Solutions will operate and connect with businesses virtually, prioritizing the safety of our clients, students, staff and faculty over face-to-face meetings.

Q20: Doesn't COVID-19 and social distancing requirements make this more difficult?

While COVID-19 does require appropriate social distancing, the rapid adoption of virtual meeting technologies (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts Meet, Skype, etc.) may make it easier for Pullman students to engage with companies across the state.

Q21: I have other questions not addressed here. Who do I talk to?

Please reach out directly to Garth Mader at garth.mader@wsu.edu.

Q22: I have an idea for a potential business client and/or student mentor. How do I refer them to Carson Business Solutions?

We will soon be launching an information site for Carson Business Solutions at business.wsu.edu, where prospective clients or mentors may apply. Until the site goes live, please send all referrals to Garth via email.