

## **Client Background Research**

### **Client Overview**

The iConsultancy Experiential Learning Program is a component of the College of Information Studies (iSchool) at the University of Maryland. Through practical, project-based learning opportunities, it links students with actual businesses to help them hone their professional skills. Every year, iConsultancy oversees more than 150 projects with about 700 students. These projects, which cover a range of industries, assist students in bridging the knowledge gap between the classroom and the demands of the workforce.

### **Mission and Business Strategy**

iConsultancy's mission aligns with the University of Maryland's broader goal of advancing workforce development across the state. Specifically, iConsultancy:

- provides students with access to real-world projects and industry professionals.
- assists students in applying what they have learned in the classroom to real-world problems.
- increases employer involvement by demonstrating iSchool graduates' abilities.
- encourages collaborations between industry and academia to meet labor demands.

The Career Skills Matrix project directly supports this mission by mapping the skills and competencies of iSchool students to job roles, improving employer awareness of the value these graduates bring to the workforce.

### **Key Individuals**

- **Dr. Justin Zielke - key stakeholder:** An instructor at UMD's iSchool with a focus on learning sciences, digital accessibility, and information literacy. His background in both

education and user experience design points to a strong fit with the project's objectives of informing employers and students about career pathways.

- **TJ Rainsford - direct client:** A Senior Program Manager at iConsultancy, where he is in charge of developing projects related to experiential learning. He is a key decision-maker for this project since part of his job is to coordinate with industry partners, students, and faculty to create meaningful learning experiences.

### **Identified Problem/Need:**

iConsultancy wants to bridge the gap between undergraduate education and workforce demands in Maryland. While students acquire technical and professional skills through their coursework, there is a need to clearly define how these skills align with industry job roles, particularly in non-traditional fields for Information Studies graduates.

The primary problem is that students may struggle to identify career opportunities, and employers may not fully understand the value of hiring graduates from Information Science, Information Design, and Social Data Science programs. This misalignment creates a barrier to workforce entry and limits students' ability to market themselves effectively in the job market.

The needs for this project include:

- Developing a career skills matrix. A structured representation of skills and knowledge from the College of Information's undergraduate programs.
- Mapping skills to workforce needs. Researching Maryland's job market trends and identifying relevant career pathways for graduates.
- Highlighting non-traditional roles. Identifying less obvious career opportunities that leverage graduates' unique skill sets.

Creating Educational Infographics – Developing visual materials to communicate the value of these skills to students, employers, and stakeholders.

Presenting Key Findings – Delivering a formal report and presentation to the iConsultancy team and relevant stakeholders.

### **Market Context**

The iConsultancy is not purely a business, and that fact is the reason this need fits with the rest of their operations. One of the main goals of the iConsultancy is to give students experience working with actual businesses to prepare them to join the workforce. Part of preparing students for the workforce involves informing them of what jobs they are qualified for, since a degree from the iSchool develops a broad range of skills. Creating infographics and datasets about the qualifications of iSchool graduates also helps bring business to the Maryland area, since it shows there is a qualified workforce, for a variety of rapidly growing industries, within the state. This can in turn bring more clients to the iConsultancy, enabling them to prepare more students for the professional workforce.

### **Similar Organizations**

Similar Organizations would include Navagant, Accenture or larger scale wise - BCG, EY, Deloitte, PwC.

### **Remaining Questions for Client Requirements Gathering**

1. **What challenges have employers faced in understanding the value of Information Studies graduates?**
2. **What data or feedback does the College of Information Studies already have on student career outcomes?**

- 3. What format would be most useful for the career skills matrix (e.g., interactive tool, static document, website integration)?**
- 4. I know the iConsultancy is disconnected from the university, but do you think anything we find regarding job skills might be used to inform or reevaluate iSchool curriculum?**
- 5. How should we address any potential discrepancies between skills learned and skills requested?**
- 6. For research into the skills the INFO College teaches, should we consider skills necessary for positions former students currently work at or should we primarily focus on skills explicitly taught here?**