

RESEARCH ASSIGNMENTS

There are two kinds of research assignments:

1. Brief (1-2 pages) topical reports associated with each topic. Specific questions or issues to be addressed are given in the syllabus after each set of reading assignments. Usually reports are due two weeks after the class in which the respective readings are discussed.
2. A research paper is assigned to encourage you to develop your fact-finding and presentation skills and to apply them in exploring some facet of your internship that is of particular interest to you. The seminar provides opportunities to share your findings with others and to learn from their experiences as well. In many Brandeis courses the "term paper" is a discrete addendum to the structured curriculum; in this seminar, research into some aspect of your internship work should be a central focus.

SOME SUGGESTED TOPICS

Some alternative types of papers are suggested below. The suggestions are illustrative rather than prescriptive; they are not intended to be rigid templates for individual projects. You are encouraged to focus on particular issues or problems arising in your internship environment. You may also propose other projects that lie outside the fields suggested in this outline.

1. The significance of your work assignment

Are you engaged in a special project? What are its origins and objectives? What are the possible outcomes of your findings for the firm? What are the possible implications of these findings for other firms, individuals, the economy at large? What will be the likely effects of your work on your supervisors and colleagues? What difference will the quality of your report make to the various constituencies affected? What are the pros and cons of using an intern for this project?

2. The interdependence of firms in your industry

Map the "ecology" of firms in your industry. Who are your firm's suppliers, customers, competitors? To what extent do they rely on impersonal market transactions as distinguished from longer term relationships? What kinds of formal and informal ties does your firm have with others in the industry? Do these firms engage in joint ventures? How successful have they been? Are the relationships of firms in your industry changing rapidly? Why or why not?

3. The internal organization of your firm

Describe the firm's departmental structure and/or make an organization chart. What functions do departments or identifiable work groups perform? Do other firms in the industry have similar or different structures?

What are your firm's products? What does it "make" and what does it "buy"? Do other firms in your industry specialize differently?

Is the internal organization of firms in this industry changing rapidly? Why or why not?

4. Employment patterns of firms in your industry

Describe the distribution of employment among job categories? What are their skill requirements? How have they been changing? Compensation packages? To what extent do individuals move from job to job? To what extent are jobs being redefined?

Analyze the career trajectories of professionals in this industry? What are the different patterns of "getting ahead"?

5. The firm in the international economy

Map the geographical dimensions of this firm's operations:

What does it import, export?

Does it have international subsidiaries? What are their functions?

How important is international competition?

Does it engage in international joint ventures? Describe them.

How have the international linkages been changing?

6. Variations in management style among firms in your industry

Compare management styles in two or more firms in your sector with respect to:

Personnel policy

Who makes decisions about what? Which decisions are joint and which centralized?

To what extent are design and production decisions shared with suppliers?

Use of outside consultants

7. How does rapid growth or technological change affect firms in your sector?

In what ways is the product changing? Becoming more varied? In what ways is process changing? In what ways is division of labor changing?

What role does rapid change play in shaping this firm's behavior? Compare the sector to its state 5 years ago.

6. Longer term history of your firm or industry

Historically oriented papers may be focused at the industry level, or more narrowly, at the firm or even at the division or department level. How have the various functions of the organization changed over time?

financing

personnel

specialization (make-or-buy, "outsourcing")

nature of product(s) and product mix
mergers and acquisitions
management style and locus of control
organizational form

Have the component parts of the organization grown at similar rates or have they changed significantly in relative importance?

TIMETABLE

Students should choose a topic for the research paper by the fourth week in the semester and hand in a half-page proposal by the sixth meeting of the class.