

*Lillian Mills*

**Southern Business Administration Association Societal Impact Award**

*Application for the Longhorn Impact Fellowship at Texas (LIFT) Program*

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Submitted By:

The McCombs School of Business at The University of Texas at Austin

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*McCombs School of Business enrollment as of Fall 2022:*

- Full Time MBA Students – 490
- Executive MBA & Non-Austin MBA Program Students - 511
- BBA Students – 4,757

### **I. Description of the Innovative Strategy or Program**

*The submission will describe the strategy or program in a way that an interested reader will have sufficient information to fully understand all dimensions of the strategy or program.* The Global Sustainability Leadership Institute is an academic institute at The McCombs School of Business and Moody College of Communications that prepares students to drive sustainable social and environmental impact in their future careers. We specialize in sustainable finance, impact infrastructure and innovation, sustainability communications, and corporate sustainability. We have grown over the last five years from a dean's initiative to provide a vast portfolio of experiential learning programs, community events, courses, and more. One of our premier programs is the Longhorn Impact Fellowship at Texas (LIFT) sustainability consulting program. LIFT matches interdisciplinary student teams of juniors, seniors, and graduate students with organizations to solve a sustainability challenge for a semester. Since 2019, the program's 165 students have supported 38 projects with sustainability strategies, ESG benchmarking, circular economy solutions, communication strategies, and other areas of social and environmental impact. The goals of the program include: 1) building a community of socially and environmentally conscious innovators, 2), developing skills such as sustainability reporting, change management, market research, systems thinking, and impact measurement, 3) supporting career exploration in the impact and consulting fields, 4) elevating the impact of our clients, and 5) creating a pipeline for recruiting.

New projects are available each semester through a competitive client application and scoping process that starts six months before the projects launch. Once clients are finalized, students have two months to apply to the program with short essays and rank their favorite projects. Their top three clients will then review their applications and shortlist a team. The GSLI staff narrow the clients' preferences down to five students based on relevant project skills, interdisciplinary status, leadership experience, and passion for sustainability. Each team has at least two undergraduates on it, and each has at least two business students. Other members are strategically chosen to provide wisdom from varying fields ranging from Biology to Architectural Engineering. We even have a few PhDs join each cohort! New teams are given a month before the work begins to write up a Client-Consultant Agreement to finalize scope of the project and set team norms. The projects kick off a month into the program with "LIFT Camp," a Saturday boot camp on consulting and sustainability essentials. Teams typically work for five hours a week over a three-month span before presenting deliverables to their clients at the end of the semester.

Throughout their experience, students receive support from four GSLI workshops, assigned team peer advisors, and McKinsey & Co. managers in our Consultants in Residence program. They also have access to an online library of recorded videos and articles for reference, and are taught how to use campus resources such as the Business Librarian. Team leaders are assigned based on interest and past experience to manage communication with the GSLI and clients, as well as to keep the projects on track.

***An explanation of innovativeness or uniqueness of strategy or program.*** LIFT is similar to many consulting programs across UT Austin and other institutions in giving students hands-on experience. However, we differ in several key ways. First, the program is interdisciplinary and our cohorts feature a wide diversity of ages, disciplines, and work experiences. This environment mimics the real world for our students and allows them to grow in their ability to communicate with, work with, and learn from a diverse workforce. It also allows our younger students to learn professionalism from graduate students with career experience, and promotes organic informational interviews on their career journeys and career connections. Second, our students work on problem-solving projects that are material to the organization's success instead of more fact-finding or established internship projects. The GSLI team carefully recruits clients who can provide a challenge to our cohorts and treat them as real consultants. Third, LIFT provides a wide array of training and support mechanisms that other programs do not. For instance, we bring in speakers on relevant project topics each month, and assign mentors to each team with previous LIFT consulting experience. We also recently launched a Consultants in Residence program in partnership with McKinsey & Co. to provide deeper managerial and career support. Finally, the GSLI offers scholarships to cohort members who need financial aid to reduce the burden of joining an experiential learning program over a campus job. This further increases our ability to recruit a diverse array of voices to each cohort.

***An explanation of how the strategy or program aligns with the business school's mission.*** The McCombs School of Business, as part of The University of Texas at Austin, aims to transform lives for the benefit of society. LIFT fulfills this in spades through providing free career training to students and support to community organizations who are trying to improve their sustainability practices or bring innovative sustainable products and services to the world. As part of the university's mission, McCombs aims to be "Future Focused," "Human Centered," "Innovator Connected," and "Collaboratively Minded." LIFT is shaping the future of our workforce and business leadership through instilling critical sustainability knowledge and problem-solving skills. Our approach is human-centered in

that we foster a diverse, well-supported environment for students to be successful in through team composition, trainings, Client-Consultant Agreements, scholarships, and more. We are also adaptive to our student and client needs through program surveys and changes each semester. LIFT connects innovative problem-solvers with organizations in need and provides human-centered design training in our online curriculum to spark creative solutions. Finally, the program prepares students for work in a collaboratively minded workforce through its interdisciplinary setting.

## **II. Societal Impact of the Strategy or Program**

***Description of how this approach or program is a force for good and the positive impact it has in the local community and more broadly on society.*** LIFT trains students to identify problems and devise solutions in any career. Although we are thrilled when students go into sustainability work (and many of our graduates have!), our main purpose is to train the business and nonprofit leaders of tomorrow to think critically, empathize with others, and consider sustainability and stakeholder challenges when making decisions. Since launching in 2019, we have received multiple recruitment requests from clients and outside consulting companies like NI, Dell, Sendero, Bell Creek, and Bridgespan Group looking for this unique set of skills. LIFT also provides all sizes of organizations with needed free support in a growing field, which allows them to address sustainability issues that may be put on the back-burner otherwise. For nonprofits and social enterprises, this means an increase in capacity and impact. For corporations, this means satisfying key stakeholders like investors, improving their long-term ability to operate, and improving their social capital. Many a client have written post-project to share that their team's work catalyzed sustainability agenda and organizational growth.

***Documentation of the size of the impact and/or outcomes of strategy or program.*** LIFT has a measurable impact for both student consultants and clients. Based on graduate surveys, we know that about 35% of students have gone into professional consulting post-graduation, and another 15-20% went into sustainability roles. 100% of LIFT graduates report that they would recommend the program to others, and 91% of our graduates report that they learned interdisciplinary skills from their peers in the program. \$7,500 in scholarship money has been awarded to 11 students thus far, reducing student financial stressors. This especially helps the 23% of our students who are first-generation college students. However, the post-graduation notes we receive from our alumni best demonstrate the impact of the program on their careers. A few examples are includes in the Appendix.

For clients, LIFT has provided a self-reported \$629,856 in value-add to their organizations over 9,580 hours of free consulting. We survey each client cohort post-project to ask for their feedback and value provided to their group. 100% of our clients recommend the program to others.

### **III. Description of applicability or transferability to other institutions.**

Although LIFT is unique compared to many other student consulting programs, our learnings can be replicated at other institutions with the support of a dedicated staff member and community or faculty advisors. In fact, we have already received requests for more information on our model from colleges like The University of San Diego. LIFT's cross-campus operational model is beneficial in reducing disciplinary siloes at universities and encouraging connections between students, faculty, and staff from across campus. It also pushes students to move beyond the "ivory tower" into the community where they can learn not only about professionalism, but how their curriculum can be put to use for societal good. Finally, LIFT provides more structure and curriculum than traditional consulting programs increase interest from employers. The program has allowed us to partner with organizations like EY, McKinsey & Co., KMPG, and more for curriculum, project support, and recruiting.

### **Appendix of Supporting Quotes & Statistics**

- "The LIFT program positioned me for a successful internship and full-time position with Deloitte's Government and Public Services practice. At LIFT I learned the skills I needed to be a successful consultant and make a difference for my clients." - Kaitlyn Anderson, MPAff '22
- "Being a part of LIFT accelerated my pursuits in starting a career in social impact and sustainability. What's really special about LIFT and GSLI is that GSLI is focused on diversity and inclusion, and they seek out students from all majors and backgrounds; being a LIFT consultant was one of the highlights of my college experience at UT. I'm really grateful for the inspiring people I met as well as the detailed programming and support the GSLI Staff provides each LIFT student consultant. I highly recommend LIFT and all of the other programs GSLI coordinates for students who are seeking to pursue both purpose and profit!" – Spring 2022 Graduate
- "I highly recommend the LIFT program to anyone who wants a high-quality, bite-size consulting experience to address real problems in the sustainability space. As a graduate student with several years of work experience at one of the largest companies in the world, I can attest that this was one of my best teamwork experiences. And the LIFT program managers provided the organizational structure and support to ensure our success!" – Spring 2022 Graduate
- "I hope that you're well. Just wanted to share that two of the students I mentored as part of LIFT recently wrote to me with some interesting news. Paul \_\_\_\_ shared that the project he did with me on SAF commercialization helped him to secure a promotion and relocation to Australia. Another student, Malvika \_\_\_\_, shared that although she entered Finance as a major, she later changed her mind after working on the deforestation project with me. She's now looking to start her career in social impact. It has been an honor to work with your students and I'm glad that they are learning and applying their knowledge and interests. I thought that you'd appreciate knowing about the impact that LIFT is having on your students." - Allan (Shell and LEAF Coalition Client, Fall 2021/Spring 2022)

LIFT Statistics 2019-2022	
# students	165
# clients (minus repeats w/ Habitat, Delll, and JUST)	38
Total Value	\$629,856.00
Average Value	\$16,250.70
# workshops (not including Camp)	18
Scholarship money awarded	\$7,500.00
Hours of consulting provided	9580
% of students reporting that they learned interdisciplinary skills	91%
% of clients recommending LIFT to others	100%
% of students recommending LIFT to others	100%
<b>Student Demographics</b>	
White	29%
Black	9%
Latinx	12%
Asian	50%
<b>First Generation?</b>	
Yes	23.20%
No	75.55%
N/A	1.25%
<b>Gender Pronoun Preference</b>	
She/her/hers	57.05%
He/him/his	42.95%
Other	0%

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The University of Texas at Austin