Alumni Highlight: Analyst/Consultant
By CJ Neely, PhD

Name: Natasha Chan

Job Title & Company: Higher Education Analyst in the Enterprise Solutions Practice at Huron Consulting Group

Degree/Department from JHSPH: MPH/MBA, 2017

1. How long have you been in your current position?
I have been with Huron since May 2017 (5 months).

2. How did you become interested in consulting?
This is a very long and complicated story that I would be happy to discuss in length with anyone who is interested…but the short story is that after graduating from college, and having spent much time in clinical and non-profit settings, I wanted to gain more business experience. Consulting seemed like a great way to work in a project based, team oriented setting. I was drawn to the fast paced, ever changing nature of the work, and wanted to push myself to step out of my comfort zone.

3. What are the specific responsibilities of your role?
As part of the enterprise solutions practice, my team assists universities and academic medical centers that are switching out their old IT systems for new cloud solutions. I specifically advise our clients on change management, handling all the people problems that can arise due to an IT implementation. These projects can disrupt the daily lives of end users who have been using their system or processes for years, even decades. I ensure that organizations have the right sponsors for the change, are communicating necessary information to their employees, training end users and giving them the tools they need, and are listening to frustrations.

4. What do you consider the most important skills for this type of role?
In order to succeed in consulting, you need to be flexible, detail oriented, forward thinking, and client focused. Though we are expected to be experts in the fields we consult in, often times each university or organization we encounter has a unique set of problems or circumstances that we have never seen before, requiring us to think quickly on our feet and conduct extensive research to come up with a solution. Though you may spend days, weeks, months, coming up with a strategy or plan, things can change at the drop of a hat (whether it be budget, timelines, or resources) and you will need to learn to roll with the punches. Being in consulting often feels like you are drinking out of the end of the firehose – there are always a thousand moving pieces and timelines to keep track of, and as you are serving a client, it is important to always stay one step ahead so that you can provide the answers, support, and knowledge they are seeking.

5. What is the most enjoyable/rewarding part of your current position?
I love working with universities and academic medical centers – they are value based institutions that I believe in and it is rewarding to know that the work I am doing is going towards a good cause: helping these entities operate more efficiently so that they can better serve students and patients.

6. What is the most challenging aspect?
The travel can be quite grueling – I am on the road Mon-Thurs. My client is currently in Wyoming and I am staffed on the project through December 2018. I have to fly from Chicago to Denver, and then drive 2.5 hours to the client, every week, every month. Even in the dead of winter! It can be hard to maintain a personal life (seeing friends/family, cooking, grocery shopping, going to the gym) when you’re never living at home.

7. What has been the most difficult aspect of transitioning into this position?
Having come from a strong healthcare background, transitioning into a human resources and IT role in higher education was a huge change for me. I had to learn completely new terminology, business processes, organizational structures, and politics that I am not familiar with.

8. What did you highlight on your resume when applying for consulting jobs?  
Prior consulting experience, client service, problem solving skills, working with teams, data analytics

9. Can you describe the interview process?  
Huron Consulting Group does not conduct on-campus interviews at Johns Hopkins or for masters students. You will need to apply online as an experienced hire. There will be several rounds of interviews: a phone screen with a recruiter, 1-2 phone interviews with a manager or a director, and one all-day in-person interview at the Huron headquarters in Chicago. The in-person interview will consist of 5 behavioral interviews with varying levels of directors, as well as a case study.

10. Any last bit of advice for JHSPH students interested in pursuing a similar career (ie. what can students do during their training to gain a competitive edge when applying)?  
Network, network, network! Independent of Huron, consulting as an industry relies heavily on networking and recommendations. As you will need to apply online as an experienced hire, you will need every advantage you can get to be noticed and distinguished from the crowd – it is crucial to conduct informational interviews with current employees or alumni who currently have the position or work at the company you are interested in. I would also encourage you to get experience. If you have never worked in consulting before, I highly recommend you do a consulting internship (paid or unpaid) or work in the industry the consulting firm of interest serves. There is only so much you can learn in a classroom – though the skills you learn in graduate school provide an important foundation for your future job, they are not a replacement for real world, hands-on learning.

If you have additional questions about Huron Consulting Group or a career in consulting, feel free to connect with Natasha via email at nachan@huronconsultinggroup.com

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