The Role of the Sponsor Liaison
Harvey Mudd College Clinics

Each Organization sponsoring a Clinic project should give careful thought to assigning the liaison. This sponsor representative plays an important, continuing role in the conduct of the project. Along with the faculty advisor, the liaison is in a critical position to advise, direct, and evaluate the ongoing work of the Clinic team. Experience has proven that interaction between the team members and the sponsor liaison is crucial for the project’s educational value – as well as a successful resolution of the project. The liaison represents the sponsor’s needs and usually serves as a source of information and technical authority. Regular communication between the liaison and the team is necessary to keep the project on schedule. Typically, a liaison would:

- Provide the student team with context for the project and its importance to the sponsor.
- Provide the student team with access to references or specific technical information on the project.
- Work with the team to determine and adjust deliverables and milestones.
- Hold periodic (usually weekly) teleconferences or other meetings with the team.
- Help plan and arrange the site visits.
- Help team members learn and understand professional behavior in such areas as agendas, reports, teleconferences, and meeting deadlines. Let them know how and where they’re falling short, and what the sponsor’s expected professional standards are.

The students have three required written reports and five required presentations during the course of the year. If a project contains proprietary information, the students should provide the liaison with drafts of the reports and the presentations, with sufficient lead-time, to assure they aren’t divulging proprietary information in public forums. Please let the students know what constitutes sufficient time.

The faculty advisor is coaching the team on project management, technical approaches, and professional standards. Please feel free to contact the faculty advisor or the Clinic Director with
questions, concerns, or suggestions about how the team is doing and what advice they are receiving.

One of the most challenging aspects of being a liaison is striking the correct balance between providing the team with specific guidance and leaving the team free to explore. Some projects have a goal of having the students develop innovative ideas and approaches. Others have fairly well defined deliverables and need more focus. The liaison has the responsibility for clearly articulating these expectations to the team. Letting the team flounder for a bit is valuable, but the academic year is short, and they can’t be left to flounder for too long. Discussions with the faculty advisor, the Clinic Director, or former liaisons can assist in striking the correct balance.