



Sohum Doshi



Sohum's understanding of the importance of civic engagement came during a trip to Mumbai, India in the summer of his junior year of high school. During an internship with Reliance Mutual Fund Group, he experienced firsthand the terrible poverty that existed in India while he learned about the internal dynamics of one of India's largest businesses. While originally there only to study the company, he received greater lessons on successful community engagement. At Penn, Sohum is a student in the Wharton School studying Finance and Operations and Information Management. He is particularly interested in studying the factors that contribute to small business growth and success. During Sohum's freshman year summer, he participated in the Penn Program for Public Service Internship and conducted research on the problems faced by small businesses ringing Penn's campus. The experience stuck with him, and Sohum is currently a consultant for the Wharton Small Business Development Center where he has had the opportunity to work with several businesses in and around Philadelphia to solve strategic and developmental challenges.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

“Creating a Win-Win: Reimagining Penn’s Small Business Relationship”

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Urban universities are often landlords—not only for their students, but for retail businesses as well. Through a case study of the University of Pennsylvania, a paragon of university-assisted community development, this paper seeks to understand whether university leasing and commercial real estate policies contribute to the success or failure of these businesses. The question is an important one to answer since the success of local businesses has direct implications for the partner university. This paper cites research that vibrant retail can lead to lower crime and poverty rates in the area and, therefore, lead to higher enrollment rates and satisfaction among students, faculty, and staff. After establishing the importance of answering the main question, the paper turns its attention to understanding the current sentiments of business owners and Penn commercial real estate representatives through interviews. Specifically, it analyzes business owner concerns by examining current policy in three categories—rents, communications, and filling vacant retail spaces. Moreover, it tries to explain differences in the interpretation of these policies by business owners and University representatives. Finally, the paper concludes that while policies in each area could be improved, University communication policies with businesses in particular have led to tangible harms and require immediate change. This paper provides several recommendations to solve these problems.