

Addressing Global Demands Helps School Expand

When Boston University, Massachusetts, USA launched a new master's program in project management in 2005, it expected to draw modest student numbers. However, the global demand for employees with project management skills, and the recognition that for many, a traditional MBA is not enough, has seen the program expand significantly over the last few years. Today the program, which resides in the two academic units of Computer Science and Administrative Sciences, has a strong full-time faculty and contributes millions of dollars to the school's bottom line. Focus on quality has played a key role in their growth, and their new online IT-PM program has been ranked as the second in the country by *US News and World Report*.



RECOGNIZING THE GROWING DEMAND FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Project management studies at Boston University are not something new; they have been teaching project management courses for four decades and dedicated project management modules or certificates have formed part of other degree programs for years. However, increasing demand from employers and students helped Vijay Kanabar, PhD, PMP, associate professor and director of the school's project management programs, recognize the need for a more formal degree and interdisciplinary approach to the way the university taught project management skills and methodologies.

"Younger students and accidental project managers were going into the workplace with no idea how to plan, identify risks, manage stakeholders or do cost estimates," says Dr. Kanabar. "Whether they were in life sciences, finance, engineering, management or software development, they were all doing projects, and the first thing they heard from their employers was, 'You need formal project management skills.'"

Project management, Dr. Kanabar realized, had potential as an academic degree program in its own right but it required recalibrating the way business education was approached. Boston University Metropolitan College, a multidisciplinary academic environment within the prestigious university, offers courses on campus, online and at various sites regionally and globally, and it became the natural home for this interdisciplinary study area.

MOVING ONLINE HELPS THE SCHOOL EXPAND

In July 2006 the full program was offered online. This enabled Boston University Metropolitan College to reach a vast global base of prospective students and grow the program beyond initial expectations while still aligning with the university's selective admissions procedure.

Dr. Kanabar had hoped to add 20 students when the program went online, which was his financial break-even point. Instead, the program attracted 46 students in the first year, and the student body has increased substantially since. "Even local working students take advantage of the online courses to accommodate their busy schedules," say Dr. Kanabar. "Rather than arrive late to class as a result of the local traffic, some Boston-based students prefer to study online if they are comfortable with the distance learning paradigm."

There are currently over 300 students enrolled in the online program, representing around 75 percent of the program's intake. The program represents ten percent of Boston University Metropolitan College's overall student base.

This increase in students brought with it an increase in revenues which enabled the school to recruit and retain an additional six high caliber full-time faculty members as well as several part-time professors for a variety of courses. Faculty members come from seven countries with experience in key management roles prior to joining the university. They bring innovative approaches to curriculum design and have highly recognized publishing records, as well as having made significant contributions to research.

PMI GAC ACCREDITATION PROVIDES CREDIBILITY

"We are proud that BU is among the top five universities in the project management field—both in education and research," says Dr. Kanabar. In order to achieve this, the school needed to ensure that the courses offered were considered credible by the corporate community. In addition to doctoral degrees, around 75 percent of faculty members are PMI Project Management Professionals (PMP®) but it was important to go further than that. "Aligning the curriculum with PMI and the Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) standards was the turning point for our growth," says Dr. Kanabar.

Boston University Metropolitan College's project management degree programs earned GAC accreditation in 2006, indicating that the programs fulfill a rigorous global standard for learning and performance objectives and demonstrates academic excellence delivered by internationally-recognized faculty members and staff. The accreditation process is repeated every seven years and in 2013 the programs achieved renewal of GAC accreditation, demonstrating their ongoing commitment to rigorous project management pedagogy in pioneering and inventive formats.

The school is one of less than 50 worldwide with degree programs that have achieved GAC accreditation. Top level students seek out accredited programs and enjoy the confidence of knowing that their program reaches international quality standards. The successful completion of an accredited course also gives students a competitive advantage when seeking employment.

Adding these academically rigorous, accredited courses of study to the school was a significant undertaking, but one that Dr. Kanabar knows has paid off for students, employers, faculty members and the university.

"If you don't offer project management courses, you aren't serving your student base, and you are losing an opportunity to invest in interdisciplinary research."

~ Vijay Kanabar, PhD, PMP, Associate Professor and Director of Project Management Programs, Boston University



HOW TO START YOUR OWN PROJECT MANAGEMENT DEGREE PROGRAM

With research showing there will be 15.7 million new project management roles by 2020, the demand for project management education shows no sign of slowing. Master's degrees, courses and certifications offer rewarding opportunities for colleges and universities to expand their interdisciplinary and management remits. A solid academic base also provides the opportunity to extend an institution's educational outreach into continuing and corporate education.

The lessons learned by Boston University as it built its world-renowned program can be adopted by other institutions. The following points will help you get started.

Find project management a home.

Project management crosses disciplines and it can be difficult to determine where the program should reside. BU centered its programs in the multidisciplinary environment of the Department of Administrative Sciences and Computer Science at Metropolitan College.

Be a champion.

Dr. Kanabar recommends appointing someone to lead the new program. "As the champion on our faculty, I was able to introduce the idea to our leadership team and show them the value it would bring to the university," he says. A clear leader can promote investment in project management and ensure the program gets the attention, budget and expertise necessary.

Gain buy-in.

You will have greater success if the institution's executive management team sees the potential for the program and can support the initiative with the appropriate resources. Explain to the stakeholders how the learning outcomes from a project management program align with institutional program goals. Buy-in also extends to the wider project management community. "Organize annual conferences so that you engage the current students, alumni, and practitioner community," says Dr. Kanabar.

Create high standards.

The program needs to have the academic rigor expected of any master's program, including full-time PhD-level faculty members and those with a significant business background. "Form a curriculum development team that consists of faculty and practitioners and leverage PMI academic curriculum guidelines resources," says Dr. Kanabar. Accredited course offerings and a clear investment in research will differentiate your program.

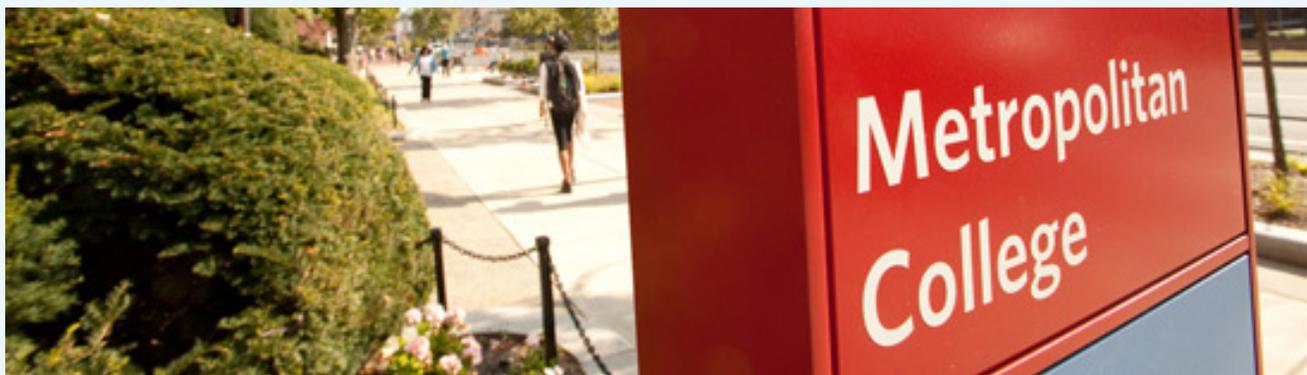
Seek out advice.

Dr. Kanabar reached out to the directors of GAC accredited project management programs when he wanted guidance around creating BU's own master's program. Today he works with other academic institutions, meets with university leaders and delivers curriculum guideline presentations on establishing or improving their project management degree programs. "There are many unique project management models that achieve different levels of depth and breadth," he says. "Some colleges are strong in management and others in engineering. It can be very valuable to explore what's out there as you create your own offering."

PMITEACH.ORG

PMITeach.org supports the academic project management community. As an institution or faculty member considering expanding into project management education, strengthening and differentiating your existing degree program or carrying out research, PMITeach.org can provide you with the resources, networking opportunities and professional development that you need.

Visit PMITeach.org for more information.



BOSTON UNIVERSITY METROPOLITAN COLLEGE AT A GLANCE

Location: Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Project Management Program Offerings:

- Master of Science in Project Management (GAC accredited)
- Master of Science in Computer Information Systems with concentration in Information Technology Project Management (GAC Accredited)
- Graduate Certificate in Project Management
- Graduate Certificate IT Project Management
- Graduate Certificate in Risk Management & Organizational Continuity
- Undergraduate modules in Project Management
- Corporate education in Project Management including PMI certifications in Agile and PMP.

Delivery methods

- On campus
- Online
- Blended (online and on campus)

The program is also available at selected military locations and through corporate on-site offerings.

www.bu.edu/met/pm



WHAT IS THE PMI GLOBAL ACCREDITATION CENTER FOR PROJECT MANAGEMENT EDUCATION PROGRAMS (GAC)?

GAC is the world's leading specialized accrediting body for project management and related degree programs. GAC accreditation serves two fundamental purposes:

- It confirms that a program has been carefully assessed and that it meets comprehensive international quality and scope standards.
- It makes a public statement about the commitment of the institution to ongoing evaluation and continuous improvement.

Academic accreditation may be conducted at the bachelor's, post-graduate and doctorate program levels. GAC also assists faculty and universities in the improvement of project management degree programs.

For more information, visit GACPM.org.

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