

Dynamic School Grows by Addressing a Global Market Need

Boston University's project management master's program boosts both the quality of the school's educational offerings—and its bottom line.

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—Vijay Kanabar, PhD, PMP, global project management academic coordinator, Boston University

SUMMARY:

When Boston University, Massachusetts, USA launched a master's program in project management in 2005, it expected to draw modest numbers. Five years later, it boasts a half-dozen full-time faculty members and contributes millions of dollars to the school's bottom line.

With a commitment from school leadership and support from the academic and business worlds, the university's foray into the world of project management education is paying dividends.

It's also proving that for many, the traditional master of business administration program will not be enough.

BUILDING A BETTER PROGRAM

Boston University has long recognized the value of project management training, and for years it offered a variety of related courses within other degree programs. But Vijay Kanabar, PhD, PMP, global project management academic coordinator at the school, recognized a need for a more formal approach to

the way the university taught project management skills and methodologies.

"Younger students 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 engineering, management or software development, they were all doing projects, and the first thing they heard from their employers was, 'You need project management skills.'"

The increasing demand helped Boston University recognize that project management was an untapped academic path. The next step became finding the right home for the program. "The coursework doesn't fit naturally into any particular college or discipline," says Jay Halfond, Dean of the Metropolitan College. Ultimately the project management program became part of Boston University Metropolitan College, a multidisciplinary academic environment within the university that offers courses on campus, online and at various sites regionally and globally.

"It was an opportunity to pursue something unique, interdisciplinary and valuable to the corporate world," says

Dean Halfond. "Project management skills are not limited to one professional area. It's a common need across the corporate community."

And Dr. Kanabar's experience in corporate and academic worlds proved vital.

"Dr. Kanabar crosses several disciplines," he says. "He understood project management from an administrative perspective and he could put the coursework together."

Twelve years ago, the college kicked off its formal project management offerings with an intensive project management

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Want to know why your institution should be teaching project management?

Interested in starting a course or program?

Want help strengthening your current courses or program?

Visit [PMITeach.org](https://www.pmiteach.org) for more information.

BOSTON UNIVERSITY METROPOLITAN COLLEGE

Location: Boston, Massachusetts, USA

Program Offerings:

- Master of Science in Project Management
- Master of Science in Administrative Studies
- Master of Science in Computer Information Systems
- Graduate Certificate in Project Management
- Graduate Certificate IT Project Management

Delivery methods

- Traditional Classroom
- Online

www.bu.edu/met/pm

certificate program aligned with PMI's *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*.

"We started small," says Dr. Kanabar. "A few students each year pursuing a master's in computer science would minor in project management."

But interest in the subject grew.

"We realized this had potential as an academic degree program," says Dean

Halfond. "That's when we began thinking of it as a new way to approach business education."

THE BENEFITS OF PMI GAC ACCREDITATION

Recognizing the value the courses brought to the corporate community, the school developed a full 12-course master of science in project management degree. In July 2006, Metropolitan College began offering the entire program online and earned the PMI Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) recognition. (See *What is the PMI Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC)?* box on this page.)

The GAC accreditation indicates the program:

- Fulfills a rigorous global standard for learning and performance objectives
- Demonstrates academic excellence delivered by highly qualified faculty members and staff

The school is one of 69 programs worldwide to achieve this distinction and it has helped the school stake its claim in the project management profession.

"Aligning the curriculum with PMI and the Global Accreditation Center standard was the turning point for our growth," says Dr. Kanabar. "Project management

became a legitimate discipline due to educational emphasis from PMI, and we rode that wave."

Along with adding credibility to the program, the connection to PMI helped expand the student body, he adds. "The PMI family has supported us in many ways, including helping us market the program."

The PMI website offers links to GAC-accredited programs, which is how many students discover Boston University's project management offerings. Tom Breineder of Vienna, Austria, found the program while searching online for an accredited project management course. He was so impressed with the offering that he relocated to Boston for a year to complete the program on campus.

The knowledge of his professors, who come from a variety of different industries, proved invaluable to his education, he says. "The lectures were incredibly interesting. I never could have gotten exposure to those kinds of experiences anywhere else."

Mr. Breineder also learned the subtleties of project management. "When I started, I thought project management was just schedules and budgets, but at [Boston University's Metropolitan College] I learned all about the sub-areas, like how projects can fail pretty quickly if you don't do good risk management."

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

GAC serves two fundamental purposes:

- To ensure the quality of academic degree programs in project management globally
- To assist faculty and universities in the improvement of project management degree programs

Academic accreditation may be conducted at the bachelor's, master's and doctorate program levels.

Graduates of GAC-accredited programs receive 1,500 hours of project management experience toward earning their Project Management Professional (PMP)® and Program Management Professional (PgMP)® credentials.

For more information, visit PMI.org/Accreditation.

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Having graduated from the program in September 2009, Mr. Breineder is now interviewing for a job at the United Nations in New York, New York, USA. And he says his coursework helped him land the interview. “My project management degree was a major talking point in the interview,” he says. “They were very interested in what I could bring to the table from a project management standpoint.”

GROWING THE PROGRAM

Although Mr. Breineder completed the program on campus, most students are drawn to the online program, says Dr. Kanabar. “Even local working students take advantage of the online courses to accommodate their busy schedules.”

Giving students around the world access to an online master’s program has enabled Metropolitan College to dramatically expand its potential audience and grow the program far beyond expectations.

Dr. Kanabar had hoped to add 20 students when the program went online, which was his financial break-even point. Instead, the program picked up 46 students in the first year, and the student body has doubled every year since. There are currently 45 on-campus students and another 400 enrolled in the online program. The entire program now represents 10 percent of the Boston University Metropolitan College’s student base.

The expanded student base and accompanying tuition, which can average thousands of dollars a year per student, enabled the school to hire six additional full-time faculty members as well as several part-time professors for a variety of courses. “That’s faculty we wouldn’t have been able to hire if we hadn’t invested in this program,” says Dean Halfond.

PROMOTING THE PROGRAM

All professors teaching in the program have the Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] credential and many have doctorates, which has helped build the program’s credibility.

BRINGING PROJECT MANAGEMENT TRAINING TO THE CORPORATE WORLD

Having a leading project management master’s degree program wasn’t enough for Boston University. The school’s affiliate, the Boston University Corporate Education Center (BUCEC), has its own set of project management training options—increasing its educational offerings and its revenue stream.

The BUCEC program includes a full project management curriculum that introduces students to the entire range of project management skills and knowledge areas, at the fundamental, advanced and masters level. The center also offers coursework aimed at helping students prepare for exam to earn the PMI Project Management Professional (PMP)[®] credential and Certified Associate in Project Management

(CAPM)[®] certification and obtain Professional Development Units (PDUs) to maintain the PMP credential.

“Our program meets the needs of individuals looking to become project management practitioners, as well as corporations who want to ensure that their project managers are up to speed on their skills and competencies to manage important projects,” says Ron LaBonte, director, instruction and quality assurance at BUCEC.

And the center’s status as a PMI Registered Education Provider (R.E.P.) lends authority to the program. “Becoming a Registered Education Provider gave us added credibility,” he says. “It lets people know

that our courses have been reviewed and meet the specifications mandated by PMI.”

But more than that, it gives his team clarity regarding the intricacies of the project management profession. “It helps us better understand what the project management needs are in the corporate and public arena,” Mr. LaBonte says.

That added knowledge and affiliation with PMI brings benefits to trainees as well as to the center’s bottom line. The project management course offerings meet the needs of the corporate and public community with training designed to help students meet timelines, track resources and deliver projects on time and within budget, he says. “It’s a valuable addition to our offering.”

"At Boston University we invest in excellence and the quality of our programs," says Dr. Kanabar. "That includes hiring faculty with global experience and focusing our efforts on research and publishing."

In the years since the master's program was launched, faculty members have

published books on project management, written papers, participated in annual PMI congress events, and are regularly invited to speak at conferences and PMI chapter meetings.

"Our project management students are going out into the world, and they come back to us all the time requesting

we attend a meeting or speak to their teams," Dr. Kanabar says. The Boston University Metropolitan College program may have started out small, but the word on project management is spreading. And that's good for the school—and its students. ■

HOW TO START YOUR OWN PROJECT MANAGEMENT DEGREE PROGRAM

The project management profession offers lucrative opportunities for colleges and universities to expand their course offerings, draw in new students and meet corporate needs.

"Project management is not a fad," says Jay Halfond, Dean of Boston University's Metropolitan College, home to the school's master of science in project management degree program. "Project management is a solid academic discipline that adds real value to our university."

And schools shouldn't miss out.

"Project management courses, certifications and master's degree programs are fast becoming a legitimate academic stream," says Vijay Kanabar, PhD, PMP, global project management academic coordinator of Boston University's project management master's program. "If you don't offer these courses, you aren't serving your student base, and you are losing an opportunity to invest in interdisciplinary research."

Dean Halfond and Dr. Kanabar offer this advice on how to get started:

Find it a home. Because project management crosses disciplines, it can be difficult to determine where the program should be built, says Dean Halfond.

Business management programs or multidisciplinary colleges can be good options.

Be a champion. You need a leader within the institution to promote investment in project management and ensure the program gets the attention, budget and expertise necessary to get off the ground, says Dr. Kanabar. "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."

The support Dr. Kanabar received from Dean Halfond ensured the program's growth. "Dean Halfond saw the potential and he believed in the value of project management," he says. "Having his buy-in was essential to our success."

Do more than teach to a test. "The project management discipline is becoming an alternative to the masters of business administration," says Dean Halfond. "It's a different way to think about business education."

As such, these programs need to have the academic rigor expected of any master's program, including qualified faculty from business and academic environments, accredited course offerings, and investment in research and publishing. "Hold your project management program to high

academic standards," he says. "That's what it takes to be successful."

Seek out advice. When Dr. Kanabar wanted to expand Boston University's project management offering into a master's program, he reached out to the directors of accredited universities that had already established project management programs for guidance.

Since his own program's success, he has returned the favor, meeting with university leaders and delivering presentations on how to establish project management degree programs. "There are many project management models that achieve different levels of depth and breadth," he says. "For instance, some colleges are strong in construction management and others in engineering. It can be very valuable to explore what's out there as you create your own offering."

Educate students about the project management path. Demand for project management programs is coming from the corporate world. "Many younger students don't understand the importance of these skills until they enter the workplace and realize they don't have them," says Dr. Kanabar. "It's the college's job to educate students about the value of project management or they will go into the world underprepared."