

## A Winning Alliance

*Nine U.S. schools strengthen their project management programs by partnering with the PMI Minnesota Chapter.*

The classroom is, understandably, the focal point of colleges and universities that teach project management. But by partnering with local chapters of the Project Management Institute (PMI), schools can significantly strengthen their academic offerings—and their reputations.

Nine institutions did just that when they joined the PMI Minnesota chapter’s Education Alliance Program. Formally established in 2007, the program was designed to bring “colleges and universities together to create a collaborative and development-oriented environment, thereby advancing the project management profession.”

Today, the chapter maintains alliances with:

- Anoka Technical College

- Concordia University—St. Paul
- DeVry University
- Keller Graduate School of Management
- North Hennepin Community College—Adult Education & Training
- St. Mary’s University of Minnesota
- University of Mary (North Dakota)
- University of Minnesota—College of Continuing Education
- University of St. Thomas—Minnesota

### NEEDS ANALYSIS

To kick things off, representatives of several area colleges and universities met with the chapter to explore collaboration opportunities.

“We brainstormed and then formalized those thoughts into a charter for the program,” says Garfield Bowen, enterprise project management

office director at the University of Minnesota and director of professional development for the Minnesota Chapter. “We asked what these groups would look for in a partnership. What would spell a win for them? And we clearly defined what kind of commitments—from the institutions and from the chapter—would make a partnership successful.”

For example, the chapter agreed to review coursework and talk to students about the profession.

### PARTNERING WITH THE CHAPTER WOULD HELP SCHOOLS:

- Shape curricula
- Connect students with professional practitioners
- Increase the visibility of their institutions
- Gain access to industry experts

### PARTNERING WITH SCHOOLS WOULD HELP THE CHAPTER:

- Build project management awareness and, by extension, increase membership
- Solidify its members’ reputations as thought leaders in the project management profession

Many of the colleges and universities that the chapter contacted already had project management courses or materials, often as part of the

### AT A GLANCE:

The PMI Minnesota Chapter Educational Alliance Program:

- Number of PMI Minnesota Chapter academic partners: 9
- Benefits for the Academic institutions: curriculum review, mentoring and student discounts to chapter events
- Benefits for the Chapter: increased visibility, brand awareness and membership growth

Chapter website: [www.pmi-mn.org](http://www.pmi-mn.org)

broader business curriculum. But these institutions still saw the benefits of working with the chapter.

“We had been teaching a project management course for quite a while when the chapter came to us,” says Joel Schuessler, chairman and assistant professor of IT in management at Concordia University in St. Paul. “But we saw an immediate benefit from having the Minnesota Chapter involved. The chapter members’ insights and expertise give us peer validation that our content is on track.

“Our bandwidth is limited for developing project management coursework in our college,” he adds.

“This pulling in and sharing curriculum ideas allows us to better ensure what we offer students is accurate and practical.”

### MAKING IT WORK

The chapter’s interactions are typically at the program level. For example, one university offers a master’s in project management, while another awards a master’s in IT with a major in project management. No matter the focus, the goal is to bring in real-life experience and curriculum review, as well as help ensure alignment with *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide)*.

Member institutions in the Education Alliance Program have access to

two types of partnerships with the Minnesota Chapter.

### TYPE I: INTRODUCTORY-LEVEL RELATIONSHIP

In Type 1 relationships, the chapter invites students to events, during which they network with members and attend job fairs. Members facilitate conversations, share the benefits of earning a Project Management Professional (PMP)® credential and shed light on career opportunities.

This level also offers cross-promotional benefits.

“We include the institution’s relevant events and logos on our chapter’s

## MAKING IT WORK

Education Alliance members testify to the numerous advantages of the relationship.

### Benefits to the Educational Provider:

- Student discounts on PMI membership, complimentary admission to hear speakers and attend networking events and a possible invitation to attend a chapter dinner meeting
- Participation in the chapter-organized job fair
- Peer validation on project management curriculum
- Promotion of the institution at chapter events, on promotional materials and on the website
- Exposure at chapter meetings

### Opportunities for Improvement

After three years, feedback on the program is positive and the chapter continues to add institutions to the partnership, but it still has work to do.

The original charter, for example, outlined different benefit levels for different partnership types.

“During my tenure I noted that some partners made infrequent use of the full slate of benefits,” Mr. Green says. “Some partners thought they were entitled to benefits that

were not explicitly stated in our agreements. Additionally, we’ve turned down potential partnerships, principally because what the applicant wanted didn’t map specifically to one of our partner types.”

The chapter also has completed relatively few curriculum reviews. Mr. Green says that the most frequent requests are for speakers about a very narrow subject.

“We have found that not everything we envisioned in that initial charter is being realized—but that is all right,” Mr. Green says. “The program has evolved as we work more closely with and learn what our partners really need.”

### Building Communication

At the end of the first year, the five educational partners met with chapter leaders to assess the alliance. Although the partners saw the benefits of the relationship, they were unanimous in their desire for more communication from the chapter about opportunities and trends.

So, the chapter developed the Partners Program newsletter, a bimonthly e-publication offering information about upcoming events, partner projects, surveys, awards and other opportunities that may benefit the institution or its students.

“The communication is a lot better than it was early in the relationship,” Mr. Amidon says. “We are able to bring a real perspective to the class. Our students want a roadmap

website and promotional materials. They, in turn, include our information on their sites and in their materials,” Mr. Bowen explains. “We invite these partners to project management forums, either on campus or through the monthly chapter dinner meetings.”

This introductory relationship also gives students enrolled in project management courses at participating colleges discounts on PMI membership and free admission to monthly speakers and networking events. “This allows them to cross-fertilize and build their own network,” Mr. Bowen says.

Other benefits of teaming with the Minnesota Chapter, according to Mr.

Schuessler, include a chapter-organized job fair for Concordia students. Up to three students are also regularly invited as guests to the chapter’s educational dinner meetings.

Even this basic level of involvement helps greatly. “Advertising for each other is always beneficial,” he says. “It is valuable for students to learn what opportunities are available to expand their project management education. We don’t have the corner on intellectual capital.”

### TYPE II: IN-DEPTH PROFESSIONAL-TO-STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

The second type of relationship delves deeper into the project management

student experience, giving the institutions practitioner-led overviews of project management methodology and credentials.

Students also have access to chapter-led mentorship programs, and many partners offer them the opportunity to interact directly with PMP® credential holders. The practitioners discuss topics of interest in the professions and share experience related to the PMI certification process. They may also serve as guest lecturers, addressing practical project management issues.

Mr. Bowen and Mr. Green, for example, have presented to project management students. “We are ambassadors. We talk

for project management, and the chapter’s efforts are helping us lead the way.”

#### Adding Chapter Involvement in Partner Curriculum

As the alliance moves forward, the schools see even greater benefits from the chapter helping shape its partners’ project management curriculum.

“We have not actually created a project management course for any of the institutions, but the curriculum review is well-received,” Mr. Bowen says. “This allows us to match the skills of our members with the needs of our partners. We involve a lot of PMP credential holders in this process so other members in the chapter are also leveraged.”

Mr. Bowen says he’s hopeful the chapter will be tapped in this capacity as project management courses grow.

“There are a couple of local schools developing a project management degree program,” he says. “We have offered our services in any way that can be helpful to them.”

#### Increasing Chapter Membership

Chapters are also looking to leverage the partnership to increase membership, either through the creation of a student chapter or through recruiting project management students into the Minnesota Chapter.

“Student attendees to our events seem very excited about PMI and the profession,” Mr. Bowen says. “However,

we need to do a better job at following up with these less-seasoned professionals and working with them to find value in joining and participating in the chapter as a way to help start their project management careers.”

#### Win-Win Partnerships

Mr. Bowen does offer one caveat for making collaborations like the ones in Minnesota work: “It’s one thing to establish these partnerships, but they need to be maintained.”

So far that has happened, laying the foundation for a long and fruitful alliance.

“We want to work even more closely with the schools,” Mr. Green says. “We hope that our efforts give credence to their efforts, just as their recognition of PMI raises awareness among future project management practitioners. We want to solidify our brand in the industry. To that end, we are interested in helping any way we can.”

At Concordia, Mr. Schuessler says he feels like the school is a true partner with the Minnesota Chapter. He cites the group’s ongoing communication and accessible PMI member contact as key to success.

“The PMI Minnesota Chapter makes me feel welcome,” he says. “They really want to partner and look for win-wins in this situation. I’m hopeful that we can use the relationship to connect more of our students with mentors or internships.”

about the chapter. We cover topics that apply to the profession,” Mr. Bowen says.

The University of Minnesota College of Continuing Education offers a certificate of project management and includes discussion of PMI and its credentials.

“We encourage students to go to PMI meetings to learn more. Some of our students may be interested in credentials someday, but they are not seasoned project management veterans,” says Mike Amidon, associate program director.

In some cases, though, these students may be open to the idea of the Certified Associate in Project Management (CAPM)<sup>®</sup> certification.

For the schools, it’s a chance to get an in-the-trenches perspective on coursework.

“Type II institutions receive curriculum reviews from practitioners who are PMP<sup>®</sup> certified,” says Mr. Bowen.

“This also gives students and program directors insight into the methodologies used in the practice.”

Other benefits for institutions that opt in as Type II schools include cross-promotion on the web, chapter-provided speakers, student admission to dinner meetings and curriculum reviews.

Curriculum reviews start with a chapter-created checklist as a benchmark. Chapter member reviewers provide feedback to the program director, who in turn can pass the feedback on to the instructors—especially when a change is recommended. This process may require conversations with the reviewer and/or instructor for clarification purposes.

In one case, says Mr. Bowen, “We conducted a short seminar with

## ON A MISSION:

The PMI Minnesota Chapter Educational Alliance Program:

- Provides support for colleges and universities to help them deliver the best possible education to their students
- Provides learning opportunities for students in the project management field
- Promotes the profession of project management
- Provides college and university directors with recommendations on how to incorporate project management approaches, methodologies, systems and tools into course curriculum
- Involves students in project management discussions, conferences and the PMI Minnesota Chapter educational events
- Offers Minnesota Chapter members for guest lecture opportunities at colleges and universities

### *The Takeaway:*

*By keeping communication lines open and strengthening chapter involvement with educational institutions, both stakeholder groups can realize the benefits of the relationship over time.*

instructors on the changes to the *PMBOK<sup>®</sup> Guide* in the fourth edition. This way, they could be equipped to make the changes before another review.”

Signing up as a Type II partner turned out to be good timing for Concordia University.

“Our involvement with Minnesota chapter really came during a strategic phase of our process,” says Mr. Schuessler. “We are incorporating project management across the business college. The relationship allows students to come away with adaptive skills learned directly from PMI folks who come into our classroom.”

At Concordia, Minnesota Chapter members conducted guest lectures, both face-to-face and online.

“I worked with one instructor to plan a syllabus and serve as lead teacher in newly developed project management courses,” Mr. Schuessler says. “Chapter members have been invited to participate in bachelor’s of business administration, information technology in management and continuing studies workshops.”

Concordia also invited chapter members from Fissure Corp., a Minnesota-based training firm, to conduct a project management simulation. And now, the school plans to incorporate these kinds of real-world simulations into its coursework.

For all the schools in the Alliance, working with the Minnesota Chapter is and will continue to be a rewarding relationship. ■