GAC Accreditation
Fostering Education Excellence in Project Management and Related Degree Programs
Quality Assurance in Project Management Education

As project management has become a critical competency of organizations, the profession has experienced unprecedented growth and recognition. Research shows that, by the year 2020, 15.7 million new project management jobs are expected to be added globally.

Due to this explosive growth and demand for talent, the academic world has responded. The number of project management educational programs offered by academic institutions has increased substantially over the last two decades, exceeding 900 globally. Project management programs can now be found in schools as diverse as business, construction management, health care, engineering, and information technology.

The expansion of project management education demonstrates the need for formal standards in project management education programs offered by academic institutions.

About GAC

The PMI® Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) is the world’s leading specialized accrediting body for project management and related degree programs, accrediting project management programs at the bachelor’s, postgraduate, and doctorate levels offered within accredited institutions of higher education worldwide.

GAC, a voluntary, independent accrediting body governed by an autonomous board of directors, ensures the quality of academic degree programs in project management and assists faculty and universities in the continuous improvement of educational offerings.

GAC is a member of the Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors (ASPA), which advances the knowledge, skills, good practices, and ethical commitments of accreditors as a means of enhancing educational quality.
The Importance of GAC Accreditation

GAC accreditation is a peer-review process which confirms that an institution’s project management or related degree program has been carefully assessed and that its scale, scope, and quality conform to a comprehensive international standard. It makes a public statement about the deep commitment of the institution and its faculty to ongoing evaluation and continuous quality improvement.

Empirical research, recently completed by PMI, demonstrates that GAC accreditation delivers a wide range of benefits to academic institutions, programs and their students.

Benefits of GAC Accreditation to Programs

**Quality assurance and continuous improvement**

GAC accreditation establishes a mechanism/structure by which an institution maintains and improves the quality of its program.

“Accreditation is a global trend […], so having accreditation in the area of project management is extremely relevant. Having project management programs assessed by a third party provides a strong signal to students, employees, quality agencies, and other stakeholders about the robustness and seriousness of what is done.”

CHRISTOPHE BREDILLET, PhD
Former Provost and Dean of Postgraduate Programs, SKEMA Business School (France)

“[Seeking GAC accreditation] gives you focus…it’s a way to measure your progress and performance… a way that you can continually improve what you’re doing.”

WILLIAM MOYLAN, PhD, PMP, FESD
Coordinator, Master of Science in Construction Management program
Eastern Michigan University, Michigan (USA)

**Program growth**

GAC accredited programs involved in the study report a steady growth in the student body and number of full-time and adjunct faculty.

“Daily requests for program information are coming from more global sources across the world. Since the university has spent zero dollars on marketing this program other than through PMI channels, all of this activity almost certainly would not have happened without GAC accreditation.”

GARY L. RICHARDSON, PhD
Program Coordinator, Technology Project Management Graduate Program, University of Houston, Texas (USA)

**Differentiation from other programs**

Faculty and administrators from the GAC accredited programs note that attaining specialized accreditation provides an advantage over programs that have not achieved this recognition from GAC. GAC accreditation of a degree program makes its students more marketable and gives employers paying for their staff’s professional education additional confidence in the quality and rigor of the education program in which their employees are enrolled.

“Accreditation for specialized programs is the hallmark that says you’ve established and met a certain degree of credibility. It’s a high standard and a standard of excellence.”

JOHN CABLE, R.A., PMP
Director, Project Management Center for Excellence, A. James Clark School of Engineering
University of Maryland, Maryland (USA)

**Demonstrates alliance with the world’s largest and most influential project management association**

Recognition by the global accrediting body affiliated with PMI, the world’s most prominent project management association demonstrates that GAC accredited programs reflect the latest developments in the project management profession.

**Promotion on a global directory of accredited degree programs**

GAC accredited programs are listed in a directory on the GACP.M.org website. This directory is a key resource for students seeking project management degree programs.
Benefits of GAC Accreditation to Students

GAC accreditation is a testament to the program’s quality
Students can be confident that the program they enroll in is a rigorous academic program that reflects the latest developments in research and practices in the project management profession.

Graduates from the GAC program find it easier to transition into the workplace and advance in their careers
Graduates of GAC accredited programs are more marketable, as they have the skills that are needed in the workplace. Most employers prefer to hire job applicants from a college or university with the appropriate accreditation status. Additionally, employers seek employees who have been educated at an appropriately accredited institution when making decisions about business promotions and company advancements.

“Since I joined the [UT-Dallas] program, I have received two promotions at work. These career opportunities were directly the results of the changes in my vocabulary and the tools I had in my pocket.”

RICHARD STOCKTON, MBA
Graduate, Project Management Program
School of Management, University of Texas at Dallas, Dallas, Texas (USA)

GAC status makes it easier for students in GAC accredited programs to qualify for tuition coverage and scholarships
Many employers also require that employees have been educated at an appropriately accredited institution when making decisions whether to provide tuition coverage or assistance for employees who wish or need to further their education.

Earn contact hours/PDUs towards PMI certifications
Any student who completes a project management course/module within a GAC accredited program is able to use that education towards fulfilling the education requirement to sit for a PMI credential examination or to meet continuing education requirements to maintain a credential.
Statistics from the 2013 Annual Reports submitted by GAC accredited programs:

- **16,986**: Total number of enrolled students in GAC accredited programs
- **5,229**: Number of graduates from GAC accredited programs in 2013
- **15,410**: Number of total graduates from GAC accredited programs over a 3 year period (2011-2013)
- Additionally, over 1,000 faculty are teaching in GAC accredited programs

GAC Accredited Programs Around the Globe

Disciplines of GAC Accredited Programs

- General Management: 32%
- Information Technology: 19%
- Project Management: 13%
- Computer Science: 6%
- Civil Engineering: 4%
- Supply Chain: 3%
- Technology: 1%
- Construction: 1%
- Telecommunications: 1%

Profiles of GAC Programs

- North America: 57
- EMEA: 11
- Asia Pacific: 20
- Latin America: 3
The process consists of four stages:

The accreditation process consists of four stages, noted below. The GAC confers accreditation only upon the degree programs that meet the GAC accreditation standards found in the *GAC Handbook of Accreditation of Degree Programs in Project Management*. This handbook is the key resource for both applicant and accredited programs as it contains the GAC accreditation standards, as well as all related policies and processes.

**Step 1: Letter of Intent/Executive Summary**

The Letter of Intent/Executive Summary is the initial step in the GAC accreditation process, and is how the prospective applicant program demonstrates that it is eligible to move forward in the GAC accreditation process.

Upon receipt, GAC reviews the Letter of Intent for alignment. If the letter is found aligned, the program moves on to GAC applicant program status and begins work on its programmatic self-evaluation report. Additionally, the program is added to the GAC Applicant Programs area listing on of the GACPM.org website. Representatives from these programs begin receiving informative communications from the GAC regarding the accreditation process.

To assist applicants at this stage of the process, GAC provides electronic templates for the Letter of Intent/Executive Summary.

**Step 2: Self-evaluation Report**

The self-evaluation process requires the applicant programs to reflect and report on their purposes and effectiveness. Through the Self-evaluation Report, applicant programs demonstrate how they align with GAC accreditation standards. Applicants have up to six months to prepare and submit this report.

The report includes, but is not limited to, the following information:

- Mission
- Demonstration of achievement of mission
- Academic community/faculty and staff
- Student support services/Information in the public domain
- Student selection
- Program outcomes
- Project management core learning outcomes
- Student performance criteria
- Library/learning resource centers and educational innovations and technology
- Financial resources, facilities, and equipment

Once complete, the applicant program submits the report to the GAC. After receipt and review, the report is forwarded to the GAC Board for consideration and decision. Upon acceptance of the report, the applicant program is notified, and the onsite visit is scheduled.

To assist applicants at this stage of the process, GAC provides electronic templates for the Self-evaluation Reports.

**Step 3: Onsite Visit Evaluation**

GAC and the applicant program agree on the dates of the onsite visit. GAC onsite visit teams are normally comprised of one team lead and one or two additional team members. At least one member of the team is comprised of members from the project management academic community and a project management practitioner. During the onsite visit, team members:
Verify the information presented in the Self-evaluation Report
Follow up on questions raised by the GAC Board during the review of the Self-evaluation Report
Interview key administrative officers, program representatives, faculty members, and enrolled students and program alumni
Review classroom facilities, library resources, curriculum, and other resources used to support the program

GAC onsite visits typically require two to three business days to complete. The applicant program is responsible for lodging and all expenses associated with the visit. At the completion of the visit, the team presents its findings to the applicant program for review and verification. The final onsite visit report and recommendations are then forwarded to the GAC Board for a final decision.

Step 4: The GAC Decision
Upon receipt of the onsite visit report, the GAC makes its final decision regarding an applicant program. The decision is based on the collective evidence provided by the Letter of Intent, Self-evaluation Report, and Onsite Visit Evaluation. The GAC then votes either to:

- Grant accreditation
- Defer accreditation
- Deny accreditation

Applicants are notified in writing of the ruling within 30 days of the decision by the GAC Board. The GAC confers accreditation only upon the degree programs that meet the GAC accreditation standards found in the GAC Handbook of Accreditation of Degree Programs in Project Management.

How can GAC help you prepare for accreditation?

- Programs considering accreditation are encouraged to obtain assistance throughout the GAC application process by contacting GAC staff at GAC@pmi.org. Staff can assist you with any questions you have about the process, from developing your Letter of Intent/Executive Summary through any aspect of the process.
- Additionally, GAC staff can connect you with volunteer GAC mentors, from accredited project management programs, who have agreed to provide guidance in the process.
- The GAC hosts information sessions on accreditation throughout the year. Applicants are encouraged to attend these sessions to better understand the process and receive tips on preparing the Self-evaluation Report.

What can you do next?

- Download the GAC Handbook of Accreditation of Degree Programs in Project Management at GACPM.org. The handbook provides the full description of the process briefly described above.
- Visit GACPM.org for more information on schools with GAC accredited programs and resources available to applicants.

E-mail us at GAC@pmi.org or call 1-610-355-1601 with questions.