It’s no secret that business is going global and the business of education is no different. Building international connections helps universities attract the best students and faculty but it can be time-consuming, especially if your project management program is in its infancy and the team is focused on curriculum development and local industry links.

The benefits of building these links are clear. Strategic alliances with relevant schools provide exceptional opportunities for both project management students and faculty. Students who have had the opportunity of a semester abroad or exchange trip really stand out in a competitive employment marketplace. The possibilities for visiting professorship, cross-institutional research projects and access to other prestigious universities make an attractive proposition for faculty.

PMI’s Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC) is a path to creating those international relationships between academic institutions. By collaborating with and supporting universities and faculty members, GAC makes it easy to get started.

Providing Experiences for Students

The network of GAC accredited programs helps build collaborative links between universities to facilitate educational student exchanges. Exchanges are a valuable learning experience, helping students build their confidence and gain an appreciation of other cultures – skills that are essential in a global workplace. An international exchange prepares students for a multi-national working environment and demonstrates achievement, tenacity and flexibility: guaranteed to impress any employer during an interview.

“We send students to our partner schools for two weeks where they take a course for credit,” explains Dr. James Szot, Director of the Naveen Jindal School of Management Executive Education graduate program in project management at the University of Texas at Dallas (UTD), USA. “It’s an international study trip and cultural immersion.”

Students are interested in the exchange program, and so keen to take part that many will take vacation time from their workplace to allow them to participate in the exchange. A cohort of around thirty part-time graduate students will travel to the partner university. On arrival, the university arranges company visits to demonstrate how project, manufacturing and operations management work in that region and the students will sit in on relevant project management classes as well.

Exchanges work both ways, as the UTD students get to host their new peers on their campus. “The overseas students come to Dallas and we do the same thing,” says Dr. Szot, who has been facilitating student exchanges for over 10 years. “Typically we’ll run some business project simulations too to make it interesting.”
Students from Shanghai Jiao Tong University, People’s Republic of China, have been coming to Dallas since 2013. “There are around thirty to forty students and faculty involved in exchanges with other GAC accredited universities each year,” says Professor Lin Shaopei. “Graduate students take one or two courses in the university they are visiting, attend industry and construction site visits and take seminars given by local professionals. Taking courses and attending site visits expands the horizon for students.”

Professor Shaopei, who also runs a student exchange program with domestic Chinese universities, appreciates that the course offerings in partner schools expand the curriculum available to the students. No project management program is able to offer every conceivable module, and exchanges give his students the opportunity to experience different course specialisms. “The ‘Digital Revolution’ course at UTD provided students with a broad vision of innovative ideas around introducing new products to market and setting up digital enterprises online,” he says.

Whether students are experiencing life in Texas or Shanghai, the welcome is always the same. Students gain experience of both project management in practice and an awareness of the local culture. “Alumni and students may host barbecues at their homes,” says Dr. Szot. “Collaboration between the students is important.”

Building Ties Between Faculty

Building international connections allows faculty members as well as students to benefit from opportunities at partner universities. Whether it’s the opportunity to work with expert academics or access to a library or archive, holding a visiting professorship at another prestigious university or securing research funding through cross-institutional projects, the benefits of forging ties with other universities is clear. The potential for collaboration is a key tool for attracting and retaining world-class educators.

“We know the PMI community through the GAC and through research conferences,” says Dr. Szot. “We’ve made contacts through the GAC process and the academic forums that GAC sponsors.” UTD is not alone in this. Dr. Andrew Gale from the University of Manchester in the United Kingdom is a visiting faculty member at the University of Maryland (UMD) in the United States after forming links with the school (see profile box on next page). Collaboration can exist even where languages are not shared: a small group from UTD travelled to China and while they could not take part in the local classes, they were able to take short courses and participate in company visits. Faculty from UTD have also delivered short courses and seminars at the influential SKEMA Business School in France.

Exchanges strengthen multicultural understanding and expose faculty members to different approaches to project management education along with sharing best practices and resources. These ideas can be brought back and incorporated into the project management curriculum, fostering an environment of continuous development and improvement.
An Ongoing Partnership

Strategic alliances with other institutions are a long-term commitment. These mutually beneficial relationships for students and faculty—once in place—can create year-on-year success for both parties, and the possibilities are almost endless. A pipeline of top master’s students choosing to come to your schools for their PhD studies? No problem. Shared resources for outreach programs? Of course. Fantastic international industry links for recruitment and curriculum development? With the right commitment, you can shape your partnership to deliver exactly what each school needs.

Given the global nature of project management as a practitioner discipline it’s no surprise that it lends itself perfectly to a global network of international schools supporting each other with learning, research and education. “Besides degree accreditation, we will work with PMI to further the exchange of knowledge, research and development activities within GAC schools,” says Professor Shaopei. “This will directly promote our project management education and the profession.”

When the doors are open, developing deeper ties with other institutions is suddenly easy. “We know there is the opportunity for more collaboration,” says Dr. Szot. “This year we are going to the UK and our goal is to get to Asia.”

University of Manchester and University of Maryland: Connecting Students and Faculty Globally

The University of Maryland (UMD) in the United States has a strategic partnership with the University of Manchester in the UK. “We send five or six students a year to spend a semester in Manchester,” says John H. Cable, RA, PMP, Executive Director at the university’s Project Management Center of Excellence. “The University of Manchester’s curriculum is closely aligned to ours and students have the option of choosing to do a semester abroad at both GAC and non-GAC programs.” UMD faculty members also participate in overseas opportunities and exchanges such as teaching workshops at partner universities and working together on online programs.
GET STARTED

Here are some tips to help build links between your institution and others around the world.

■ **Make the most of national and international conferences. Network!** These forums are the perfect place to meet faculty who may be looking for an exchange partner.

■ **Go direct.** If you want to target a particular university, find the person in a similar role to you using the university website’s faculty directory and call them. You might be pleasantly surprised! If nothing else, you’ll have opened the door to further discussion.

■ **Use the Internet.** Join online forums: not all of your inter-faculty collaboration has to be face-to-face and students can also benefit from ‘virtual’ exchanges.

■ **Tap into the GAC network.** With approximately 100 accredited programs worldwide, there is sure to be a perfect match for your university. Reach out to the PMI GAC team and let us help you connect with your peers around the world.

**Get in touch at gac@pmi.org.**

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**What is the PMI Global Accreditation Center for Project Management Education Programs (GAC)?**

The GAC’s mission is to advance excellence in project management education worldwide through collaboration with and support of academic institutions and through accreditation of academic programs.

GAC is the world’s leading specialized accrediting body for project management and related degree programs. GAC accreditation publicly confirms that your project management degree program meets comprehensive quality standards and can prepare students for success in their project management careers.

**For more information, visit GACPM.org.**