

Lane Community College

# Project Management Professional Certification

Sabbatical Report

Jill Gillett, CPA, PMP  
Sabbatical: Fall 2023

# Introduction

Lane Community College, at the time of this report, is about to welcome the first cohort of students in the first Bachelor's of Applied Science degree (BAS) in Applied Business Management (ABM) in Oregon. This degree offering has taken many years—and many hours of work—from both faculty and staff at Lane to make into a reality. Everyone who has been involved in this project is excited for its launch this September.

As a Business department faculty member, I have contributed to the design and strategic plan for this degree, and am scheduled to develop and teach two upper-division courses in Project Management that will be required of all of our ABM students. Curriculum development of the new courses is scheduled for late in the 24-25 academic year. This will be my first experience developing and teaching project management at the upper-division level. My sabbatical, taken in the fall of 2023, was designed to help me prepare to both develop and teach these courses using the most current professional standards in the project management industry as well as integrate an appropriate pedagogy for upper-division education.

## *Main Goals*

- 1) To obtain my professional certification as a Project Management Professional (PMP). The PMP credential is recognized nationally and internationally as the premier professional credential for project managers. The PMP is granted by the Project Management Institute (PMI), a non-profit professional association for project managers (see [www.pmi.org](http://www.pmi.org)).
- 2) To interview professional Project Managers (PM) in various industries with the intention of determining current best practices in the workplace, to be able to model those practices for students, and to gain insight on what knowledge, skills, and abilities specific to working as a current project management professional should be emphasized in the curriculum of the upper-division project management courses I will develop and teach.
- 3) To connect with a faculty member at Oregon State University (OSU) who currently teaches Project Management at the upper division level (Lacey McNeely, MGMT 364) to gain insight into the specific aspects of academic rigor associated with the topic at the 300+ level (types and difficulty of assignments, levels of student collaboration vs. independent work, amount of scaffolding from instructor, reliance on prerequisite knowledge, etc.).

## Methods and Results

In order to be awarded a PMP by the Project Management Institute, an applicant must demonstrate work experience managing projects by documenting their experience in the PMP application form, and pass a proctored certification exam designed by PMI based on the Project Management Body of Knowledge (PMBOK), the unofficial “textbook” on professional project management. I was able to complete and submit the written application prior to my sabbatical. During my sabbatical, I purchased both print and online study materials from the PMI, including the most current print editions of both the PMBOK and the PMI Standards.

Over the course of the term, I was able to work through the online exam preparation course and materials, which included taking two complete practice exams. I also found several other online resources with exam study courses and past exam test banks to help me practice before taking the exam. I took, and passed, the PMP exam on November 28, 2023 at the Pearson Vue Testing Center in Salem, Oregon. I was awarded my PMP Certification from PMI shortly thereafter.

I had intended to interview at least six different working professional project managers from different industries where our future student graduates are likely to find employment in Lane County (healthcare, construction, education, information technology, financial services, and manufacturing). My intention was to discover the key knowledge, skills, and abilities that are considered necessary as a professional project manager. I was interested in learning what I should be emphasizing in my courses, what current practices I should be modeling, and what I should incorporate into my curriculum to help prepare my students to enter the field after graduation.

I contacted and interviewed representatives from healthcare and information technology/cybersecurity prior to my sabbatical. I was able to meet with a project manager in education after my sabbatical (but prior to this report). I was unable to identify and interview working professional project managers from either the financial services or manufacturing industries at the time of this report. All of my interviews provided me with valuable insight into what skills are considered critical in the profession; communication skills, negotiation skills, and organizational skills topped the list. These skills were mentioned in each interview; skills that are transferable across industries.

At the beginning of the term, I contacted Lacey McNeely at Oregon State University, who agreed to meet with me and discuss my sabbatical goals. At our initial meeting, Lacey was prepared to share her course syllabus and agreed to let me observe her MGMT 364 course at OSU. While I had originally thought to sit in on every class session during the term, we agreed that I would attend only on key class days—when more complicated material was presented or when key assignments were distributed. I also asked to sit in on final presentations during finals week, when the students presented their final projects. During the term, I attended five class sessions and the final presentations.

Sitting in on classes was an invaluable opportunity to observe students. I was able to watch team and social dynamics between students, the relationship of the students to the teacher, and see first-hand how students reacted to the subject material and assignment expectations in an upper-division course. It has been many years since I was a student in a 300+ level college course, and a lot (though not all!) has changed. I noted with interest how most of the OSU students brought laptops to class, referred to course materials during class that had been posted online in their LMS, and readily agreed to meet up with each other outside of class to work on their team projects—three trends that I do not usually observe with students in my current introductory courses at Lane.

I also met with Lacey several times to discuss student assignments and expectations, course design and assessment, and general academic rigor at the University. We shared stories about successes and failures when teaching project management; where students struggled and where they shined. Lacey was exceedingly supportive and willing to share both her time and materials. I gave her an outline of my anticipated courses and she gave me detailed feedback on the breadth and depth of the material, as well as ideas on how to logistically structure certain aspects of the courses. She had a lot of experience with managing student teams, having taught the practicum course in project management

as well as the principles. She shared her grading rubrics as well as her thoughts on proctored vs. online assessments. We've continued to meet after my sabbatical ended, and I consider her to be a valuable professional colleague and resource.

## Reflection

My sabbatical activities were directly related to improving my teaching by:

- 1) Learning more about project management by studying the materials required to pass the PMP certification exam;
- 2) Curating a list of current professional knowledge, skills, and abilities to emphasize in my courses by interviewing project management professionals currently working in the field; and
- 3) Raising the level of academic rigor and expectations of student learning at the upper-division level by connecting with faculty at Oregon State University.

### ***Personal Significance:***

Professionally, gaining the PMP credential is an important extension of my experience and will enrich my endeavors as an instructor. The additional education and study of the PMI Standards to prepare for the exam has better prepared me to teach the subject matter with more breadth and depth, which is appropriate for the upper-division level of study.

Continuing professional education is a hallmark of being a professional in your field, and leading by example is a large part of teaching. We want our students to become life-long learners. As a result of gaining my PMP during my sabbatical, I can tell my ABM students not only of my experiences leading projects (both academic and personal), but also of my experience developing project management skills later in my career and successfully pursuing professional credentials. I can share my own personal examples of what professionalism and achieving professional goals looks like—examples that may not have been modeled for our students prior to coming to Lane.

The PMP certification requires continuing education to maintain licensure, and with the PMP I will gain access to continuing education resources through PMI. Access to high-quality continuing education in the subject matter will continue to benefit me professionally for years to come.

### ***Student Significance:***

Earning the PMP credential gives me professional credibility with my students. In addition to additional technical knowledge gained by preparing for the certification exam, interviewing current project management professionals in relevant industries has provided timely, real-world examples of professional project management at work to share with my students. Some of my interviewees have volunteered to either visit class to discuss real-world experience leading projects, or to stay in touch with me and keep me abreast of changes in the profession in their industry.

There was also tremendous value in being a student in MGMT 364 at OSU—having the “student experience” with my subject matter. Understanding the learner experience makes me a better teacher. By sitting in on classes and completing the online study courses for the exam, I have acquired recent experience in tackling new material, connecting new material to previous knowledge,

and facing the challenge of taking a proctored exam. I can now share these experiences with my students and use them to help my students successfully tackle the coursework and material.

***Department/College Significance:***

My sabbatical activities allowed me to gain the technical and pedagogical knowledge to successfully develop upper-division courses in Project Management for the ABM degree program, which is directly related to the future growth of the Business Department. The ABM has been under development for over three years by Business faculty, and it is strongly supported by both the College administration and the Lane Board of Education. My sabbatical work to improve the quality and content of those course offerings is directly related to improving the quality and content of the program. Additionally, making connections with Business faculty at OSU is beneficial for our department as we explore potential articulations with MBA programs such as that at OSU.

I am grateful for the opportunity provided by the College's sabbatical program to pursue these goals. I am confident that what I learned during these activities will significantly raise the standard of practice in my teaching.