Management of Projects and Programs: Beyond PMBOK®

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN MANAGEMENT
OF PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

Rabb School of Continuing Studies
Division of Graduate Professional Studies
Brandeis University

By Anne Marando
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projectmgmt.brandeis.edu
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Abstract

This paper provides an overview of the Master of Science in Management of Projects and Programs (MSMPP) program at Brandeis University’s Division of Graduate Professional Studies, addressing the curriculum design in the context of project and program management skills. The remainder of the paper discusses how the curriculum aligns with, and goes beyond, Standards of the Project Management Institute (PMI).¹

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Anne Marando, MS, is the Academic Program Chair of Management of Projects and Programs at Brandeis University, Division of Graduate Professional Studies (GPS). She also is a faculty member, and she serves as Director of Distance Learning for GPS. She has been teaching at Brandeis GPS since its inception in 1997. She has held project and process management positions at several organizations and has led virtual and co-located teams. Her specialty areas include project and program management, risk management, distance education, and methodology management.

¹“PMI” and “PMBOK® Guide” are trademarks of the Project Management Institute, Inc.
Managing projects and programs brings together the hard skills of planning, estimating and budgeting with the soft skills of negotiation, conflict management, influencing and effective communication. The curriculum of the Master of Science in Management of Projects and Programs (MSMPP) at Brandeis Graduate Professional Studies (GPS) reflects this balance of hard and soft skills.

### Core Courses of the MSMPP Program that align with these skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Hard” Skills</th>
<th>“Soft” Skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning, estimating, budgeting, reporting</td>
<td>Communicating, leading and influencing, resolving conflicts, negotiating, motivating</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Hard” Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Project Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Scheduling and Control</td>
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<tr>
<td>Risk Management for Projects and Programs</td>
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<td>Program Management: Theory and Practice</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Soft” Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Project Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership, Team-Building, and Decision Making</td>
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<tr>
<td>Negotiating and Conflict Resolution</td>
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</table>

### Characteristic of this type of skill in the context of a project

<table>
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<tr>
<th>“Hard” Skills</th>
<th>“Soft” Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often involve the creation of a tangible deliverable</td>
<td>Relate to interpersonal skills and their challenges</td>
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<tr>
<td>More technical in nature</td>
<td>More intangible and less visible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often incorporate the use of a tool (MS Project; spreadsheets; presentations) or deliverable templates</td>
<td>Typically employed without the use of tools/templates</td>
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</table>
Examples of deliverables produced, or work involved, when applying these skills

- Schedules
- Work breakdown structures
- Critical path diagrams
- Precedence diagrams
- Project controls
- Variance analysis
- Metrics
- Earned value
- Risk management deliverables
- Status reports
- Operating standards
- Resource estimates
- Budgets
- Dashboards

Implication to course workload

Assignments that demonstrate hard skills often result in the creation of tangible product deliverables (schedules; metrics; components of project management plans; budgets)

Assignments that demonstrate soft skills often consist of writing papers, developing and delivering presentations, participating in role-plays, analyzing behaviors and styles

Common themes across all courses

Both types of courses include:

- Application of the related skills/techniques in the work place
- Discussions related to how to demonstrate and “sell” the value of the skills/techniques within organizations where they may not be universally accepted or standardized
- Analysis of case studies to uncover best practices in applying the related skills
- Opportunities for group work as well as use of virtual collaboration tools
- Applicability to many disciplines and industry areas including software, construction, financial services, pharmaceutical companies, non-profits, and others

“Hard” Skills
Planning, estimating, budgeting, reporting

“Soft” Skills
Effective communication
Leadership
Staff development
Decision making
Business judgment
Influencing
Negotiations
Resolving conflicts
Motivating
Customer relations
Problem-solving
Managing change
Managing stakeholders
Managing expectations
Project Management Institution (PMI) Standards

Many of the MSMPP courses when applicable incorporate PMI Standards including the Guide to the PMBOK®, the Program Management Standards, the Practice Standards for Risk Management, Earned Value, and so forth. These standards are not industry-specific, and they provide a common vocabulary through which we can speak to project management processes and techniques.

The strongest alignment to PMI Standards exists among our hard-skills courses including Foundations of Project Management, Advanced Scheduling and Control, Risk Management for Projects and Programs, and Program Management: Theory and Practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>PMI Standards</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundations of Project Management (RPJM-101)</td>
<td>Guide to the PMBOK®</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced Scheduling and Control (RPJM-103)</td>
<td>Practice Standards: Scheduling; WBS; Earned Value Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Management for Projects and Programs (RPJM-110)</td>
<td>Practice Standard: Risk Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Management: Theory and Practice (RPJM-117)</td>
<td>Practice Standards: Program Management; Portfolio Management</td>
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</table>
While many of the MSMPP courses align with PMI Standards, GPS has chosen not to become a registered education provider with the PMI. Part of the GPS mission is to focus on practical, cost-effective project and program management techniques. It’s generally accepted that the PMI standards for the most part focus on what is involved with project management. MSMPP courses focus on the how – that is, the techniques that can be tailored to best meet the needs of the project, program, and organization. For example, the PMI Standards list process groups with their corresponding inputs, outputs, and techniques through rather broad coverage. MSMPP courses and their related assignments focus on how to apply these techniques in the workplace.

Students and instructors discuss how to select cost-effective approaches and tailor them based on organizational needs, project size, complexity, virtual collaboration needs, and industry.
Beyond PMBOK® Boundaries

Because MSMPP courses are aligned but not tied to the PMBOK®, the curriculum provides an expanded focus on the inter-personal skills such as communication, leadership, and negotiation. Three of the core courses focus on these areas.

In addition, the MSMPP curriculum has the flexibility to explore non-traditional methods through courses such as Agile Project Management, Challenges in Project Management, and Virtual Team Management and Communication.

Finally, the MSMPP curriculum provides opportunities to explore areas of interest and evolve with the industry. The Special Topics in Project Management course changes to reflect industry trends, as do non-credit special offerings courses based on student needs and interests. In addition, along with all Brandeis Graduate Professional Studies programs, the MSMPP is guided by a Professional Advisory Council made up of senior project and program management professionals. They provide input to the curriculum design, based on their awareness of what today’s project and program management leaders are looking for in employees of their organizations.

Courses providing expanded focus on inter-personal skills essential for project and program managers

- Professional Communication (RCOM-102)
- Leadership, Team-Building, and Decision Making (RMGT-110)
- Negotiating and Conflict Resolution (RPJM-113)

Flexibility to offer courses which explore non-traditional methods

- Agile Project Management (RPJM-130)
- Challenges in Project Management (RPJM-115)
- Virtual Team Management and Communication courses (RVTM-101, RVTM-110)

Opportunities to explore areas of focus and to evolve with the industry

- Special Topics in Project Management (RPJM-125)
- Professional Advisory Council
- Non-Credit Special Offerings
The MSMPP is a graduate program providing students with the opportunity to earn a master’s degree. This is very different from a project management training organization, in that the MSMPP offers more in-depth coverage of techniques and a graduate-level focus on outcomes reflecting skills that students can demonstrate upon course completion. Many students study for and successfully pass the PMP Exam after taking one or more courses of the MSMPP program. However the master’s curriculum contrasts greatly with training approaches. MSMPP course and program outcomes focus on the advancement of project management professionals, not on the attainment of a credential.

In addition, seeking accreditation from a for-profit organization in the profession would restrict GPS’s abilities to cover a broad range of topics and techniques not addressed by the PMI. Brandeis accreditation is with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), which is recognized as an official accrediting body of the United States Department of Education. This better reflects our commitment to providing a rigorous curriculum for project and program management professionals looking to advance within the field.
While none of the MSMPP courses are intended to explicitly prepare someone to sit for the PMP Exam, GPS does recognize the relevance of the credential to many individuals and organizations. The majority of faculty members who teach courses in the program are PMPs, and in fact, many of its students are as well.

Courses in the program qualify for professional development units, the PDUs needed for practitioners studying for and maintaining their project management credentials.

Each graduate course aligns with 30 PDUs. In addition the program includes a non-credit PMP Exam Prep course as an option for students who wish to take the exam at some point in the future. The 5-week course focuses on exam content and the interpretation of the multiple styles of exam questions. It allows students to assess gaps in their knowledge of the PMI process groups and knowledge areas, using regular self-assessments and feedback, so students can develop and implement a personalized plan of study.
Master of Science in Management of Projects and Programs

In summary, the MSMPP seeks to advance project and program management professionals in the field by providing a robust curriculum that balances the hard and soft skills essential of project and program managers. The curriculum is aligned but not tied to PMI Standards, allowing the master’s program to retain its applied focus and while recognizing the relevance of the professional standards.

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