

keeping with the times

But boss, I looked, and couldn't find project management training anywhere in La Crosse!

Twenty years ago, those trying to learn about project management in the Coulee Region had options spanning from few to far between. There were no project management courses at local colleges, and only rare workshops were offered on the topic. There were no local professional associations, no coaches, and no project management contractors located here. Even five years ago it was very slim pickings.

History shows that the country developed an interest in project management during World War II due to a push for technology projects including weaponry development, logistical support, communications and intelligence, medical developments, and industrial advancements. And while the countries urban centers and two coasts grabbed a hold of this beneficial trend quickly, the La Crosse region did not...until relatively recently.

Project Management is finally being recognized as one of the most highly demanded, and fastest growing professional disciplines by both employers and recruiters in our region. La Crosse area education providers have been stepping up to the plate as well.

A thriving chapter

One of the most notable changes in the past five years is that La Crosse now has its own Project Management Institute (PMI) chapter. Founded in 2002, this local chapter of the national association is a nonprofit, professional organization whose purpose is to "provide a forum for discussion and examination of ideas related to the management of projects and aiding with problems, solutions, and applications."

As of this writing, the La Crosse PMI chapter

has 89 members and 37 PMPs (certified project management professionals). The chapter likes to make it clear that meetings are open to all interested visitors, even if they are not interested in PMP certification, and that membership is not required to attend meetings. They offer monthly professional development meetings, occasional workshops, and study groups. More information on the chapter's upcoming meetings can be found on their web site: www.lacrossepmi.org.

Colleges providing varied options

Each of the local colleges has added project management courses to their curriculum. Western Technical College, Viterbo University, UW-La Crosse, St. Mary's University, Winona State University, and Southeast Minnesota Technical College all include project management courses in their business and IT programs now.

One of the most interesting offerings is the new Certificate in Project Management planned for rollout in the Spring 2007 semester from the UW-La Crosse Small Business Development Center. This certificate program will have a custom-designed curriculum based on individual student and employer perceived gap assessments. The new program will include some unique content and coaching, and will also incorporate courses and events from PMI and the other local academic institutions.

Public workshops

Now a great selection of local, publicly offered project management workshop opportunities are available in the La Crosse area. They are brought in by the local PMI chapter, through



national workshop providers, through the academic institutions, and also through Successful Projects and Hawkins, Ash, and Baptie Training Center. Local workshops vary from soft skills, personality-based workshops led by famous authors, to fundamental process training, project management software, and hard skills training.

As opposed to the college courses, the workshops appeal to those who need a quick infusion of motivation or knowledge and best practices, but who don't necessarily need the degree or want the homework. The public workshops are often opportunities for local organizations to benchmark against each other and learn best practices from those who are working in the trenches.

The options that used to range from "few and far between" have improved to "plentiful and varied." So yesterday I smiled when I heard a project manager say, "*But boss, there are so many project management learning opportunities to choose from in La Crosse, it's hard to pick what to sign up for first.*"

Information provided by: Kay Wais, PMP, Owner of Successful Projects, A Connexio Alliance partner, Founder of the La Crosse PMI chapter