



# CASE STUDY

Teaching Project Management - the Hands-on Approach

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## Teaching project management

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The engineering department at Quebec's University in Rimouski (UQAR) regroups three disciplines: mechanical engineering, electrical engineering and electro mechanic systems engineering. During their academic journey, students must pass three courses that include a real design project, during their third and fourth year of training. In order to help them, two professors created the CRSNG-UQAR Chair. The Chair creates a bridge between the university's partners and the students. Two professional engineers are also involved as supervisors. The mission of the Chair is to develop design abilities in the engineering students that will help him or her contribute significantly to technological innovation in the companies where they work, as well as to introduce design best practices.

The project starts with partners that submit real project requests to the Chair, with well-defined deliverables. Then, the projects are offered to the students during their projects courses. These partners can be private companies, other teaching establishments, a university department, a government organization or a non-profit organization. The goal is to have students develop and maintain a client relationship with the partner in order to be better prepared to the reality of professional work.

To ensure the success of the project, project management concepts and tools are presented to the engineering students. The implementation of a project management system is part of those tools, so that students can plan and control each of the phases in their projects.

## Finding the right software

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Our main requirement was to find a software tool that was intuitive and that required a short learning period to become familiar with it. We had additional requirements to choose the software.

### For the user:

- Students must only see their assigned projects.
- Students must be able to change the description, start and end dates, and uses assignments on their projects.
- Students must be able to create tasks with a start and end date, duration, the percentage done and assigned persons.
- Students must be able to display a Gantt chart from the data entered.
- Student must be able to fill out time sheets for each task.
- The software had to be accessible remotely and in French.
- Technical support for the software had to be available in French.

### For the administrator:

- The software must be able to show several projects at once.
- All projects must be accessible to the administrator, and must be editable by the administrator.
- The administrator must be able to restrict access for a user to one or several projects.
- The use of filters to display data: per user, per group, per project type.
- The availability of time reports.

## AceProject, the ideal choice

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AceProject fit our requirements perfectly. We chose AceProject because of these added benefits:

- Web access gives the students access to his or her project in the university's computer labs, via the WI-FI network or from home.
- All projects are accessible simultaneously by all students.
- Data is exportable to Excel so that they can be included in the student's project binder.
- Tasks and time sheets allow commenting.
- It is possible to send message via the interface.
- It is easy to see a project's Gantt chart in three views: daily, weekly and monthly.
- The Gantt chart can be exported to JPEG format.
- The complete online help.
- User preferences are saved with the user's profile.
- For the administrator, it is easy to generate customized time reports.

## AceProject at Quebec's University in Rimouski (UQAR)

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Each team is assigned a pre-configured project in AceProject, with its own project number and description. The students must then write a project scope document according to their client's needs.

With AceProject, the students can write their scope document while they are planning their project. Then, they will be able to easily recuperate the data from the software to integrate it in their reports as tables or Gantt charts.

Before AceProject, students used Excel or MS Project to create and manage their project plan. However, Excel is not a project management system and requires re-entering information each time there is a change.

While MS Project is a project management system, it requires extensive training and additional software to have common access on an Intranet. Professors could only check on the project's progress during meetings with the student, which is traditionally done mid-semester.

Now, with AceProject, professors can follow their students' projects and see how far ahead they are without planning a team meeting. Moreover, it is easier to plan university resource needs, for example the mechanics workshop, to work on projects.

### Professors and AceProject

The professor's role is to accompany the students in their projects and to give them the required tools to complete the project successfully. The main goal is for the student to become familiar with project management and AceProject is one of the tools available. Since they are real projects with a client and deliverables, the student must use rigor and method to reach the objectives at the end of the course.

The software includes all the features we were looking for, such as web-based access that varies depending on each user. This way each team only has access to their project, while the professors and teaching aides can see all projects.

Reports and time sheets from the students are very easy to produce and customize. It is then easy to browse access teams to get an idea of their progress, the challenges they are having and how much time they are spending on their tasks.

### Students and AceProject

For the students, the data exported in Excel format becomes part of the project binder. By comparing their planning data and actual time spent on the project, they can understand the factors that influence the duration of certain tasks.

It is also easy to browse the interface with the added option of displaying the fields according to each student's preferences. Web-based tools are gaining in popularity with students. They learn how to use the tool quickly, without requiring formal training.

Julie Campagna, an electrical engineering student, explains: "AceProject is an intuitive project management tool, easy to learn for the newbie. Its interface is easy and fun to use. Being online simplifies many things, since no installation is required and the system is accessible regardless of where we are. It's a tool I will be using again for future projects."

Simon Bujold, who studies electro mechanics systems engineering, adds: "Fast, simple and effective. AceProject has enabled me to manage my project well while optimizing my time management. I recommend it to everyone."

### A first project management role





The project courses enable students to gain their first experience as a project manager. This role requires good work organization skills in order to reach the project's goals. A software tool like AceProject brings the professional side we wanted to introduce in these courses that focus on the practical side of the profession.

### For more information

Visit the CRSNG-UQAR Chair's [website](#).

You can [try AceProject online](#), or [request a web-based demo of AceProject](#) with a representative.

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