

# Charting a Path towards IFMA Accreditation in Universities

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## **Abstract**

Within the realm of higher education institutions, the development, growth and accreditation process with IFMA normally takes years of work with the persistent push of one or more faculty members. Additionally, the process requires high levels of coordination with both internal administrative leadership staff and members of the accreditation team.

This paper is directed towards outlining the steps of various universities as they shepherd their FM-related programs towards accomplishing the key goals of filling market demand for such employees as well as accomplishing the highest level of certifying accreditation. As a part of the document, various areas of the FM Program growth process will be outlined. Additionally, case experiences of various institutions will be used as well as data collection from FM program offerings, in order to establish patterns of growth and programs.

It is anticipated that such a contribution will be helpful to other institutions as they consider the steps to initiate, grow and accredit such FM programs within their schools of learning.

**Keywords:** Accreditation, Facilities, IFMA, University Programs

## **Introduction**

Since its inception in 1980, the progress of the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA) has maintained continuous growth in membership, geography and industry knowledge base. Today it runs with full force containing 24,000 members in 103 countries, 3 credentialing programs, 2 international conferences and an educational accreditation system (IFMA, 2014). Closely tied with an industry that has a high demand for new workers (IFMA, 2007) there is great effort being put into the shepherding of entry-level employees that are well rehearsed and educated in the field. As a response to this need, the association has established accreditation standards that allow educational institutions throughout the world to align their curriculum resources with the needs of Facilities Management (FM) careers.

This paper is directed towards outlining the steps of various universities as they educate their FM-related students towards accomplishing the key goals of filling market demand for such employees as well as accomplishing the highest level of certifying accreditation. As a part of the document, various areas of the program growth process will be outlined. Additionally, case examples of three institutions will be used as well as data collection from FM program offerings to profile the patterns of advancement.

## **Methods**

To accomplish this task of outlining the accreditation process, a multi-faceted data gathering approach was taken from the three main sources of facilities management as they relate to university curriculums. These three areas were first, the IFMA accreditation website requirements documentation. Secondly, the college and university website listings of each of the accredited FM programs were reviewed to obtain details of what levels of certificates were offered, and third, personal interviews with faculty and staff employees who are related to the accreditation process where they gave information on their histories, challenges and program focuses. Data collected from these sources allowed for the authors to assess patterns and define commonalities in the paths taken amongst varying schools.

Additionally, assessments were made by analyzing the geographical locations and curriculum offerings from the varying accredited schools to help indicate possible strengths, weaknesses, niches and other nuances of the offerings.

### **General Analysis of IFMA-Accredited Environments**

Typically found in environments with related programs are already in existence, the study of physical facilities typically originate from or near schools that have related fields in place such as construction management, engineering, business management, architecture, project management and even real estate management. As a part of this research, each of the accredited schools was analyzed in-depth through the study of their website program and offered curriculum.

Table 1 shows the current listing of IFMA accredited universities as well as an analysis of some of the major fields of study that house the FM curriculum.

Of the 26 accredited programs, approximately 30% of them are within an engineering school and almost half of them have a laterally positioned construction management program within the area of study. This is likely due to the crossover areas of study that both construction management (CM) and engineering schools share which allow them to create synergy by housing themselves in the same departments. Of the list, only two programs offer both a bachelors and masters accredited degree in-house in which neither had any construction or engineering-based school linked departmentally. These programs are likely to be considered more self-reliant in their coursework and self-sufficient in programs. Lastly, the three associate degrees accreditations showed similar autonomy in programs in that they had no formally listed ties to construction, or engineering on their program websites.

Though not shown in the table, it is worth noting that there were several accredited programs which were closely linked on their web pages other programs such as architectural design, real estate management, project management and even business management.

From this data a few items can be assessed. First, because of the related fields of FM, CM and Engineering, it is a common occurrence to build from courses that overlap such as project management, accounting, graphical communication, finance, human resources. It can also be assessed that related programs may help to spawn and maintain strong FM areas of study. Additionally, at some point in the progression of such a program, a more self-standing bachelors and masters' certificate option can be established and linked in a program.

### **Flow chart of progression**

In order to demonstrate a pattern of initiation, Figure 1 shows a general path that three exclusively observed programs took towards accreditation. Of the three programs, one has been accredited for over a decade, the other was recently recognized into the program and the third is in the process of taking its first steps towards the accreditation.

### **Organizing Program Advocate**

As demonstrated in the figure, the common denominator is having an initiating faculty member who will carry the incorporation of a program and accreditation through. Though no program or degree is completely established by an individual, the commencement of an academic FM program seems to have the common origins of possessing a single individual who is willing to take on the task of pushing the concept over the various hurdles of inauguration. “There needs to be a program champion” in order to make it work (Sullivan, 2012), who is willing to see the process through from start to finish. Someone who is “passionate” about the field as a whole as well as one who truly cares about the student’s success in their FM career (Harmon, 2015).

Though the faculty member may not necessarily carry the bulk of the workload required, they do carry the responsibility of persistently pressing a key group of individuals forward towards assessing their program and carrying out a plan towards a university presence.

Two of the three programs that were exclusively assessed were influenced by a published study which indicated a projected increase in demand for facilities managers (IFMA, 2007) yet the youngest pursuer of accreditation received strong influence by members in industry that the demand was present (Diez, 2014).

### **Feasibility Study**

As is customary of most educational institutions, there is a tedious and sometimes long process of expanding program subjects, curriculum and certificates. As a part of this process, typically there is a proposal requirement to demonstrate the feasibility and practicality of such modifications. Recommended areas of such a document should include minimally the following items:

- Demand for workforce members who would study such an area
- Evidence of student interest
- Accessibility challenges to existing programs for student population
- Curriculum plan for student certificates of graduation (Hunter, et al., 2014):

Though the writing of such a document can be considered an onerous task, it is helpful to know the following facts about the current environment of FM’s in the field. First, much of the market demand information is already provided by the 2007 study conducted by IFMA and the data listed indicates a 10-20 year event of workforce exiting. Secondly, current published data of IFMA accredited graduates indicate a high level of employment along with an enticing average starting salary. Therefore, a simple survey can be carried out with potential students informing them of the demand and earning potential which is likely to produce a response of significant demand.

In the case of the initiating school for accreditation, a questionnaire was distributed to freshman/sophomore students in a business/engineering school in order to verify the level of interest in the field. As indicated, there is strong information given through the existing data to

facilitate interest in the field based off of salary, work options and the scope of tasks that FM's carry out. When 60 students were actually surveyed at 2 universities considering the IFMA accreditation, CM students interest demonstrated to be high considering approximately 50% of them had never heard of field, yet over 50% would consider studying the field based off of the salary data of the industry. Additionally, 73% of the same group indicated that they would consider taking FM elective courses or minoring in such a field of study.

### **Strategy Towards a Specific Degree Certificate**

With planning and organizing of curriculum, there is a good amount of collaboration that can be done with related areas of study within the schools of business, supply chain management, human resources, real estate, construction management and the like to streamline the faculty workload of an expanded program proposal. A careful analysis of the university catalog and proper communication with related courses must be undertaken in order to align the reach of the program with various areas of FM studies based on the requirements of individual schools. Additionally, while organizing a curriculum plan, it is a good time to consider which certificate goal the department wants to achieve as a final result of its efforts. Table 2 outlines some of the basic differences in curriculum requirements that IFMA has set depending on whether a school is offering an associates, bachelors or master's degree. It is noteworthy to mention that the associate degree requirements deal more with the technical set of competencies whereas the graduate-level requirements address the managerial and administrative perspective of the competencies. Only the bachelor's degree curriculum requires that all 11 of the competencies are covered more extensively throughout the program of study to give the students a well-rounded understanding of the profession.

As a part of organizing a technology-related program, the involvement of members of industry is important but not necessarily essential. University-level acceptance can be considered a formal hurdle to cross but industry involvement will play a much bigger role as the program works to maintain and grow. However, it would be helpful to initiate contact with local and regional facilities groups in order to let them know that the formal education will soon be in place. Any contacts made will be helpful when it is time to establish an advisory committee in order to fulfill accreditation requirements.

### **Petition and Resistance to Program Expansion**

As a team is organized and a proposal being created, for university approval, it is common phenomenon that some members both in and out of the department may show resentment or resistance to the changes. Probably the biggest reason for resentment is the feeling threatened that the new additional program will cannibalize the existing student enrolment numbers (Sullivan, 2012). This is a real concern and should be considered as a part of opening up a new area of study. Additionally, there may be faculty concerns about stretching existing employees across additional responsibilities; e.g., extra classes, additional modules to existing courses and the future task of participating in another accreditation in addition to existing ones. Lastly, there could simply be poor chemistry within a faculty group which cause any change in program to be intentionally sabotaged. Regardless of the reason, any resistance to the additions of a program should be considered and anticipated with planning and mitigation of such risks.

## **Program Initiation & Incubation**

Assuming that the FM curriculum is approved at the university level, a subsequent focus of faculty resources will be on curriculum development of the newly outlined courses and modifications to existing courses in order to align with the facilities and property management approach. This effort of coursework coincides with two other key areas in the development of a program. First, it involves the shepherding of the first generation of enrolled students that run through the program towards graduation. Secondly, it requires that the program take on an active role in courting industry participants in the field through guest lectures, adjunct instructors, location site tours and student internships. These two areas involve the establishment of relationships that will likely have a long-term impact on the program's future. Additionally, the program's relationship with alumni, students and industry members are an integral part of obtaining accreditation as will be outlined subsequently.

## **Accreditation with IFMA**

Since its beginnings in 1996, the accreditation group that worked in tandem with IFMA has undergone various changes to accommodate the needs of education institutions as well as industrial recommendations. Initially known as the Committee on Recognized Programs, the group progressed in titles and roles to include the IFMA Foundation in 2007, the Commission of Academic Affairs (CoAA) in 2009 and finally to the Facilities Management Accreditation Commission (FMAC) in 2010 (IFMA, 2014). It is also worth noting that in 2007, the association implemented specific degree standards, known as its Accredited Degree Program (ADP) in order to help standardize degree certificates being offered by learning institutions.

The process of receiving accreditation has been patterned after other associations with specific requirements such as curriculum, reporting of student base and graduation data, site visits by representatives. However, it was in the most recent ADP standard revisions of 2013 that reflected the 2014 publication of accreditation requirements which added more detailed inspection and interviews of the programs by the commission as well as more extensive demonstration of "outcomes" or "evidences", (assignments, projects, presentations and tests) from the student work which substantially increased the workload and credibility of the process (Harmon, 2014).

Today, the accreditation has reached a level of requirement and reporting to match most other rigorous national and international associations. This is demonstrated with the following highlights of the requirements:

- A 2 to 3-day site visit by multiple committee members for program inspection and interviews with faculty, students, and other related members.
- Demonstration of outcomes of course requirements through assigned material and 3 sets of student assignments (low, medium and high levels of performance), projects and exams.
- Demonstration of competencies of students by reporting grades and spread of grading.
- Program representation and guidance from a Program Advisory Committee (PAC) which includes members of industry, student base and faculty.
- Further assessment of student, alumni and industry survey opinions on the effectiveness of the program (IFMA, 2015).

A final council from the interviewed universities in this overview of accreditation is also worth mentioning here. It is highly recommended that any universities considering the process do the following:

1. Review closely the most recent document issued by IFMA outlining the requirements towards accreditation (IFMA, 2015).
2. Attend the yearly conference (World Workplace) training programs for accreditation.
3. Work closely with the accrediting representative, Steve Lockwood, with questions and help on organizing your program and proposals for accreditation.

### **Analysis of Existing Accredited Programs**

As a concluding section of this paper, a surface-level assessment is given on the various accredited institutions of learning to demonstrate both the demographics and other distinguishing items of the group. Again, table 1 shows a list of the 26 schools and their relative programs offered as bachelors, masters or both. Additionally, due to the high relationship with construction management and traditional engineering programs, data is listed identifying if their programs are closely linked as illustrated on their web page descriptions.

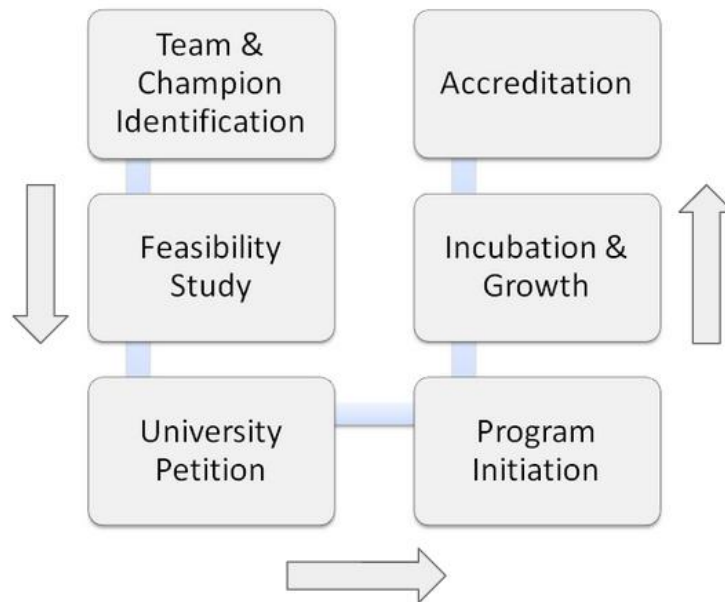
Although the U.S. is clearly involved with IFMA where it consists of 55% of the total, other countries such as the Netherlands and Singapore have rigorously invested in education programs with 5 universities between the two small countries. Figure 2 illustrates location maps of the currently accredited schools to show that there is currently no accreditation presence in the continents of South America, Africa and little in Asia. These three areas remain largely untapped to IFMA-related universities.

Another distinctive point comes from the locations of schools found within the United States. Of the 15 U.S.-based universities, thirteen are geographically located on the eastern half of the country while only two are in the west. This distinction is likely to have some effect on job placement for those graduating considering that a notable portion of students would rather work closer to their home university. However, the above factor is not likely to have as much of an impact as the geographic location of schools that students are able to travel to in order to attend. Students who wish to stay within their home state or region for degrees in facilities management currently have many more choices in the eastern part of the country than in states than in the west. Finally, an added difficulty for students living in the western part of the U.S. who wish to remain in their local region, the options for studying FM at an accredited university diminish for two reasons. First, Brigham Young University (BYU), located in the western part of the country, is a private religious school with strict lifestyle standards for attending students. Though they boast a rigorous program and extremely high job placement, a student would need to be willing to live the standards of that institution in order to attend. Secondly, Arizona State University (ASU), also located in the west, only offers a masters FM degree which is geared towards working professionals who are willing to take much of the curriculum online. Though the online option is a benefit for working professionals regardless of their location, it does not offer much for the traditional bachelor student seeking an FM degree in the western part of the country.

### **Conclusion**

As education institutions consider the possibility of aligning their studies with the a professional association it is helpful to not only know of the key requirements towards accreditation but also

the steps that other universities have taken in order to reach accreditation. With this study, the authors endeavored to demonstrate some commonalities in universities in accreditation steps, geographical locations as well as final FM-level certificates as they relate to the academic realm. In addition, knowing certain pitfalls and niches of market demand are greatly beneficial in helping administrators to more quickly assess if the accreditation process is worth their effort in pursuing. It is the hope of the authors of this paper to present a path that is documented from the experience and expertise of those who have trodden before them and want to help others as they consider the undertaking.



**Figure 1: Path Towards Accreditation**

**Table 1: Accredited Schools Programs**

IFMA Accredited Schools	Assoc.	BS	MS	BS	CM	MS	CM	Eng.
Arizona State University			x	x		x		x
Brigham Young University		x						x
Community College of Philadelphia	x							
Conestoga College		x						
Cornell University		x	x					
Ferris State University		x						
Florida A&M University (FAMU)		x						
Georgia Institute of Tech. (Georgia Tech)			x	x		x		x
Hanze University		x		x				x
Leeds Metropolitan University			x					
Missouri State University		x		x		x		
NHTV Breda University of Applied Science		x						
Pratt Institute			x					
Rochester Institute of Technology			x			x		x
Saxion Universities of Applied Sciences		x						
SIM University		x						
Southern Polytechnic State University (S. Poly)		x		x				
TCI College: Technical Career Institutes	x							
Temasek Polytechnic	x							
Temple University		x		x				x
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University			x	x		x		x
The University of Sydney			x	x				x
University College London (UCL)			x	x				
University of Minnesota		x		x				
Wentworth Institute of Technology		x		x		x		
Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW)		x	x					

**Abbreviations Key**

Assoc: Associates Degree in Facilities Management

BS: Bachelor's Degree in Facilities Management

MS: Master's Degree in Facilities Management

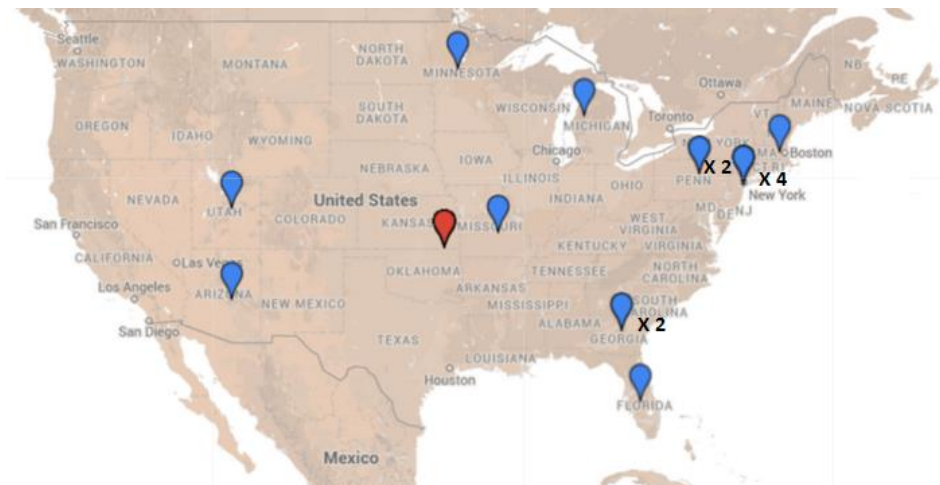
CM: Construction Management Program

Eng.: Engineering Program



**Table 2 - Summary of Key Degree Requirements for IFMA Accreditation**

Program Degree	ADP Requirements	Options of Study Allowed	Competency Requirements in Courses
Associates	Yes	1	Operations and Maint, Technology, Project Management, Environmental Stewardship & Sustainability
Bachelors	Yes	1 or more	All 11 Competencies
Masters	Yes	1 or more	Finance & business, Communication, Leadership & strategy, Quality



**By U.S. State**



**By Country & Nation**

**Figure 2: 2015 Map of IFMA Accredited Schools (State and National listings)**

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