

For my Hands—on project I decided to visit Kelley Executive Partners (KEP) in Bloomington, Indiana. KEP is a division of the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University; however, it is a separate entity from the university. The main purpose of KEP is to provide executive education for corporate and sponsor groups. KEP uses faculty from the Kelley School of Business to provide custom training programs for corporations and sponsor groups that are interested in certain areas of business and have a goal of providing further training for employees. Each group decides the training/educational goals and KEP facilitates the learning. I met with KEP's Associate Director, David Prince, to learn more about the programs offered through KEP.

Since each group is different and customizes the training/learning based on the company's needs, I decided to focus on one program in particular: Financial Planning and Analysis Program (FP&A). The FP&A certification course, as offered by KEP, is designed as an online, self-paced course that prepares students for the Certified Corporate FP&A Professional credential exam. This program differs from other KEP programs because anyone can enroll in the program, not just corporate employees. A majority of the students who enroll in the program are mid-career and are interested in gaining the FP&A certification in order to learn a newer industry or gain skills that benefit their companies and their careers. Seeing that the company benefits from its employees gaining FP&A certification, most companies provide continuing education funds. Ninety percent of the \$2000.00 course cost is covered by the individual's company. The remaining balance is then covered by the student as an out-of-pocket expense. Due to the fact this is a new program offered through KEP so there is, currently, no recruiting plan in place. The students are directed to the program through the AFP's website.

Even though KEP facilitates this course, the education is centrally based on the requirements set by the Association for Financial Professionals (AFP). The AFP provides the course materials and determines the course objectives. The educational information is delivered to students by a, Kelley School of Business, faculty member who holds FP&A certifications. Professor Dubos J. Masson uses a combination of pre-recorded videos for the students to view for each chapter covered in the curriculum designed by the AFP and a handful of live webinars. Even though the course is self-paced and the students have access to the materials for five months, Professor Masson has designed a seven-week model for students to follow. There is no evaluation tool for the course or for the instructor; however, KEP does have a plan to incorporate a survey upon completion of the course. Having only one professor delivering the educational information, he reports directly to the Executive Director of KEP.

Overall, I was impressed by the FP&A course that KEP offers. The course uses guidelines set by the AFP to create a course that will allow students to prepare to take the FP&A certification exam. Even though it is a self-paced course, Professor Masson has created a seven-week model that the students can follow. I thought this was a great idea. It provides the students, who might not know where to start, a guide to follow whether they choose to or not. Since the course dates are determined by when the exam is offered, students have access to this course and the materials for a total of five months (until the close of the exam). If a student follows the seven-week structure he/she will have ample opportunity to either rework the entire seven-week course or visit certain areas that they may need more in depth review. Although students will have access to the materials for longer than seven-weeks the live sessions will be offered within that allotted time frame. One suggestion I would make is to space out the live sessions over the entire five months and provide review sessions. This approach may

be a little more difficult to plan, logistically, but may provide additional resources to the students taking more time to work through their course.

I feel this course is well organized, for a new program, but it does have some room for improvement. Specifically, I think there are missed opportunities with student recruitment, student competency evaluation, course evaluation, faculty involvement, and long-term program planning.

As mentioned previously, this is a new course offered by KEP. Currently, there is no dedicated recruitment plan. KEP has an information page on their website and there is information regarding KEP's program on the AFP's website. This approach may work now, with a smaller class size; however, if the program administrators seek to grow the program they will need to take a more active role in recruiting students. I think they would benefit by creating a marketing plan that would include advertising online, dedicated emails to Kelley School of Business alumni, and reaching out to financial institutions. With this being an online course, KEP is not constrained by physical location.

I also noticed a lack of evaluation metrics for the students, instructor, and the course. The AFP provided curriculum does contain pre/post tests and practice exams however there is no mention of how the professor interacts with the students and those tests/exams. I think there should be a structure in place that the professor can track how the students perform on the pre/post tests and practice exams. The students do have access to the professor via phone or email but that doesn't necessarily mean that they will utilize these sources. Having a tool in place will not only allow the professor to review how the students are progressing but it would allow the facilitators the opportunity to adjust the program to meet the learner's needs. This point connects closely to evaluating the instructor and the course. Having student feedback will give facilitators and the professor the information needed to make adjustments to the program; thus, ultimately, improving the course. Since individuals learn differently at different rates it would be helpful to incorporate different perspectives into the course in order to maximize the student's time.

Another critique of the program is that there is only one faculty member. Even though Professor Masson has multiple certifications in the area of financial planning and analysis I think it would be beneficial to have an additional one or two faculty members involved. The course is relatively small now but if it continues to grow the numbers may be hard for one faculty member to manage on top of the course load assigned by the university. Another benefit of additional faculty member would be the students would receive a slight variety of teaching methods. The delivery of the information would remain similar because it is an online course, however, different faculty members may provide a different approach to the information.

Lastly, the program does not have a long-term goal for the course. Once the course begins to gain recognition the enrollment should increase. While the numbers are manageable, I think it would benefit KEP to develop a plan that would allow them to manage a larger group of enrollees without having to scramble at the last minute. Defining a standard operating procedure would be helpful and keep the course consistent for the future cohorts thus creating a valuable service.

My favorite take away idea from the program is how KEP and the instructor provided a study model for the course even though it is self-paced. I like the idea of being able to offer students an example of how they could work through the materials without having to force them to adhere to a specific time frame. Also, while I feel the course has started out with a good organizational base I think there are some questions/issues that could have been addressed prior to the start of the program.

Obviously, the course will change as it grows but having a standard operating procedure, a marketing/recruitment plan, and evaluation opportunities in place would be incredibly helpful. For me, I would feel more comfortable rolling out a program or course having this information in place to avoid any inconsistency or confusion.