

## NEXTcast Season 1 Episode 10: Cheryl Francis-Nurse on the Value of Industry Partnerships

In this episode, we talk to Cheryl Francis-Nurse, the program coordinator for the Project Management graduate certificate at Humber College, about the new partnership she helped develop with the Toronto chapter of the Project Management Institute.

Nathan: Welcome to NEXTcast. My name is Nathan Whitlock, an editor at Humber Press. NEXTcast is a podcast about teaching and learning at Humber College. Every episode, we talk to some of the faculty and staff who are leading innovation, both inside and outside the classroom. This episode, we speak to Cheryl Francis-Nurse, the program coordinator for the Project Management graduate certificate, offered through the School of Applied Technology. We'll be talking to Cheryl about the recent launch of a new partnership with the Toronto Chapter of the Project Management Institute and what the value of these kinds of partnerships is to students.

Nathan: Welcome to NEXTcast, Cheryl.

Cheryl: Thank you for having me, it's a pleasure to be here.

Nathan: I was wondering if we could start out just if you could tell us a little bit about what the kind of work you do at Humber.

Cheryl: I'm a program coordinator and professor for the Project Management graduate certificate program in the school of Applied Technology. Now this is a program that attracts candidates from very diverse backgrounds from all over the world. I think given the recognition that Project Management certainly is a skill that is required by organizations, all organizations in fact, whether, you know, public, private or not for profit, so our students come from everywhere.

Nathan: That's great, and we talk a lot about Humber, about partnering with industry and making sure, ya know, often having projects that have these real-world connections, and you did something yourself in this program, that you launched a new partnership. I was wondering if you could tell us a little bit about that, how that went.

Cheryl: Yes, we did. Actually on Thursday, March 1st, we launched our Humber PMI Toronto Student Community, and this was a huge milestone for our program. It is actually a partnership with PMI Toronto, which happens to be one of the largest chapters of our standards body The Project Management Institute. They have five hundred thousand members, so this is an opportunity for us and for

our students to engage with senior practitioners, right, who are certainly eager and ready and able to help them to transition to the next phase of their careers.

Nathan: And I know this launch and this partnership was a long time in the making, a lot of planning went into it, a lot of thought went into it. I was wondering how, what inspired it? How did it first, ya know, how did the idea first come to you?

Cheryl: Well, certainly there's quite a history there. So, from its inception, our program saw to engage with the Project Management Institute and its chapters. We at Humber are a registered education provider of the PMI, which means that we approved on the project management training on very rigorous standards and requirements. If you go back to when our program started, back in 2005-2006, we had fourteen graduates in the first year. Today, certainly the last academic year, we had over two hundred and twenty graduates, and the growth trend continues.

Cheryl: So in the beginning, we had this relationship with our PMI chapters where students would have access through members of our graduate committee, directly with a PMI, access to projects sponsors, for example, they would go on site visits, they would have access to events at the local chapters at their various facilities. However, with growth came some challenges and opportunities.

Cheryl: One key challenge was the fact that these events, or these chapters, really had their own challenges in accommodating such a large number of students, so we had to start thinking outside the box. We wanted to maintain and strengthen our relationship obviously with the PMI, and with its chapters. So the research and the brainstorming began, and essentially what happened was that we realized by opening our discussion, collaborating with the cooperate offices of the PMI and its local chapter PMI Toronto, that a student community was both a novel and viable option. So we engaged our students on an alternative capstone project, where they created a framework, an operational framework for this particular event, which culminated in what happened last Thursday.

Cheryl: So they work closely with the executives of PMI Toronto, its president, its director of membership services, our capstone professor, the faculty advisor and myself, to create this framework. Now this is one of the most wonderful things and is a very key milestone in our history and we look forward to what emerges from it.

Nathan: And you mention this event, this launch of this partnership, it only happened just a few days ago-

Cheryl: It did!

Nathan: So you're still recovering-

Cheryl: We are, absolutely!

Nathan: I imagine. What was some of the feedback you got in the immediate aftermath? Or even at the event, what were some of the students saying? And some of the industry people?

Cheryl: The feedback has been overwhelming, and it's still coming in. I mean I just saw an email before I came to speak to you today. Our partners are so excited, motivated to embark on this journey with us. They made it very clear that they expect to use this model for other educational institutions, so that's a big plus. Our students are also highly motivated. Certainly, last week we showcased our students their professionalism, their dedication, from the first semester student who shared his musical talents alongside one of our professors to the student ambassadors who took care of our guests, to the wonderful presentations by both our alumni and our leadership club. I mean, we saw our students at their best and they realized that this is a pathway to many opportunities and they are ready and eager to go.

Nathan: And I guess at the most basic level that kind of partnership and that kind of approach to learning, you know that classic student question where they say "When are we ever gonna learn that, when are we ever gonna need this?" "Why do we need to learn this skill or this, you know, technology or software, learn about this process?" When you're doing it like that, when they're actually working with people in the industry, they're seeing these skills getting used all the time, these processes in place. That must be very satisfying, it must be very kind of enriching for the students, too.

Cheryl: Absolutely. I mean this particular initiative will afford our students many, many benefits. You just certainly touched on one, where they're engaging with practitioners from industry. They're seeing themselves and the people that they'll be networking with, engaging with, based on our new relationship or formalized relationship with PMI Toronto.

Cheryl: So if I look at some additional benefits to our students, yes we're strengthening relationships, but the strengthening of relationships means that the students will have access to such a vast pool of project managers. They will have the ability to seek advice, coaching, mentoring, as they transition from being a student to a professional. They will have access to capstone sponsors. They will have access to various networking opportunities, many of which will be hosted here at Humber, which is why it's so important to have our program and certainly to launch our own student community because this means that they are also going

to be coming to us and engaging right here at the North Campus with our students.

Cheryl: It also means that our students will have volunteer opportunities. There's also the potential for internships and I must say that when we initiated this project last year around springtime, the PMI invited our students to compete for internships on the special outreach program that they were piloting. Two of our students got the opportunities. They were supposed to be three month internships. In one case, this turned out to be a nine month engagement. Both students were there last semester, last week, and they essentially said, "We have had an opportunity to jumpstart our career. We'll be forever grateful for the opportunity afforded us by Humber, the PMI Toronto, and the employer." So already we are seeing those results. And we are just starting the journey, and we are confident that we will see many opportunities evolve from this.

Cheryl: I should also say that we've been focusing on the benefits to our students and by extension, our program, but if you look at this particular initiative, it also benefits Humber and it is certainly a line to Humber's strategic priorities. Think about the fact that we're all about industry partnerships, strengthening alumni relationships, community engagement. All those boxes are checked with this initiative.

Nathan: And you mentioned you're just getting started with this-

Cheryl: We are just getting started.

Nathan: Yeah, this is ground zero for this, and I know again you're just still recovering from the big launch last week, but I was wondering if I could ask what's in the immediate future? What's the next, is there another event being planned or are you sort of giving yourself at least a week to take a breath?

Cheryl: Well, we're not giving ourselves a lot of time at all because we're already starting a planning for first official event under the auspices of our student community. This is going to be led by our leadership club who will know become the executives of this community. On April 3rd we are going to have our industry round table, and this means that members of the PMI from various disciplines, various backgrounds, whether it is engineering, construction, etcetera, but through those, seeing a project practitioners from PMI Toronto, will be here at the North Campus with our students for an industry round table. This will be on April 3rd, so we are very, very excited about this. We are starting planning today, in fact, at 1'o clock today will be our first meeting where we're going to be starting to put that together. We have already started to promote it and the students are very, very excited to engage with these practitioners.

Nathan: And there are a number of similar types of partnerships going on at Humber across the various schools, but I'm guessing that a program coordinator or an associate dean or dean who listens to this who doesn't have something like that going on currently might think this is great, we need to get something like this going on.

Nathan: So thinking back over all that planning you did right back to the brainstorming and up to this event itself and now going forward, building these new events, building these new partnerships, what advice would you give to someone in another program, another school, even another college, who wants to build this kind of partnership, this kind of industry partnership? What practical advice?

Cheryl: Certainly I'll be happy to comment on that but I must say, not only program coordinators and associate deans in our cases, in our case the dean or program advisor committee, I mean they are various other stakeholders across Humber, who are very, very interested and engaged in this initiative, and certainly present there to support us last week.

Cheryl: To think about the advice I would give, I would say for us, what really worked was having a strong business case. We had a clearly articulated business case that looked at the benefits to our students, the most important to the program and to Humber as a whole. We also clearly outline the benefits to our partners, and so therefore that business case was what we certainly used to first gain our garner interest in this initiative, but also very important for this to be successful is the building of relationships and engaging the right team. We have a very strong and committed team in our program. The faculty and other staff, supporting staff, are technologists, our administrative staff are all very committed to our program. In fact, many of them are part-timers, which makes it even more special. They realize that it is necessary to engage and build opportunities for our students outside of the classroom and they're doing just that through coaching, mentoring opportunities and through certainly volunteering their time and effort to an initiative like this.

Cheryl: I think building relationships and having those really strong and committed team is what certainly made our event successful.

Nathan: And you had sort of a built-in advantage that you work in project management, managing this project, was like second nature, sure.

Cheryl: Without question, it was managed as a project.

Nathan: Exactly, but that will obviously help, all that advice, that idea of building the case-

Cheryl: Yes

Nathan: Being specific,

Cheryl: Yes

Nathan: Outlining the benefits, that's clearly gonna help anyone else at the school or any school wants to put something like this together.

Cheryl: And we'd be more than happy to engage with others from outside our school who may be interested in and certainly embarking on such a journey, to share certainly our experience.

Nathan: Well that's fantastic, Cheryl, thank you very much.

Cheryl: You're most welcome.

Nathan: NEXTcast is produced by Humber Press and the creative productions team at The Centre for Teaching and Learning at Humber College. Special thanks to Puneet Wagh, Santino Pannozzo, Allison LaSorda, Darren Richards, and Eileen DeCourcy. To suggest stories for future episodes of NEXTcast or to let us know what you think, email HumberPress, all one word, at Humber.ca. That's humberpress@humber.ca. To learn more about the workshops, teaching certificates, and other support offered through The Centre for Teaching and Learning, and to read issues of NEXT Magazine, go to Humber.ca/centreforteachingandlearning. Thanks for listening, see ya next time. That's still not a pun.