

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF A HUMAN RESOURCE CURRICULUM FOR INSTITUTIONS EXPERIENCING RAPID GROWTH

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## Abstract

One key challenge with the growth and expansion of institutions of higher education is the development of cutting-edge degree programs and emphases. Because human resources is constantly changing, new academic programs need to be designed, and current ones updated to reflect these dynamic changes. This article reports research conducted to aid in the development of a human resources emphasis in a School of Business at a fast-growth institution. Results of this study will assist academia in designing/redesigning human resource programs to ensure alignment with the current knowledge and competency required for successful human resource leadership in today's workplace.

## Introduction

A key challenge with the growth and expansion of institutions of higher education is in the development of degree programs and emphases. New programs and emphases need to be designed to reflect current research findings and job market needs and competencies. Unfortunately, curricula at some institutions have been formed through the opinions of local experts instead of through valid and rigorous research projects. In 2002 Utah Valley State College (UVSC) ranked eighth in the nation for student growth and institutional expansion when compared with other four-year institutions (Stewart, 2002).

Although this is exciting and exhilarating in many ways, caution must be used to ensure the thorough and effective design and implement of new programs and emphases. The Business Management Department in the School of Business at UVSC is currently developing a new emphasis on human resources. This research project is an important step in ensuring the development of a program that will be cutting edge of HR research and industry. Results will be utilized to create and structure curriculum for students who, after graduation, will be able to effectively meet the needs of Utah, U.S., and international employers.

Kuchinke (2001) explained that "responding to the increasing demand for employee skills, expertise, and performance in rapidly changing economic and social environments, many universities have implemented academic programs to educate and

train...practitioners..." (P. 20-1). According to Lee (2002), academic programs at the undergraduate level are increasingly important for success in the field of HR. Debra J. Cohen, the SHRM director of research, explained that both full-time students and practicing HR professionals want advanced education; and it is anticipated that more academic programs will be developed.

Over one year ago a survey was given to UVSC business students to assess the need and interest for an HR emphasis. The results suggested students had a strong interest and felt there was a definite need. Next, a small group of faculty met to determine an initial program/curriculum, which served as a starting framework for this study. The faculty representatives concluded, however, that the program would be revised upon the hiring and employ of a faculty member with specific expertise (industry and academic) in human resources. This study is the primary step in accomplishing this goal.

## Purpose and Research Questions

The ultimate goal of this research study is to aid in the development of the human resources emphasis of the Business Management Bachelor's degree program in the School of Business at UVSC. The recommendations of the study also serve to develop these curricula. The study was divided into various qualitative and quantitative phases. The following research questions outline the process utilized to study and collect pertinent data:

1. What does the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) consider to be the important and essential areas of knowledge and skills for human resource professionals?
2. What areas of study do the top 18 most current and utilized human resource management college textbook authors consider to be most important (determined by amount of content)?
3. What courses are offered and required in established U.S. business schools' HR programs?
4. What model(s) are relevant in the design of the UVSC-HR emphasis?

5. According to Utah business and HR professionals, what topics, courses, and areas of knowledge are most important to be an effective and successful human resource leader?

### HR Body of Knowledge-SHRM

Telephone interviews and e-mail correspondence was established with ten leading human resource experts in the country (seven academic/consultants, three practitioners). Five interviewees encouraged us to closely study the SHRM professional examination sections and then design courses to help students obtain strong competence in all areas. Considering courses with verified competencies enables students to participate in the HR games and ultimately be prepared to obtain professional certifications.

SHRM competencies and certification are well respected among HR practitioners throughout the U.S. After conducting these interviews or correspondence, it became clear that the certifications and the *SHRM Body of Knowledge* are also well respected in the academic and scholarly environments.

Weinberg (2002) authored the "Certificate Guide" for Human Resource Certification Institute. The book reported the general results of extensive research that identified numerous responsibilities, areas of knowledge, and core competencies needed by competent and successful human resource professionals. Six identified functional areas, for the two examinations (certifications) are widely acquired in the HR profession:

- Professional in Human Resources (PHR)
- Senior Professional in Human Resources (SHPR)

The six functional areas included strategic management; workforce planning and employment; human resource development; compensation and benefits; employee and labor relations; and occupational health, safety, and security (see Table 1). A percentage of the examination that focused on each functional area was determined for the certifications. It is possible that this percentage be considered the level or weight of importance that the Institute gave to each functional area.

**Table 1**  
**Human Resource Certification Institute**  
**Test Specifications**

Functional Area	PHR	SPHR
Strategic Management	12%	26%
Workforce Planning and Employment	26%	16%
Human Resource Development	15%	13%
Compensation and Benefits	20%	16%
Employee and Labor Relations	21%	24%
Occupational Health, Safety, and Security	6%	5%

Table 1: Adapted from Weinburg (2002), p. 27.

### Human Resource Management Textbooks

A general content review of 18 of the most current and popular HRM textbooks was performed (see Appendix). The majority of the textbooks have authors who are well published in the HRM field. Table 2 is a chart of the results of this inquiry.

**Table 2**  
**HRM Textbooks and Topics**

HR Topic/Area	Primary	Secondary	Mention
Benefits	15	3	0
Change - Organization Development	13	5	0
Compensation and Rewards	17	1	0
Competitive and Strategic HRM	13	5	0
Employee and Career Development	15	3	0
Employee Retention and Termination	9	9	0
Global/International Issues	14	2	2
HR Planning and Recruiting	17	1	0
Job Analysis and Design	13	5	0
Labor and Employee Relations	18	0	0
Legal Issues and Environment	16	2	0
Management	15	3	0
Performance Appraisal and Management	18	0	0
Safety and Health	14	4	0
Selection, Interviewing, and Placement	16	2	0
Training and Development	16	2	0

### Curricula of Other Undergraduate Four-Year Programs

Six of the ten interviewed HR experts also encouraged us to study HR academic programs across the country. Many shared experiences with the development of their programs. A content analysis research project was undertaken to determine what courses were required and offered in HR 4-year bachelor degree programs throughout the United States. Even though numerous HR programs are offered in non-business departments, this analysis focused only on business college/school programs. According to the consulted HR experts, the majority of educational institutions with HR programs would have established SHRM student chapters. SHRM maintains a list (no additional data) of all colleges

and universities that have SHRM chapters. All inactive chapters were deleted. Researchers then studied the website of each institution to determine whether or not an official HR program could be located in the business school/college. Of the 392 chartered institutions, official programs and course information were found in 201 chapters. Detailed program and course information could be located in 33 Business Management degrees but were not identified at HR programs. Other programs are likely found outside business schools or have been identified online. Results of this table provide insights into what other institutions believe are key components of HR curriculum (see Table 3).

Table 3

Content Areas Covered in Curricula of U.S. Undergraduate HR Programs (N=168)

Rank	Area of Human Resource Study	Required Frequency	Elective Frequency	Total Frequency	Percent
1	Human Resource Management	150	3	153	91%
2	Compensation and Benefits	94	29	123	73%
3	Labor Relations	83	27	110	65%
4	Organizational Behavior	79	8	87	52%
5	Staffing, Recruitment, and Retention	62	20	82	49%
6	Employment Law	45	13	58	35%
7	Training and Development	37	19	56	33%
8	Emerging, Contemporary, and Current Issues	14	30	44	26%
9	International Human Resources	15	20	35	21%
10	Psychology	22	13	35	21%
11	Organizational Development	18	15	33	20%
12	Negotiations and/or Conflict Resolution	13	20	33	20%
13	Leadership	16	14	30	18%
14	Employee Relations	21	5	26	15%
15	Human Resource Information Systems	17	9	26	15%
16	Safety, Health, and Security	12	8	20	12%
17	Human Resource Development	13	3	16	10%
18	Managing Diversity	6	8	14	8%
19	Career Management	6	3	9	5%
20	Quality Management	3	6	9	5%
21	Human Resource Strategy	5	3	8	5%
22	Team Management	1	7	8	5%
23	Wage and Salary Administration	4	3	7	4%
24	Performance Management	4	2	6	4%
25	Personnel Administration	4	2	6	4%
26	Research Methods	4	2	6	4%
27	Human Resource Planning	3	1	4	2%
28	Human Resource Measurement	0	3	3	2%
29	Business Process Analysis	2	1	3	2%

Table 3: Printed with permission from Madsen, S. R., Musto, A. L., & Hall, T. (2003).

Two primary limitations should be noted for this content analysis research project. First, because of the research design, many HR programs may not have been analyzed and included in the results. Second, it was sometimes difficult to categorize certain courses because of the variety of titles and course descriptions explored. Gathering this data became somewhat subjective at times.

### A Human Resource Model

After reviewing a number of HR models, one well-known model seems most widely published and is used by ASTD (American Society for Training & Development) as their primary HR framework. The model visualizes the following eleven core components of human resources:

- Training and Development
- Organization Development
- Career Development
- Organization/Job Design
- Human Resource Planning
- Performance Management System
- Selection and Staffing
- Compensation/Benefits
- Employee Assistance
- Union/Labor Relations
- HR Research and Information Systems

McLagan (1989) proposed (and it is visualized in the model) that core human resource results should be productivity, quality, innovation, HR fulfillment, and readiness for change.

### Utah Business and HR Practitioner Study

The final phase of this project was to conduct an HR research study in the state of Utah. The target population included human resource leaders and business executives and managers in Northern and central Utah, who have a solid understanding and close and continuous working relationships with their human resource leaders and departments. The surveys were distributed to participants through contacts of the researchers (e.g., a program advisory board, students, business contacts, colleagues). Of the 225 originally given to distributors, 220 were actually given to appropriate participants, and 136 were completed and returned for a 62 percent return rate. The survey asked what level of importance it was for a human resource manager, director, and/or leader to have knowledge and competence in 27 different HR areas. A Likert scale was used with "1" being no importance and "5" of utmost importance.

However, generally speaking, the statistical means of the 27 items ranged from 2.66 to 4.47. Table 4 contains a list of the 27 items in order of perceived importance (means) with the first item ranking as most important and the last being the least. All 27 items we found to be important to some degree (possibly inferring that all should be somehow integrated in the HR curriculum). In addition, many of the item means are very close and therefore do not have statistical significance when compared to other close items.

**Table 4**  
**Importance of Knowledge and Competence Areas for HR Leaders and Managers**

Knowledge and Competence Areas	Mean
Attitudes, Values, and Ethics	4.47
Employment Law	4.36
Employee Relations	4.22
Business and Human Resource Strategy	4.19
Leadership	4.19
Compensation and Benefits	4.09
Management	4.06
Negotiation and Conflict Negotiation	4.04
Employee Retention	4.01
Training and Development	3.96
Career and Employee Development	3.94
Selection, Interviewing, and Staffing	3.93
Employee Termination	3.91
Performance Management	3.9
Human Resource Development	3.85
Organization Development (Change)	3.85
Human Resource Measurement and Evaluation	3.74
Organizational Behavior	3.73
Human Resource Planning	3.71
Workplace Safety & Health	3.58
Business Process Analysis	3.51
Human Resource Systems	3.47
Job Analysis and Design	3.44
Labor Relations	3.29
Information Management	3.22
Psychology	2.96
International Human Resources	2.66

### UVSC Human Resource Curriculum

After carefully studying the results of all five research questions, the information was synthesized, an HR curricula developed, and paperwork submitted. Table 5 displays the general course offerings for a new emphasis. A detailed description of this synthesis will not be included in this manuscript although the

details of the design of each course were created and documented so that all key HR knowledge and competency areas are addressed through a primary course or as key objectives in one or more courses.

For example, because of the limited number of available course slots, job analysis and design are not separate courses. However, given that this topic is highly important in HR, it will be taught (and projects given) as a component of the following courses: Human Resources Management, Compensation and Benefits, and HR Planning and Staffing. A second example relates to the design of the Human Resources Development course.

This course has been designed to incorporate objectives related to general human resource development, adult learning strategies, organization development, career development, and contains components of performance management.

In addition to the HR knowledge and competency area objectives, each HR course has been designed to incorporate educational objectives (outcomes) that the institution's faculty has deemed important (such as skills related to written and oral communication, teamwork, analysis, technology, critical thinking, and decision-making).



**Table 5**  
**Human Resources Curriculum – UVSC**

Course Number	Course Title	Credits
MGMT 3430	Human Resource Management	3.0
MGMT 3530	Employment Law and Policy	3.0
MGMT 3550	Human Resource Development	3.0
ISYS 3650	Training and Development	3.0
MGMT 4000	Compensation and Benefits	3.0
MGMT 4530	Employee and Labor Relations	3.0
MGMT 4610	Human Resource Planning and Staffing	3.0
MGMT 492R	Human Resource Seminar: Emerging Research and Issues	1.0
Select 3 credits of electives 3000- or 4000-level from MGMT, ACC, HM, ISYS, or LEGL prefixes		3.0
<b>Total Credits</b>		<b>25.0</b>

### Conclusions

This research project has been an important step in ensuring the development of an HR program that is aligned with the knowledge and competency base of SHRM, current textbooks, U.S. undergraduate HR programs, and the Utah business community. This emphasis had been designed to be at the cutting edge of HR research and industry. Students should be assured as they graduate from a college or university, and specifically with an HR emphasis in Business Management from UVSC, that they have been taught and have gained (if they are engaged in the learning process) the knowledge and skills linked to successful employment in the human resource field.

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#### Appendix A

*Textbooks Reviewed for General HR Content Analysis Include the following:*

1. Anthony, W. P., Kacmar, K. M., Perrewe, P. L. (2002). Human resources management; a strategic approach. (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). South-Western.
2. Byars, L. L., Rue, L. W. (2000). Human resource management. Irwin McGraw-Hill.
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7. Dreher, G., Dougherty, T. W. (2002). Human resource strategy: a behavioral perspective for the general manager. McGraw-Hill.
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