

**EXTERNAL REVIEW OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HUMAN RESOURCES
PROGRAM
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND ALLIED PROFESSIONS
REPORT PREPARED MARCH 17, 2008**

I. INTRODUCTION

a. Visit Length.

The external review of the Master of Science in Human Resources (MSHR) program within the Department of Human Services was conducted on February 22, 2008 by a review team consisting of three external reviewers: Dr. James P. Gelatt of the University of Maryland University College (jgelatt@umuc.edu); Dr. Terry Carter of the School of Education at Virginia Commonwealth University (tjcarter@vcu.edu); and Dr. Meagan Karvonen of the Department of Educational Leadership and Foundations in the CEAP (karvonen@wcu.edu).

b. Summary and description of meetings conducted by the review team.

The review team met with the following University administrators and faculty: Provost Kyle Carter, Associate Vice Chancellor Beth Tyson-Lofquist, Dean Michael Dougherty of the CEAP, Dr. Lisa Bloom, Chair of the Department of Human Services. Additionally, we met with Dr. Brian Gastle, Associate Dean of the Graduate School and Dr. Regis Gilman, Associate Dean for Educational Outreach.

We held separate meetings with MSHR program faculty, Dr. John Sherlock, director, and Dr. James Kirk. Telephone conferences with Ms. Anne McClintic and Ms. Shelley McGrail, adjunct faculty in the MSHR program were scheduled, however, conflicts with their work schedules left us unable to connect with them during the time of our visit. During the lunch session, the review team was able to meet with three students in the program who are currently employed at Western Carolina: two recent graduates and one presently enrolled student.

In each case, interviewees were candid and forthright with us in their assessment and comments, permitting us a glimpse into the MSHR program and its University context through the perspectives of many different stakeholders. By the end of the day, we had a well-rounded “360-degree” perspective on the relative strengths and merits of the program as well as its opportunities for growth and development at Western Carolina.

Themes. Several themes emerged from the interviews, which will be analyzed in depth in sections in this report on strengths of the program and our recommendations for improvements. Consistently, the program was discussed in terms of its strength and viability, with particular emphasis on its potential expansion as an online degree program.

Dr. Kyle Carter, Provost asserted the impressive nature of the program, especially given its limited staffing level. Dr. Carter has seen the MSHR program become a great resource for other programs with its faculty willingly sharing its expertise in the development of online instruction. He asked us to assess the fit of this program within the CEAP. He outlined for us the challenges of funding for distance education programs in which no athletic or student activity fees are collected, and shared how productivity is measured in terms of student credit hours. He emphasized his commitment to online education in programs where it makes sense to do so and where the University can provide access to individuals who would otherwise not be able to take advantage of the education Western Carolina offers.

Associate Chancellor Beth Tyson-Lofquist emphasized the importance of impact assessment so that the University might determine what impact decisions have on resources; she also discussed the possibility that the University will consider an alternative to the WebCT Vista system for online course delivery.

Associate Dean for Educational Outreach Regis Gilman apprised us of the many resources available to support student learning in the online environment and of her efforts to extend the traditional boundaries of the University by marketing to various constituencies within and outside of the state to build program enrollment. She spoke of the unintended benefits of the career fairs supported by Educational Outreach in which prospective employers throughout the state participate in recruiting WCU students for open positions. Since these recruiters represent the major HR personnel in organizations around the state, the Educational Outreach staff has used this opportunity to market the MSHR program at career fairs.

Associate Dean Brian Gastle conveyed an assessment shared by the Graduate School Dean and staff about the “good, strong nature of the program” and the positive comments he has heard about the MSHR program since assuming his new position. He noted that the program has done a much better job with distance education than many others have and that the Graduate School has never had complaints from students, who are always very positive about the program. He commented on the large number of applicants for the MSHR, emphasizing that this program has demonstrated its potential for growth.

CEAP Dean Michael Dougherty was clear in his perception that the program was a good fit within the CEAP, and recognized the need for additional faculty to grow the program. His desire is to overcome whatever obstacles remain to allow the MSHR program to become more national in its recruitment; he spoke of the benefits of the UNC Online website that is now in place. We discussed adjunct salaries, the need for state of the art technology equipment, the process involved in being able to bring a new faculty member onboard, and the pool of faculty talent (both fulltime and adjunct) and what attracts them to WCU. He spoke of the accomplishments of current

MSHR faculty in engaging in scholarly activities with people in other disciplines as both desirable and an example of good citizenship within the College and University.

Dr. Lisa Bloom, Department Head of Human Services where the MSHR program resides, shared with us her impression of the program as state-of-the-art, highly interactive and very in-tune with student needs. She spoke of the new undergraduate five-course leadership minor in the College that will help boost FTE as they seek to recruit another faculty position for the MSHR program. She mentioned that there had been no lowering of applicant standards since the program became fully online, and she complimented adjunct faculty on their expertise and skills in HR. Her major concerns were with resources to support the program, including more technology support, state-of-the-art laptops and software, and marketing needs. We discussed the fit between the MSHR and the HS Department. Dr. Bloom spoke of the “business of human potential,” which situates the MSHR very nicely within the department. She complimented program faculty on their collaboration with colleagues, mentioning Jim’s collaboration with Counseling, and asserting that “John has mentored other faculty; he looks for ways to collaborate and share his expertise willingly with others.”

MSHR graduate students, with whom we shared the lunch hour, were eager to tell us how much they had learned in the program and how they were using what they had learned. They spoke of the personalized attention they had received in the program and praised faculty, both for their accessibility as well as the quality of their teaching, asserting the rigor of the curriculum. One spoke of the desire for more human resource development (HRD) coursework in the program so that HRD might become a focus area of study for her; others praised the curriculum as having prepared them for the “real world” of HR work. A couple of the students graduated before the program became fully online. Preference for either the partially-versus-fully online program did not appear to be an issue; however, students were consistent in asserting the convenience of the online format.

Dr. John Sherlock, MSHR Program Director, has a clear vision of the program growing in terms of its reputation within the state as well as a desire for more national visibility; these will, in large part, depend upon increased marketing efforts. While the program has successfully marketed itself as the premier graduate program in HR within North Carolina, the opportunity to continue to build the program exists. Dr. Sherlock commented on how the financial support he has received during the past six years to attend state and national conferences (over and beyond the regular \$250 budget amount for professional development) has greatly increased the visibility of the program. When it comes time to hire a new faculty member, he spoke of the need to hire someone who will “be out there, carrying the Western flag” in the scholarly community. In contrast to some other nationally known master’s programs in HR, the MSHR is proud of its strong learning emphasis, which does not negate the need to

develop data-driven decision-making capacity among its students as leaders in HR. “We have this learning emphasis, which is part of our roots, our heart and soul that we never want to take away.”

Dr. James Kirk, the other full-time faculty member in the program, spoke of the tremendous addition that Dr. Sherlock has been to the program by taking it to new levels and broadening its focus from HRD to HR. He spoke of the benefits to the program of moving into the online format as the potential market among HR professionals in western North Carolina had become saturated since the program began in 1984. Dr. Kirk emphasized the need for continuous support in the delivery of distance education and the need for greater marketing efforts if the program is to achieve its national reach; within NC, Dr. Kirk reaffirmed the excellent reputation of the MSHR. Dr. Kirk spoke of the good support that the MSHR program has had from leadership throughout the “chain.” He spoke of his own impending retirement, perhaps as early as December 2009 and the need to recruit another faculty member before he left to make that transition easier for the program.

Overall, throughout these interviews, we had the clear impression that the MSHR program enjoys a stellar reputation at WCU with administrators, fellow faculty members, and students, both past and present. This appears to be in no small measure due to the outstanding leadership exhibited by current faculty and their personal and professional standards for collaboration, academic rigor, and scholarship.

II. ANALYSIS OF THE MSHR PROGRAM

a. The Curriculum.

THE MSHR curriculum has done a good job of embracing key areas of knowledge and skill development within the field of human resources (HR). HR is usually considered to consist of multiple areas, including human resource development (training and development, organization development, and career development); organizational job design, human resource planning, performance management systems, selection and staffing, compensation and benefits, employee assistance, union/labor relations, and HR research and information systems (Source: ASTD competency study by McLagan, 1985). Increasingly, as HRD emphasis on workplace learning and performance moves in the direction of driving business performance, functional lines between HR and HRD are becoming blurred: all HR professionals must become attuned to areas of strategic alignment between the “people” side of the business and business performance, which includes developing the capacity for learning at the individual and organizational levels.

One of the aspects of the curriculum that impressed us the most was its design around the competencies needed by Human Resources professionals in the twenty-first century workplace. Using the competencies provided by the Society for Human

Resource Management (SHRM), Drs. Sherlock and Kirk have built coursework to support development of many of these competencies within the program.

The six core courses (HR602, HR605, HR 610, HR645, HR683, and HR698) are well designed to provide a solid foundation in research and evaluation methods, basic orientation to the field of human resources and an introduction to human resource development (HRD), including the consulting skills so necessary for success of an HR professional. HR683 provides the much needed bridge to practice with a field experience, and, as a capstone seminar, HR698 integrates knowledge and skills in a final synthesis course experience.

The depth and variety of electives offered in the program appear well-aligned with faculty's expertise, scholarly interests, and practical experiences, with excellent choices for students in human resource development areas (organization development, HR615; organizational performance, HR617; and career development/management systems, HR660). Specialty areas within Human Resources include special topics courses (HR 693) in Compensation and Benefits, Legal Issues in HR, and Organizational Planning and Execution. Other elective choices include the e-Learning Projects course (HR 678) and Leadership in Human Resources (HR 675).

There are at least two areas within the SHRM competencies not yet addressed in the curriculum that offer opportunities for the MSHR program to enhance its existing course offerings to meet the needs of students. One is a course in Global HR to develop skills and knowledge among HR professionals for cross-cultural competencies in hiring, developing, and working with managers who are placed in overseas assignments, and for dealing with nationals from other cultures who may be part of a global organization. The other is consideration of an elective in understanding the nature of organizational mergers and acquisitions from an HR perspective, which necessarily includes depth of understanding in dealing with the organization's cultural practices and norms.

As the program grows and adds new faculty, acquiring expertise in these areas would add strength and depth when the program is marketed from a national perspective. A case can also be made that an elective course in labor relations and labor negotiations may have appeal in a national market for the MSHR degree.

The MSHR degree program appears, from all that we have observed through our document analysis and interviews, to offer a wide range of coursework applicable for today's practicing HR professional. The courses appear well-constructed and of sufficient rigor for the master's degree level, with excellent textbook selections and readings. Students admitted to the program have a wide range of electives, which, if supplemented with these additional course suggestions as time and the addition of

new program faculty permit, will indeed place the MSHR curriculum in a competitive position on a national level for rigor and comprehensiveness in program quality.

b. Support for Student Learning.

Of particular note to us was the ease with which prospective MSHR students could navigate the well-designed webpages for the program. The website is beautifully designed to facilitate access to program information, answer many basic advising questions, and provide commentary on the online learning experience. With links on the program site to Hunter Library, a WebCAT FAQ, student tutorials for using WebCAT, the WCU Writing Center, and IT Services and Helpdesk, our clear impression is that MSHR students are well supported by the online resources they need to be successful, in addition to the accessibility of the program's faculty by email or telephone.

c. Assessment of Student Learning.

The primary assessment of student learning occurs through the comprehensive examination process. MSHR students have an excellent online guide on the program's website with FAQ to assist them in preparing for the comprehensive exam. This exam is taken in the final semester of coursework during the time that the student is (usually) enrolled in the integrative capstone course experience, yet the four courses upon which the exam is based occur much earlier in the program; these are primarily the HRD coursework, HR 610 and HR 645; the basic introduction to human resources, HR 605, and the research and evaluation course, HR 602.

While studying for comprehensive exams can provide an excellent opportunity for students to synthesize their knowledge, comprehensive exams can also be considered an unrealistic and stressful performance mandate, something not even all "good" students can successfully navigate. An alternative for the program's faculty to consider is adoption of more formative assessment points throughout the curriculum, or alternative assessment strategies such as e-portfolios to demonstrate competence in a given area. Other types of written synthesis may be incorporated at the end of courses that do not have such strategies embedded within them already. If the comprehensive examination assessment strategy continues to be used, we recommend that faculty consider whether the existing four courses covered by the exam are those best suited to measure the competencies that the program is striving to adopt as a model for HR professional practice.

III. ANALYSIS OF FACULTY

a. Qualifications

Both full-time MSHR faculty clearly possess the necessary qualifications to effectively deliver the program. Dr. Sherlock holds the terminal degree in his field with an Ed.D. in Executive Leadership in Human Resource Development, as well as

an MBA. His expertise is further evidenced by his 20 years of experience in HR-related positions in business and an industry association. Dr. Kirk holds an Ed.D. in Adult and Continuing Education and has been a faculty member at WCU for more than 20 years. Thus, the two primary faculty bring expertise in human resource development, leadership development, performance management, and technology. Between the two of them, they provide expertise in a wide range of content areas. Adjunct faculty in the program generally hold master's degrees rather than doctorates, but their résumés clearly highlight their extensive experience in the HR field. Their workplace-related credentials, described by one interviewee as a "wealth of experience," are assets to their teaching.

b. Resources and support.

The MSHR program is housed in the Department of Human Services in the College of Education and Allied Professions (CEAP). While several interviewees noted that questions had been raised in the past about the program's fit in CEAP (versus the College of Business), the clear message based on comments from faculty, students, and administrators was that the program is a good fit in the Department of Human Services. It is viewed as an asset to other programs and is highly visible within the college. The departmental AFE/TPR document contains detailed guidance about standards and evidence for faculty evaluation. This guidance certainly allows for faculty in the Human Resources discipline to be successful in their current place within the organization.

One apparent challenge for the MSHR is sufficient staffing. The program is operating at capacity, and qualified student applicants have been turned away. While the program has hired qualified adjunct instructors to support the two full-time faculty, the program's historic growth and potential future growth as an online program suggests the program would be better staffed by three full-time faculty members. The additional full-time member would more fairly distribute the advising load and add breadth to the faculty expertise.

Although specific salaries of current faculty were not evaluated in this program review, the general impression was that salaries are commensurate with those at similar institutions in the UNC System. UNC's goal of having faculty salaries at the 80th percentile of their nationwide peers implies that full-time faculty salaries are competitive outside North Carolina as well.

Under the program's current staffing arrangements (in which adjunct instructors play a large role), recruiting and retaining high-quality adjunct instructors is critical. While the Program Director provides ongoing support and monitoring, compensation for adjuncts is limited. There is currently no system for rewarding long-term adjunct instructors for quality work. Given the increasing availability of online graduate programs in the field, WCU may have difficulty retaining adjunct faculty in the

future. Although there has apparently been a recent increase in adjunct pay rates at WCU, the adjunct instructors in this program (most of whom hold Master's degrees) are not eligible for the highest pay rate under this plan. The program may petition for an additional \$500 per course for these instructors, but it is not clear whether that request is likely to be granted.

The MSHR program has adequate access to library holdings, including print and electronic subscriptions to journals in the field and a wide array of electronic databases. What is not available in the library's holdings is easily delivered via interlibrary loan or ABC Express.

In the past, faculty members have received the technological resources requested; that support has sometimes been sought outside the department or college. It was noted that support for technology had improved over time. However, it was not clear from this review whether the technological resources needed to support the program's online delivery – especially while maintaining its reputation for being “state-of-the-art” – would be sustained in the future.

The MSHR also faces potential resource challenges due to its classification as a distance education program. For instance, the program cannot be directly allocated any Graduate Assistants because of the university's system for funding assistantships. Similarly the program's part-time students are not eligible for tuition waivers. While the program has received Graduate Assistants in the past through the department's allocation or external funding, the program relies on the continued generosity of other units to maintain GA support.

The perception at WCU is that the MSHR program has performed well despite limited resources. It was described as “an impressive program for the level of staffing.” Even when tangible support has not been provided at the optimal level, non-tangible (i.e., verbal) support for faculty members' work has been clear.

c. Teaching, research/creative activity, and service

Both full-time faculty members demonstrate diversity in their teaching, as evidenced by the wide range of courses taught over the years. Both Dr. Sherlock and Dr. Kirk have engaged in scholarly work related to their teaching as well as their disciplines. In recent years Dr. Kirk has developed and disseminated a series of learning objects, many of which are made available through MERLOT. Dr. Sherlock has published and presented on issues related to online teaching and learning. Both have demonstrated consistent scholarly activity over time. Dr. Sherlock has more than 30 publications and 60 presentations in prominent venues within the field. He has been recognized as a nominee, finalist, and winner of several awards in teaching, research, and service. Dr. Sherlock in particular was recognized by interviewees as a strong collaborator and contributor to a wide range of initiatives and committees within the college and

university. His campus visibility has led to recognition and visibility for the MSHR program.

IV. ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL FACILITIES AND BUDGET

a. Adequacy of facilities.

Since the MSHR program is now delivered completely online, “facilities” for delivering instruction translate to having appropriate technological resources for online delivery. If the program is going to meet its vision and goals, these resources are crucial. The issue of technological support was addressed in detail under Section III.b.

In terms of physical facilities, the two full-time faculty members share an office on the Cullowhee campus and have access to more widely shared office space at the Graduate Office on UNCA’s campus. While space availability seems extremely limited from a reviewer’s perspective, it was not expressed as a significant concern by the program faculty or other interviewees.

b. Adequacy of budget.

The MSHR program does not have a budget of its own, so it is not possible to determine whether the program has a sufficient budget to meet its educational mission. Funding comes from the Department of Human Services, the Graduate School, and the Division of Educational Outreach. As described earlier, the program was noted for successful marketing and recruitment, and for delivering a high-quality educational program with extremely limited human and financial resources. Adequacy of funding was addressed indirectly in earlier sections (see III.b). Several of our interviewees commented on the desire for greater resources to boost technology support for the department and provide state-of-the-art equipment for faculty teaching in the program. This includes the need to make sure that adjunct faculty have adequate technological resources to provide the highest quality instruction possible, as well.

V. SUMMARY OF PROGRAM STRENGTHS AND AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

a. Our general impressions of the MSHR program.

Overall, the External Review Team was very favorably impressed with the quality of the MSHR program at WCU. The program is well received within the University community, not only in the CEAP but also in the Administration. Persons interviewed consistently used words and phrases such as “outstanding,” “stellar,” “impressive . . . for the size of its resources,” and “rigorous.” The faculty, both full time and adjunct, appear well qualified and committed to teaching excellence as well as scholarship.

b. Program strengths.

Leadership. The MSHR program exhibits leadership in a number of ways, both within the program itself and within the University. Dr. John Sherlock, the Program Director, demonstrates a number of qualities associated with leaders: self-knowledge, dedication, willingness to look to others for support, being open to suggestions and change, and a willingness to do whatever it takes to make the program successful. Dr. Sherlock's joining the WCU community was viewed as "a breath of fresh air." The MSHR program is ably supported by Dr. James Kirk, whose experience and reputation in the HR field have served the University for over 18 years. The MSHR program is further supported by leadership within the administration, notably Dr. Lisa Bloom, Department Head; and Dr. Michael Dougherty, CEAP Dean; as well as the Graduate School and the Division of Educational Outreach.

Academic Rigor. Evidence of the academic rigor of the MSHR program was seen in the syllabi provided to the Program Review team; in the requirement that all students in the program successfully pass a Comprehensive exam; and in the comments from MSHR program students and alumni. Dr. Sherlock also works to ensure that courses taught by adjunct faculty maintain the same level of academic rigor as those taught by full-time faculty with periodic monitoring of online content and delivery.

Student Satisfaction. Based on a number of measures – student evaluations, comments from administrators interviewed by the Review Team, and comments from students themselves – it seems clear that both current and former students feel very positive about the program. According to Dean Michael Dougherty, students are "successful when they graduate." And Department Head Lisa Bloom noted that the MSHR program faculty are "very in-tune with their students." As a result, the department does not "get complaints from HR students." The students we interviewed were very clear about the quality of the education that they had received in the program.

Visibility on the WCU Campus. Although it is not a large program, the MSHR program enjoys visibility on the WCU campus, as evidenced by these comments:

- The program is "more visible in the college since John" joined the University.
- John is active on a number of committees. The "best way to get your program known is to get to know your colleagues; if you work with them in a project, they get to know you and what you are like."
- The MSHR program has served as a "great resource for the entire faculty for online instruction."
- John works "with Outreach for marketing the program." The MSHR program is involved in "networking above and beyond the state."

- The MSHR program has an excellent reputation “inside and outside” the University. Drs. Kirk and Sherlock are “known in the community.”

Collaboration. The MSHR program is open to collaborating with other units within the CEAP and the University. Dr. Sherlock collaborates with a number of faculty in the CEAP in joint authorship, serves on dissertation committees in other departments, and has become known as a source for help with e-teaching and learning throughout WCU. He provides leadership by serving on a number of University Committees. Dr. Kirk has been active in the Academy of Human Resource Development, and has contributed his technological expertise on a national level at MERLOT.

Positive Climate. The MSHR program enjoys a positive climate in which it operates, due in no small measure to the way the program is viewed by those interviewed for this report:

- The program is “outstanding given its limited resources.”
- The program is “solid” in its “excellent curriculum, initiative, and reputation.”
- It is an “impressive program for the size of its resources.”

Online Success. Several of those interviewed spoke favorably about the success that the MSHR program has had in transitioning to a fully online mode. The success was deemed to be due to Dr. Kirk’s technical savvy, and to Dr. Sherlock’s experience in online teaching and his assisting part-time faculty as they moved into a distance learning format.

Faculty Development. Respondents said that both Dr. Sherlock and Dr. Kirk were invested in the “quality of their program.” Respondents spoke favorably not only of the two full time faculty but also those with adjunct status. The MSHR program is seen as having “motivated faculty” who take advantage of resources such as the Coulter Faculty Center for Teaching Excellence including the Center’s “sandbox” that allows faculty to learn new technology skills. One interviewee said that there was a “culture of feedback and evaluation” within the MSHR program. Another observed that Dr. Sherlock John “mentors other faculty,” looks for ways to collaborate, and “shares his expertise willingly with others.”

Sustainability and Growth. The MSHR program is seen as having “great potential” for growth. Most of those interviewed felt that it belongs where it is currently housed, in the Department of Human Services within the College of Education and Allied Professions because of its orientation on learning, as well as improvement in organizational performance.

c. Areas for Improvement

Marketing. The MSHR program has been marketed through online ads, use of funds from the Division of Educational Outreach as well as the Graduate School for recruiting; promotional booths at conferences, and ads in conference brochures. Both full time faculty are regular presenters at national, statewide, and regional conferences for HR professionals. But most of those interviewed, including Drs. Kirk and Sherlock, said that in order for the program to grow, a greater emphasis needed to be placed on marketing. That may involve release time for Dr. Sherlock, funds for increased online advertising and travel, and ads in professional magazines and journals (e.g., the Society of Human Resource Management).

Adjunct Faculty. With only two full-time faculty, the Human Resources Program relies extensively on adjunct faculty. Given the online format of the program, WCU could potentially recruit adjunct faculty with certain areas of expertise nationwide. The pay for these adjuncts is low, and if the program wants to attract adjunct faculty nationally, in order to compete for students at that level, it may find it difficult to do so. WCU may need to periodically compare its adjunct pay rate with national data for online universities, in order to monitor the competitiveness of its adjunct pay rates for online instructors.

In addition, some respondents said that more training funds should be made available for adjunct faculty. Faculty need to keep current with their discipline, which means having access to journals and the opportunity to attend conferences. Given the program's online focus, it is important that all faculty keep up with the latest technology.

Equipment and "tech" support are also areas that may need improvement as the program continues its online delivery format, with a heavily reliance on adjunct faculty. Some colleges provide adjunct faculty with loaners of laptops, and some provide access to distance education specialists who can help faculty set up and manage their online "classrooms." Since adjunct faculty in the MSHR program are typically not based in Cullowhee, WCU may also consider providing hardware (e.g., webcams) and software to support these faculty who cannot access the instructional resources provided by the Coulter Faculty Center.

Full Time Faculty. There seems to be agreement that the MSHR Program would benefit from a third full time faculty member. It makes sense to have that person on board before Dr. Kirk retires, so that the program does not find itself with two new faculty at the same time or with only one full-time faculty member during a transitional period. It appears from the interviews that a third full time faculty member may not actually be "on board" until 2010. A year earlier than that would be preferable, which implies a recruitment process in the Fall of 2008. The success of the

MSHR program, coupled with its potential for national growth and recognition, are reasons to support an earlier recruitment timeframe.

Courses. Although the current course offerings are impressive given the program's size, there do seem to be some areas where courses might be added or modified, as faculty are added to support the program. These possibilities include:

- A Global HR course emphasizing cross-cultural awareness and skills development;
- A course on mergers and acquisitions, emphasizing understanding of organizational culture;
- A course on Labor Relations and Negotiations.

Assessment. Although the MSHR program does conduct evaluation activities, there may be a need for more systematic program assessment. This review team supports the plan to have the MSHR curriculum reviewed for its alignment with SHRM standards. Beyond the curriculum, a revised program assessment plan could help MSHR faculty further document program impact and provide evidence for needed resources. While there is clearly a foundation for data collection (e.g., admissions profiles, course enrollment and faculty load reports), the program may wish to collect data to help assess its transition to an online format (e.g., Has delivery format had an impact on time to graduation? On the quality of the applicant pool?). Data on post-graduation outcomes could provide formative feedback for program improvement but also support program marketing. If the revised program assessment plan requires substantial resources to implement, support mechanisms (e.g., clerical assistance, release time) should be provided.

Another aspect of assessment that we recommend that the program consider is to revisit the goals and purposes for summative assessment of student learning through the current model of comprehensive examinations. The program may want to consider alternative assessment strategies, including more formative assessment points throughout the program that will emphasize writing and critical thinking abilities without the stress of a cumulative, timed examination. Given the online nature of the program, e-portfolios of student accomplishments or reflective journals or essays that document learning may be determined to be effective strategies, especially if they are supplemented with end-of-course examinations to ensure adequate knowledge of content and skills. The end-of-program course, HR698, represents an ideal time for an integrative synthesis experience to assess student learning throughout the program.