

Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Institute of Labor & Industrial Relations

Unit Head: Joel Cutcher-Gershenfeld

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Prepared by: Elizabeth Barker
Director of Student Services

Joseph J. Martocchio
Professor and
Director of Degree Programs

SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

We have endeavored to make important changes to both our degree programs – Master’s of Human Resources and Industrial Relations (M.H.R.I.R.) and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree – since we completed an outcomes assessment plan in 2000. A number of substantive improvements have been implemented as a result of the goals set forth in 2000. We describe the past outcome assessment results first for the Ph.D. program, then for the M.H.R.I.R. degree program.

Ph.D. Program Improvements

We relied on multiple sources besides the 2000 outcome assessment plan to inform faculty discussions and to guide our actions toward improving an established doctoral degree program. The six primary sources we relied on most include:

1. ILIR Strategic Plan
2. Informal discussions between LIR doctoral students and faculty
3. NRC Assessment of Research Doctorate Programs
4. Ph.D. curriculum review that included benchmarking of peer program curricula.
5. Newly minted Ph.D. degree earners’ comments in exit interviews
6. Student placement (placement rate, where placed in academia or industry, and the level of research intensity of universities employing our graduates)

We describe program changes in a chronological fashion.

Summer 2000. A committee of faculty presented a report of its review of the Ph.D. program curriculum to the entire faculty at a day-long retreat.

Fall 2000. We recognized that a critical gap existed in the curriculum. We simply did not offer essential research methodology courses because we had previously relied on allied units (i.e., Business Administration, Educational Psychology, Psychology, and Sociology) that regularly provided these courses to their students. For a variety of reasons outside the scope of this report, those course offerings were becoming sparse and the offerings schedule difficult to predict. As a result, we added two required courses to the

Ph.D. curriculum: LIR 590 H – Micro Research Methods and Processes, and LIR 590 J – Macro Research Methods. Effective Fall 2000 Ph.D. students were required to take at least one of these courses as required curriculum.

Summer 2001. Following further review of the curriculum, we decided to incorporate both courses – LIR 590 H and LIR 590 X (previously lettered J) as required courses for students matriculating for Fall 2001 or after. Productive faculty discussion and feedback from the external job market (primarily, research universities) pointed to the importance of students having mastery in both types of research methodologies. As a result, we required that students matriculating in Fall 2001 and later take both courses. We offer these methods courses every other year, with the required theory courses (LIR 556 – Industrial Relations Theory and LIR 557 – Human Resource Theory) offered during the off year.

Fall 2006: The Ph.D. Advisory Committee conducted a review of the Ph.D. program, with particular emphasis on the curriculum, placement of students, methods for ensuring that students demonstrate competence in their research areas of specialization, and admissions practices. The Committee presented a detailed report with recommendations to the ILIR Dean and Executive Committee. The Dean and Executive Committee supported the recommendation that students sit for a comprehensive examination to demonstrate competence in their research areas of specialization rather than the previously accepted alternative of writing two papers of publishable quality.

Spring 2007. The full faculty discussed the Ph.D. Advisory Committee’s recommendations at its curriculum summit. The faculty supported all, but one recommendation of admitting students on alternating years to synchronize their studies with the required course and proposed second-year research paper. The faculty consensus was that the possible risks of alternating-year admissions outweighed the possible benefits. The biggest concern was losing out on top candidates who wanted admission during the off cycle.

Fall 2007. We instituted a weekly lunch for the doctoral students and faculty. The purpose was to help educate all involved about research interests and career goals. This familiarity has shown to be effective in an increase in faculty-student collaboration on research projects.

Fall – Spring 2008. ILIR and five peer doctoral degree programs in human resources and industrial relations (at Cornell U., MIT, Michigan State U., Rutgers U., and U. of Minnesota) formed a consortium to enhance doctoral education by expanding students’ access to faculty and students in their field. The consortium developed a seminar (LIR 590 MIT – Work, Employment & Industrial Relations Theory and Research) that was conducted live on Friday afternoons during the Spring 2008 semester. The lead instructor was Tom Kochan, MIT. Students from the participating programs convened in videoconferencing rooms on their campuses. Students earned 4 graduate credits for completing the seminar. We plan to continue offering shared seminars in the future hosted by different schools.

Spring 2008. LIR 590 H became a permanent course -- LIR 555 Micro Research Methods and Processes – following a thorough review by the Graduate College and the Office of the Provost.

Effective for Fall 2008 admissions. At least two faculty members must express a willingness to work with a qualified doctoral applicant during their first year as a condition of acceptance into the program. Such sponsorship will encourage collaboration before admission to the Ph.D. program is extended. This is to encourage collaboration between faculty and students, and serves as a check on whether qualified applicants fit well within the range of faculty expertise. We expect that students will be more likely to complete their degrees and place well in research-oriented universities.

Fall 2008. The multi campus doctoral consortium will offer three professional development workshops to students from the participating doctoral programs. A planning committee of students, overseen by Professor Joe Martocchio, is developing the workshops.

Ph.D. Program Resource Improvements

We provide each Ph.D. student with a computer for use in their ILIR offices. We recently upgraded the computers (fall 2006 and fall 2007) and expect to do so approximately once every three years. We also provide students with basic software (basics, such as word processing, spreadsheets, etc.) and specialized software (statistical analysis programs) to facilitate their research. We based our decision to offer computers and software following sentiments expressed in exit interviews that such tools in student offices would facilitate interactions among faculty and students as well as boost productivity.

We offer funding to Ph.D. students when available such as through alumni gifts, endowment accounts, and faculty research grants.

We increased the amount of money given as fellowship in first-year doctoral student financial aid packages. We also have increased research assistantship stipends. Our decision to increase these amounts came through feedback from admits who chose to accept offers of admission and more lucrative financial aid from competing doctoral programs.

We added a new seminar room for doctoral courses and seminars. Video conferencing equipment will be installed sometime during Fall 2008.

M.H.R.I.R. Program Improvements

We relied on multiple sources besides the 2000 outcome assessment plan to inform faculty discussions and to guide our actions toward improving an established master's degree program. The six primary sources we relied on most include:

1. ILIR Strategic Plan
2. Informal discussions between LIR master's degree students and faculty
3. Interviews with current and prospective employers of our students
4. MHRIR curriculum review that included benchmarking of peer program curricula.
5. Master's degree students comments in exit interviews
6. Student placement

We describe program changes in a chronological fashion.

Spring 2000: We instituted a limit of 2 on the number of independent studies a student may use toward fulfilling degree requirements. We also instituted a limit of 1 non required course a student may take on a credit/no credit basis.

The On-Campus Committee submitted its review of the ILIR Master's Degree Curriculum to the LIR faculty. We recognized the need to offer courses that enabled students to develop two important competencies for their professional careers – teamwork and general business knowledge.

Effective Fall 2000: Following recommendations contained in the curriculum review, we added an International Human Resources distribution requirement to the curriculum. That is, students must take at least once course that addresses human resource management and employment relations issues in other countries.

Also following our review and the recommendation to provide students with general business knowledge, we added the following course to the curriculum: LIR 590 G – Analytical Dimensions in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations.

Fall 2001: LIR tuition differential proposal was presented to campus, but rejected. The goal of the tuition differential is to increase revenues that could assist in retaining top quality faculty needed for the degree programs and to help bolster professional development workshop activities (for example, résumé writing). We justified the request by demonstrating that graduates of the master's degree program earn a substantially positive return on their tuition investment, and our tuition costs were substantially lower than our peer programs at other universities.

Fall 2002: The LIR 590 G course was assigned a permanent course number and title (LIR 568 – Firm Performance & HR Management) following support from the new course process involving the Graduate College and the Office of the Provost.

Fall 2002: We added three additional courses to the curriculum based on gaps identified in our curriculum review and upon having available faculty experts: LIR 590 K – Power, Influence and Leadership for HR Managers; LIR 590 L – Managing Diversity in a Global Workplace; and, LIR 590 M – Performance Management: Implications for HRM.

Spring 2002: We resubmitted the LIR tuition differential proposal to campus, which was approved.

Fall 2003: We began a 3-year phasing in of the LIR tuition differential.

Following a successful trial with a joint MBA/MHRIR degree program, we instituted this option on a regular basis.

We added the following course to the Labor Markets and Employment distribution requirement: LIR 590 N – Health, Savings & Family Issues. This course offering was in response to the rising importance of the economics of health care and retirement savings programs in the employment setting.

We dropped the following course from our curriculum because it no longer served the educational needs of our students: LIR 455 – Labor in Less Developed Countries.

Spring 2007: The faculty discussed the MHRIR curriculum structure at our Curriculum Summit meeting. The discussions led to the adoption of 8-week courses (2 credits each) to provide students the opportunity to expand their breadth of knowledge. Increasingly, employers require new hires in our field to have a substantially broader knowledge base of topics than traditionally had been the case.

Fall 2007: Socio-Technical Systems joint venture with the College of Engineering launched with course work LIR 590 ST and field work LIR 590 FW. The goal of this program is to bring together engineering students into the classroom with ours to help promote a stronger understanding of the socio (human resources, motivation) and technical (systems design, work redesign) aspects of employment settings. Following completion of LIR 590 ST, students are placed into small teams in a company to study and understand the socio and technical complexities of the workplace.

LIR 567 – Negotiations – was approved for the 8-week format following the course revision process of the Graduate College and Office of the Provost.

Spring 2008: We submitted four course revision proposals to the Graduate College.

A Kaizen continuous improvement student initiative was conceived and implemented to identify ways to improve the educational experience.

Fall 2008: We have added the following new courses to the curriculum based on relevance to students' educational needs and availability of faculty expertise:

- LIR 590 CB -- Collective Bargaining in Sports & Entertainment
- LIR 590 EB -- Topics in Employee Benefits
- LIR 590 CM -- Change Management in HR Organizations
- LIR 590 EL HR -- Employment Law & the Multinational Organization
- LIR 590 EO -- Strategic HRM & the Entrepreneurial Organization (course development sponsored by The Academy for Entrepreneurial Leadership)
- LIR 590 RE -- Readings in Labor Economics

M.H.R.I.R. Program Resource Improvements

We updated the LIR computer lab with wireless access to allow students' use of personal lap top computers throughout the building.

Since the year 2000, we hired nine individuals to join our faculty to teach courses in both degree programs: Deborah Rupp, Aparna Joshi, Gerald Ericksen, Darren Lubotsky, Ron Laschever, Craig Olson, John Dencker, Kristine Brown, and Ariel Avgar. Although there has been some faculty attrition, we've experienced a net increase in faculty.

ILIR and the University Library agreed to place our library collection (previously housed in the ILIR Building) in the main library. This move substantially increased available space to create six interview (or group break-out) rooms and one seminar room that will be equipped with video conferencing technology. The creation of these new facilities within the ILIR Building is essential, permitting greater numbers of prospective employers to consider our students for employment.

Resource Improvements for both Degree Programs.

The ILIR Dean and faculty agreed to create a new position titled Director of Degree Programs on a two-year basis, to be held by a tenured faculty member. This position involves overall responsibility for the quality of our degree programs. It is our plan that this individual will chair one of our standing academic committees and work in coordination with the chairs of other standing committees. Professor Joe Martocchio has agreed to serve in this position. For the first year in the role, Professor Martocchio's priorities will include:

1. Chairing the Ph.D. Committee and serving as the ILIR lead for the distance learning doctoral consortium that presently includes Cornell, Illinois, MIT, Michigan State, Minnesota, and Rutgers. The long-term goal is transformation of the Ph.D. Program in order to improve the pool of applicants, the curriculum, the research experience, and the placement of our graduates.

2. Leading strategic planning across the degree programs, which will include setting annual goals and objectives, aligning metrics and data, and facilitating increased data-based decision making. The long-term goal is the integration of strategic planning into ILIR operations, aligned with strategic planning across the campus.
3. Working with the Dean, Executive Committee, Chairs of the Admissions and On-Campus Committees, Assistant Dean, Director of Student Services, and others as appropriate to develop a rolling three-year plan that aligns admissions, course offerings, teaching loads, faculty staffing, and student placement for the Master's program. The long-term goal is to maintain our standing as the premier master's degree in our field, being responsive to increased demand while ensuring continued excellence in curriculum, teaching assignments, and placement outcomes.
4. Working with the Labor Education Program in this coming year on the planned launch of a minor and a certificate in Global Labor Studies. This includes support for Student Services staff as it expands to accommodate distance learning offerings. The long-term goal is to offer the world's highest quality distance learning curriculum in "Global Labor Studies," with options for currently enrolled Illinois students and for continuing education students.
5. Aligning and chartering ILIR committees and forums. This will include a potential name change for the "On-Campus" Committee and a new charter incorporating distance learning initiatives, chartering the PhD committee, Admissions committees, and others as appropriate. The long-term goal is stable, effective internal governance system for ILIR, with each Committee or Forum having a clear mandate and consistent operational procedures.
6. Working with the ILIR Faculty, Staff and Students in the development of a "social contract" or a "code of conduct" that clarifies our reciprocal responsibilities to one another so that we can all be successful as a community -- with particular attention to new generational dynamics. The long-term goal is a culture that combines caring, creativity, professionalism, and excellence.

SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN

(a) Process

We have described the process in Section 1 we followed to implement and revise the original assessment plan. Please refer to the following two parts above -- *Ph.D. Program Improvements* and *M.H.R.I.R. Program Improvements*.

(b) Student Outcomes

Ph.D. Degree Program

- Broad knowledge of theories from various disciplines (e.g., economics, psychology, sociology) that bear on the employment relationship.
- Specific knowledge of theories within each student's chosen area of specialization pertaining to the employment relationship.
- Independent, scholarly research on the employment relationship either sole-authored or in collaboration with peer and faculty member colleagues.
- Critical thinking and problem solving skills
- Verbal and written communication skills
- Other professional skills (e.g., through attendance at professional conferences and doctoral student consortia).

MHRIR Degree Program

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) is a leading professional organization for human resource management practitioners worldwide. SHRM created the Human Resource Certification Institute (HRCI), which is the human resource credentialing body to promote the establishment of standards for the profession. We regularly consult those professional standards to keep abreast of emerging essential knowledge areas.

In addition to proficiency with respect to a common body of knowledge, the following professional competencies should be imparted through formal coursework and co-curricular activities:

- Critical thinking and problem solving skills

- Verbal and written communication skills
- Leadership, team, and interpersonal skills
- Business knowledge
- Other professional skills (e.g., through resume writing and interview skills workshops)

(c) Measures and Methods Used to Measure Outcomes

Please note these measures are contained in the full Outcomes Assessment Plan submitted to the Campus in 1999. We have reviewed those methods and measures, and find them to be effective. Please refer to the original plan for the full survey items. Below, is a brief identification of each component.

Attitudinal Measures

- ICES (*each semester*)
- Expectations survey for entering master's degree students –(*each semester*)
- Focus group meetings conducted by an independent facilitator coordinator separately for master's degree students, Alumni Board of Director representatives, and the ILIR Director (*once every two years*)
- Meeting with Ph.D. students conducted by the Ph.D. Advisory committee to discuss progress (*each semester*)
- Student Exit Surveys (separate surveys for the MHRIR and Ph.D. degree programs) -- (*each semester for all graduating students*)
- Alumni Surveys – (separate surveys for the MHRIR and Ph.D. degree programs)
- Discussions with Corporate Recruiters – extent to which master's degree program meets employer expectations based on internship and interviews for full-time jobs with students and progress of currently employed master's degree program graduates (*once each semester during corporate recruiters' visits to the Institute*)

Learning: Declarative Knowledge

- Ph.D. examinations: IR/HR Theory examination and Area of Specialization examination (*for the former, early summer for students who have successfully*)

*completed the required courses as specified in the **ILIR Handbook**; for the latter, typically, 3 to 9 months upon completion of the IR/HR Theory exam).*

Learning: Training Transfer

- Ph.D. preliminary examination and dissertation (*as determined by the designated examination committees*)
- Alumni Surveys (as previously noted in the year 2000 plan) (*once every three years*)
- Ph.D. student authoring / co-authoring of peer-reviewed journal articles or conference papers (on a continuing basis)

SECTION 3: PLANS FOR USING RESULTS

(a) Plans to effect positive change

First, with the assistance of the Office of Instructional Resources, a database with survey results will be created and maintained for the purposes of analyzing data cross sectionally and longitudinally.

Second, the Outcomes Assessment coordinators (Director of Student Services and Director of Degree Programs) will provide descriptive feedback to the ILIR Dean each Fall semester.

Third, the ILIR Dean will disseminate the feedback to faculty, pertinent academic professional staff members, and members of the Alumni Board of Directors for reactions.

Fourth, the Ph.D. Advisory committee, the Master's On-Campus committee, and the Placement committee will discuss the feedback, consider faculty and staff reactions, and offer action plans for improvement to the ILIR Dean.

(b) Timeline for implementation

We implemented our plan in the year 2000 and continue to follow the process described above, which has been effective.