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HR program prepares students to manage valuable commodity

While human resources managers are sometimes associated with resume screening and endless administrative paperwork, these professionals contribute considerably more.

"Labor resources are very important, and you have to know how to manage them," says Lizabeth Barclay, management professor, OU's School of Business Administration (SBA). "Human resources is a field that has changed significantly over the last 30 years. We're not sitting around doing payroll. We engage with upper management and help with planning. We can really make a difference with an organization."

While the human resources field has been changing, the SBA's Human Resources Management program has evolved as well.

When Barclay started teaching at OU in the early 1980s, the SBA offered the program as a concentration. Shortly after Barclay's arrival the program became a major, and in 1988 she became the department chairperson. "At the time, we only had 11 students," says Barclay, who stayed in the chair position until 1993. "Now we're very steady with 40 to 50."

In March 2009 the department was certified for adherence to National Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) curriculum guidelines. "We hadn't been seeking the certification," Barclay says. "We've been modifying our curriculum for the last 15 years. They looked at our program and found it fit."

In one of the program's more recent changes, the Labor Management course shifted from a requirement to an elective, and former elective Compensation and Benefits became a requirement. "Not everyone will work in a union environment anymore, but everyone will work in an environment where they get paid," Barclay says.

Another new development is a professional work experience requirement. Majors in the program must either pass the exam required for national Professional in Human Resources certification or complete 280 hours of HR work, Management Professor Karen Markel says.

These professional experiences combine with a strong curriculum and a dedicated faculty to give OU human resources students a solid foundation for success, Markel says. During their studies, students will cover at least 13 core HR topics, along with 11 elective HR topics.

"As a faculty, we work closely together to make sure we're covering all of the dimensions of human resources," she says.

Another key to the program is OU's award-winning student chapter of the SHRM. The chapter regularly hosts speakers from the professional world, says Barclay, who co-sponsors the organization with Markel. Students can meet members of the chapter's sponsoring organization -- the Human Resource Association of Greater Detroit -- to shadow professionals on the job and to participate in service projects.

Alexandria Kelly, who graduated from the SBA's Human Resources Management program in May 2008, says her role as the SHRM chapter president contributed significantly to her success. "I learned how important it is to network," says Kelly, who now works as a human resources coordinator for the Detroit Zoo. "It was a great program."

Kelly says she really benefited from the SBA's Human Resources Management program. "It's given me a great background. I can transfer my training to any position."

By Flori Meeks

SUMMARY

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