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**Needed Skills for Human Resource
Professionals: A Pilot Study**

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ABSTRACT

This pilot study identifies the skills needed by human resource/industrial relations (HR/IR) practitioners and contrasts them with the emphasis currently placed on developing these skills in a single master's degree industrial relations program. The findings are based on surveys of 1994-95 graduate students, faculty members, and recent alumni of the UW-Madison's Industrial Relations Research Institute. Students and faculty were questioned about how much the various skills identified in this analysis are and should be emphasized in this particular industrial relations program. Alumni, viewing themselves as employers, were asked to contrast the levels of skills needed by newly hired, entry-level HR/IR practitioners with the skills possessed by job applicants. The survey information is combined to indicate gaps in the training of newly graduated masters degree entrants into the HR/IR job market. The paper closes by discussing how to reduce the skills gap and the usefulness of bringing together employers, faculty and students to determine the most effective ways of infusing skills training into a traditional, subject matter oriented curriculum.

*Presented at the Conference on Innovative Teaching in Human Resources and Industrial Relations June 7-9, 1996 Atlanta, Georgia, and published in *Labor Law Journal*, August 1996, 524 - 534.

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Abstract

This pilot study identifies the skills needed by human resource/industrial relations (HR/IR) practitioners and contrasts them with the emphasis currently placed on developing these skills in a single master's degree industrial relations program. The findings are based on surveys of 1994-95 graduate students, faculty members, and recent alumni of the UW-Madison's Industrial Relations Research Institute. Students and faculty were questioned about how much the various skills identified in this analysis are and should be emphasized in this particular industrial relations program. Alumni, viewing themselves as employers, were asked to contrast the levels of skills needed by newly hired, entry-level HR/IR practitioners with the skills possessed by job applicants. The survey information is combined to indicate gaps in the training of newly graduated masters degree entrants into the HR/IR job market. The paper closes by discussing how to reduce the skills gap and the usefulness of bringing together employers, faculty and students to determine the most effective ways of infusing skills training into a traditional, subject matter oriented curriculum. It suggests using a continuous quality improvement approach.

I. Introduction

What knowledge and skills are most needed by master's degree holders in human resources/industrial relations (HR/IR) to perform effectively as practitioners? Much has been written about the new human resources orientation of the industrial relations field. While the subject matter to be mastered can be identified fairly readily, much less is known about the particular skills practitioners need on the job. Because academic programs focus primarily on subject-matter knowledge, students often enter the job market without well-developed skills to complement their content knowledge. Thus, it is important to identify not only the skills needed by human resource graduates but also how the development of these skills can be fostered within masters degree industrial relations programs. This paper assesses the closeness of the match in skill levels between

what employers seek in applicants for entry-level HR/IR jobs and the emphasis given to developing these skills in masters level HR/IR programs.

II. Framing the Issue

The approach adopted in this study differs from the typical assessment of academic degree programs. Rather than looking at how effectively this particular industrial relations program serves its students in terms of academic requirements, course content, and intellectual enrichment, we focus on its role in facilitating the development of a broad set of skills which, typically, are not the central objective of most academic programs. Viewing a program from this perspective shifts attention away from subject matter knowledge to the skills needed to perform entry level jobs and simultaneously enhance future job performance.

*Prepared for presentation at the Conference on Innovative Teaching in Human Resources and Industrial Relations June 7-9, 1996 Atlanta, Georgia

**Hansen is a Professor of Economics and Industrial Relations; his coauthors participated in an Industrial Relations Seminar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison during the Spring Semester of the 1994-95 academic year. The authors are grateful for the support provided by the Industrial Relations Research Institute and its staff, and the many students, faculty members, and alumni who responded to the project's survey questionnaires.

This pilot study rests on two assumptions, one concerning the division of knowledge and the other the tightness of the link between labor market needs and program outcomes. First, we assume that knowledge can be divided into two categories, substantive and enabling. Substantive knowledge embraces the concepts, theories, analytical tools, and what we think of as the subject matter of a field or discipline.¹ Typically, this knowledge is conveyed through texts and course lectures; mastering this knowledge requires intensive individual study. An example of substantive knowledge in HR/IR might call for identifying the components of a seniority or merit pay system. Individuals with no more than this substantive knowledge may be unable to make recommendations for changing an organization's compensation system because they lack needed analytical and decision making skills which are in the domain of enabling knowledge.

Enabling knowledge represents the skills individuals possess that allow them to apply their substantive knowledge and at the same time gain expertise in applying that knowledge. The importance of enabling knowledge is recognized in recent research that seeks to identify what skills and proficiencies are and should be developed by academic programs² and are needed for successful labor market performance.³

We also assume that academic programs, established to train professionals, view potential employers of their graduates as their program's customers.⁴ Regardless of how these professional programs may be evaluated within the confines of academe, no program can deviate too far from satisfying the needs of its particular labor market. An almost inevitable tension exists, however, between what employers want in the way of skill development and what faculty, through their programs, provide, with students caught in the middle. A tighter linkage is likely to satisfy students who are the intermediate customers of faculty services and anxious to utilize their skills in challenging and satisfying careers. But, how tight should be the linkage between the skills employers seek and what these professional programs provide?

This study examines this terrain by surveying not only students but also their professors and potential employers to learn more about what kinds of skills are sought in the labor market for HR/IR professionals, what kinds of skills are being produced in HR/IR masters degree programs, and what gaps exist between the two. Doing so is important because relatively little seems to be known about what skills HR/IR professionals need in this changing world.⁵

III. Methodology

Most thinking about academic programs focuses on content knowledge. The result is a paucity of information about what skills are required by HR/IR professionals and how to develop these skills. To assemble a comprehensive list of skills, we searched the academic literature, empirical studies, and government reports, to identify the skills needed by college graduates generally, graduates from professional programs, and graduates from HR/IR programs.⁶ Through an iterative process, relying on the literature as well as our own work experience (most had such experience), we arrived at what might be described as an expert consensus. In this process, the list was condensed to include the 20 key skills, exhibited in Figure 1, we believe employers seek in their new hires.⁷ Of course, a number of these skills would be equally important for graduates of other types of academic degree programs.

Because the survey was to be administered to three different population groups, the core items had to be similar so that meaningful inferences could be drawn from the responses. Thus, the survey questionnaires contained identical lists of skills. However, the employer survey had to focus on the labor market while the surveys for graduate students and faculty centered on their academic program.

Due to time constraints imposed by the academic calendar, the population of HR/IR students and faculty was selected from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Industrial Relations Research Institute (IRRI). The employers were drawn from the IRRI's 1990-92 master's degree recipients who were thought to have enough job market

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| • Active Listening Skills | • Oral Communication Skills |
| • Adaptability | • Planning / Organization Skills |
| • Analytical Skills | • Presentation Skills |
| • Computer Skills | • Research Skills |
| • Creativity | • Resourcefulness |
| • Decision Making Skills | • Risk Taking |
| • Facilitation Skills | • Sensitivity to Diversity |
| • Group Problem Solving Skills | • Team Building Skills |
| • Leadership Skills | • Understanding Organizational Dynamics |
| • Negotiation Skills | • Written Communication Skills |

Figure 1. Key Skills and Proficiencies that HR/IR Graduates Should Possess.

knowledge and experience (some were already on hiring teams) to provide useful information on the skills needed by employers and those possessed by job applicants.

Data on the responses appear in Table 1. Both the numbers surveyed and responding are small because the program itself is small. The response rates for students and faculty, at 76 and 75 percent respectively, were gratifyingly large, and mean that the results reflect the attention given to skill development in this particular program. The response rate for program alumni, though somewhat lower at 56 percent, is viewed as sufficient to reflect the experience of employers.

Students and faculty were asked to indicate how much emphasis is and should be given to these skills in preparing students for entry into HR/IR jobs, and employers were asked to indicate the level of skill new HR/IR professionals do have and should have.⁸ The surveys used a four-point scale for market entry skills and program skills emphasis, respectively: 4=very skilled/strongly emphasized, 3=skilled/emphasized, 2=somewhat skilled/somewhat emphasized, and 1 =not skilled/not emphasized. While not directly comparable, this wording is sufficiently similar to facilitate inferences about gaps between what the HR/IR labor market seeks and what HR/IR programs provide. Averages were computed for each skill to facilitate the comparisons which are anchored to the ranking of skills sought by employers. A variety of skill gaps calculated from the averages provides the focus of the discussion.

IV. Results

The 20 skills previously identified are ranked by their importance to employers, as shown in Table 2, column 1. Written Communication Skills tops the list with a perfect 4.0 ranking, followed at some distance by Oral Communication and Active Listening (each at 3.6). The remaining skills are arrayed below them, with the lowest ranking of 2.6 going to Research Skills. The overwhelming importance of the several varieties of communication skills is apparent. Paradoxically, Research Skills, which are so

highly regarded by faculty, show up at the bottom of the employer list of needed skills.

These results may reflect the ambiguity of the term "research skills." Employers no doubt give this skill a low ranking because they do not hire practitioners to engage in research. Faculty, by contrast, give research skills a high ranking because this is what faculty do well and can convey effectively to their students. Students need to know research skills so they can read and interpret research studies they encounter in their work, and the process of acquiring research skills simultaneously develops important related skills, among them analytical skills, written communication skills, and so on.

The average levels of skills found in current HR/IR job applications appear in Table 2, column 2, and the gap between what employers seek and what they find is shown in column 5. For the 20 skills, the gaps range from a high of 1.2 to an excess of -0.2. The gaps exceed 0.5 in 14 of the 20 cases, and they equal or exceed 1.0 in 5 of the 20 cases. The most glaring gaps are in Written and Oral Communication Skills, Presentation Skills, Negotiation Skills, and Understanding Organizational Dynamics. By contrast, no gap exists for Creativity or for Research Skills; indeed, new job applicants possess more of both these skills than employers say are needed. Overall, these results indicate that employers would like to see HR/IR applicants equipped with considerably higher skill levels across almost the entire spectrum of skills.

The actual emphasis on skills in the program, as reported by HR/IR students and faculty members, appears in column 3 and 4. For only two skills is the level of emphasis close to 3.0 or higher: Research Skills (3.3 for students, 3.1 for faculty) and Analytical Skills (3.0 for students, 2.9 for faculty). Indeed, the actual level of emphasis given to roughly half the skills by both students and faculty is 2.0 or below.

The average gap between the skill levels employers seek and what the program provides is substantial and virtually

Response Group	Population	Valid Responses	Percent Responding
MA Level Industrial Relations Students	25	19	76%
Industrial Relations Faculty	12	9	75%
1990-92 MA Level Industrial Relations Alumni*	36	20	56%
Industrial Relations Seminar Members	11	10	91%

Table 1: Survey Response Rates. *Note: Data excludes one response from a person no longer in the field, and three other questionnaires were returned for lack of proper address.

identical, at 1.0 for graduate students and 1.2 for faculty (columns 6 and 7, bottom line). Both graduate students and faculty agree that one skill is "overemphasized" relative to employer needs, namely, Research Skills, with excess emphasis of -0.7 and -0.8, respectively.⁹ For graduate students, large gaps exist between what the labor market seeks and what skills their program actually emphasizes, for example: Active Listening Skills (1.6), Oral Communication skills, Decision Making Skills, and Facilitation Skills (all with 1.4), and Computer Skills, Understanding Organizational Dynamics, and Risk Taking (all with 1.3). The gaps differ somewhat for faculty but many are equally large. Taken together, these results indicate substantial gaps between the skills actually emphasized by the pro-

gram and the level of skills employers seek in entry-level hires.

Another perspective comes from comparing the levels of skills sought by employers and the levels of emphasis that graduate students and faculty believe should be given to these skills. How comparable are the views of employers about the skill levels they seek in new employees and the emphasis, as perceived by graduate students and faculty, that HR/IR programs should give to these skills? The results are presented in Table 3, columns 1 and 2. Clearly, the average gap is negligible, +0.1 for graduate students and about +0.3 for faculty, suggesting that graduate students are more closely attuned than faculty to the labor market demand for entry skills.

Table 2. Gaps Between Needed and Actual Market Entry Skills, and Between Needed Market Entry Skills and Actual Program Skills Emphasis.

HR/IR Practitioner Skills	Market Entry Skills As Seen by Professionals		Actual Program Skills Emphasis as seen by		Gaps Between Needed Market Entry Skills and		
	Needed (1)	Actual (2)	Students (3)	Faculty (4)	Actual Market Entry Skills as seen by		Faculty (7)*
					Professionals (5)*	Students (6)*	
Written Communication Skills	4.0	2.9	2.8	2.3	1.1	1.2	1.7
Active Listening Skills	3.6	2.4	2.0	2.0	1.2	1.6	1.6
Oral Communication Skills	3.6	2.8	2.2	2.3	0.8	1.4	1.3
Decision Making Skills	3.4	2.7	2.0	1.8	0.7	1.4	1.6
Analytical Skills	3.4	2.7	3.0	2.9	0.7	0.4	0.5
Adaptability	3.3	2.6	2.1	2.0	0.7	1.2	1.3
Computer Skills	3.3	2.5	2.0	2.3	0.8	1.3	1.0
Planning/Organization Skills	3.3	2.7	2.3	2.1	0.6	1.0	1.2
Presentation Skills	3.3	2.3	2.2	2.0	1.0	1.1	1.3
Sensitivity to Diversity	3.3	2.8	2.1	1.8	0.5	1.2	1.5
Resourcefulness	3.2	2.7	2.1	1.8	0.5	1.1	1.4
Group Problem Solving	3.1	2.4	2.6	2.1	0.7	0.5	1.0
Understanding Organizational Dynamics	3.0	2.0	2.7	1.9	1.0	0.3	1.1
Team Building Skills	3.0	2.3	2.0	1.8	0.7	1.0	1.2
Leadership Skills	2.9	2.2	1.8	1.6	0.7	1.1	1.3
Facilitation Skills	2.9	2.1	1.5	1.6	0.8	1.4	1.3
Creativity	2.8	2.6	1.7	2.1	0.2	1.1	0.7
Risk Taking	2.7	2.2	1.4	1.4	0.5	1.3	1.3
Negotiation Skills	2.7	1.7	1.9	2.0	1.0	0.8	0.7
Research Skills	2.6	2.8	3.3	3.1	-0.2	-0.7	-0.5
AVERAGES	3.2	2.5	2.2	2.0	0.7	1.0	1.1

Note: Needed and Actual Entry Skill levels are averages of Very Skilled=4; Skilled=3; Somewhat Skilled=2; and Not Skilled=1. Needed and Actual Program Skills Emphasis levels are averages of Strongly Emphasized=4; Emphasized=3; Somewhat Emphasized=2; and Not Emphasized=1.

*Column 5 is difference between columns 1 and 2; column 6 is difference between columns 1 and 3; and column 7 is difference between columns 1 and 4.

Hiding behind these averages are substantial differences. For example, faculty seriously underrate the importance of the skills of Resourcefulness (1.1), Active Listening (1.0), Sensitivity to Diversity (0.8), and Written Communication, Adaptability, and Risk Taking (all 0.7). By contrast, they overrate the importance of Creativity and Research Skills (both at -0.8) and to a somewhat lesser degree, Negotiation Skills (-0.2). The absolute size of the skill gaps for graduate students is somewhat lower, at 0.5 for both Written Communication Skills and Active Listening Skills. Graduate students, however, believe that for seven skills the needed emphasis exceeds, though not by much (about -0.2), what the labor market demands.

Putting aside what skills the labor market seeks, what differences exist between the level of skills now emphasized in the program and the skills both graduate students and faculty believe should be emphasized? The results, shown in Table 3, columns 3 and 4, indicate that students perceive a larger skills gap than do faculty—the gap between what students believe the program should emphasize and

what the program currently emphasizes. The average gap for graduate students is 1.0 compared to 0.8 for faculty, with the perceived gap greater among students than faculty in 12 of the 20 skills. Indeed, graduate students perceive a gap of 1.0 or more between what is and should be emphasized for 13 skills in contrast to only 6 for faculty. The largest gap is for Research Skills, with students indicating an excessive emphasis (-0.5) whereas faculty believe that Research Skills deserves somewhat greater emphasis (0.3), for an overall disparity of -0.8 between students and faculty.

Students seem most aware of program gaps in the emphasis on Facilitation Skills and Understanding Organizational Dynamics (both 1.5), Oral Communication Skills (1.4), Leadership Skills and Creativity (both 1.3), and Decision Making Skills, Computer Skills, and Team Building Skills (all 1.2), followed by Active Listening Skills, Presentation Skills, and Sensitivity to Diversity (all 1.1). In all, graduate students perceive program gaps in all but one of the 20 skills. Faculty see the largest program gaps in Cre-

Table 3. Gaps Between Needed Market Entry Skills and Needed Program Skills Emphasis, and Between Needed and Actual Program Skills Emphasis.

HR/IR Practitioner Skills	Gap Between Needed Market Entry Skills and Needed Program Skills Emphasis as seen by		Gap Between Needed and Actual Program Skills Emphasis as seen by	
	Students (1)	Faculty (2)	Students (3)	Faculty (4)
Written Communication Skills	0.5	0.7	0.7	1.0
Active Listening Skills	0.5	1.0	1.1	0.6
Oral Communication Skills	0.1	0.4	1.4	1.0
Decision Making Skills	0.2	0.3	1.2	1.3
Analytical Skills	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.5
Adaptability	0.2	0.7	1.0	0.6
Computer Skills	0.1	0.5	1.2	0.5
Planning/Organization Skills	0.2	0.5	0.8	0.7
Presentation Skills	0.0	0.0	1.1	1.4
Sensitivity to Diversity	0.1	0.8	1.1	0.7
Resourcefulness	0.4	1.1	0.7	0.3
Group Problem Solving	-0.3	0.2	0.8	0.8
Understanding Organizational Dynamics	-0.2	0.0	1.5	1.2
Team Building Skills	-0.2	0.2	1.2	1.0
Leadership Skills	-0.1	0.6	1.3	0.6
Facilitation Skills	-0.1	0.5	1.5	0.8
Creativity	-0.2	-0.8	1.3	1.5
Risk Taking	0.3	0.7	1.0	0.6
Negotiation Skills	0	-0.2	0.8	0.9
Research Skills	-0.2	-0.8	-0.5	0.3
Averages	0.1	0.3	1.0	0.8

See Notes to Table 2.

ativity (1.5), Presentation Skills (1.4), Decision Making Skills (1.3), and Understanding Organizational Dynamics (1.2). Among the 11 largest perceived gaps identified by graduate students (those greater than 1.1), only 4 are similarly identified by faculty.

V. Discussion

The relatively low attention in this program to skill development is neither unexpected nor likely to differ much from other similar programs. Academic programs and their associated courses typically concentrate on subject matter rather than skills. Not that skills development is completely neglected; rather it varies by course. Theory courses inevitably place less emphasis on skills and more on content. Research methods courses highlight some skills and not others. Small seminars can give greater attention to skill development, particularly communication skills. Regardless of the course, differences in faculty teaching objectives and teaching styles also affect the attention given to skills. Despite some emphasis in the program on skill development, substantial gaps remain between the skill levels employers seek and the program's current attention to skill development.

What remains unclear is how graduates can be assured of developing the skills necessary to compete in a difficult job market. If we consider employers and students as the program's customers, as the continuous quality movement suggests, does the onus fall on institutions and their faculties to ensure that students have the requisite skills to succeed? We believe faculty in professional programs do bear responsibility for imparting skill-based knowledge to students, but, this responsibility must also be spread among students and employers.

Students must be viewed as being responsible for taking a more active interest in their education. They must adopt a proactive approach and seek out opportunities to develop skills both inside and outside the classroom. Even if classroom opportunities are limited, they must do what they can to enhance their skills through participation in student-faculty committees, extracurricular activities, internships, and parttime work; ideally, they would have developed these skills while still undergraduates. To the extent that masters level students arrive with more fully-developed skills, it becomes easier for professional programs to enhance these skills than to build many of them from scratch. Some provision must be made, however, for students to exercise and develop these skills while in the program.

Employers cannot expect academic programs to tailor student skill preparation to suit their exact needs. As a matter of strategic human resource management, they must invest to enhance the skills of their employees. Accord-

ing to the Porter and Lawler¹⁰ expanded expectancy model, training can increase the expectations of employees in their ability to perform the tasks at hand, leading to greater job satisfaction for themselves and greater productivity for the organization. Thus, employers must establish skills training programs, nurture on-the-job learning opportunities for skill development, and create skill mentoring programs.

Finally, academic programs and their faculties can and should play a more significant and dominant role in skill development of their students and subsequent HR/IR practitioners. Educational institutions by virtue of their mission are best poised to take a more active role than they now do. They are limited, however, by the system which trains their faculty. Most doctoral training programs do little to impart anything more than content knowledge and research skills, largely because their faculty were themselves never exposed to broader skill development in their training. Simply put, faculty are not trained to help students learn even though instruction is one of the faculty's principal responsibilities.

VI. Recommendations

We offer two major recommendations. First, the teaching of skills needs to be infused into content courses so that the close interplay of knowledge and skills is emphasized. This will require increasing the capacity of professional programs to offer skill development. Doctoral training programs need to include some training to enhance student learning of both knowledge and skills. This recommendation poses a catch-22 situation because existing faculty are not well positioned to offer such training. In the meantime, faculty members must be shown how to infuse skill development into their courses. While some faculty may volunteer, the wider success of this approach hinges on demonstrating that the benefits of infusion exceed the costs of implementation and/or produce substantial increases in student learning.¹¹ Without more careful study, however, the potential for infusion and the challenges of implementing an infusion strategy remain unclear.

Second, a continuous quality improvement approach is required to address the skills training gap. Rather than allowing each participant group to seek its own solution to what is a collective problem, a more creative and potentially effective approach would bring together employers, faculty, and students to explore the opportunities for and constraints in developing a tighter linkage between labor market skills needs and professional program capacities for enhancing student skill development. Though students represent the only group that talks to the other two groups, they are not in any position to exert much pressure for change. Contact between faculty and employers, the producers and the customers of student knowledge and

skills, is quite limited and certainly does not focus on skill development. Some vehicle must be found that can bring together employers, faculty, and students where they can begin discussing what it takes to develop more effective strategies for skill development within and around HR/IR programs.¹² The results of such discussions may reshape the views of students, faculty, and employers about their individual and collective responsibilities for skill development and lead to cooperative ventures that overcome existing barriers to change.

VII. Conclusions, Implications, & Limitations

This study identified twenty skills needed by newly hired human resource professionals. Based on surveys of graduate students, faculty members, and recent graduates of a single masters degree HR/IR program, several results emerged. HR/IR practitioners see major deficiencies in the skill preparation of job applicants. Though graduate students and faculty members are in close agreement about the skills employers seek and the levels of skills their program should emphasize, substantial gaps exist between what skills are and should be emphasized in these programs.

How then do we remedy the skill gaps? The most obvious solution is to bring together employers, faculty, and students to establish more clearly what skills, and what skill levels, HR/IR practitioners need to perform effectively and then figure out how to close the gap in the emphasis given to these skills in HR/IR programs. Through the resulting dialogue each group will gain a sharper vision of what it can and cannot do. The hope is that a collective dialogue may identify a comprehensive approach, involving employers, students, and faculty, for infusing a much broader array of skills into HR/IR programs, without compromising the intellectual integrity of these programs. A continuous quality improvement process would be useful in creating and implementing such a process.

Several limitations to this study must be acknowledged. The main goal has been to build a foundation for future research into the relationship between skills and professional academic programs. As a pilot study, the results surely cannot be generalized to other HR/IR programs because of likely differences in the emphasis given to skill development. Whether the skills list is broad enough even for HR/IR practitioners needs further study. The comparability of the responses to market entry skills and program skills emphasis may be open to question because of the way the survey questions had to be posed. Finally, the time constraint of a semester limited the analysis to a single program. Despite these limitations, we believe the results call for replicating this study for a broader set of programs and employers.

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Endnotes

¹ Siegfried, et al., 1991.

² Hansen, 1986; Hansen, 1991; Schneider, 1991; Stevenson and Weil, 1992.

³ U.S. Department of Labor, 1991; Stampen and Stampen, 1995.

⁴ Hansen, 1993.

⁵ Kaufman, 1994.

⁶ Carnevale, 1990; Hansen, 1986; Higgins, 1992; Kaufman, 1994; Porter and McKibbin 1988; and Secretary's Committee on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1994.

⁷ Several additional caveats are in order. First, the skill requirements for entry level HR/IR jobs may well differ from those needed for a successful career in the HR/IR

field. Second, the skill requirements being reported now may be in a state of transition due to the on-going transformation of the workplace and global competitiveness. Third, the skills being emphasized in HR/IR programs reflect the current status of these programs, including the presence of some courses that provide explicit training in these skills and others that give them only incidental attention.

⁸ Other information was obtained but is not reported here. Students were asked to indicate how much emphasis (using the same four-point scale) is and should be given to the major areas of knowledge within industrial relations and also to selected HR/IR topics extracted from course syllabi. In addition, graduate students enrolled in the seminar were asked to rate the emphasis given to skills in the various HR/IR courses they had taken in the program. Brief reference is made to these results later in the paper.

⁹ It is possible that Research Skills embrace and reinforce a variety of other important skills.

¹⁰ Porter and Lawler, 1968.

¹¹ Some success has been achieved recently in helping faculty develop undergraduate writing skills through the Writing Across the Curriculum movement (Hansen, 1993).

¹² The literature and practices of the continuous quality improvement approach might be utilized to facilitate such a dialogue.