An Evaluation of the Master of Science Program in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College: Determining Whether Possessing the Degree has an Impact on the Salary Levels or Career Attainment of its Graduates

Jean L. Gardner

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An Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree Program in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College: Determining Whether Possessing the Degree has an Impact on the Salary Levels or Career Attainment of its Graduates

By

Jean L. Gardner

B.A. May 1999, Syracuse University

A final project submitted to The Faculty of
The Graduate School of Human Resource Development of
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David Gardner for your support and willingness to help me further my education. Your
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Chapter 1

An Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree Program in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College: Determining Whether Possessing the Degree has an Impact on the Salary Level or Career Attainment of its Graduates

The number of graduate and post-secondary professional degree programs has increased significantly over the past several decades, and students and organizations alike seek the most for their investment. In 2001, there were 900 American universities offering MBA programs, and this number is only expected to increase (U.S. News and World Report, 2002). Other research (Ehrenberg & Mavros, 1995) also found a significant increase in the number of students enrolling in programs in the 1990's, and market factors of the 2001 impacted this even further. The field of Human Resources is following this trend as well, as more students are pursuing master's degrees in HR Management and Development.

Given this increase in programs and degrees, a focus on whether gaining a higher-level education is warranted on both a financial and career attainment level. The problem, however, is that evaluations of whether master level degrees in Human Resources, or any other field for that matter, have not been conducted to a large extent. As such, questions about the return on investment of higher-level education have been raised, both on a curriculum and post graduation career and salary level. Pfeffer and Fong (2002), for example, state, “There are substantial questions about the relevance of their [MBA degrees] educational product and doubts about their effect on both the careers of their graduates and on management practice” (p 79). The Master of Science Program in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher is no exception, and alumni have not been evaluated in this manner to date.
well. Finally, a sample of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) members will be sent separate surveys to control for “real world” differences among those already working in the field.

*Significance*

This study is warranted for several reasons. First, it is the first survey of its kind to be conducted with the Graduate HRD program at St. John Fisher. Given that the cost of tuition is approximately $32,000 for the degree, an investigation on whether it makes a difference in the careers of graduates is useful. Current literature is both positive and negative in terms of whether possessing a post-graduate degree actually has an impact, and data from the St. John Fisher program would be significant to the school and students. The design of the study will attempt to control for differences in experience, as well as striving to gain as much objective information on the careers and skill sets of graduates. Results, therefore, should be realistic and valid to the school and field. Also, the program at Fisher places a strong emphasis on the importance of evaluation, and this survey provides one way to demonstrate this core value. In addition, evaluations of graduate programs are under-researched in general. While many programs conduct informal research, the fact that a validated survey does not exist is telling. Finally, the development or improvement of these limited survey tools would be a benefit to the field to conduct further evaluative research as well.

*Framework of the Study*

This project will attempt to address these issues by surveying a number of groups against the past five years of graduates of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher. Comparison groups will include current program attendees (those expected to graduate in 2004 and 2005), and incoming accepted students. Members of the Society of Human Resources Management
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The research is lacking due to limited evaluative efforts. Several conclusions, however, based on other avenues of study have revealed general similarities. Research performed in the past has focused on specific areas. First, there is a large amount of literature focusing on salary level and earning potential advanced degrees in various industries. Second, some literature has investigated whether and to what extent possessing a graduate degree has on career level. Also, program structure has been reviewed, and there is some question whether the curriculum used in various graduate schools can impact on future success of its members. In addition, possessing a master’s degree has been enormously impacted by economic factors since September 11, 2001, so a thorough discussion of these considerations is warranted.

There were 75,000 MBA’s awarded in 1991 (Simmering & Wilcox, 1995), and this number increased by almost 20,000 by 2001. Thus, literature has focused attention on whether investing in a graduate degree is useful. Although much of the literature has primarily discussed the MBA degree, commonalities to the Human Resource degree can be drawn. First, graduates of Human Resources Management and/or Development programs can be assumed to work in this or related fields, and should be similar to one another in terms of motivation and skill. Therefore, the measurement of salaries and careers should be fairly equalized, so conclusions on whether possessing an advanced degree should be as accurate as those done for MBA programs. Also, the curriculum of HRM/HRD programs should be somewhat similar across programs (like with MBA’s), so conclusions made in this area should be similar. Finally, the number of people possessing advanced degrees in any area is increasing, so any positive or negative impact this holds for future salaries, career, or success of graduates should be similar for most degree
current market for those possessing advanced degrees by stating “on the bright side, the
economic slowdown has lowered the opportunity cost of an MBA: Wages and opportunities
outside of business school are not as enticing as during a robust economy. Furthermore, interest
costs for borrowing to finance the MBA are at historic lows” (Connolly, 2003, p. 367). Thus,
while research remains somewhat disparate as to what the actual return on investment is for a
post-graduate degree, it appears as though certain fields are still positively impacted.

Controlling for Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors. Other research (Ashenfelter & Krueger,
1994) also supports the overall positive salary trend associated with possessing a master’s
degree. A large study utilizing data from twins, for example, found that the economic return of a
master’s degree when individual skill was accounted for increased a worker’s wage rate by 12
and16 percent for each year of school completed (Ashenfelter & Krueger, 1994). In addition,
Dohm and Wyatt (2002) found that even with the increase in the number of people receiving
advanced degrees (26-33% from 2000-2010), there was a subsequent return on investment of
6%. Reasons for this increase include student motivation, as “students working toward a degree
are likely to set their sights on the long term payoffs – which include more career options, better
promotion opportunities, higher earnings and lower unemployment” (Dohm & Wyatt, 2002, p.
2). Findings from a 2003 study by Connolly (2003) also support this contention, as “the average
rate of return for an MBA from the University of Miami from 1999-2002, estimated here to be
13.8% gross and 9.7% after taxes, reflects the MBA’s continued value in the marketplace” (p.
365). This study, though quite large, did study only graduates from this university, so cannot be
confidently applied to all MBA graduates. Regardless, it demonstrates the potential value. In
further support of this positive finding, a government study by the Bureau of Labor showed that
“higher levels of education and training substantially boost life-time earnings” (Anonymous,
finding of a large empirical review found that “there is little evidence that mastery of the knowledge acquired in business schools enhances people’s careers, or that even attaining the MBA credential itself has much effect on graduates’ salaries or career attainment” (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002, p. 80). This research discusses the fact that the MBA may not have the significant impact that popular opinion expects. In fact, several studies conducted with graduates from the University of Chicago (Burt, 2001, as cited in Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) and the Harvard Business School (Livingston, 1971, as cited in Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) not only found a very limited association, but one that was actually negative in some respects. This finding may be due to the fact that graduates of higher degree programs are a year or two behind their undergraduate counterparts in terms of entering a career. This connection was corroborated by Dreher, Dougherty, & Whitely (1985, as cited in Pfeffer & Fong 2002) as they state, “…although there was an effect of having the graduate MBA degree on starting salary, there was no effect of having an MBA on current salary, except for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds” (pp. 81-82). Other research (Anonymous, 2003) also found that possessing a doctoral degree was had a negative effect relative to salary, as a “West Virginian holding a doctorate degree in 2001 earned nearly $3,300 less per year than a resident with a certificate from community college” (Anonymous, 2003, p.17). This study did not speculate on the reasons for this finding, and it should be noted that only doctorate graduates in a limited area were evaluated. Gandel (2002) also found that entry level salaries for Cornell MBA’s was markedly lower than the previous year, and graduates were forced to adjust their expectancies accordingly.

Obviously, the results of research on the impact of graduate degrees on salary is mixed. There is a debate about this issue in general, particularly in terms of what institution is conducting the research. Academic institutions granting degrees clearly have a vested interest in
part, due to the fact that people getting employment directly from college gain more experience than their graduate degree-holding counterparts. In addition, non-MBA consultants do not experience the same transfer-of-training difficulties on the job that those possessing the degree do (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002).

Further, other research has focused on performance and how it relates to career progression of graduates of master's degree programs. Given that performance is clearly related to career promotion, investigators wonder about graduates who fail in their careers. A survey of "failed" CEO’s, for example, found that of 33 companies, 40% of the CEO’s did hold graduate degrees (Mintzberg & Lampel, 2001). It seems, therefore, that the skill and ability that should be provided by master’s programs do not necessarily help career success at all. This statistic is clearly limited and not conclusive, but it does raise some interesting questions as to what use the degree is to performance on the job (especially at the higher level).

Other research (Johnson, 2001), however, continues to herald the value of holding an MBA degree, and states, "The bottom line is that MBA career opportunities will continue to be plentiful, but the competition will be fierce" (p. 82). This literature explores the issue that there may be greater opportunity for those possessing post-graduate degrees, and this fact cannot be separated by possibilities of career advancement. Also supporting this issue from a career perspective, Yang and Lu (2001) found that receiving an MBA degree did help alumni obtain employment. This study, however, examined Stanford graduates, and did suggest that networking and relationships were equally as important as education.

**Economic Factors**

In any current discussion relative to career attainment, one must also consider economic and market factors. With recent trends in downsizing (also referred to as "rightsizing" or
business components, have also been forced to re-assess their careers, and many individuals must increase attendance at programs specific to human resources. The lack of strong survey tools and disappointing findings thus far do warrant further study in this area. Specifically, the literature does suggest that holding an advanced degree does have a limited effect in terms of pay and performance, but there is much to be explored. With the statistics found by research, there is much discussion pertaining to possible reasons why there is a trend in these results. This study will also address the research question of whether possessing the GHRD degree from St. John Fisher College has an impact on the career level and progression of its graduates.

Reasons for Salary Level and Career Attainment Discrepancies

Correlating Factors

The fact that there are differing findings with respect to salary and career research begs the question as to why there are so many differences. The literature has suggested that there are some key factors that do correlate to higher compensation level and subsequent career progression, though again, the research is limited. One survey found that school prestige did make a difference, and those attending highly competitive programs “report the highest annual earnings in their current jobs ($96,000 for fulltime graduates...)” (Dugan, Grady, Payn, & Johnson, 1999, p. 7). Haksever and Muragishi (1998), however, disagree and found that “the top 20 MBA programmes [sic] do not seem to be different from the second 20 in terms of average efficiency” (p. 11). In addition, higher GMAT scores did correlate slightly to increased salaries (Leavitt, 1989), but this research looked only at starting pay. Other research (Abell, 2004) shows that students attending full-time programs have greater subsequent jumps in salaries in their careers, though only students age 33 and older were studied. It appears that there is, so far, no one factor about possessing an advanced degree can guarantee future success or salary level.
(Liberty & Prewitt, 1999) has suggested this may be a way to increase career success of graduates. Also, some intriguing literature has shown that programs based in software (e-learning) may impact upon the kinds of employment and monthly salaries (Kathawala, Abdou, & Elmuti, 2002), though future research could study this issue.

The Role of Experience

Many evaluations look only at starting pay (U.S. News and World Report, 2003), and there has been little done in terms of salary level for individuals much more established in their careers. Specifically, perhaps the degree does not significantly affect entry level salaries, but employees may be limited for promotion and salary level when moving upward later in their careers. Connolly (2003) begins to consider this issue and shows that there is a continuous decline in both entry and exit salaries for MBA's. He, however, attributes this trend to the increase in the number of people receiving advanced degrees, and suggests that this contributes to the overall de-valuation of the degree. Other research corroborates the increase in the total number of people pursuing advanced education, as "an AACSB study published in the spring of 2002 showed that the percentage of MBA graduates coming out of for-profit programs increased by 600% between 1992 and 1999..." (AACSB International, 2002, as cited in Pfeffer & Fong, 2003, p. 370). Other research (Becker, Vlad, Huh, & Mace, 2003) in specific industries has also studied the increase in enrollment, and notes that graduate student attendance to journalism and mass communication programs was up 20.8% in 2002 from the previous year. There is an increasing number of people attending programs and receiving advanced degrees, and these students are older in general. According to data from October 2002 from the U.S. Census, the largest number of both full and part-time graduates was in the 25-29 age category, at 747 thousand people in total (U.S. Census, 2002). This number includes both males and females, and
institutions being hesitant to gather data that may not be positive. In addition, it is difficult for people to remember what salary level they were at prior to receiving a master’s and post-graduation. Confidentiality is also an issue, as many Human Resources departments cannot legally disclose salary information. Thus, researchers must contact employees directly, and many people refuse to provide this sensitive information. Even comprehensive evaluations, such as those done by *U.S. News and World Report*, rely on perceptions and studies done by university presidents to collect data. In a review of the methodology of such reports, the magazine says, "Since then, *U.S. News* has added 15 more indicators to its system, continually trying to find ways to measure academic quality" (Cary, p. 1).

It is difficult to argue with some of the negative research associated with salary levels found by Pfeffer, as he analyzed 40 years worth of studies on the issue (Mangan, 2002). As with this study, much of the research is cross-sectional in nature, and relies on a host of sources to make any calculations. In this literature review (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002), the researchers relied on data from consulting firms and the limited number of schools that had attempted to evaluate their MBA programs. They do suggest that there is some correlation between school prestige and higher economic gains, though "a straightforward interpretation of these results is that it is not education in business but selectivity that is being assessed" (p. 82). Even in a thorough review of outside sources (like the information gleaned from the past several years' worth of reports from *U.S. News and World Report*), these investigators discuss that selectivity in recruiting may have a later impact on the graduate compensation. This factor, coupled with inherent motivational differences in people choosing to further their education, and the fact that so many students are older, makes any standard of measurement difficult. Also, surveying people with regards to their salaries is difficult, in and of itself. This is because research tools ask participants to attempt to
career attainment, as many companies are flatter in hierarchy, and there may be a fewer number of opportunities available at all. Therefore, holding a degree may have an impact on one's career, but cannot be determined because there are fewer opportunities in general.

Similar to salary level, there has been little attempt at evaluating career attainment of graduates. Pfeffer and Fong (2002), for example, state “In fact the absence of much assessment of any kind is one of the defining characteristics of contemporary business education, and one reason that problems are likely to persist” (p. 80). Also, there may be fundamental differences in people pursuing or possessing master’s degrees, as they are not a random sample of the labor force. More specifically, Pfeffer and Fong (2003) state “they are willing to invest in their education, they have enough skill and aptitude to get admitted to a program, and they have the persistence to complete the program (p. 368).

Socioeconomic and Demographic Factors

Other factors impacting in difficulties in measurement include demographic and gender information. As there appear to be salary differences in general based on gender (Simpson, 2000), researches have trouble factoring this out when examining men and women who possess advanced degrees. Second, other research (Ulinski & O'Callaghan, 2002) shows that non-white MBA graduates do not receive a starting salary at par with their Caucasian peers even when grade point averages are equalized, and this confuses true measurement of whether skill and performance level are really impacted. In addition, it is also important to take changing lifestyles into consideration when examining career attainment. Specifically, some research (Schneer & Reitman, 1993) has suggested that the "traditional" (p. 831) model of family structure has changed dramatically, and more people are seeking a work-life balance. Thus, career attainment
Another overall measurement method used is to survey people within organizations to determine whether people possessing degrees are different in skill level than those who do not. Tools utilized to achieve this end, however, are usually individualized for the organization, and generally have not been tested or validated in a controlled setting. Also, there is a debate about whether business school curriculum takes practice into consideration by looking at successful performers, and Weick (1989) states, "Theorists often write trivial theories because their process of theory construction is hemmed in by methodological strictures that favor validation rather than usefulness" (p. 516). He suggests that the purpose of the tool may be lost, as research is interested only in the academic usefulness of the method, rather than actually measuring any practical knowledge, skills, or competencies.

Measurement of the numerous areas intended to be influenced by an advanced degree are difficult and often limited. As more research is conducted to not only develop a valid tool to test for differences in career attainment and salary differences, perhaps more academic institutions will be encouraged to evaluate their programs. In addition, as the number of graduates entering into industry from academics increases, MBA and other master's program curricula should resemble a more useful structure designed to help students transfer training to performance and organizational success. In any event, while many of the graduates of the St. John Fisher College informally debate as to whether receiving the Master of Science in GHRD is useful to achieve personal compensation and career ends, a more thorough analysis of the degree is warranted. In addition, the development of survey tools to evaluate this program should contribute to the field, as this literature review found a limited number of instruments available for this endeavor.

This study will attempt to contribute to research on salary and career attainment of individuals possessing an advanced degree. Specifically, people possessing master's degrees
Design

Based upon the population and research question, this study will utilize a survey method. There are six distinct groups of individuals under investigation. Alumni from the past five cohorts of the St. John Fisher M.S. program in Human Resources development are the primary group under analysis, and there are five comparison groups. First, data from current students in the program were under investigation. Second, incoming accepted students to the program were surveyed. Third, supervisors of program graduates were given questionnaires to gain more information on alumni skill level and salary input. Fourth, co-workers of the alumni were surveyed to control for organizational and/or experiential factors. Finally, a sample of Society for Human Resource Management members was investigated to help account for realistic differences in salary level and career attainment in the field as opposed to academia. Comparing current data from the alumni to these five sources of data is expected to yield quantitative information as to whether possessing the degree from St. John Fisher impacts on career level and salary attainment while controlling for differences in background, experience, skill level, possessing a post-graduate degree from another program, company specifics, gender, and age.

Participants

Alumni

This research pool consists of the individuals in the past five cohorts of the program. A "cohort" is a group of students who progress through the program together, and most members graduate on the same date. Each cohort is different in the number of individuals, as the program has increased in enrollment since its inception. A list of these members were provided by the Alumni Office at St. John Fisher, and resulted in a group of 31 individuals. Age, experience, background, employment, demographic, and social factors of these individuals were expected to
Supervisors of Alumni

Program graduates were additionally asked to give Supervisor surveys to their direct managers. Thirty-one individuals were targeted for this response group, and data was expected to provide perceptual support for alumni skill level and/or salary/career attainment. Again, five of the alumni surveys were returned because of incorrect addresses, so the overall response is actually calculated by 26. The response rate for this group was 15 percent, as 4 surveys were returned back. Subsequently, data from this group were not utilized.

Co-Workers of Alumni

Program graduates were sent additional surveys to give to a select co-worker. Specifically, this co-worker should have the same or a similar job title as the graduate, and a sample of 31 individuals was targeted. This group was surveyed to help account for whether the company itself, or differences in experience, had an impact on salary/career level, as opposed to possessing the M.S. degree. As with the Supervisor surveys, the rate is calculated out of 26 because of incorrect addresses. The response rate for this group was 7 percent, as 2 were sent back. Data from this sample were then grouped in with all other participants and only used for salary level and career attainment measures. The small size of this pool did not allow that any direct analysis between this group and the alumni to be drawn, and was therefore not used for this purpose.

Society for Human Resource Management Members

Members of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) were surveyed as well. A random sample of 440 people were selected by the Chapter President (Mr. Bob Peter), and e-mailed surveys. These individuals were utilized in an attempt to control for realistic differences in background and experience of people already working in the field of Human
degree made a difference in salary, career, and skill levels. The first page of the document contained contact information, the purpose of the study, instructions, and the implied consent, and was printed on St. John Fisher letterhead.

The St. John Fisher Alumni Office provided the list of alumni, and surveys were mailed to these individuals in large manila envelopes. The Supervisor and Co-Worker surveys were also included in the envelope, with instructions to the graduate on how to distribute these documents. In addition, there were three postage-paid, self-addressed envelopes included for alumni, supervisors, and co-workers to return questionnaires to the investigator. Surveys were mailed in mid-February, and respondents were given two weeks to respond (specifically, a date of February 27, 2004 was given as the deadline). These surveys were labeled HRDA followed by a two-digit number. In addition, alumni were mailed a reminder letter approximately one week after this deadline (see Figure 8), and were asked to mail in their surveys if they had not already done so. They were also asked to remind their supervisors and co-workers to do the same.

Current Student Surveys

These questionnaires were similar to the Alumni surveys, and were also five pages in length (see Figure 3). Questions were adjusted slightly to change tenses (as students had not yet obtained the degree), and were a combination of circled and fill in the blank responses. Current students were targeted as a comparison group because they were expected to be similar in terms of experience level, background, skill level, age, and gender to the alumni, but did not yet possess the degree. The first page of this survey also contained contact information, instructions, purpose, and the implied consent, and was printed on St. John Fisher letterhead.
asked to respond by February 27, 2004. These surveys were labeled HRDI with a two-digit number.

Supervisor Surveys

Supervisor surveys were three pages in length (six questions total), and were a combination of circled and open-ended responses (see Figure 5). This survey was entirely developed by the investigator, and was not based upon any prior research. Surveys given to the supervisors were intended to gather objective perceptual information relative to career attainment of graduates, and if the degree had an impact on improvement of competencies and skill sets of graduates as opposed to others in their departments. Questions focused on job performance, job title, and whether the manager felt possessing the degree had an impact on salary. The first page of this survey was printed on St. John Fisher letterhead.

As previously described, Supervisor Surveys were included in the packet sent to alumni. Direct managers were also given roughly two weeks to complete and mail the questionnaire to the investigator. Self-addressed, postage paid envelopes were also included. These surveys were coded HRDS followed by a two-digit number.

Co-Worker Surveys

Co-worker surveys were three pages in total, and consisted of thirteen circled and open-ended questions (see Figure 6). Co-worker surveys were based upon the alumni questionnaire, but were generic in terms of whether the individual possessed a post-graduate degree. All language pertaining to the St. John Fisher program was eliminated, and a question inquiring on what school (if any) the individual had gained a degree from was included. In addition, the first page of the survey contained study purpose, procedure, instructions, contact information, implied consent, and was printed on St. John Fisher letterhead. Surveys were given to coworkers in
integrity of the study. Surveys were e-mailed in mid-February, and this group was asked to complete them by March 1, 2004. Returned surveys were printed out promptly and then deleted so any identifying information was destroyed. These surveys were then coded SHRM with a two-digit number.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed primarily using a combination of independent-samples t-tests, paired-samples t-tests, and Pearson correlations. The primary group under investigation is the graduates, and all other samples will be compared to them. They were labeled as survey type 1, and there were a total of five groups. Coding relative to career attainment and job titles was as objective as possible. All groups (excluding supervisors) were asked to write in their job titles when they began their masters programs and followed by their current positions. The investigator then created four levels of title level, and each person possessing a master's degree (whether it was from the HRD program at Fisher or an advanced degree from some other institution) was ranked 1-4. Four was considered the highest level of Human Resources, and included positions like Director or Vice President of Human Resources. All individuals working outside the field of HR were left blank so they would not interfere with the results.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality was maintained at all times by the researcher. An implied consent was included on all surveys, and respondents were given detailed explanations relative to the purpose of the information. Identification codes were included to identify which group the respondent was a part of, as well as to connect Supervisor and Co-Worker data to alumni information. There was no matching of these codes to names, and no data that can identify company or personal information would be used in this project.
Research Question #1: Analysis of Salary Information

The first question was designed to understand whether obtaining a master's degree in Human Resource Development from St. John Fisher College had an impact on the salaries of its graduates. To examine this question, current salaries of HRD alumni were compared to a) their salaries prior to when they started in the program, b) the salaries of current HRD students, and c) the salaries of a random sample of SHRM members.

Analysis of Alumni Salaries. The first analysis utilized a paired-samples t-test to compare the current salaries of alumni to their salaries prior to starting the program. The t-test revealed a significant increase in current salaries ($M = 51,485, SD = 17,137$) over the salaries before beginning the program ($M = 35,465, SD = 14,037$), $t(7) = 4.83$, $p = .002$.

Alumni Compared to Current Students. This question was designed to understand whether obtaining a master's degree in Human Resource Development from St. John Fisher College has an impact on the salaries of its graduates as opposed to those currently attending. The second analysis utilized an independent-samples t-test to compare alumni to current students. The t-test revealed a significant difference in salaries such that the salaries of alumni ($M = 51,485, SD = 17,137$) were significantly greater than the salaries of the current students ($M = 35,671, SD = 11,386$), $t(30) = 2.99$, $p = .006$.

Alumni Compared to SHRM Members. This question was designed to understand whether possessing a master's degree from the GHRD program has an impact on salary level in comparison to SHRM members working in the field of Human Resources. An independent-samples t-test revealed the salaries of these groups were not different such that the salaries of the alumni ($M = 51,485, SD = 17,137$) were similar to the salaries of SHRM members ($M = 52,035, SD = 16,622$), $t(17) = -.077$, $p = .94$.
Alumni Compared to Current Students. The first analysis compared alumni to current students' years of experience. An independent-samples t-test revealed that graduates of the program received their undergraduate degrees 7.27 years earlier ($r = 9, M = 14.67, SD = 9.11$) than the current students ($M = 7.4, SD = 6.26$), $t(30) = 2.74, p = .009$.

Alumni Compared to SHRM Members. The second analysis compared alumni to SHRM members' years of experience. An independent-samples t-test revealed no difference years of experience between alumni and SHRM members. The alumni years since undergraduate degree was ($M = 14.67, SD = 9.11$). The SHRM members years of experience was ($M = 14.65, SD = 8.6$), $t(17) = .005, p = .996$.

Comparison of Salaries and Years of Experience of All Participants. The third analysis measured the association between years of experience and current salary for the entire dataset. A Pearson correlation showed a significant relationship between current salaries and years of experience, such that years of experience correlates to salary level, $r(48) = .428, p = .002$.

**Research Question #2: Analysis of Career Attainment**

The second question was designed to understand whether obtaining a master's degree in Human Resource Development from St. John Fisher College had an impact on the career level of its graduates. To examine this question, the position level of HRD alumni were compared to a) the position level of current students, and b) the position level of a sample of SHRM members.

Alumni Compared to Current Students. The first analysis utilized an independent-samples t-test to compare the position level of alumni to current students. Information from graduates is compared to current students in the GHRD program to normalize differences in background or skill level. Current students do not yet possess the degree, but are assumed to be similar to the graduates with respect to demographics, age, socioeconomics, background, and
This analysis was designed to understand whether years since receiving an undergraduate degree impacted on the position level of all groups. To examine this question, we analyzed the association between a) years of experience and educational status, and b) years of experience and position level. Because the variable years of experience was not directly available, the following analyses substituted years since receiving an undergraduate degree.

*Alumni Compared to Current Students.* The first analysis compared alumni to current students' years of experience. An independent-samples t-test revealed that graduates of the program received their undergraduate degrees 7.27 years earlier ($r = 9, M = 14.67, SD = 9.11$) than the current students ($M = 7.4, SD = 6.26$), $t(30) = 2.74, p = .009$.

*Alumni Compared to SHRM Members.* The second analysis compared alumni to SHRM members' years of experience. An independent-samples t-test showed no difference in years of experience as the alumni level was ($M = 14.67, SD = 9.11$) and the SHRM member level was ($M = 14.65, SD = 8.6$), $t(17) = .005, p = .996$.

*Comparison of Career Attainment and Years of Experience of All Groups.* The third analysis measured the association between years of experience and position level for the entire dataset. Results of a Pearson correlation indicate a significant relationship between years since receiving an undergraduate degree and higher position level, $r(41) = .368, p = .018$.

*Other Findings*

*Alumni and Student Perceptions*

Perceptual questions were included in the surveys to determine whether alumni from the St. John Fisher GHRD program felt receiving the degree impacted on their current salaries or career levels. To examine this question, graduates and current students of the program were asked quantitative and qualitative questions to gather information on if they felt possessing the
current job." Others pointed out the function of the marketplace, specifically mentioning that job opportunities in Rochester, NY was poor and could negatively affect a current review of the GHRD master's degree program.

The current student surveys qualitatively appear to be more mixed and there were a combination of positive and negative comments. Many students questioned whether the degree would have an impact on salary level or career progression, and one student stated, "I have seen no kick-back financially." Some students also made suggestions to improve the program in the future, and many suggested the addition of "real world" components. One participant, for example, said "Incorporate an internship or some type of job experience to enhance the program and its potential to help get us a new job in the field." Others seconded this opinion, as one individual stated, "The program is very helpful with both practical and theory, but I would recommend a practical project rather than a thesis project." Many students were quite positive, however, that the program helped them network to obtain their current positions in the Human Resources field, and felt their skills had been enhanced in general. More of the specific comments are beyond the scope of the project, but were important to report.
As indicated by prior research, findings in this area are generally inconclusive. Some research (Johnson, 2001) poses that post-secondary degree programs are losing their value because of the increase in the number of graduates enrolling over past several years. Other discussion (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002) has led to the conclusion that only graduates from the most prestigious institutions can be predicted to increase their earning potential. Connolly (2003) predicts that graduates in the coming years can expect to increase their earnings at a rate of 12-16 percent. It should be noted again that much of this research was conducted with MBA programs, and evaluations of Human Resources graduate programs are very limited. The closest parallels can be made from inferences to Industrial and Organizational Psychology programs (mainly from literature supplied by www.siop.com), and also show the increase in graduates may impact on the overall de-valuation of further degrees in general. Though the discussion continues, much research does indicate that acquiring a master's degree is still of value in the later salaries of graduates.

Findings at St. John Fisher College

Alumni Salaries. The findings from the present study, in general, are also mixed. One positive area shown to be significant in this study was reflected in the difference of the salaries of the alumni from when they began the program to their current compensation. This study showed there was an average increase of $16,020 in the salaries of the graduates from when they began the program to current levels. This finding, which is also dependent on years of experience, did show that alumni of the GHRD program earn more after completing the degree. Research in this area is not strong, and further studies could evaluate other degree programs.

Alumni Compared to Current Students. The second area examined was alumni in comparison to current cohort members. Though results of the surveys showed that alumni
demonstrates that women still earn less on average than their male counterparts. This study supported past findings, as women were earning less than their male counterparts. Women earned less than men on average (there was a $9,692.60 annual difference). Results of the salary differences between men and women holding master’s degrees were not statistically significant, but women were likely to earn less money than their male co-workers. This study found that there is a gender difference in salaries.

*Years of Experience.* As noted earlier, findings in the area of salaries in this study is impacted by years of experience. The alumni of the program had spent roughly seven more years in the field than current students, and this was shown to be a better predictor of enhanced earnings. Alumni and SHRM members were good comparison groups, as they had roughly the same number of years of experience (both had been in the workforce for similar amounts of time). This study found tenure was a major factor in enhanced earnings, and was exhibited by all groups. In fact, this study showed that years of experience was a much better predictor of earnings than was the possession of a master’s degree. This held true for all groups, even for SHRM members who received degrees from other institutions. Alumni of the Fisher earned approximately $3,000 than those who possessed undergraduate degrees alone, but this sample size was extremely small. This finding could have been more thoroughly investigated by including a question on how many jobs participants had held since receiving both undergraduate and advanced degrees. Possibly the graduates had more opportunity to move to other positions more often, and this impacted on entry-level salary level. Unfortunately, these variables were not considered, and this makes it difficult to make interpretations about salary level of graduates especially in the poor economic conditions of Rochester, NY. Therefore, specific determinations
*Alumni Compared to Current Students.* The question was included to gather information on whether alumni had progressed further in their careers in comparison to current students. The trend was that the graduates had, in fact, achieved higher position levels than their colleagues from Fisher who had not yet obtained the degree. Graduates of the program were typically in the HR Management level, while current students were more likely to be in the administrative or generalist categories.

Though this finding is limited, it is interesting because the comparison to current students was made to control for differences in skill and motivational level. In short, students and alumni were admitted to the M.S. program based on the same selection criteria, and were probably similar in terms of background. These groups are employed under the same market, economic, and demographic factors. Therefore, while the results are not statistically strong, there was a slight positive relationship between possessing the degree and career attainment. This data could have been strengthened by the inclusion of manager data to determine if and how much impact receiving the degree has on the performance level of the graduates. The supervisor sample pool, however, had a poor response rate and their data could not be included.

*Alumni Compared to SHRM Members.* These results were included in an attempt to factor out the role of experience relative to career progression. As the research indicates uncertainties on both whether an advanced degree impacts either on performance or career progression, this survey sought to gain more information with this specific program. Results between these groups are not statistically meaningful, and found no difference between the alumni and SHRM member position level. When making comparisons between alumni and SHRM members that did possess master's degrees, this study again found no differences in career attainment. In addition, there was also no relationship found between alumni and SHRM
structure), and results of this study add to the field because they show that years of experience is most important.

Other Findings

Perceptual Data. Other statistically significantly areas reported by this study involved the perceptual information provided by the alumni and current student populations. The graduates, in general, felt that possessing the M.S. degree had impacted on increased job opportunities and enhanced earnings. The current students had lower scores for this area, and also had more negative comments relative to their skepticism. It is in the opinion of this researcher that the current students have not yet received the degree, and are therefore still considered bachelor's degree educated only in the marketplace. The graduates most likely have enjoyed increased recognition and better opportunity (both career and earning-wise) as a result of receiving an advanced degree. This finding is congruent to other research (Mangan, 2002), which showed that people receiving master's degrees perceived enhanced opportunities and salaries, regardless of their actual level. In addition, attending the master's program at St. John Fisher allows graduates to network with one another, and impacts upon increased possibility to enter into what is currently an extremely selective field in an area with few entry level opportunities.

Limitations and Research Implications

Response Rate

As with many previous studies in this area, this project had several limitations. First, the poor response rate in every population surveyed was a major factor in data analysis. The Alumni Office, unfortunately, did not have up-to-date list of addresses for many alumni, so the list was rather small. In addition, the supervisors and co-workers of the alumni had an extremely poor
Another salary problem lies in the fact that much of the data collected was in Rochester, NY. While this is an advantage in that economic factors were controlled for, the market in this area may be more depressed in general. Job opportunities are also most likely limited, so a stronger study may have looked at a larger metropolitan area as well. In addition, there was no way for salaries to be necessarily connected with demographics and other issues. As the majority of the sample size was female, there could have been socioeconomic and gender differences in salary. Further research could include perceptual questions on whether males and females felt their salary levels were affected by their gender or time in the workplace.

*Position Level and Career Progression*

Third, there was an issue with career and job level. As the surveys requested that people fill in what their titles were at the initiation of their master’s programs, followed by their current positions, their level was subjective on the part of the researcher. While I attempted to convert this information to a quantitative number, the 4-level scale was based upon a subjective interpretation of position level. In the future, an effort could be made to gather job descriptions, although that may adversely affect response rate even further. Also, the survey did not inquire about what school the SHRM members my have received graduate degrees from. Attending either a more or less prestigious institution could impact on job performance and subsequent career level, so this may have been a factor.

An issue with career progression is the fact that many companies are significantly improving their internal training programs. As more employees are demanding cross-training and increased marketability in their careers, companies are impacting their bottom-line retention by responding with better programs. Pertaining to this study, it is possible that some graduates, students, and/or SHRM members have improved training programs at their companies, or had
Conclusion

Evaluations of master's level degree programs have focused on a number of areas. Mainstream sources are mainly interested in determining whether possessing a degree equates to higher earnings and the calculated rate of return. Though the market collapse in 2001 made such calculations difficult, possessing an advanced degree does appear to positively impact upon graduates. Given the trend in the increase in graduate students, exactly what the rate of return is remains to be seen. In addition, prestige of specific graduate programs appears to impact upon the later salaries of students, so this factor should be taken into consideration.

Similar to previous research, this study found mixed results regarding salary level of people receiving the M.S. in Graduate Human Resources Development from St. John Fisher College. A positive finding was that alumni salaries were significantly higher after receiving the degree, and they were also increased in comparison to current students. This study showed no relationship between alumni salaries and SHRM members either possessing a degree or with undergraduate degrees alone. The best predictor of salary level in this study was shown to be years of experience in the field, and this was true across all groups.

Other investigations have attempted to determine if possessing a master's degree impacts on later career progression or job success of graduates. Many of these studies focus on performance and program structure to determine if business lessons taught in degree programs translates to successful practice. Results in the past have been mixed, and this unclear finding was reported in this study also. Although the position levels tended to be higher for graduates in comparison to current students, they were similar to people working in Human Resources. It appears that possessing the master's degree from the GHRD program has a limited impact on the later career advancement of its graduates, but these conclusions, again, are weak. As in the area
degrees, a repeat of this survey could be performed at other master's HR programs in an attempt to contribute to research of this industry. Comparisons between Human Resources Development and Management students could also be investigated, as well as differences between a degree in HR compared to MBA degrees.


μ I'm not planning to graduate from the program

Please continue to the back of this page ➔
Section B
GHRD Assessment Information

Please circle the number that most closely matches your response to the statement. Where appropriate, please add your comments.

11. I am satisfied with the courses in the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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Please comment:

12. I am satisfied with the quality of the instructors in the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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Please comment:

13. I am satisfied with the intellectual challenge of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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19. I contribute to workplace learning as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
---|---|---|---|---
Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Please comment:

---

20. I take a leadership role in providing strategies and practical solutions to the business challenges affecting the workplace as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
---|---|---|---|---
Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Please comment:

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21. I have had enhanced job/career opportunities as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
---|---|---|---|---
Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Please comment:

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22. I have increased my earning potential as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
---|---|---|---|---
Strongly disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree

Please comment:

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EVALUATION OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE
DEGREE IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

STUDY PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in the research study titled Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether possessing the M.S. Degree in HRD from St. John Fisher College has an impact on the salary levels or career attainment of its graduates.

PROCEDURE FOR THE STUDY: Surveys will be conducted with incoming students, current students, and graduates of the GHRD program. The questions in the survey will address salary level, work status, and perceptions of career attainment. In addition, we ask that you give a copy of the Supervisor Survey to your direct manager to complete and send back. The purpose of the Supervisor Survey is to investigate management perceptions of whether the degree has an impact. Also, please also give a copy of the survey to a co-worker who has a similar position and/or job title as you. Please return the completed survey no later than Friday, February 27th, 2004.

CONFIDENTIALITY: You are free to refuse to answer any questions on this survey. I ensure confidentiality of the information you provide on this survey. The information you provide to us will be used for research purposes only, and will only be accessible by members of the research team. There is an identification code listed on the upper right of your survey; the purpose of this number is to connect your survey to the supervisor and co-worker surveys, but there is no matching of these codes to names. No data that can identify you or your company will be used in this project.

CONTACT PERSON: If you have questions regarding the survey or project, you can contact Jean Gardner at (585) 314-3279.

IMPLIED CONSENT: By completing and returning the survey, you give your consent to use the data you provide in this research study.

INSTRUCTIONS: For each question, please circle the number corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer. Please do not put your name on this survey.
6. I did not work at the time

7. Where are you currently working? Circle all that apply.
   1. In the HR Development field only
   2. In the HR Management field only
   3. In the HR Administrative field only
   4. In HR Development, Management, and Administrative fields
   5. I work outside the field of Human Resources
   6. I am not working at this time

8. How many years have you worked at your current company?
   1. One (1) year or less
   2. One (1) year to three (3) years
   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years
   5. Ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years
   6. Fifteen (15) years or more

9. How many years have you worked in your current position at this company?
   1. One (1) year or less
   2. One (1) year to three (3) years
   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years
   5. Ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years
   6. Fifteen (15) years or more

10. What was your annual salary when you began the HRD program?

   ______________________________

11. What is your annual salary now?

   ______________________________

12. What was your title when you began the program?

   ______________________________

13. What is your title now?

   ______________________________
5. I have increased my earning potential as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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Please use the space below for any additional comments about the Graduate Human Resource Development program at St. John Fisher College:

________________________________________________________________________
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Assessment of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development from St. John Fisher College

Instrument I: Assessment—Program Student Self Report

Section A

Demographic Information

Please circle the number corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer.

1. What is your age?
   1. 25 or under
   2. Between 26 and 30
   3. Between 31 and 40
   4. Between 41 and 50
   5. 51 or over

2. What is your gender?
   3. Male
   4. Female

3. What is the year in which you received your undergraduate degree?

________________________

4. What is the date of your graduation with a M.S. in HRD?

________________________

5. How long did it (will it) take you to complete the GHRD program?
   1. Two (2) years or less
   2. More than two (2) years, but less than three (3) years
   3. More than four (4) years, but less than three (3) years
   4. More than four (4) years
   5. I don’t know

6A. When you began this program, were you working? (If no, skip to question 7)
   7. Yes
   8. No

6B. When you began the program, where were you working? Circle all that apply.
   1. In the HR Development field only
   2. In the HR Management field only
   3. In the HR Administrative field only
   4. In HR Development, Management, and Administrative fields
Section B

GHRD Assessment Information

Please circle the number that most closely matches your response to the statement. Where appropriate, please add your comments.

1. I improved my knowledge in the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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Please comment:

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2. I transferred the learning from the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College to my job.

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Please comment:

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3. I have had enhanced job/career opportunities as a result of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College.

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Please comment:

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4. I anticipate that possessing this degree will have an impact on my career progression.

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Please comment:

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Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development

STUDY PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in the research study titled Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether possessing the M.S. Degree in HRD from St. John Fisher College has an impact on the salary levels or career attainment of its graduates.

PROCEDURE FOR THE STUDY: Surveys will be conducted with incoming and current students, and graduates of the GHRD program. The questions in the survey will address salary level, work status, and perceptions of career attainment. Please complete the survey and return it in the included envelope no later than Friday, February 27th, 2004.

CONFIDENTIALITY: You are free to refuse to answer any questions on this survey. I ensure confidentiality of the information you provide on this survey. The information you provide to us will be used for research purposes only, and will only be accessible by members of the research team. There is an identification code listed on the upper right of your survey; the purpose of this number is to identify the sample group you are a part of, but there is no matching of these codes to names. No data that can identify you or your company will be used in this project.

CONTACT PERSON: If you have questions regarding the survey or project, you can contact Jean Gardner at (585) 314-3279.

IMPLIED CONSENT: By completing and returning the survey, you give your consent to use the data you provide in this research study.

INSTRUCTIONS: For each question, please circle the number corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer. Please do not put your name on this survey.
5. I worked outside the field of Human Resources
6. I did not work at the time

7. Where are you currently working? Circle all that apply.
   1. In the HR Development field only
   2. In the HR Management field only
   3. In the HR Administrative field only
   4. In HR Development, Management, and Administrative fields
   5. I work outside the field of Human Resources
   6. I am not working at this time

8. How many years have you worked at your current company?
   1. One (1) year or less
   2. One (1) year to three (3) years
   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years
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   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years
   5. Ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years
   6. Fifteen (15) years or more

10. What was your annual salary when you began working in your current position?

11. What is your annual salary now?

12. What was your title when you began working in your company?

13. What is your title now?
Assessment of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College

Instrument 2: Assessment--Program Graduate Supervisor Report

Please circle the number corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer.

1. How long has this employee reported to you?
   1. 1 year or less
   2. 1 – 3 years
   3. 3 - 5 years
   4. 5 – 10 years
   5. 10 years or more

2. Did this employee report to you prior to receiving an M.S. degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Not applicable

3. To what extent has possessing this degree improved the salary of the employee?

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<td>Some extent</td>
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4. To what extent has possessing this degree improved the job performance of the employee?

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EVALUATION OF THE MASTER OF SCIENCE
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STUDY PURPOSE: You are invited to participate in the research study titled Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College. The purpose of this study is to investigate whether possessing the M.S. Degree in HRD from St. John Fisher College has an impact on the salary levels or career attainment of its graduates.

PROCEDURE FOR THE STUDY: Surveys will be conducted with co-workers of students of the GHRD program at St. John Fisher College. The questions in the survey will address salary level, work status, and perceptions of career attainment. Please complete the survey and return it in the enclosed envelope no later than Friday, February 27th, 2004.

CONFIDENTIALITY: You are free to refuse to answer any questions on this survey. I ensure confidentiality of the information you provide on this survey. The information you provide to us will be used for research purposes only, and will only be accessible by members of the research team. There is an identification code listed on the upper right of your survey; the purpose of this number is to connect your survey to the student’s survey, but there is no matching of these codes to names. No data that can identify you or your company will be used in this project.

CONTACT PERSON: If you have questions regarding the survey or project, you can contact Jean Gardner at (585) 314-3279.

IMPLIED CONSENT: By completing and returning the survey, you give your consent to use the data you provide in this research study.

INSTRUCTIONS: For each question, please circle the number corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer. Please do not put your name on this survey.
5. I worked outside the field of Human Resources  
6. I did not work at the time

7. Where are you currently working? Circle all that apply.  
   1. In the HR Development field only  
   2. In the HR Management field only  
   3. In the HR Administrative field only  
   4. In HR Development, Management, and Administrative fields  
   5. I work outside the field of Human Resources  
   6. I am not working at this time

8. How many years have you worked at your current company?  
   1. One (1) year or less  
   2. One (1) year to three (3) years  
   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years  
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years  
   5. Ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years  
   6. Fifteen (15) years or more

9. How many years have you worked in your current position at this company?  
   1. One (1) year or less  
   2. One (1) year to three (3) years  
   3. Three (3) years to five (5) years  
   4. Five (5) years to ten (10) years  
   5. Ten (10) years to fifteen (15) years  
   6. Fifteen (15) years or more

10. What was your annual salary when you began working in your current position?  
    ____________________________

11. What is your annual salary now?  
    ____________________________

12. What was your title when you began working in your company?  
    ____________________________

13. What is your title now?  
    ____________________________
Assessment of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development from St. John Fisher College

Instrument I: Assessment—SHRM Member Self Report

Section A
Demographic Information

Please check the blank corresponding to your answer to the question or, where appropriate, write in your answer.

1. What is your age?
   ___ 25 or under
   ___ Between 26 and 30
   ___ Between 31 and 40
   ___ Between 41 and 50
   ___ 51 or over

2. What is your gender?
   ___ Male
   ___ Female

3. What is the year in which you received your undergraduate degree?

4. Do you possess a Master’s Degree? (If no, skip to question 7)

5. How long did it (will it) take you to complete your Master’s Degree program?
   ___ Two (2) years or less
   ___ More than two (2) years, but less than three (3) years
   ___ More than four (4) years, but less than three (3) years
   ___ More than four (4) years
   ___ I don’t know

6A. When you began this program, were you working? (If no, skip to question 7)
   ___ Yes
   ___ No

6B. When you began the program, where were you working? Check all that apply.
   ___ In the HR Development field only
   ___ In the HR Management field only
   ___ In the HR Administrative field only
   ___ In HR Development, Management, and Administrative fields
March 10, 2004

Dear Graduate of the Human Resources Development Program:

Several weeks ago, you were invited to participate in a survey titled "Evaluation of the Master of Science Degree in Human Resource Development at St. John Fisher College." You were asked to provide information regarding your salary, career, and perceptions of the M.S. degree, and were also requested to give copies of surveys to your manager and a co-worker.

If you have not already done so, I would greatly appreciate it if you could complete and return the survey to me. In addition, please remind your manager and co-worker to also return their surveys. If you have sent back your questionnaire, I sincerely thank you for your participation.

Please contact me with any questions or issues.

Thank you,

Jean Gardner
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Rochester, NY 14692
(585) 314-3279
jg7367@sjfc.edu