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Program Evaluation

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**Research Design Paper**

The Adult Education/Human Resource Development (AHRD) program at James Madison University is founded on a number of objectives that aim to prepare students for a career in the fields of education, instructional design, and human resources. “The program is designed for persons entering or advancing in positions associated with learning in education, business, industry, government, and other public and private sector organizations” (AHRD Graduate Program, 2014). This Research Design Paper evaluates the program objective focused on students learning appropriate technologies for AHRD-related career fields. The paper will begin by adjusting the objective to become a SMART objective, then the stakeholders, outputs, outcomes, assumptions, and environment will be evaluated. There will also be an explanation of the research design, evaluation strategy, and relevant program information. The goal of this study is to determine whether the objective that aims to have students “be aware of and apply appropriate technologies” is actually happening within the program and, if not, what changes and adjustments need to happen to ensure that students are developing a technological proficiency.

**Research Question**

The research question that propels this study determines whether the objective “to be aware of and apply appropriate technologies” is being carried out throughout the program courses and whether the courses benefit those who use technology in their careers after completing the graduate program. Before beginning the analysis of the objective, I began I began by aligning this objective to the SMART objective format. The technology objective now reads “by graduation, demonstrate the ability to utilize and apply current instructional technologies to analyze, design, develop, and implement instructional programs.”

**Program Description**

The structure of the program has a large influence on program’s ability to teach appropriate technologies. The structure of the program is made up of the program stakeholders, courses, materials, and exams. The program’s stakeholders include the course instructors and courses (Figure 1), the graduate students, the internship firms, and the companies that hire students following graduation. The students in the AHRD program include traditional graduate students: those who entered the graduate program directly after completing their undergraduate coursework; and non-traditional students: individuals who entered the graduate program after gaining work experience (AHRD Graduate Student Handbook, 2012). The materials used within the program include the computer labs, software, and classrooms used to instruct students. The exams consist of the oral comprehensive exams, written comprehensive exams, reading and research paper, thesis paper, and the online portfolio. These program components aim to achieve the technology objective in a number of ways. Courses such as LTLE 570 and LTLE 610 utilize the computer labs which contain software needed for careers instructional design. There is also an online portfolio requirement that requires students to utilize technology and software to create an online website highlighting their knowledge, courses, and experiences.

**Environment**

 The Adult Education/Human Resource development is currently in a state of flux because of changes to department leadership and teaching ideas amongst faculty. Jane Thall, the current program director, was previously an instructor in the program. Her positional change to program administrator has given her a large amount of control over the coursework, requirements, and standards of the program. However, her role change has also caused a missing position in several courses. These courses were filled by instructors Noorie Brantmeier and Amy Thelk.

While these instructors do an exemplary job of teaching the courses, the courses are taught from new perspectives because of the new professors and their experience levels with the graduate courses. The new professors bring a fresh outlook on the program courses and the material taught, however there is a lack of consistency in the program because of the new hires and the new direction the program is taking. These changes impact the program, teaching advising, and administration of program assessments. Because there are so many changes taking place, this will ultimately affect job placement assistance and internship opportunities for students.

***Figure 1: AHRD Instructional Stakeholders and Courses***

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|  AHRD Instructional Stakeholders and Courses  |
| AHRD 520: Foundations of AHRD | Randy Snow |
| LTLE 570: Design and Development of Digital MediaLTLE 610: Instructional Design in AHRD | Diane Wilcox |
| AHRD 600: Performance Analysis and Needs Assessment in AHRDAHRD 630: Research Methods and Inquiry in AHRD | Noorie Brantmeier |
| AHRD 580: Learning Theories and PracticeAHRD 540: Leadership and Facilitation | Oris Griffin |
| AHRD 680: Reading and ResearchAHRD 700: Thesis | Diane Wilcox, Jane Thall, Oris Griffin, Noorie Brantmeier |
| AHRD 695: Portfolio | Diane Wilcox, Jane Thall, Oris Griffin, Noorie Brantmeier |

**Program Evaluation**

 There has not been any formal evaluation of students using technology in the program. However, students are given the assignment to create an online portfolio using Weebly as a graduation requirement. This assignment could be used to gauge student’s technological skills. There has also been prior evaluation data collected from alumni in the program. In 2010, an Alumni Survey was distributed to graduates of the program. The survey asked questions about the work that students are doing and advice they would give students currently in the program. The survey lacked questions about technology that the students utilize in their careers, however the survey was a good indicator that alumni could be willing to complete a technology-based survey following graduation.

**Research Design**

 The research design for this study would be non-experimental (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012); we cannot do a big study because there are only 15 students enrolled each semester. Research design is about control of variables (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012), however I do not have much room to do that because the research involved in this program cannot manipulate independent variables. Because of this, the study will consist of an evaluation for current students and alumni that will focus directly on the technology learned in the program and used after graduating. Incoming students will complete a pre-test before taking any course work in the program. These questions will determine the knowledge AHRD students possess coming into the program. The same students will then complete a post-test following the qualifying exams. The questions will assess knowledge that was gained, changed, or lost throughout the duration of the program in terms of their knowledge in the field. Alumni of the program will receive a survey asking questions about the technology and software they use within their careers, their satisfaction with the education they received, as well as suggestions for future improvements for the program. The AHRD program can use resources such as Qualtrics, a JMU sponsored survey software, to distribute surveys to the alumni. They can also utilize Excel spreadsheets to compare the pre-test and post test data.

**Conclusions**

This study should be conducted for a number of reasons. Technology is becoming an overwhelming force in the fields of business, industry, and government (Dertouzos, 1998). Because of this, it is important for the program to ensure that they remain vigilant and cognizant of the technology that is needed in these career fields. In analyzing the program and its components, I have discovered that there are only three courses that specifically focus on technology in the HRD field. Only one out of those three courses are required for students to graduate from the program. The other two can be taken as electives, however the courses are not always offered every year or semester (AHRD Graduate Program, 2014). This presents a gap between information that is taught and information that is needed for student success. This study will help close the information gap and make students more prepared for their future careers.

**References**

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