# AN ASSESSEMNT OF GRADUATE ADULT EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS: A U.S. PERSPECTIVE

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#### **Abstract**

Due to recent changes in the workplace, the workforce and higher education have driven academic programs of adult education (AE) and human resource development (HRD) in the U.S. to become more integrated as part of the mission of institutions of higher education. In this exploratory study, existing graduate programs in AE and HRD in the U.S. were investigated based on the *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006) to assess the current status of these academic programs in both fields. Results indicate that some of these programs already coexist and collaborate at the institutional level. Implications for the future of academic programs of AE and HRD are discussed.

Institutions of higher education (IHEs) have a two-fold mission: to train people for practical and technical work and to foster civic engagement (Brint, 1994; Englund, 2002; Larsen, 2002; Solbrekke & Karseth, 2006). While striving to achieve their mission, they face a number of issues that impact the way they conduct business. Among these issues are academic and policy planning; access, diversity, and participation; accountability and assessment; and finance and costs. Salerno (2006) argues that "as competition for scarce public funding intensifies, so too have tensions between institutions of higher education (IHEs) and the public they serve" (p. 281). Accountability is considered to be part of these tensions. Carey (2007) defines accountability in higher education as "the responsibility to the students whom colleges educate, to the governments that provide funding, to society at large" (p. 29). This broad definition of accountability presents a number of implications to the practices in higher education. An important issue that concerns the public today is funding. It is no surprise, therefore, to see many IHEs undergo a re-structuring phase where academic units, departments, and programs are reorganized, and in some cases, eliminated.

The academic programs of adult education (AE) and human resource development (HRD) are no exception to these challenges. In fact, one of the emerging areas of research in both fields involves academic education (Akdere, 2005; Kuchinke, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007; Merriam & Brocket, 1997; Smith, 1989). Since these concerns have a number of implications for

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the academic programs in both fields, it is important to examine the current state of collaborations and networks between AE and HRD academic programs.

Although the fields of AE and HRD and have a lot to offer to each other, there seems to be a disconnect. While HRD has been perceived as insensitive to issues of workers' lives, justice, equity, and sustainable work by some adult educators (Fenwick, 2004), AE often receives negative comments from some of the business leaders and managers due to its affiliation with schools, colleges, and universities and is perceived as insensitive to the needs and functions of businesses (Smith, 1989). Hatcher and Bowles (2006a, 2006b) suggest that the tension between the two fields is the result of lack of understanding and lack of collaboration. Though differences of ideas exist between the two fields, there are a number of AE and HRD academic programs that co-exist and collaborate as part of the vision of the IHEs hosting them.

A complementary relationship between the two fields may be emerging to cope with the changes that affect academic programs and units. Historically HRD academic programs in the U.S. were established in vocational/technical or adult/continuing education departments (Kuchinke, 2004). As a result, the boundaries between the two fields are unclear. However, their practice implications are becoming increasingly integrated due to changes in higher education.

Programs in both fields serve as gatekeepers through higher education institutions. Previous studies have often focused on one single field (Kuchinke, 2002, 2003; Milton, Watkins, Studdar, & Burch 2003; Yang, 2004). A study that could identify where AE and HRD programs have merged could be beneficial for both fields. The purpose of this exploratory study is to investigate existing graduate programs in AE and HRD in the U.S. based on the *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006) and to assess and understand the current state of affairs of these academic programs in both fields. Based on a list of existing programs and their trends, higher education institutions can identify current changes in both fields and develop better marketing materials. Also, comparing both fields through the blending of their academic programs can help set directions for the future of higher education institutions. The results of such a study can have implications for academic programs not only in the U.S., but also outside the U.S.

The following basic research question guided this study: What is the current state of affairs of graduate academic programs in the fields of AE and HRD in higher education in the U.S? This question is answered with related questions based on five categories identified in *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006):

- How are graduate programs in AE and HRD grouped in institutions of higher education?
- What is the graduate program distribution in both fields?
- What are the academic degrees in both AE and HRD offered?
- Where are the AE and HRD programs located?
- What type of institutions of higher education offer AE and HRD programs?

#### **Review of Related Literature**

AE and HRD have traditionally worked as separate fields serving different learners with similar purposes, thus causing each academic field to function as silos, with little collaboration and interaction at both the theoretical and practice levels. The perspective in academic circles on the relationship between AE and HRD is the emergence of workforce development as part of a discipline-focused view of workplace and individual needs for improvement and learning (Jacobs, 2006). Both fields are interested in educating people, helping them become skilled employees, and facilitating life-long learning.

Acting in response to the emerging changes that affect individuals and organizations, many institutions of higher education have offered academic programs that prepare and educate practitioners and scholars in the fields of AE and HRD. It is not new that these academic programs have their own identity, differing in philosophical approaches related to the purpose and focus of adult learning, and varying in structure, content, and institutional affiliation (Kuchinke, 2002, 2003; Milton et al., 2003; Yang, 2004). In the following section, differences and similarities between AE and HRD will be addressed.

#### AE and HRD Identity

HRD is "the process of developing/unleashing human expertise through organization development and personal training and development for the purpose of improving performance. The domains of performance include organization, process, and individual levels" (Swanson, 1995, p. 208). HRD provides expertise and tools to help adult learners in their effort to address work-related issues. AE, on the other hand, is "a process whereby an individual whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitude, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).

Yang (2004) describes adult education as an applied field of study, while HRD is an applied field of study and professional practice. He further explains that both fields evolved from multiple disciplines: HRD as a field of study developed from disciplines such as education, business administration, industrial/applied psychology, and communication. AE was founded in psychology, sociology, philosophy, political science, and history. Both fields consider themselves as an independent field and practice, with their own identity, and accomplishing their own missions.

Even though both fields have their own identity, scholars have attempted to argue that they should work as close partners (Yang, 2004), but still keep their own identities. The name HRD places the field in a good position because it represents the field precisely (i.e., the name represents a specific focus area of practice) whereas AE encompasses a broad range of professional practices such as vocational and technical education, and adult basic education, including HRD. This relationship between the two fields is yet to be defined because AE perceives including HRD as part of its practice and organizational function. For AE, HRD is considered an educational process and its professionals should be considered adult educators "whose main task is to facilitate workplace learning" (Yang, 2004, p. 133). Contrary to this

thought, Yang posits that "adult learning theory provides a foundation for HRD theory and practice" and "can expand the current scope of the field" (p. 140).

# Different Philosophical Approaches

AE and HRD fields are inclined to embrace different philosophical approaches related to the purpose and focus of adult learning. Both fields accept the philosophies of liberalism and progressivism, but are inclined to diverge in other approaches. For example, while the HRD practice tends to focus on behaviorism and human capitalism, the AE practice centers on humanism, liberalism, and sometimes radicalism. However, this is not to say that both fields are totally opposed to each other's philosophical practices; rather, these practices are less likely to be found in the respective fields (Yang, 2004).

Yang (2004) indicates that "perhaps the sharp difference between the two fields can be observed in their approach to the social implications and consequences of learning" (p. 136). Whereas HRD looks at learning as a form of investment (i.e., human capitalism), AE focuses on the what, how, and why of adult learning and advocates for maintaining a democratic society, with the purpose of empowering individuals through education and knowledge (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Even though the two fields distinguish themselves in terms of the focus of learning, they also agree in terms of valuing ideas and experiences, which are the emphases of liberalism (i.e., acquisition of knowledge and development of rational perspective) and progressivism (i.e., emphasis on knowledge and skills resulting from observation and experience).

Another area where the two fields disagree is related to control over the learning process and outcomes. HRD academics believe that the learning process and outcomes should be controlled by the organization (Swanson & Holton, 2001); AE academics believe that the individuals should have control over their own learning process (Bierema, 2000). The organizational control over the learning process is an outcome of the performance paradigm and dictates the mission of the organization. According to Bierema (2000), the issue with HRD is that it operates as a means of productivity, performance, and profit, losing sight of the meaning to be human; however, HRD views these areas as a sound approach to maintaining its role and function as an agent of learning in the organization.

#### AE and HRD Program Characteristics

Some AE and HRD programs differ slightly in terms of curriculum, but may be affiliated with similar institutional units and have comparable structures. Two studies were published in the same year addressing the characteristics of programs in both fields. Kuchinke's (2003) study investigated the institutional and curricular characteristics of HRD master's programs in the U.K. and the U.S. Kuchinke's study used a document review of printed and Internet-based program information, brochures, and syllabi; and information received from respective program administrators for validation, correction, and missing information. The study results showed that for HRD programs in the U.S. there is no national level focus or coordination, accreditation, or certification; rather there is HRD education and training based on a vocational system. Also, HRD programs were primarily housed in schools of education with a curriculum centered on

vocational and adult education, but program emphasis on training design, delivery, and evaluation. This study showed evidence that the skill profile of graduate programs in the U.S. had a great focus on training and development.

Milton et al. (2003) examined programs offering graduate degrees in adult education in the U.S. to determine key organizational factors influencing changes in the size of these programs. Milton et al.'s study used a mixed-method research design involving 11 semistructured interviews conducted with a purposeful sample and the participation of 131 individuals representing 71 adult education programs who responded to an on-line survey instrument. Results of this study uncovered that adult education programs were changing in organizational structure due to changes in student enrollment and in the number of full-time faculty size. These changes in size led graduate adult education departments to be reconfigured or renamed; there was no longer an adult education program by itself, rather adult education faculty; and the program name had changed to "educational leadership, HRD, higher education, or instructional technology" (Milton et al., 2003, p. 35).

According to Milton et al. (2003), program integration, responsiveness to change, and leadership were significant factors for an adult education program to succeed. Most adult education programs in the study were located in the colleges of education. The study reported that adult education programs that created boundaries within their institutions could become marginalized. There was a concern about programs that expanded across departments or disciplines running the risk of dilution and absorption. The predicament was to integrate adult education programs into the main focus of education. Understanding the institutional politics and taking an active and leadership role by being involved in changing and reinforcing perceptions was the key to success.

Both AE and HRD programs in the U.S. are primarily located in schools of education. HRD programs are also located in departments or units with names such as public administration, urban studies, leadership, higher education, management, and human services, to mention a few (Kuchinke, 2003). When it comes to program structure, both fields provide graduate (master and doctoral) degrees and are located in related program areas with comparable names such as administrative and educational leadership, career development, instructional design and development, instructional technology, vocational or technical education, or higher education (Kuchinke, 2003; Milton et al., 2003).

Program identity, philosophical approaches, and program characteristics can be essential attributes for an academic field to survive in a rapidly changing society because they represent the foundation and signature of a field. But when the line distinguishing two fields blurs and their applications become increasingly integrated, there may be issues of concern related to changes in the academic market and implications for program redesign, recruitment of students, and maintenance of program status.

#### Methodology

The existing literature suggests that most AE and HRD programs in the U.S. offer graduate level education (Brown, 2004; Gaudet & Vincent, 1993; Kuchinke, 2002). Because the

purpose of this study was to investigate the existing AE and HRD graduate programs in the U.S., a comprehensive approach was the best method to conduct this study. The study examined *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006) to identify the programs related to both fields across the U.S. *Peterson's* contains a comprehensive file of degree-granting, post-secondary colleges and universities in the U.S. The profiles of academic programs include details on general institutional information such as enrollment, academic setting, program accreditation, and degrees granted; geographic and ethnicity information of student population; enrollment patterns; admissions such as entrance difficulty, requirements, and deadlines; graduation requirements; expenses and financial aid; housing; campus life; student and career services; sports; majors; and application contact.

Data collection included two steps. First, the *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006) was used to identify these programs. Second, an Internet search was conducted to verify the existence of the programs found in *Peterson's* as well as to cross-examine the accuracy of demographic information related to the programs. The data were then reviewed, validated, corrected, recorded, and coded. The data included four types of information on these programs based on the research questions: (a) program names, to examine how these programs strategically positioned themselves; (b) hosting institutions of higher education to understand what type of institutions of higher education host these programs (such as public or private); (c) geographic locations, which would be helpful to provide geographical distributions of the programs; and (d) types of graduate degrees offered, including graduate-level certificate, master's, and doctoral levels. Descriptive statistics were used for data analysis purposes.

Some of the limitations of this study are based on the database—*Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006)—utilized. While *Peterson's* is perceived to be one of the most comprehensive databases of academic programs in the U.S., some programs might be excluded as each individual program needs to apply for inclusion. Further, some of the programs might have been discontinued due to various reasons, but still remain in *Peterson's*, or in some cases these programs might be part of departments that are not traditionally associated with either fields.

### **Results**

This study sought to answer one research question with five related categories that were identified in the *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006). The study surveyed AE and HRD programs in the U.S. in terms of program categories, distribution of professional areas, academic degrees, geographical locations, and types of institutions. The results are explained by categories in the following section.

## Program Categories

Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S. (2006) reported a variety of graduate programs. Each program's web page was visited to gather further information to classify the programs into like categories. As a result, there were 7 different categories of graduate programs related to the field of AE and HRD. These categories are: (a) human resource development, (b) adult education, (c) career and technical education, (d) adult and higher education, (e)

instructional design, (f) organizational change and leadership, and (g) other. The category of "other" is compiled by including the academic programs that are related to the both fields, but are hosted within different program units. Table 1 illustrates these categories and their respective sub-categories.

Table 1

Categories of Academic Graduate Degree Programs

Categories of Academic Graduate Degree Programs						
Human	Adult	Career &	Adult & Higher	Instructional	Organizational	Other
Resource	Education	Technical	Education	Design	Change &	
Development		Education			Leadership	
Human	Adult	Adult &	Adult & Higher	Adult	Corporate	Urban
Resource	Education/	Technical	Education/ Post	Education/	Training &	
Development	Learning/ Foundations	Education	Secondary	Distance Education/	Knowledge Management	
	Toundations			Technology	Wanagement	
Organizational	Adult	Adult &	Education	Instructional	Organizational	Multicultural
Learning	Education/	Continuing	Administration/	Design/	Leadership/	Education
	Community	Education/	Leadership/	Leadership/	Development/	
	Education	Vocational Education/	Higher Education/	Instructional Education	Change/	
		Technical	Management/	Education	Training/ Learning	
		Education	Supervision		Learning	
Human	Adult	Career &	Higher, Adult,	Technology/		International
Resource	Education	Technical	& Lifelong	Distance		Education
Education	& Training	Education	Education	Education		
	Community	Workforce				
	& Adult	Education &				
	Education	Development /				
		Vocational/				
		Industrial/ Training				
		Training				
		Continuing				
		Education &				
		Training				
		Management				

#### Professional Area Distribution

When graduate AE and HRD programs were analyzed by professional area, there were a total of 264 programs. Forty of them were in the HRD category while 13 were in the adult education category. The highest number of programs fell under the adult and higher education category, with 84 programs. The career and technical education category followed, with 67 programs, instructional design 26, and 25 for all other categories. Only 9 programs were under the organizational change and leadership category. Table 2 provides a summary of the frequency and percentage of these sub-categories of graduate programs in AE and HRD.

Table 2

Distributions of Academic Graduate Degree Programs by Professional Area

Category	Frequency	Percent
A dult and III about Education	0.4	21.0
Adult and Higher Education	84	31.8
Career & Technical Education	67	25.4
Human Resource Development	40	15.2
Instructional Design	26	9.8
Other	25	9.5
Adult Education	13	4.9
Organizational Change & Leadership	9	3.4
Total	264	100

## Academic Degrees

The analysis of data on distributions of graduate programs in AE and HRD by degree shows that Master of Education (n=53) and Master of Science (n=47) were the highest number of degrees offered, while Doctor of Education was offered at 42 and Philosophy of Doctorate of Education was offered at 37 institutions. Master's of Arts degrees were offered at 25 and Specialist in Education degrees were offered at 21 institutions. Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages of the graduate degree programs offered at U.S. universities and colleges.

Table 3

Distributions of Academic Graduate Degree Programs by Academic Degrees

Degree	Frequency	Percent
Masters of Education	53	20.07
Masters of Science	47	17.80
Doctor of Education	42	15.90
Philosophy of Doctorate of Education	37	14.01
Masters of Arts	25	9.46
Specialist in Education	21	7.95
Master of Science in Education	13	4.92
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies	11	4.16
Master of Arts in Education	10	3.82
Masters of Liberal Studies	2	.80
Master of HRD	1	.37
Masters of Training and Development	1	.37
Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies	1	.37
Total	264	100

# Geographical Location

The geographic location analysis of these programs revealed the majority of these programs are located in the states of Florida (n=28), Virginia (n=27), Massachusetts (n=19), Pennsylvania (n=14), and Illinois (n=13). The analysis further indicates that both AE and HRD graduate degree programs are primarily in the East, South, and Midwest of the U.S. The western part of the country has fewer programs, Oregon being an exception with 7 programs. Additionally, only 40 states out of 50 in the U.S. have at least one AE or HRD graduate program. Table 4 presents the distribution of AE and HRD graduate programs for each state within the U.S.

Table 4

Distributions of Academic Graduate Degree Programs by U.S. States

State	Frequency	Percent	State	Frequency	Percent
Florida	28	10.6	New York	5	1.9
Virginia	27	10.2	Alabama	4	1.5
Massachusetts	19	7.2	Indiana	4	1.5
Pennsylvania	14	5.3	Iowa	4	1.5
Illinois	13	4.9	Minnesota	4	1.5
Kentucky	6	4.5	South Carolina	3	1.1
Maryland	11	4.2	Tennessee	3	1.1
Ohio	10	3.8	North Carolina	3	1.1
Texas	10	3.8	Arizona	2	.8
Colorado	9	3.4	California	2	.8
Mississippi	8	3.0	Georgia	2	.8
Louisiana	7	2.7	Idaho	2	.8
Michigan	7	2.7	Kansas	2	.8
Missouri	7	2.7	New Jersey	2	.8
Nevada	7	2.7	Vermont	2	.8
Oregon	7	2.7	Washington	2	.8
Wisconsin	7	2.7	Alaska	1	.4
Oklahoma	6	2.3	Maine	1	.4
Wyoming	6	2.3	West Virginia	1	.4

## *Type of Institutions*

The final component of analysis looked at the types of institutions offering these programs. Accordingly, 202 of the programs were offered by public whereas 62 were offered by private universities and colleges. Thus, about 75% of the AE and HRD graduate degree programs are hosted in a public institution while about 25% are in private institutions. Table 5 illustrates this distribution.

Table 5

Distributions of Academic Graduate Degree Programs by Institutional Type

Institutional Type	Frequency	Percent
Public Private	202 62	76.5 23.5
Total	264	100

# **Implications for Academic Programs**

The findings of this study indicate that AE and HRD academic programs co-exist in many institutions of higher education across the U.S. These programs may have purposefully chosen to co-exist or may have been placed together in the same department by external forces. In an age of accountability in higher education where public funding continues to decrease, the market remains very competitive, and the demands of the workplace are ever increasing, neither AE nor HRD programs can afford to depend on their traditional approaches to function as independent academic units. These programs need to find new ways to strategically align themselves and become stronger in order to survive in the marketplace.

When compared to McLagan's (1989) Human Resource Wheel, this analysis in fact provides the current state of both fields which is significantly different than decades ago. HRD is traditionally identified with training and development (T&D), organization development (OD), and career development. However, the academic programs included in this study do not necessarily follow this philosophical approach. Instead, T&D is generally placed in the category of career and technical education, and OD is listed under the organizational change and leadership category. Career development, on the other hand, does not even exist as an academic program either in the AE or HRD realm. It can be argued that HRD is moving away from career development, and other disciplines such as management and psychology are filling the gap (Swanson, 2007). This is particularly evident when career development related studies or publications are examined within the AE and HRD literature. Although there have been some studies about career development within the HRD literature (Akdere & Foster, 2005; Boudreaux, 2001; Upton, Egan, & Lynham, 2003; Van Dijk, 2004), this is not necessarily a significant area of research within HRD. For example, Swanson (2007) conceptually removed career development from HRD and gave it to AE, claiming that AE is a discipline that focuses on individual development, not the organization or system. Nevertheless, it should be noted that this is not inherently the case for adult education academic programs either.

The results of this study support the current literature on AE and HRD program characteristics. As indicated in the studies of Kuchinke (2003) and Milton et al. (2003), AE and HRD programs present similar program structures but overlapping content. The implication of this is that students are better prepared for the workforce when they are exposed to both fields during their graduate education. Furthermore, Kuchinke (2007) urges HRD academic programs to increase the emphasis on various AE approaches to illuminate different aspects of human experiences in organizations. We also would encourage AE academic programs to increase the

emphasis on various HRD approaches such as organizational change and performance paradigms to consider the organizational needs and demands of today's workplace.

At a time when HRD programs are merging with other programs and AE programs are being eliminated, it is the perfect opportunity to rethink how these academic programs and fields of study can benefit from each other and how organizations can better market their programs to reach out to the current workforce. Hatcher and Bowles (2006b) recommend a proactive approach in dealing with these issues by using critical theory to bridge the gap between AE and HRD. Critical theory allows individuals to critique "social issues in order to change society's views of the issues" (p. 6).

Several strategies can be used to critically reflect where both academic programs are currently placed within institutions of higher education and what methods have been used to stay abreast of the changes in the fields. One way to get started is to look at databases with information related to programs such as the *Peterson's Graduate Schools in the U.S.* (2006). Some may wonder why their program is not included in the list of programs within *Peterson's*. *Peterson's* is a comprehensive database and a marketing strategy that may not have been considered by certain institutions of higher education in the U.S. Programs must be constantly conducting market analysis to determine whether the target audience of the programs and the needs of the fields are still current or need modification. Both fields should engage in conversations about the academic program level benefits from all stakeholders' (i.e., students, faculty, etc.) perspectives. These conversations can take place at the department, college/school, university, and AE and HRD professional association levels.

One must be creative in collaborating with other fields of study that do not involve education and bring in the educational perspective to that field. AE and HRD are fields of study that are broad and can together influence other areas from an organizational or individual perspective such as health care, military, businesses, and industry. Both AE and HRD may need to be advocates for the importance of including education and learning in any projects developed by other fields. Projects may start at the college/school level by collaborating with other areas such as engineering, sciences, and health care. This can expand to community organizations such as hospitals, local businesses, and government. The presence of both fields should be noted as an essential component of any project through organizational development, training, and learning.

Given the increasing pressures on the institutions of higher education, we believe that the results of this study call for closer collaboration on the part of major professional organizations of both fields such as the Academy of Human Resource Development and American Association for Adult and Continuing Education. While many practitioners and scholars from both fields collaborate at the individual level, the same cannot be said for professional organizations. Therefore, we suggest that these professional organizations establish formal networks to strengthen the relationship between the two fields that will benefit these academic programs. A future study is needed to understand how the scholars and practitioners from both fields view and approach the idea of closer collaboration at the academic level as a way to strengthen academic programs.

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