



Graduate Student Handbook

School of Labor and
Employment Relations

ler.la.psu.edu

Graduate Student Handbook

This Handbook formally specifies the requirements and procedures governing the faculty and students in the Graduate Program of the School of Labor & Employment Relations (LER) at Penn State. On a school level, this Handbook supplements the regulations contained in the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#). All students pursuing an M.S. in Human Resources and Employment Relations (HRER) are urged to study this document carefully. The responsibility for the satisfactory completion of all M.S. degree requirements rests with the student.

All students are expected to assume all responsibility for knowledge of all regulations. Your transition into the graduate program will be eased considerably by becoming familiar with this handbook and with the regulations specified in the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#).

Updated: Summer 2021

Graduate Program Director: Dr. Paul Clark (pfc2@psu.edu)

Graduate Staff Assistant: Erin Hetzel (eab27@psu.edu). To make an appointment, go to <https://sites.psu.edu/starfishinfo/> and search for Hetzel under Services.

Contents

A. Introduction to the Program

1. Our Mission, Program Learning Objectives, and Competency Development Model
2. Our Program by Numbers

B. Program Requirements

3. Students in Good Standing
4. Honor Code
5. Ethics
6. Scholarship and Research Integrity (SARI) Training
7. International Students

C. Programs and Courses

8. Advising
9. Programs of Study
10. Joint J.D./M.S. in HRER Program (4 Year J.D./M.S.)
11. Course Requirements for MS Degree
12. Thesis
13. Course Load

D. Resources

14. Financial Support Policy
15. Guideline for Assistantships
16. Use of Departmental Resources
17. Graduate Office Usage
18. Student Forms

E. Graduation and beyond

19. Graduation Application
20. Career Options
21. Professional Resources

F. Anything else you need to know?

22. Appeals Procedures
23. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

G. A Reminder

A. Introduction to the Program

1. OUR SCHOOL MISSION, PROGRAM LEARNING OBJECTIVES, AND COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Our Mission

The mission of the School of Labor and Employment Relations' MS in Human Resources and Employment Relations program is to prepare students to excel in a variety of human resource management and employment relations roles by developing students' functional knowledge, business acumen, global and ethical awareness, and analytical and strategic thinking skills required to facilitate employee and organizational success.

-- February 2016

MS in HRER Learning Objectives

Penn State's MS in Human Resources and Employment Relations program strives to advance our students' knowledge, communication skills, thinking skills, professional practice competencies, and ability to implement organizational policies and strategies. The five learning objectives for the program are:

1. ***M.S. IN HRER KNOW:*** *Students will be able to demonstrate the necessary advanced knowledge and competence in the fields to excel in ER and HRM careers.*
2. ***M.S. IN HRER APPLY/CREATE:*** *Students will be able to apply their knowledge by interacting effectively with organizational leaders in helping to develop and implement organizational strategies.*
3. ***M.S. IN HRER COMMUNICATE:*** *Students will be able to effectively communicate knowledge of current topics in the fields both verbally and in writing to excel as ER and HRM professionals.*
4. ***M.S. in HRER THINK:*** *Students will be able to recognize and analyze practical, legal, and ethical ER and HRM challenges in domestic and global workplaces.*
5. ***M.S. IN HRER PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:*** *Students will be able to respond appropriately to practical, legal, and ethical ER and HRM challenges in domestic and global workplaces using both theoretical and practical approaches and in accordance with the standards, values and best practices of their discipline.*

Competency Development Model

Supporting the five learning objectives, the following competencies necessary for professional success as HRM and ER professionals are developed across the curriculum (expanding from the 2016 [Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\) Competency Model](#)).

Knowledge Competencies

- **HR expertise:** The principles, functions and practices of efficient and effective human resource management in a global environment
- **ER expertise:** The principles, functions and practices of efficient and effective employment relations in a global environment

- Labor expertise: The principles, functions and practices associated with labor, workers' rights, and related organizations in a global environment
- Organizational awareness: Behavioral theories and concepts related to HRER that affect the efficient and effective performance of organizations
- Global awareness: Theories and concepts that impact the world including natural resources; the environment; and social, cultural, political, and economic relations
- Ethical awareness: Theories and concepts that help HRER practitioners provide ethical guidance to organizational stakeholders

Cognitive Competencies

- Critical evaluation: The ability to interpret information with which to make effective decisions and recommendations
- Analytical skills: The ability to use logic and reasoning to identify and evaluate the merits of alternative solutions, conclusions or approaches to problems
- Strategic thinking skills: The ability to derive effective plans and strategies aligned with an organization's objectives in a given situation

Skill Competencies

- Leadership & navigation: The ability to direct and contribute to initiatives and processes within the organization; the ability to influence others in pursuit of legitimate organizational objectives
- Ethical practice: The ability to integrate core values, integrity, and accountability throughout all organizational practices
- Business acumen: The ability to understand and apply information with which to contribute to the organization's strategic plan
- Relationship management: The ability to manage interactions to provide service and to support the organization
- Consultation: The ability to provide guidance to organizational stakeholders
- Global & cultural effectiveness: The ability to value and consider the perspectives and backgrounds of all stakeholders
- Communication: The ability to effectively exchange information with stakeholders
- Technology skills: The ability to effectively utilize the Internet, Microsoft Excel, Word, and other technologies
- Financial analysis skills: The ability to utilize financial planning and analysis tools and methods to understand financial spreadsheets and develop cost and return on investment analyses for HR and ER projects
- Metrics: The ability to create and use valid and reliable measures to manage organizational efficiency and effectiveness
- Teamwork skills: The ability to encourage and build mutual trust, respect, and cooperation among team members

To develop these competencies, we use the following targeted learning approaches in our classes:

- *Applied project experience*: completing applied projects that develop professional and practical skills and competencies

- *Professional career development*: developing the attitudes, skills, knowledge, and behaviors that contribute to personal career success including job search skills, presentation skills, negotiation skills, and setting and attaining career goals

2. OUR PROGRAM BY NUMBERS

Penn State's MS in HRER program is recognized by both employers and students as one of the top programs in the world for human resources and employment relations professionals. Employers recognize the high quality, professionalism, business acumen, and HR and ER expertise of our program's graduates. Many of our students graduate with multiple job offers and our personalized career services helps students find the right job and career path for their interests. Every student is treated as an individual and we are committed to helping all our students receive the education and experience necessary to launch and succeed in their chosen HR or ER career. Our program is:

- aligned with the [2019 Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\) HR Curriculum Guidebook and Template](#);
- recognized by SHRM as a quality MS in HRM program.

Enrollment

Over the five-year period prior to 2019, our master's students were 68% female, 22% underrepresented minorities, and 24% international students.

Starting Salaries

For full-time entry-level hires, in 2017 the average private sector starting salary for our graduates was \$73,000.

Alumni Network

Penn State is proud of our network of over 170,000 Alumni Association members. The School of Labor and Employment Relations boasts its own active alumni network with over 3,000 alums, most of whom continue to work in the HR and ER fields. Our School's alumni include senior corporate executives, government officials, national and local union leaders, HR consultants, labor and employment law attorneys, and professors. Our graduates are extremely committed to, and engaged with, our School and they have a long history of supporting and mentoring our students. Being part of this network gives our students a tremendous advantage when they go out to work as practitioners.

B. Program Requirements

3. STUDENTS IN GOOD STANDING

Students are expected to take the courses and examinations necessary to satisfy the requirements of the Graduate School and the School according to the rules specified in the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#). Specifically, "normal progress" refers to the satisfactory completion of courses taken, avoidance of accumulating incompletes, scheduling of required courses, fulfillment of all School and Graduate School requirements in their proper sequence, and development toward assuming a professional role.

Each student is expected to maintain a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 on all work taken, including any prerequisite or supporting courses. Students are allowed only **one** "C" on their transcript, regardless of their grade point average. To be eligible for graduation students must have a 3.0 grade point average and no more than one C on their transcript on completion of their coursework. The University uses an A through F system in assigning grades. The grade of "DF" (Incomplete) may be given when, because of extenuating circumstances, course requirements have not been completed. Students must apply for a DF. However, obtaining a "DF" should be avoided except in the direst circumstances and must be removed during the first ten weeks of the subsequent semester in order to prevent the grade from converting to an "F". Effective January 2017, all courses in the MS in HRER program are graded on the following scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-92.99
B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99
B-	80-82.99
C+	77-79.99
C	70-76.99
D	60-69.99
F	59.99 or below

In addition to the successful completion of academic work, students should endeavor to maintain the highest academic and professional standards of the School, University, and the profession to which they aspire. If a student conducts him or herself in a manner unbecoming a member of the academic discipline, such conduct may be reviewed at a meeting of the School Graduate Committee convened for that purpose. The Graduate Committee's recommendations will be made known to the School Director or their designate who will decide what further action, if any, should be taken. Disciplinary actions will be in keeping with University policies and the [Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\) Code of Ethics](#).

The School's Graduate Program Director will evaluate the progress of each active student every year.

Students must complete all requirements, including thesis defense within eight years from the date they started.

4. HONOR CODE

College of the Liberal Arts Honor Code

Adopted by the Liberal Arts Undergraduate Council, 2011

"As a member of the College of the Liberal Arts, I pledge to conduct myself with honor and integrity in all academic, personal, and professional pursuits. I will be responsible for the academic integrity of my work and encourage my peers to do the same. Bound by the respect I possess for the work and dignity of all members of the College, I strive to be an integral part of a community based upon communication, respect, integrity, and honor. I will carry these values forward as I graduate from this College, and go forth into my personal and professional life."

Students are expected to sign a copy of this [Honor Code](#) annually. A copy is also available in the Graduate Forms section of this Handbook.

5. ETHICS

[Penn State Values & Culture](#)

The [Penn State Values](#), a statement of core values for the University, represent our core ethical aspirations for all our daily activities and actions as students, faculty, staff, and volunteers at Penn State. Click on the link above for more information.

The Penn State [Ethical Decision-Making Model](#) was developed to assist faculty, staff, and students in making complex decisions. It is designed to encourage us to pause and think about the implications and consequences for decisions that we make daily. The model is based on the Penn State Values and was developed by the University Ethics Committee in conjunction with the Rock Ethics Institute. For more information, please see the [January 2016 article published in Penn State Today](#).

Avoiding Plagiarism

From the [College of the Liberal Arts website](#): "Plagiarism is the act of representing the words or ideas of someone else as your own. Whether deliberate or unintentional, it is a serious breach of academic integrity that carries serious consequences. The best protection against unintentional plagiarism is to educate yourself". The site goes on to recommend the following:

- “Learn about the various forms of plagiarism, and how to avoid them.” - see Penn State Department of English [Types of Plagiarism](#) document.
- “Practice responsible research techniques.” - see [Penn State's Library Learning Services](#).
- “Keep a writer's guide close by as you write.” – see, for example, [AUT's APA Referencing Style Guide](#).
- “When in doubt, ask for help.” – ask your instructors or [peer tutors](#).

We recommend the online tutorial to learn more: <https://academicintegrity.psu.edu/>. For further information about the College of the Liberal Arts Policies and Procedures in the case of suspected academic integrity violations, please visit <https://la.psu.edu/current-students/undergraduate-students/education/academic-integrity/students>.

If you have any questions about how to properly research your paper and cite your sources, please contact the instructor for the related course. Remember, even unintentional plagiarism can result in serious consequences.

Posting material to sharing sites including CourseHero.com is also a violation of the integrity policy.

6. SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY (SARI) TRAINING

All entering graduate students will be expected to complete the online Scholarship and Research Integrity (SARI) training as part of the core HRER 512 course, including an online program and five hours of discussion-based Responsible Conduct of Research education.

This training offers graduate students comprehensive, multilevel training in the responsible conduct of research in a way that is tailored to address the issues faced by individual disciplines.

The SARI@PSU program at Penn State utilizes online courses offered through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) program. It is the responsibility of the student to go to the SARI website at <https://citi.psu.edu/> and follow the directions below.

- Complete the SARI requirement: Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research Course (RCR).
- Once you have registered, you may enter and leave the course at any time, completing modules as time permits.
- Participants who have successfully completed a CITI course (with a grade of 80% or higher) will receive a certificate at the end of the course. **Please print your certificate to give to the School's Graduate Staff Assistant.**

7. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Penn State and The School of Labor and Employment Relations values racial, ethnic and international diversity in its student body. Our students' diversity contributes to a vibrant community. Recently, our students have come from a variety of countries including Colombia, Nigeria, The Netherlands, People's Republic of China, Taiwan, South Korea, Canada, India, and Italy.

Language Proficiency

Because the language of instruction at Penn State is English, international applicants must take and submit scores for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or the IELTS (International English Language Testing System), with the exceptions noted below. The minimum acceptable score for the TOEFL is 550 for the paper-based test, or a total score of 80 with 19 on the speaking section on the internet-based test (iBT). The minimum acceptable composite score for the IELTS is 6.5.

1. The TOEFL/IELTS is not needed for permanent U.S. residents or anyone with a Penn State or other U.S. institution's undergraduate or Master's degree, including international students.
2. International applicants are exempt from the TOEFL/IELTS requirement if they have or about to receive a baccalaureate or graduate degree from a college/university/institution in any of the following countries: Australia, Belize, British Caribbean and British West Indies, Canada (except Quebec), England, Guyana, Republic of Ireland, Liberia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the United States, and Wales. You must submit a transcript that shows you have attended college in one of these approved locations.

Financial Guarantee Requirements

The U.S. government requires schools to determine that individuals can meet expenses without resorting to unlawful employment or public funds. To be issued an I-20 / DS-2019, you must:

- Be admitted into a full-time program
- Provide proof of finances for the first year to receive an I-20 or provide proof of financing for the length of the program for a DS-2019
- Provide information/documentation for how your educational expenses will be supported in all succeeding years at Penn State.

Please visit <https://global.psu.edu/category/financial> for more information on these requirements as well as sources of scholarship and financial help.

Placement

It is important that international applicants understand that employment opportunities for full-time positions and internships in the U.S.A. are restricted by strict immigration laws. Because of this, an increasing number of U.S. organizations are only able to hire U.S. citizens and permanent residents. We provide career assistance in finding U.S. based internships and jobs, but we cannot guarantee a U.S. based internship or job upon graduation, and indeed many international students do not find a position in the U.S.A.

C. Programs and Courses

8. ADVISING

Throughout their time in the graduate program the Graduate Program Director will serve as the students' graduate advisor. In this role the Graduate Program Director will acquaint new students with the various procedures and requirements necessary for successful degree completion and assist in course selections. If a student decides to write a Thesis, the Graduate Program Director will remain the student's graduate advisor until a Thesis Committee Chair is chosen.

If a student prefers, she or he may request that a different faculty member serve as their graduate advisor. If the faculty member consents, he or she assumes the role of the student's graduate advisor. A [Change of Committee/Adviser](#) form should be completed.

In coordination with the Graduate Program Director, you will receive regular contact from the Graduate Staff Assistant who will assist in course selections, keep you on track by making you aware of timelines and important deadlines. For that reason, it is crucial that you check your Penn State email on a regular basis and respond in a timely fashion to all emails.

9. PROGRAMS OF STUDY

A program of study must be filed with the School by students in consultation with their adviser prior to completing 18 credits. Students should declare their Option and their intent to complete a thesis at this time (see the [M.S. HRER Checksheet](#)). The completed form must be signed by the MS Graduate Program Director who will help to ensure that all degree requirements are met in the program of study.

Students may amend their programs of study with the consent of the M.S. in HRER Graduate Program Director. Note, however, that it is in the student's interest to obtain permission for changes prior to deviating from the Program of Study to ensure that the changes are acceptable to the Graduate Adviser and that the student will still comply with all relevant rules.

10. COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR MS DEGREE

The requirements for the Master of Science degree in Human Resources and Employment Relations are:

1. A minimum of thirty-nine (39) credits in courses numbered 400 or above including;
2. A maximum of 12 credits at the 400 level;
3. Prescribed Courses: 501; 502; 504; 505; 512; 825;
4. Prescribed courses for the base program, the HR Option, or the ER Option;
5. A minimum of 6 thesis credits if you are completing a thesis.

Consult the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#) for additional information on requirements and curriculum.

HR and ER option requirements

In addition to the base program, there are two Options available: 1) HR and 2) ER. An option is a distinct curricular specialization within (but not exclusive to) a graduate major; it is the only formal curricular specialization within a graduate major that is recognized on the transcript and diploma for students in the major. Options are defined by certain minimum requirements related to the distinctiveness and commonality of the coursework in the major. Full details of the HR and ER Options can be found in the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#).

11. THESIS

The HRER thesis option is intended for students anticipating additional graduate or professional education beyond the master's degree or who want to gain experience using analytical, empirical, and research skills and methodologies to delve more deeply into an interesting and professionally substantive problem. It requires a minimum of six 600-level thesis credits that replace elective credits.

The thesis option requires a substantial investment of time and effort; however, students choosing to write a thesis set aside time in their schedules to complete the project by replacing six credits of course work with six thesis credits (HRER 600). Most students register for three thesis credits each during their third and fourth semesters in the program, however, all six credits can be taken in either of the last two semesters.

The master's thesis is intended to be a relatively limited research exercise, focused on a manageable empirical topic related to the student's interests within the HRER field. Theses sometimes represent a new contribution to knowledge (e.g. a survey of the attitudes of a group of employees concerning a cutting-edge issue), but this is not required. A thesis can be a replication of an earlier investigation or an attempt to extend an established hypothesis. Nonetheless, the thesis should address a well-defined topic and be carried out with care and rigor. A thesis following these guidelines could easily be achieved within fifty pages.

Example titles of theses include:

- *Health insurance: A rising cost in today's public and private sector workplaces*
- *The impact of downsizing on individuals and the community in two rural Pennsylvania plant closings*
- *The impact of a supermarket's human resource program on employee turnover*
- *The effectiveness of employee caucus groups as a diversity management initiative: A case study*

Thesis Committee

The thesis advisory committee should be identified prior to completing 18 credits. Students should have a description of their intended thesis topic when approaching a faculty member to serve as their adviser. This overview will understandably be vague, but it should identify the base issue central to the project and why it is worthy of pursuit. A thesis is written under the supervision of a thesis committee of 3 faculty members, 2 of whom must be in the School of Labor and Employment Relations. All members of the committee must be members of the graduate faculty.

- One committee member serves as Chair and primary advisor to the student.
- Students participate in an oral proposal defense, during which the committee and the student have a chance to discuss the proposed thesis, and an oral thesis defense, which the student must pass with the committee's approval.

After gaining the consent of faculty members to serve on their committee, students are to formally request the appointment of the particular faculty by submitting the [Selection of Thesis Chair and Committee](#) form. This is important as it allows checking of the eligibility of the committee members to serve on the committee and can prevent problems later. Students must obtain the signatures of their thesis Chair, other committee members, and the Graduate Program Director, and submit the form to the Graduate Staff Assistant.

Graduate students may change their committee membership at any time during their course of study. Such changes are granted with approval of all faculty members concerned, using the [Change of Committee/Adviser](#) form.

Proposal Defense

Proposals are written in consultation primarily with the thesis Chair and also with the committee members as appropriate. Thesis proposals are reviewed and approved by the full thesis committee at a formal defense meeting.

At least seven calendar days prior to a scheduled meeting of a thesis committee, the written thesis proposal must be made available to the entire School and a written notice of the meeting given to all faculty and graduate students. Primary responsibility for the notice resides with the thesis Chair, but students share the responsibility.

The meeting must be held during regularly scheduled class days or examination days at the University, unless there are extenuating circumstances. Once a proposal is successfully defended, it constitutes a binding agreement between the student and the committee (see the [Thesis Proposal Approval](#) form). If the research will involve primary data collection from human subjects, the student must obtain approval through the Office of Research Protections ([ORP forms webpage](#)).

Final Defense

A student's adviser and committee shall agree on a suitable time and place for the thesis defense. It must be held during regularly scheduled class days or examination days at the University, unless there are extenuating circumstances. The thesis Chair will

circulate a memorandum to all School faculty members and graduate students at least seven calendar days in advance, inviting them to attend the defense and notifying them that the thesis is available for their perusal. Students share the responsibility for the notification of the School.

A formal thesis defense includes: a fifteen- to twenty-minute overview of the research project by the student, followed by questions from the thesis committee and other attendees. Upon completion of the question and answer session, only the committee will remain in the room to deliberate.

No more than one dissenting vote from the candidate's committee can be registered for a successful defense. Upon completion of the defense, the [Thesis Defense Approval](#) form must be signed by the committee and forwarded to the Graduate Staff Assistant.

While a student may successfully pass this defense, he or she normally will be requested to revise the thesis before it is submitted to the Graduate School with faculty signatures.

Formatting

The thesis must be formatted in compliance with Penn State's Graduate School guidelines. The student is responsible for being aware of and meeting all thesis deadlines, including the mandatory format review required by the Graduate School.

Distribution of Copies

A student must submit their thesis in electronic format (PDF FILE ONLY) to the Graduate School.

IMPORTANT--Consult the Graduate School's [Thesis and Dissertation Information](#) page for more information, including deadlines and formatting information.

12. COURSE LOAD

Full-time graduate students may register for up to 15 credits per academic semester. Full-time students are expected to take a minimum of 9 credits during any regular academic semester to be considered full-time. Students on an assistantship or fellowship must be enrolled full-time.

Under exceptional circumstances, students may be relieved of these requirements. A request must be made in the form of an appeal to the Graduate Committee. Part-time students are relieved from the contact-credit requirement.

To resume coursework following an absence of one or more semesters, a student must submit a [Resume Study](#) form to Graduate Enrollment Services prior to registration.

13. JOINT J.D./M.S. IN HRER PROGRAM (4 YEAR J.D./M.S.)

For law students with strong interests in human resources and employment relations, Penn State Law and the School of Labor Employment Relations (in the College of Liberal Arts) combine to offer law students an opportunity to earn both a J.D. and an M.S. in Human Resources and Employment Relations (HRER) on an expedited basis. The joint degree program prepares students for careers in labor and employment law, human resource management, and labor relations.

Normally, it would take a student five years to earn both degrees, but the joint program authorizes “double-counting” of credits that reduces that to four years. By earning both degrees according to an integrated course schedule, students can enrich their education and enhance their career prospects. Holders of the joint degrees give a strong demonstration to prospective employers of their commitment to the employment and labor fields.

Admission Requirements:

Applicants to the joint J.D./M.S. in HRER degree program must have an outstanding academic record and in addition:

- Must have been admitted to the Penn State School of Law.
- Must have successfully completed the [first-year curriculum](#) at the Penn State School of Law with a minimum grade point average of 3.0.
- Must complete a plan of study, to be determined in consultation with the student's Law School Adviser and the Director of the HRER Graduate Program;
- Must submit two letters of recommendation from Penn State Law faculty.
- Must submit a statement of career goals outlining the student's objectives and reasons for applying to the program.

Interested applicants complete a normal graduate school application for admission to the joint program. However, because applicants must have been admitted to the Law School, there is no need for them complete the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) or Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT).

Course of Study:

- First two semesters - Students take the normal first-year sequence of law courses.
- Subsequent semesters - Students take a combination of upper-year law courses and HRER graduate courses. This includes completing the normal requirements for the J.D. degree as well as the normal 39 credits required in the M.S. in HRER graduate program. Masters students must also complete either a thesis, which counts for six credits toward the graduate degree, or HRER 588 Capstone course.
- Law students may apply twelve law school credits in courses related to employment and labor law towards the HRER M.S. degree credit requirements – see list below. (Similarly, as students will see from the [Penn State Law](#) website, the Law School allows twelve credits in relevant HRER M.S. courses to apply toward the J.D. degree credit requirements, excluding HRER 501.)

D. Resources

14. FINANCIAL SUPPORT POLICY

At most universities, students in Master's programs like our MS in HRER, are usually expected to cover their own tuition and living costs. This is because these programs prepare students for attractive, well-paying jobs and the cost of the program is seen as an investment that will pay for itself many times over in the course of a career. Many students take out low-cost student loans to help cover their costs. Our School does offer limited financial support to some students on a competitive basis through assistantships and scholarships.

Assistantships

The Penn State MS in HRER program has financial aid available for a limited number of students. This aid usually takes the form of graduate assistantships that pay a modest stipend and provide a full tuition scholarship. In return, students serving as graduate assistants (GAs) are expected to work 10-20 hours a week, depending on the assigned contract, assisting faculty with research or teaching. Assistantships are awarded on a competitive basis to students at the discretion of the School. All recipients must remain in good standing to maintain their eligibility for the award.

The Graduate Assistantship program provides assistance to the School, as well as financial aid and professional training to students. To the degree possible, the School and the faculty member to whom an assistant is assigned will provide tasks that will ensure that the Graduate Assistant has opportunities to increase and utilize knowledge of the discipline. To facilitate this end, students are encouraged to make known their specific interests so that this factor may be taken into consideration in assistantship assignments. Nevertheless, the needs of the School are diverse, and some assignments may be more relevant, more routine, or less interesting than others. In any event, the needs and financial resources of the School will be the most important criteria in the determination and allocation of specific assistantship assignments.

Students are to make arrangements at the beginning of each semester with the faculty member(s) to whom they are assigned to determine work assignments and schedules.

Hours: Graduate Assistants and the faculty members to whom they are assigned are responsible for monitoring the appropriate number of hours stipulated by their assignments. Often the academic workloads vary so that an equivalent number of hours of work each week may not be feasible. Because of this, Graduate Assistants and the faculty members to whom they are assigned should discuss the workload at the beginning of each semester so that students may plan in advance for their study time. If a faculty member has not assigned enough work to fill a student's hourly commitment for a week, that student cannot be held responsible for the remaining hours later in the semester, without prior arrangement.

Graduate Assistants may be asked to maintain a record of hours worked per week and present it to their assigned faculty members.

Evaluation by faculty: If a faculty member to whom an assistant is assigned considers the assistant's work performance unsatisfactory, the faculty member may apprise the School's Graduate Program Director, who will forward the complaint to the Graduate Committee. After hearing the case, the committee will forward its recommendation to the School Director or their designate. The final decision will rest with the School Director or their designate.

Evaluation by Graduate Assistant: If a Graduate Assistant who is assigned to a faculty member considers the faculty member's requests inappropriate, the Graduate Assistant may apprise the School's Graduate Program Director, who will forward the complaint to the School Director or their designate. The final decision on any action will rest with the School Director or their designate.

Renewal of Graduate Assistantships: Assistantships are renewed on a semester-by-semester basis depending on satisfactory academic and professional progress and an evaluation of the student's assistantship performance. An assistantship may be withdrawn at the end of any semester if the cumulative GPA of the student falls below the 3.0 GPA required by the program.

Scholarships

The School also has limited scholarship money made available through the following endowments:

- Chartwell Investment Partners Graduate Scholarship: made to full-time graduate students enrolled or planning to enroll in Human Resources and Employment Relations who have achieved superior academic records or who manifest promise of outstanding academic success.
- Joseph and Karin Costello Graduate Award: made to HRER graduate students in their first year of study who have demonstrated excellence in their area of study.

For full consideration, students interested in being considered for assistantships or scholarships must complete their application to the program by Feb. 1 preceding the Fall they wish to enroll. Students applying to begin the program in Spring may ask to be considered for aid, but most aid is usually awarded in the Fall for the entire academic year.

JD/MS students interested in being considered for aid should send a letter to this effect and a resume to the Graduate Staff Assistant by February 1 preceding the final year they will be a full-time student in the MS program.

Travel Subsidy

The School of Labor and Employment Relations will consider requests for travel funds from students interested in attending a professional meeting, including the Society for

Human Resource Management and the Labor and Employment Relations Association conferences, The School cannot cover the full costs of attendance but will consider a request from a student on the following basis:

- a. The meetings (or conferences) are held outside of Pennsylvania
- b. Students must be full-time, have no incompletes (grade DF), and be in good standing
- c. The School Director or their designate must approve all requests in advance
- d. Preference will be given to students making a presentation or serving on a panel.

Thesis Subsidy

The School of Labor and Employment Relations will provide, upon request, up to \$500 for thesis expenses to help to defray certain research costs including printing survey instruments, participant incentives, or travel connected with thesis data collection. If additional funding is needed, students are encouraged to apply for research support from other funding agencies.

15. GUIDELINE FOR ASSISTANTSHIPS

The relationships between faculty and graduate students should be collegial. Every effort should be made to accommodate one another's professional needs and work routines, regardless of status. Nonetheless, below are some concrete guidelines to be followed in further structuring the relationship between faculty and graduate students:

1. That the prime purpose of an assistantship should be to attract and support good students who are committed to their own development as HRER professionals and to the maintenance of a high-quality educational program.
2. That an element of reciprocity should exist, that the tasks performed by Graduate Assistants should not be viewed as a source of cheap labor, but as apprenticeships providing a learning experience; e.g., both in lecture preparation, as well as test construction.
3. That all duties required of a Graduate Assistant by a professor, including lecture attendance and required readings, should count toward the ten or twenty hours limit prescribed by the initial assignment.
4. That adequate time is given (one week) when requesting Graduate Assistants to conduct test reviews or prepare test questions or assignments.
5. That a Graduate Assistant's preference to work with a specific faculty member will be considered if made in writing, however the needs of the School will be the first consideration in making such assignments.
6. The Graduate Assistants will be given access to services, facilities, and supplies for the performance of their Graduate Assistant duties. When a professor requires extra materials or special equipment, the School or professor will provide such materials.
7. That Graduate Assistant activities are never to conflict with the normal educational and professional activities of the graduate student.

8. That, as a general policy, weekly hours not used by the professor cannot be accumulated except in unusual circumstances such as the extra time necessary to grade exams. Informal agreements between faculty and students are, of course, possible.
9. That requests for reallocations of Graduate Assistant time, after allocations have been made, must be approved by the Graduate Program Director or School Director or their designate, following consultation with the concerned faculty members and the Graduate Assistants.
10. That alleged violations of the above guidelines should be mediated through the Graduate Committee.
11. See also the [Society for Human Resource Management \(SHRM\) Code of Ethics](#).

16. USE OF DEPARTMENTAL RESOURCES

Graduate students have access to computer facilities, a study lounge, and course-related materials. Other School resources will also be available for activities related to professional advancement, e.g. independent research, professional communications, and professional travel.

17. GRADUATE OFFICE USAGE

Computers and Printers

Only HRER grad students (including students enrolled in the Integrated Undergraduate / Graduate IUG degree) should be using the computers and/or printers. Additionally, the equipment and paper are provided at the School's expense. If a friend needs to use a computer and/or printer, they should use one of the computer labs on campus.

1. Paper: As a courtesy, if the paper in the printer runs out while you are printing, please REPLACE the paper. Extra paper is stored in 506 Keller. As a reminder, ONLY HRER grad students and IUGs should use the printer, and only for MS in HRER coursework.
2. Office Courtesy: We should all remember that the office is just that, an office. Our fellow grad students and IUGs are using the grad office for school work and research. Please respect their rights to a quiet workplace and keep conversations to a minimum.
3. Refrigerator and microwave: The refrigerator and microwave are provided as a courtesy by the School and the responsibility for keeping them clean lies with the students. The teaching assistants will be responsible for managing a cleaning schedule. If the appliances are not kept clean, they may be removed from the grad office.
4. Trash and recycling: All trash and recycling must be placed in the appropriate bins in the hallway. There is no trash pickup from inside the grad office. Please take the

time to separate your recyclables and ensure that all trash is removed from the grad office every Friday by 5.

5. The grad office should be kept locked at all times when not in use, even if only leaving for a few minutes and no-one else is left in the office.

18. STUDENT FORMS

You will need the Adobe Acrobat Reader to view and print the following forms. If you do not have the reader installed, you may obtain it for free from the [Adobe Web Site](#). (*All forms are Adobe Acrobat Files.*)

- [Honor Code](#)
- [Change of Committee/Adviser](#)
- [M.S. HRER Checksheet](#)
- [HRER 595 Internship Packet](#)
- [Selection of Thesis Chair and Committee](#)
- [Thesis Proposal Approval](#)
- [Thesis Defense Approval](#)
- [The Graduate School Thesis Guide](#)

E. Graduation and beyond

19. GRADUATION APPLICATION

All applicants for degrees must file their intent to graduate through [Lionpath](#) at the beginning of the semester (or summer session) in which they expect to graduate.

20. CAREER OPTIONS

As organizations increasingly recognize the importance of acquiring, developing, motivating, and retaining their talent both HRM and ER specialists are in high demand. The internationalization of many organizations and supply chains has also led to an increasing need for professionals with expertise in international human resource management and employee relations. Changes in the nature of work, changes in the age and composition of the labor force, changing governmental regulations, corporate restructuring, and changing technologies are all factors contributing to an intensified awareness that the effective acquisition and use of an organization's people is critical for its success.

Ultimately, the role of both HRM and ER professionals is to ensure that an organization makes effective use of its human capital. This means acquiring and retaining employees able to execute the organization's business strategies, ensuring that the organization's administrative systems are running efficiently, helping individual employees and teams maximize their success and engagement, serving as an ethics champion for the organization, and acting as change agents when new practices, technologies, structures or cultures are required. HR and ER professionals do these things by analyzing and solving problems collaboratively and creatively and effectively persuading, influencing, and motivating others in the organization.

What is a Career in Human Resource Management Like?

The primary role of the human resource management function is to get the right people in the right place at the right time and ensuring that they have the knowledge, tools, resources, motivation, and processes required to succeed. HRM professionals maximize employee and team performance in alignment with the organization's strategic goals. HRM professionals can be consultants, generalists, or specialists.

The median wage for an HR manager in 2018 was \$113,300 according to O*NET (<https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/11-3121.00>), and the projected growth in the profession from 2016-2026 is 5-9%. HRM Professional is also ranked as Glassdoor's 9th Best Job in America in 2019 (https://www.glassdoor.com/List/Best-Jobs-in-America-LST_KQ0.20.htm).

In Penn State's MS in HRER degree program, you will gain the knowledge and professional skills needed to be effective in a variety of HRM roles. Some HRM career paths include:

- compensation and benefits
- recruiting
- staffing
- training and employee development
- performance management
- HRM analytics
- ethics and leadership
- diversity
- international human resource management

What is a Career in Employee Relations Like?

Employee relations involves resolving disputes between workers and managers, negotiating and managing collective bargaining agreements, and coordinating grievance procedures to handle employee complaints. According to O*NET

(<https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/13-1075.00>), the median wage for labor relations specialists in 2018 was \$67,790. Some ER career paths include:

- labor and collective bargaining
- negotiation and arbitration
- administering union contracts
- employee relations and conflict resolution
- labor union strategy
- employment and labor law
- international employment relations.

Exploring Your Career Options

In Penn State's MS in HRER program all students can participate in activities, attend lectures, and speak with numerous alumni to explore both the human resource management (HRM) as well as the Employment Relations (ER) fields. Our dedicated School's Career Services advisor and our faculty are also available to discuss the type of career path that would be a good fit for your interests and goals.

Through both our School and Penn State's Career Services, our students can receive information on internships and job opportunities around the world and meet with recruiters from leading organizations. In addition, students can schedule meetings to receive résumé and LinkedIn profile feedback, practice interviewing, and obtain overall career advice.

21. PROFESSIONAL RESOURCES

HR:

- [SHRM resources \(many require paying an annual student membership fee\)](#)
- [HR Magazine \(SHRM\)](#)
- [Talent Magazine](#)
- [Human Capital Magazine](#)
- [Human Capital Media](#)
- [Workforce Magazine](#)

- [Harvard Business Review – HRM topic](#)
- [Human Resource Executive](#)
- [HR Professionals Magazine](#)
- [Training Magazine](#)
- [Benefits Magazine](#)
- [Learning Officer Magazine](#)
- [World at Work – The Total Rewards Association](#)
- [Fast Company](#)
- [BusinessWeek](#)
- [ERE Recruiting Intelligence](#)
- [The Wall Street Journal](#)

ER:

- [Labor Relations Today](#)
- [Labor Relations topic on SHRM site:](#)
- [LERA resources \(many require paying an annual student membership fee\):](#)
- [On Labor](#)
- [Politico's Morning Shift](#)
- [Penn State's Center for Global Workers' Rights Labour Rights Indicators](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor \(resources on employee benefits, labor management services, wage and hour, disability, etc.\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics](#)
- [The International Labor Organization](#)
- [The International Trade Union Confederation](#)
- [The International Organization of Employers](#)
- [Labourstart \(a news service that covers labor issues worldwide\)](#)

F. Anything else you need to know?

22. APPEALS PROCEDURES

Graduate students in the School may initiate formal appeal proceedings on decisions that alter the student's program status. Procedures for appeal are as follows:

1. The student will consult with his or her adviser and then submit a letter of appeal to the Graduate Program Director within two weeks of the decision in question. The letter must clearly state the grounds for the appeal (e.g., answer correctness, irregularity of procedure, extenuating circumstances, personal prejudice) and make a specific change request (e.g., nullify, reverse, or modify the decision).
2. The Graduate Officer will submit copies of the letter to the School Director or their designate and for the student's file.
3. The School Director or their designate will appoint a three-member ad hoc review committee consisting of faculty members not previously involved in the situation in question.
4. The ad hoc review committee will gather relevant information, interview the necessary people, make a recommendation regarding the student's appeal, and report to the School Director or their designate as expeditiously as possible. The School Director will render the final decision.
5. The School Director's or their designate's decision will be transmitted in writing to the student with copies of the letter submitted to the Graduate Program Director, to the student's adviser, and for the student's file.

23. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

For whom is Penn State's MS in HRER program intended?

Our MS in HRER degree is a practitioner-based program designed to be the terminal professional degree for both human resource management and employee relations professionals. Class instruction is grounded in theory but delivered with a practitioner application including many hands-on projects and activities designed to build practical and professional skills to prepare our students to have successful careers in human resources, labor and employment relations. Our graduates regularly secure challenging, rewarding positions with large and small corporations, consulting firms, labor organizations, federal agencies, and global NGOs. Our program admits students from a variety of countries, majors, and backgrounds, and does not require a business degree for admission.

When is the application deadline?

For admission to begin in Fall semester: all application materials including reference letters and test scores must be received by February 1 for full consideration.

May I use paid professional assistance in completing my application?

No, you may not. We expect and require all applicants to individually complete their application materials without the use of consultants, agents, credentials services,

editors, or any other form of paid professional assistance. The use of any such service or assistance may lead to the rejection of an application, the revocation of an offer of admission, withdrawal or cancellation of an existing offer of admission, or involuntary withdrawal of the student from Penn State University.

Do you require work experience?

Work experience is not required for admission to our program, but most of our students have at least some related internship experience. We will provide assistance in finding a relevant, paid internship and permanent position for you while you are in the program. These internships often result in permanent job offers and great careers for our students.

Do you have online or hybrid degree programs?

Although we do not have a hybrid degree, we do have the top ranked online master's degree in human resources and employee relations. The program requires two years of full-time work experience and the majority of students in the program are early-to-mid career HRER professionals. The program also attracts individuals wishing to transition to the HRER field. For more information, please visit <http://www.worldcampus.psu.edu/degrees-and-certificates/human-resources-and-employment-relations-masters/overview>.

Who hires your students?

Our students are placed in a variety of quality organizations every year. Our recent HR alumni are employed in positions ranging from talent analytics specialist, compensation and benefits analyst, HR consultant, HR generalist, HR business partner, global mobility specialist, talent acquisition specialist, professionals in rotational leadership development programs, and many other roles. Recent ER alumni have found positions as labor relations representatives, union organizers, labor researchers, and policy analysts. Leading regional, national, and global corporations; unions; and government and nonprofit organizations recently hiring our graduates include GE, Lockheed Martin, TE Connectivity, EY, International Paper, Textron, PepsiCo, Schlumberger, American Rights at Work, SEIU, and United Public Employees of California Local 792.

What is the difference between the HR and ER options?

The HR Option prepares students for a career in the human resource management field, whereas the ER Option prepares students for a career in employment relations. All students receive some exposure to the other field, but coursework in each Option is focused on preparing students for success in either the HRM or ER professions.

Can I take courses outside the HRER program?

Recognizing that the School cannot satisfy all students' learning objectives, the Graduate Program Director may give a student permission to take courses in other academic departments to satisfy his or her emphasis. However, courses taken outside the School for an emphasis cannot substitute for HRER required credits. No course should be taken outside the School without first securing approval from the Graduate Program Director.

What is your acceptance rate?

Admission to our MS in HRER program is very competitive. Applications are reviewed by a committee of three faculty members who consider applicants' academic background as well as how each applicant would shape both the cohort being admitted at that time and the program itself. Our acceptance rate varies depending on the number of applications we receive each year and is usually around 25%.

May I visit campus?

You are welcome to visit us and meet with our instructors, staff, and students at any time and tour our beautiful campus. If the timing allows, you might be able to sit in on all or part of a class and have lunch with some current students as well. The best time to visit is from early September through April, when classes are in session.

Do you have any student organizations?

Our students have the opportunity to join our award-winning Society of Human Resource Management/Society for Labor and Employment Relations. **SHRM-SLER** is a student group that is affiliated with the national Society for Human Resource Management—the world's largest association devoted to human resource management, representing more than 200,000 individual members (SHRM: <https://www.shrm.org/>). Because of this affiliation, SHRM-SLER's activities focus around both professional opportunities through SHRM and also opportunities to engage and network with the School of Labor and Employment Relation's alumni and faculty through different events and activities.

SHRM-SLER's major goal is to increase members' professional development in the fields of human resources and employment relations. They do this through a number of events including professional development workshops, alumni conversations, monthly member meetings, a mentorship program, and a networking trip where members travel to different companies to learn about their HR departments and employee relations policies.

They also have activities geared toward networking and engaging with fellow club members along with the School of Labor and Employment Relation's alumni, faculty, and staff. These activities include fundraising efforts for both THON and Relay for Life, a Fall Hayride, a student-faculty bowling event, intramural sports, and much more! Students in the MS in HRER program can also join **Student Works at Penn State (SWAPS)**. SWAPS works to bring together students with local and statewide unions and their members. Students and workers and their families share an interest in many issues including voting rights, student debt, immigration reform, and minimum wage increases. SWAPS students have worked to educate themselves, other students, and the community about these issues by doing research, organizing teach-ins, collecting petition signatures, and even by producing their own documentary (on YouTube, called *On the Edge: The Fight for a Living Wage*). SWAPS students work to promote a fair and just workplace and an understanding of the important role of unions in our society. SWAPS student members have secured paid internships with Pennsylvania unions and

SWAPS has provided many networking opportunities for students interested in a career in labor or in other social justice organizations.

United Students Against Sweatshops is a student activist organization with over 150 chapters across the country. Working with the global labor movement, USAS advocate for workers' rights locally and internationally. They are committed to holding Penn State and the brands that produce its university logo apparel responsible for ethical business practices. USAS has successfully won campaigns against Adidas, Nike, and Russell, as well as campaigns in support of local campus workers. Meeting weekly, USAS works closely with the national network to coordinate actions to bring about positive change.

Do you have a minimum GMAT or GRE score requirement?

Our MS in HRER Admissions Committee considers a variety of factors in assessing an applicant's academic success and potential, only one of which is your GRE or GMAT score. In general, we look for test scores to be in at least the 60th percentile, but this component of the application is only one piece of the student profile that we consider in our evaluation.

What is your code for the GMAT, GRE, and TOEFL?

Students taking the GRE, IELTS and TOEFL should use school code 2660 to send scores to Penn State.

Students taking the GMAT should select "Pennsylvania State University - College of Liberal Arts - MS in HR & ER".

GRE and GMAT scores are valid for 5 years from the date they are taken. TOEFL and IELTS scores are valid for two years from the date they are taken.

GRE or GMAT scores are NOT required for Penn State undergraduates or graduates.

Do I need to take the TOEFL or IELTS?

Because the language of instruction at Penn State is English, international applicants must take and submit scores for the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or the IELTS (International English Language Testing System), with the exceptions noted below. The minimum acceptable score for the TOEFL is 550 for the paper-based test, or a total score of 80 with 19 on the speaking section on the internet-based test (iBT). The minimum acceptable composite score for the IELTS is 6.5.

The TOEFL/IELTS is not needed for permanent U.S. residents or anyone with a Penn State or other U.S. institution's undergraduate or Master's degree, including international students.

International applicants are exempt from the TOEFL/IELTS requirement if they have or about to receive a baccalaureate or graduate degree from a college/university/institution in any of the following countries: Australia, Belize, British Caribbean and British West Indies, Canada (except Quebec), England, Guyana, Republic of Ireland, Liberia, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Scotland, the United States, and Wales. You must submit a transcript that shows you have attended college in one of these approved locations.

How can I check the status of my application?

There is unfortunately no way for you to check the status of your application. We try to send out emails when applications are complete and you are welcome to email the Graduate Program Staff Assistant to let her know when you have received all three reference submission confirmation emails. Application delays are typically caused by unreceived reference letters, so keeping track of which ones have been confirmed as received by the Graduate School and following up with those that have not been submitted in a timely manner will help your application be processed on time.

Do you allow deferrals?

We do consider deferral requests on a case-by-case basis. If you are considering a deferral to the following fall semester after being accepted to our program, please contact our office to discuss your options.

G. A Reminder

Please remember that all students are expected to assume all responsibility for knowledge of all regulations. Your transition into the graduate program will be eased considerably by becoming familiar with this handbook and with the regulations specified in the [Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin](#).