

Overview

Virtual delivery of the SHRM Learning System[®] course provides an opportunity for people to take the course who may live too far away to attend a classroom-based course, who may have schedules that make regular class attendance impossible, or who may not be interested in attending a regularly scheduled class but would like the support of an instructor and other HR professionals as they work through the materials.

Many of our college and university partners offer the SHRM Learning System course virtually. While some participants live within the institutions' general service area, they also attract human resource practitioners living abroad and human resource professionals with disabilities.

The SHRM Learning System is the foundation for your virtual course. Online participants will access the learning software via the Internet.

Responsibilities

Education Partner will:

- Create the foundation for the online course by using a courseware development tool such as Blackboard or WebCT.
- Secure a qualified and SHRM certified instructor who has experience teaching the SHRM Learning System course and, ideally, has online teaching experience.
- Provide technical support to participants related to using the course Web site.

SHRM/HC will:

- Supply you with print materials for each participant and your instructor.
- Provide you with access to the SHRM Learning System Web site.
- Track pass rates for your organization.

Course administrator will:

- Determine the specific responsibilities of the administrator and instructor prior to the course start.
- Determine the criteria that needs to be met in order for a participant to pass the course.
- Determine course start and end dates.
- Enroll the students into the Learning System Web site via www.PartnerRC.com.
- Communicate appropriate information from SHRM to the instructor.
- Maintain ongoing coordination and communication with the instructor regarding course logistics.
- Produce certificates of achievement for participants.

Course instructor will:

- Set clear expectations regarding completion of assignments and online tests.
- Serve as a guide and resource for students as they work through the course.
- Maintain momentum of the course and keep participants engaged.
- Monitor participant progress.

Participants will:

- Need access to a computer, the Internet, and an e-mail account.
- Receive participant materials from the partner.
- Attend Web-based classes and complete assignments and tests as scheduled.

Course Decisions

The following questions identify decisions that must be made in designing a virtual course offering. It is strongly recommended that the course administrator and the instructor work together to make decisions relative to the role of the instructor, instructor/student communications, and online activities.

Course logistics:

- Where will the course Web site be hosted?
- What capabilities will the course Web site provide?
- Who will create and maintain the course Web site?
- Who at the organization will be responsible for providing technical support for the course Web site?
- How many students will be allowed to register for the course?

Course schedule:

- How closely will students be expected to maintain the course schedule in completing tests and other assignments?
- What action will be taken if a participant begins to fall significantly behind the published course schedule?

Communication between instructor and participants:

- How frequently should the instructor be expected to post a general message to participants as a whole? What should be the purpose or content of these group messages?
- Will students communicate with the instructor through the Web site, by individual e-mail, or both? What guidelines will participants be given for using different ways of communication?
- What expectations should be set on how quickly participants can expect a response from the instructor?
- Will participants' content-related questions be posted with responses online, or will the response be directed only to the individual who raised the question?
- What access (if any) will participants have to the instructor after the course ends?
- How will instructors monitor progress?

Participant relations with other participants:

- What background information on participants will be shared with other participants, and how will this information be made available?
- Will participants have access to other participants only at the course Web site or through individual e-mail as well?
- What means can be used to encourage participants to network with each other?

Evaluation of students:

- What test scores must a participant receive to pass the course?
- Will participation in a certain number of online activities or completion of a certain number of assignments be part of the criteria for passing?
- What role will the course administrator have in monitoring progress?

Overview—Virtual Participant Experience

After participants have registered for your SHRM Learning System course, you will direct them to your course Web site and provide them with the URL and password to access your secure course site as well as **www.learnhrm.com**. (We recommend using the same username and password for both sites.)

The first assignment should direct participants to:

- Read a “welcome” that includes the course syllabus and information about the instructor. Tell participants how your online course will work.
- Complete an online “get acquainted activity” that your instructor develops. The purpose of the activity is twofold—participants and instructor will get to know each other, and they will begin to get familiar with how an online course works.
- Learn about the certification exams by going to **www.shrmcertification.org** and reading about the SHRM-CP® and SHRM-SCP® exams.
- Watch the guided overview and take the assessment test. Then create a personal study plan.
- You may also want to give participants an assignment that helps them learn how to navigate the site.

Recommended Study Approach

We recommend that you use the following framework in conducting your course. Instructors will want to supplement this with online discussions and explanations of topics that frequently are confusing or difficult to understand. Most instructors also provide links to other Web sites or resources on a particular topic. Refer to online course flow for more information.

- Watch the guided overview.
- Take the 160-question assessment online.
- Get familiar with your personal SmartPath™ study plan.
- Read the first section of HR Competencies.

- Study the learning module.
- Complete quizzes online.
- Watch the Competency Quickstart Videos
- Work through the Flashcards online.
- Participate in Competencies in Action activities.

Continue in this manner until all modules are completed.

- Take the 160-question post-test online.

Hybrid Approach

Some partners may choose to use a hybrid approach to the online course. In this approach, a limited number of class sessions are combined with online assignments. Partners that choose the hybrid approach will determine the number and length of classroom sessions that they will offer. The following are several options that can be used. In some cases, a partner may decide that the orientation session is the only group session that will be held.

- **Orientation session**

An initial orientation session can be used to:

- Distribute course materials.
- Review the course schedule.
- Introduce the course instructor.
- Preview types of online assignments.
- Provide information on certification exams.
- Complete student profile forms.
- Clarify participant expectations.
- Overview the technology and how it will be used.
- Familiarize students with the course Web site.
- Activity for students to meet each other.

- **Lecture/discussion sessions**

An instructor may choose to have a limited number of lecture/discussion sessions to focus on specific course content. If this choice is made, the instructor (or guest lecturer) will be responsible for selecting areas of focus and condensing materials for use in the amount of time available.

When deciding on a hybrid approach, partners should take into consideration that it will:

- Limit the geographic area from which students can be drawn, because they will have to travel to a class location, or the instructor will have to travel to a central location.
- Require additional work by the instructor in planning how to modify content for use in class sessions.
- Eliminate participants who are not interested in a course with classroom meetings.

Interactive Videoconferencing

Some partners choose to offer the course via live videoconferencing to satellite campuses in order to have full classes each semester and to service students who live in less populated areas. The interactive video-conferencing format allows students at off-site locations to view and interact with the instruction while the class is in session, as well as with students at the other locations. It is fully interactive with two-way video and audio; it's almost like being in the same room as the instructor.

The course is scheduled in the same way as the traditional classroom-delivered course. For example, North Iowa Area Community College offers both the SHRM Learning System and the SHRM Essentials® of HR courses via the ICN (Iowa Communications Network) Interactive Television. In Iowa, the ICN equipment is available in every college and school district, so this allows students in remote areas to take a classroom course. Participant materials can be drop-shipped to each location.

Overview—Virtual Instructor Experience

As stated earlier, the virtual course instructor serves as a guide and resource for participants as they work through the modules. The instructor's HR knowledge and work-related experience can help stimulate thinking about content and increase depth of understanding for the participants.

This section further defines the instructor's role in making the online experience meaningful for participants. It discusses:

- The instructor's time commitment.
- Getting the course started.
- Increasing participant comfort levels.
- Developing an online learning environment.
- Maintaining course momentum and participant involvement.
- Ending the course.

Time Commitment

The time required to serve as an instructor for a virtual offering will equal and may exceed that required for classroom delivery. The instructor should:

- Commit to being available throughout the duration of the course.
- Commit to timely, ongoing interaction with participants.
- Provide additional direction or information to participants relative to the scheduled module.
- Respond to student questions.
- Develop online activities for student assignments or online discussion topics.
- Provide feedback on assignments.
- Monitor student progress and provide encouragement.

Getting Started

As the course begins, the instructor's two primary goals are to:

- Gain a sense of the participants, both as individuals and as a group.
- Get participants off to a good start by quickly involving them in the online environment.

The ultimate goal, of course, is to help them successfully prepare for the certification exams. The following course components can help the instructor gain a sense of the participants and their needs.

The screenshot shows a form titled "The SHRM Learning System Online Course Student Profile". It includes fields for Name, Current position, and Current position. Below these are several multiple-choice questions regarding the participant's background, experience, and reasons for taking the course. The form is designed to gather information about the participant's background and reasons for taking the course.

Pre-Class Survey

The pre-class survey provides information about the participant's background in HR and primary reasons for taking the course. Reasons for taking the course will vary from certification preparation to general professional development.

Forming a distinct picture of participants will help the instructor interact successfully with each of them. Having a sense of the group as a whole will help the instructor more effectively gauge activities that support a range of participant goals.

Assessment

The assessment is a diagnostic tool, both for you and the participants. It helps pinpoint areas of strength as well as areas for focus as they work through the course. Reviewing the results of the group may assist the instructor in identifying specific areas that need more attention.

Increasing Participant Comfort Levels

The online environment provides a greater challenge than the classroom in getting the group involved, both with the instructor and with each other. To help get participants comfortable with this approach, an instructor can:

- E-mail participants individually and welcome them to the course.
- Have participants post a brief introduction about themselves and their HRM background on the message board.
- Post a general profile of the group on the message board (based on a review of the student profiles). The group profile would cover range of years and experience in HRM, types of work environments the group reflects, etc.

Developing a Virtual Learning Environment

The major goals of an online instructor are to stimulate participant thinking about course content and to increase their depth of understanding.

The online activities the instructor develops can be used as the basis for individual or group assignments, optional activities, threaded discussions or chats, or a combination of different approaches. How and when these activities will be used should be determined by the instructor and the course administrator, so participants clearly know what is expected of them.

The instructor can also provide support to participants as they concentrate on each of the functional areas by:

- Highlighting and posting short reviews of specific areas or points that often cause confusion. Prior experience as a classroom instructor is particularly valuable in identifying which areas are commonly troublesome for participants.
- Posting work-related situations or challenges the instructor has faced in specific areas of HRM and encouraging participants to do the same.
- Highlighting areas within each functional area that are highly likely to show up on the certification exam.
- Posting links to HRM-related Web sites that participants can use in their jobs to access more in-depth information on specific topics.

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Mid-term course evaluation

The **mid-term course evaluation** should be posted or sent to participants at the midpoint of the course to gauge their reactions and overall satisfaction with the course to date. The instructor should be prepared to make modifications to the course as a result of this feedback.

Maintaining Momentum and Participant Involvement

Moving participants through the material can be more challenging in an online course than in a classroom setting. To help participants stay on schedule, the instructor should:

- Set clear expectations relative to completing online assignments and tests.
- Post a message or send an e-mail at a standard time each week to remind participants of where they should be at that point.
- Monitor participant progress by reviewing the testing software report that summarizes each participant's completion of module-specific tests.
- Initiate personal contact if an individual appears to be falling behind.

Ending the Course

The following steps should be taken to provide a sense of closure for participants at the end of the course:

- A final message from the instructor to the participants thanking them for their participation and encouraging success on the exam.
- Use of the **final course evaluation** to gain participant input on the course as a whole.
- Clarification of if and how the participants can access the instructor and the course administrator after the end of the course.
- A set date on which the students will no longer have access to the course Web site and Web-based testing (**18 months from enrollment at www.learnhrm.com**).

1200-10 Learning Technology Course
Final Course Evaluation

Name: _____ Course Number: _____

Section: _____ Today's Date: _____

Course Objectives: Are the objectives presented in the syllabus for this course met? (circle a number) or not met? (circle a number) or not evaluated (circle a number)

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It is also essential that the course administrator and the instructor take time to debrief after the course is finished and that students return the evaluations. Determining what worked well and what did not can serve as the basis for strengthening the course in the future.

Serving as a virtual instructor for the first time will be both challenging and rewarding. Instructors may find that their perception of this role and how they can best support participants evolves over time. They will certainly find that the experience provides a valuable opportunity for their continued growth and professional development.