

MBA or MSHRM? Five questions to help you decide

Issue: Is pursuing a graduate degree worth the effort? If so, which one should you pursue?

Benefits: An advanced degree can build your HR and business know-how, plus boost career opportunities.

Action: Use these five questions to weigh your current skills and career goals to decide which direction is right for you.

The two most common graduate degrees HR specialists seek are a Master of Science in Human Resource Management (MSHRM) and a Master of Business Administration (MBA). Which degree fits your education and career goals best? Here are five questions to help you decide:

1. "How strong is my desire to move beyond HR?" In an MBA program, you'll take courses in accounting, marketing, finance, IT and management with an eye toward the strategic issues of running an organization. If your HR expertise is already strong and you'd like to develop a better understanding of business management, perhaps with an eye toward moving into another functional area, an MBA may be a good fit for your career.
2. "How complete is my HR knowledge?" An MSHRM degree offers the opportunity to build your HR skills. In a typical program, you'll take about a dozen classes focused on specific human resource issues, such as compensation, benefits and employee development. Even if you choose an MBA program that offers a concentration in HR (known as an MBA/HR), you'll take only three or four HR-specific courses.
3. "How much time do I want to spend?" Requirements vary by school, but MSHRM's typically require between 12 and 15 classes, while most MBA programs call for 16 to 20.
4. "What is my long-term career goal?" If you want to move into an executive HR slot, an MSHRM can add credibility to the skills and knowledge you display. An MBA offers a more diverse career path.
5. "What's available in my area?" Compared to the MBA degree, relatively few schools offer the MSHRM. Some schools offer online course options.

You can find a list of 75 schools offering MSHRM programs and MBA programs with HR concentration (MBA/HR) at www.hrspecialist.net/extra.