

The HR certification wars: SHRM vs HRCI



For nearly four decades, the HR Certification Institute (HRCI) served happily as the semi-independent certification arm of HR's big-dog association, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).



That marriage ended last year when SHRM announced it was launching its own certification exam and credentials—the SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) and SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP).

In mid-2014, HRCI packed up its belongings and moved out of SHRM's Virginia headquarters. The controversy played out in public that summer when SHRM blocked HRCI from exhibiting at the big SHRM annual conference. HRCI was back in 2015 with a small booth at the show.

Soon after the breakup, HRCI quickly began a marketing effort to promote it as “the gold standard” of HR certifications. Among HRCI's efforts: discounted exam preparation fees and a new \$100 “second chance insurance” option for people who fail the test the first time.

As of last year, more than 140,000 HR professionals held certifications through HRCI, including the popular Professional in Human Resources (PHR) and Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR). HRCI admits that the number of people recertifying through HRCI has dropped in 2015 due to the new competition, but it hasn't released specific numbers.

Meanwhile, SHRM says nearly 60,000 HR professionals achieved SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP certifications by completing its Online Tutorial Pathway over the past year. This allowed HR professionals to quietly slide over from their HRCI certification to collect a handful of new credentialing letters after their name from SHRM.

Pass rates: HRCI vs. SHRM

	HRCI	SHRM
General certification exam	57%	69%
Senior certification exam	54%	53%

SHRM also began offering its first certification exams in May 2015. The grades from that inaugural batch of SHRM certification tests were mailed in August to test takers.

The results? It appears the SHRM test wasn't as difficult as the long-standing HRCI exam.

SHRM says 69% of people who took the SHRM-CP exam in May passed. That's well above the 57% pass rate for [the most recent batch](#) of PHR exams from HRCI.

For senior HR certification, the exam pass rates were similar between the two groups—53% for SHRM-SCP

exams and 54% for HRCI's SPHR exam.

A SHRM spokesman said both its rates are “within industry standards.”

Online resources Learn more about HRCI certification at www.hrci.org and SHRM certification at www.SHRMcertification.org.