

The following content was drafted in response to Representative Frederica Wilson’s questions during the House Committee on Education and the Workforce’s full committee hearing titled “Competencies Over Degrees: Transitioning to a Skills-Based Economy.”

Rep. Wilson asked about what steps the panelists’ organizations have taken to address the gap in soft-skills acquisition.

SHRM believes that soft skills are vital “power skills” in the workplace and are valuable contributors to company success. These power skills are best attained through flexible, shorter, more frequent skills development training rather than a singular webinar or panel discussion. In attempting to close the gap in power-skills acquisition through skills training, SHRM recognizes the value of having several training methods available to employers so that such training is as flexible as possible. These training methods can include but are not limited to, online learning, coaching and mentoring, and interactive workshops. For further information on SHRM’s position on power skills, we encourage you to read [this](#) SHRM publication that offers extensive insight into identifying what skills are needed in a workplace, the teachability of skills, and the importance of flexible training methods.

In addition, SHRM has conducted several large-scale practice analyses of the HR profession. Results have shown that behavioral competencies (including such power skills as leadership, relationship management, and communication) are essential for HR professionals. Accordingly, our certification exams (SHRM-CP and SHRM-SCP) include items to measure these behavioral competencies, mainly using situational judgment items. In the fall of 2020, SHRM unveiled the People Manage Qualification (PMQ), designed to help people develop the skills needed to successfully and effectively manage teams. PMQ is teaching people managers how to empower teams, transform the workplace, and cultivate high-performing staff. Approximately 87% of managers who use PMQ say they’re ready to lead confidently. Furthermore, the SHRM Foundation – the 501(c)(3) arm of SHRM – has prioritized educating employers about using skilled credentials in talent acquisition.

The Foundation is widening pathways to work by providing resources and training to employers so that they can effectively assess workers’ competencies, gifts, and skills and their ability to thrive on the job. This presents a holistic “whole human” approach to hiring, retention, and growth. SHRM Foundation has published a white paper on the rise of skilled credentials, a toolkit to help employers and HR professionals adopt skills-based hiring principles and has also established an apprenticeship program. These tools are helping organizations provide customized training and to tap into more diverse job candidate pools. All of SHRM’s courses are developed to prepare HR professionals and others for certifications in HR knowledge areas and behavioral competencies.

Rep Wilson also asked how would you propose collaborating with leaders in higher education, particularly at large urban, public, minority-serving institutions, so that they benefit from some of your proposed models?

For 19 years, SHRM has worked as a liaison between business and the academic community to foster the development of strong professionals at the beginning of their careers. Through the SHRM Academic Alignment Program, SHRM provides HR curriculum guidance, free instructional content, and student career development opportunities (i.e., SHRM certification) to colleges and universities that align their HR programs with SHRM's HR curriculum guidelines.

Additionally, we provide support to the SHRM Foundation's Human Resource Registered Apprenticeship Program, providing participants in underserved and or low-income communities an opportunity to work with employers to develop their skills with on-the-job training. The Academic Alignment program also identified all Historically Black Colleges and Universities with undergraduate and graduate degree programs in administration, human resources, and management and conducted an in-depth review of existing course curricula to help HBCU schools address their curriculum gaps. For three to five years, we also actively engaged with Hispanic Serving Institutions and made great progress aligning those programs with SHRM's curriculum guides. At this point, SHRM began focusing primarily on HBCU schools to continue to make progress with those colleges and universities.

As a result of this work, we propose collaborating with leaders in higher education to help them identify employers who need to fill roles within their organization and provide the leaders and educational institutions with the proper tools to assess skill levels to inform their approach to providing adequate resources to the students they serve. While this work is specific to HR, the same approach can be expanded across industries to help institutions work more closely with employers in closing the skills gap.

Rep. Wilson also asked how policymakers can foster collaboration between formal curriculum tracks and competencies.

SHRM recognizes the value of coordinating in the context of competency-based education as it complements broader efforts that aim to move towards a skills-based hiring system. Our organization has engaged with more than 800 colleges and universities to create curricula to ensure that departments with HR focuses align with the SHRM knowledge areas and competencies. These programs provide a distinct advantage in that the students are instantaneously eligible for SHRM's flagship credential upon completion of a competency-based curriculum accredited by SHRM. There is value in coordinating not only with programs that lead to degrees, but also programs that lead to interim credentials that signal individuals' specific skills acquisition based on validated assessments of competency. Collaboration between these two formal tracks could improve students' and workers' access to the skills they need to meet employer needs and streamline the process of individuals attaining the in-demand skills necessary to be successful in the workforce.

Investing in apprenticeships, like the SHRM Foundation [Human Resource Registered Apprenticeship Program](#) (HR RAP), provides businesses the opportunity to access, develop, and retain diverse talent. These programs also allow workers opportunities to earn a paycheck while training and developing technical and "soft" skills. Apprenticeships provide career paths into hundreds of industry sectors, are



flexible to fit into any size organization and can be tailored to meet the needs of the employer and apprentice.

Another good example where the associations and private sectors can work with policymakers is the SHRM Foundation *Widening Pathways to Work* pilot program in Arkansas (AR). The Foundation is working in partnership with the AR State Department of Education, the AR State Chamber of Commerce, and ARSHRM on a hyper-localized program model, where local chambers of commerce engage and convene advisory committees with local businesses and community organizations to create interventions that result in widened pathways to economic opportunity.

Additional Resources

[SHRM Certification Resources for Educators](#)

[SHRM HR Curriculum Guidebook](#)