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# HRCI Certification vs. SHRM Certification – Is One Preferred?

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This summer marks five years since the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) announced the launch of their HR certification program intended to compete with the established HR certification program offered by the HR Certification Institute (HRCI). Many were left very frustrated by this development trying to determine whether the profession could sustain two HR certifications and if one would eventually emerge as predominant and more prestigious over the other.



At the time, HR professionals had to make the decision whether to maintain their current HRCI certification, pursue the SHRM certification, or whether a smart strategy would be to go through the time, effort, and cost to hold both certifications.

So, here we are five years later, and in my role at ASE I am regularly asked, is one certification preferred over the other?

HRCI has been offering HR certifications for over 40 years, which are well recognized and respected in the HR community. More than 500,000 HR professionals in more than 125 countries have earned certifications from HRCI. Prior to the release of the SHRM certifications, HRCI certifications were considered to be the gold standard in the field, and SHRM itself widely supported and promoted them.

HRCI currently offers several types of certifications including:

**Associate Professional in Human Resources (aPHR)** - designed for individuals who are just beginning their HR career journey.

- **Associate Professional in Human Resources, International (aPHRI)** - designed for individuals who are just beginning their HR career journey internationally.
- **Professional in Human Resources (PHR)** – designed for individuals in a professional-level HR position with 1-4 years of experience plus a high school, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degree (degree needed will depend on years of experience).
- **Professional in Human Resources, International (PHRI)** - this credential demonstrates mastery of generally accepted technical and operational HR principles independent of geographic region.
- **California Professional in Human Resources (PHRca)** - for individuals who have mastered the laws, regulations, and HR management practices unique to the state of California.
- **Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR)** – designed for individuals in a professional-level HR position with 4-7 years of experience plus a high school, Bachelor’s, or Master’s degree (degree needed will depend on years of experience).
- **Senior Professional in Human Resources, International (SPHRI)** - independent of geographic region, this credential complements local HR practices.
- **Global Professional in Human Resources (GPHR)** - GPHR certification validates the expertise of cross-border HR.

Currently HR certification and testing is the main service and function offered by HRCI. For those that hold the Senior Professional in Human Resources certification, earning the business credits needed to maintain that credential can be notoriously difficult.

SHRM on the other hand touts its program, launched in 2014, as a “competency-based” certification that will show not only what the certification holder knows but how they can apply that knowledge on the job. When SHRM implemented its certification program, it allowed a “pathway” for current HRCI credential holders to apply for the new SHRM certification(s) through a streamlined process that avoided full-blown testing. SHRM offers just two types of certifications:

- **SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP)**
- **SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM -SCP)**

SHRM is the largest HR membership organization focused on professional development. They have aligned their certification prep courses with universities, certainly catering to new graduates. Their local chapters also promote the certification. SHRM has an advantage in having the certification tied directly to the society itself, which offers access to resources, networking, training, and other programs aimed at the development of HR professionals.

David Siler, CAI (Capital Associated Industries) HR Certification Study Course instructor and Managing Partner of Distinctive HR, Inc., stated, “In many ways, I see the SHRM certifications as clones of HRCI’s. When SHRM started awarding free CP and SCP certifications to holders of the PHR® and SPHR®, they themselves made it abundantly clear that they were trying to establish their certifications on par with HRCI’s. Thus, other than testing styles (SHRM has a lot more long-winded case studies on their tests), I don’t see much difference between the competing exams other than some subtle differences in their content and presentation.”

David has also described how some experts believe the HRCI exams are more suited for smaller employers because of their emphasis on employment laws. While other experts believe the SHRM tests are better suited for larger employers, as there is not such an emphasis on legal compliance since larger organizations usually have access to a general counsel. He has described how this is all speculation, as there is no scientific data to prove that one is superior to the other, in any sized organization.

According to David, “Dual certifications are becoming more popular. Many of my candidates are hedging their bet by pursuing certifications from both SHRM and HRCI at the same time. If you’re going to spend the time and money to prepare for one certification, why not go for the other simultaneously? This wasn’t very common even a year ago but has become the norm in 2019. I can see this trend increasing into the near future. Also, there is not enough of a difference between the two to justify taking two separate cert-prep programs. If you take a prep program for the HRCI exams, you should concurrently be prepared to take and pass the SHRM exams”.

Ultimately five years later, we are no closer to determining whether one certification will emerge above the other. Either certification will validate the holder’s expertise in the body of human resource knowledge. It’s a matter of simply determining which one is right for you.

According to David, “HRCI does have a 40-year head start on SHRM and has excellent brand recognition right now in 2019. But SHRM has more money and a larger network and is closing the gap. However, I think this has been a race to the middle and neither holds a decisive advantage. Right now, it’s a stalemate. Both are sharing the market. Both are spending large amounts of energy and resources and neither are being very profitable with the result.”

### **Additional ASE Resources**

**[HRCI Alliance](#)** - ASE members receive up to 12 HRCI credits for being employed at a member company and receive discounted exam rates. We also have an HRCI Concierge that can personally answer any certification questions you have. For more information, please contact [Kris Cifolelli](#).

**[HRCI and SHRM Certified Courses/Events](#)** – Most ASE courses and conferences are pre-approved for both HRCI and SHRM credits. View our list of [upcoming events](#) for more information. The upcoming Employment Law Conference on August 15<sup>th</sup> is worth 6.25 HRCI credits, of which 2.25 of are business credits. It has also been approved for 6.25 PDC credits through SHRM. [Register here](#).