

Kasie Whitener (00:02):

Welcome back to Moore Impact, the Moore School podcast, from the Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina. I'm your host, Kasie Whitener. And with me today, Dr. Maz Aziz, Managing Director of the Masters of Human Resources Program, the MHR program at the Moore School. Welcome in, Maz.

Maz Aziz (00:17):

Thank you very much for having me. Appreciate it.

Kasie Whitener (00:19):

I'm glad you're here. Me too. This is exciting me. So this is a program that is excelling at the Moore School. People are really excited about it, it's dynamic, it's growing, and your job is to manage the program to recruit new students, to bring those companies in, help the students get placement. Talk us through what this MHR program looks like, who the right candidates are and things like that.

Maz Aziz (00:41):

Sure. Um, so the MHR program has been at the Moore School for a while. It's been very successful. Um, I came in about three years ago, going on my third year now. So I inherited a very fantastic program. My job was to elevate it and make it more professionalized. Um, so the program is a year and a half. Um, usually the students are undergraduate predominantly. We do have some students that come in that are from the workforce. Um, the best way to describe the program is that it's a pipeline to jobs. We have two constituencies. One is the Moore School. Um, and then we have business partners through our Riegel and Emory, uh, board of Directors, which is comprised of these companies that, um, recruit most of our students. They advise us on curriculum, uh, we do consulting for them. And, um, they basically make sure that the program is producing the next generation of HR leaders.

Kasie Whitener (01:29):

Let's talk a little bit about the undergrads that are gonna move into this program. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. So are these undergraduates who were human resources majors or management majors in undergrad and now they've gone there? Or what do the prereqs look like?

Maz Aziz (01:42):

Um, so we take any major, uh, so predominantly they're business, um, students, about 60%. The next largest group would be psychology students because of IO psychology. Um, but do we do have sports science, um, sociology. So we look for talent. Um, we have a specific profile that we recruit for these companies, and at the top of that would be professionalism, um, students that know how to interact in a professional environment, um, that represent the program well. And of course, academics are very important.

Kasie Whitener (02:11):

Let's talk about the professionalism. You and I as we were getting ready for this conversation. We're talking about some of the work you're doing to get these students ready. There's a difference between coming out of undergrad at 22 years old and going in your first day on the job, and then maybe a year later or two years later, understanding sort of the rules of the environment, how things get done inside

the company, and that kind of thing. How do you sort of fast track that professionalism if the students are coming right outta undergrad and into the MHR program?

Maz Aziz ([02:38](#)):

Yeah, so the first thing we do is messaging. We have current students that are usually GA's or alumni that are really involved with the program. And when we advertise the program, when we talk to students, um, during the admissions process, we heavily, um, invest time in communicating what we look for in terms of professionalism. So even when we send admissions, uh, interview invites, we have like a little blurb that we talk about what we mean by that. Um, and so the students that are coming in understand that. Then we invest. A lot of times companies tell you, uh, you don't have experience, go get a couple years. So what we've done is we've invested in pre-enrollment development for these students. So we, let's say we admit you in the fall immediately we have, uh, um, Sylvia, who's our career coach, and then Julian, the professor that invest time doing behavioral interviewing, um, training, uh, resume building, uh, our GA's and myself kind of keep in touch with these students, communicate, um, what we expect. And that lasts all the way until orientation. Then we ramp it up with a 10 day orientation that again, talks about behavioral interviewing. We invite executives and alumni to discuss what these companies expect. And then basically they hit the ground running.

Kasie Whitener ([03:50](#)):

It sounds like an onboarding for graduate school.

Maz Aziz ([03:52](#)):

We are an hr, so <laugh> Yeah,

Kasie Whitener ([03:54](#)):

We, we would think we'd be really good at onboarding <laugh>.

Maz Aziz ([03:56](#)):

Yes. Literally. And onboarding. Um, and that gives you that level of quality that these companies are willing to pay for. Um, we have high salary, um, and placement numbers. And that's because these companies come here knowing that they're gonna get a student that's gonna go into a two to three year leadership rotation program. That's professional, that's resilient, that is very adept at dealing with ambiguity. And that just gets the project and hits the ground running.

Kasie Whitener ([04:20](#)):

The students that you bring in that are direct graduates out of the University of South Carolina, what's the percentage of of your student population that came out of Carolina versus students that come in from other schools?

Maz Aziz ([04:31](#)):

It's usually around 15%. We're trying to increase that, you know, in, in the coming years. So that's what we're gonna invest this semester in really going after like, marketing, management, finance, all the students trying to get the pipeline, you know, from the Moore School.

Kasie Whitener ([04:45](#)):

Some of our own undergrads get them to stick around for another year and a half. Yes, yes. All right. It's good stuff. So you talked about the business partnerships and the relationships you have with these companies and some of the projects that the MHR students are working on. Talk a little bit about some of the best ones you guys had. You mentioned earlier, like rewriting an onboarding program Yeah. Or building a training program, these kinds of things.

Maz Aziz ([05:04](#)):

Yeah. So these students, what happens is as soon as they come into the program in August, they are going to info sessions with these companies. Our Office of Career Management does a fantastic job of, um, lining up companies to come, um, and, uh, do info sessions and then hire these students for internships. So usually, um, from August to October, that's when our recruitment season is. And by October, um, you know, the students have internships. They know where they're going in the summer. In the summer they go into these positions like Pepsi, Honeywell, IBM, AbbVie, um, and they have like legitimate projects. I'm not talking about like the traditional intern filing paperwork and administrative. So they're given things like, I had a student that told me that, uh, called me and said, the GE wants me to revamp their entire onboarding process. And she was asking me questions. And we have mentorship beyond just the classroom. So they call me, they call the faculty who are very available for these students, and we guide them through it. The good thing is, in the fall, they were being recruited in the spring, they have, um, very long semester long projects in hr. So compensation, talent acquisition. So by then they're kind of familiar with these projects and they hit the ground running and we advise them through that.

Kasie Whitener ([06:13](#)):

I like that you've got this spring semester where they're in a classroom environment, they're working with their classmates, working with their faculty members. Yes. And then over the summer, as they're on their own in these companies, they already have that experience. Correct. They already really know what's expected of them.

Maz Aziz ([06:28](#)):

Correct. And we, what we do also, we divide 'em into, uh, eight teams of five to six students. We assign 'em a faculty mentor, and then these teams become, uh, their project teams during the semesters. And each semester we switch who the people are in the team. So we expose you to a very diverse, we're a very diverse program. So you might be with somebody that had two years of experience on every dimension of diversity to kind of expose 'em to what the real world, you know, um, professional market is that way when they hit that internship, it's not foreign to them. They know how to deal with different kinds of people, different ties, work methods, that kind of thing.

Kasie Whitener ([07:01](#)):

Talk a little bit about the class structures. So a lot of times a graduate degree program will have smaller cohorts. You'll have fewer students in your class. There'll be a lot of discussion based, uh, these kinds of case study, research based. What did the classes look like? If I'm a potential student and I'm thinking, am I gonna be there at night? Am I gonna be there during the day? Are these three hour seminars? What does the class structure look like?

Maz Aziz ([07:23](#)):

Yeah, so classes are, we are fully residential programs. So it's onsite, uh, classes. Could be from eight about, um, five. But we do have one class that's six to 9:00 PM um, that the students do. Um, the fall semester is heavily focused towards, uh, internship recruitment. So the students could have a schedule that looks like this. You have class in the morning, then you have an info session with IBM, and then you have another class, then an info session with PepsiCo the next day, you've already lined up your, um, your interviews. So you have class, then an interview with, you know, a like Chevron and then class and an interview with Chevron. So their classes, you know, are intermingled with this recruitment season. And your day could be from eight to 9:00 PM It's a very rigorous program. So, like I said, that lasts all the way until October.

Maz Aziz (08:09):

This current cohort, they're fantastic. They had the fastest recruitment season of any cohort in the history of the program. So by the end of September, they all had internships lined up. Uh, spring semester is where we really, really do a deep dive into HR. So you have talent acquisition, compensation. Uh, we do also, we're very big on business acumen. Um, HR is not just about HR anymore. It's about understanding how the business makes money, how it operates, and how you can support it. So they have, you know, uh, financial accounting, they have managerial accounting, corporate finance, and those classes are also very important. 'cause that's what the business partners tell us. We need to, you know, teach 'em. So spring is very, you have a project, it lasts for an entire semester. You and your team have to produce, uh, you know, a full, you know, project for the professor. And the professors do channel, you know, think of it like almost the project, like a, this mini dissertation. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. You have to defend your logic. Right. You know, behind everything. You have to and

Kasie Whitener (09:04):

Do the research and have the backup and all that.

Maz Aziz (09:06):

Yep. Lit review and everything. Gotcha.

Kasie Whitener (09:08):

Uh, I'm thinking, as I'm thinking through how students are going to progress through this, the support mechanism. So you of course, as director of the program, what else do you have? Who else do you have engaged? What does the scaffolding look like to support these students to make sure they'll be successful?

Maz Aziz (09:23):

So the first thing that happens once you're admitted is we assign you a buddy from a second year student, a current student. So we look at your resume, we look at their resume. We find somebody that's, that has similar background to you, and we sign you, that person, that student becomes available to you immediately upon admission. Then we start that professional development. Uh, uh, one of the professors, Julian, uh, will basically email you. He has a questionnaire for you to get to know who you are. You'll have a class with him in the fall. And, uh, he begins doing mock interviewing with you, behavioral interviewing. Because that's very important. That's how we help you get that internship. Uh, and then Sylvia from the OCM, from, uh, OCM, you know, Office Career Management, she contacts you. She does the same thing. Behavioral interviewing, coaching. Um, I basically send, uh, kind of like an

employee handbook, but it's an MHR handbook with everything you need to know, transition into the program. Um, once you start, we assign you a faculty mentor that's with you for the, in a team for the entire semester. And then each semester you have a group project mentor for faculty. So the faculty are involved. I'm involved. Uh, second year students are involved also. Alumni make themselves available. So there's, within the school, uh, of business, you can take advantage of the alumni network. You log in there, you put your name, and they assign you an alumni that was in the program two, three years ago. And, you know, they make themselves available.

Kasie Whitener ([10:41](#)):

All of those connections, all the conversations they're having all that sort of like off the books learning. Yes. Is just incredibly powerful. Yeah. It's very experiential. And when we think about measuring the student's growth over the time, from the time they get there, especially if they're fresh outta undergrad. Correct. Through this one and a half years experience at the MHR program, what kind of growth are you seeing? What kind of metrics do you guys use?

Maz Aziz ([11:04](#)):

So you see the growth, uh, qualitatively, um, after that pre-enrollment development, once they come into the program, you can see a difference in them. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>, uh, we have a 10 day orientation, and they have a case study and team building and all that. So at the end of orientation, you see kind of an elevation in the professionalism, but we are, when you really see it is it's after that spring semester when they work on those projects, they're really doing a deep dive into HR. And when they come back from their, uh, internships, uh, 60 to 70% come back with job offers. And within three to six months out of the program, we have a hundred percent placement. So the biggest bang for the buck is that internship. But we do a lot of preparation that way. You're successful, you know, once you come out of that internship.

Kasie Whitener ([11:45](#)):

When we think about regular coursework and regular course grades and all of that is, is it Master's programs have a tendency to just sort of turn it up a notch, right? Yes. That undergrad program, if you've been in for four years, you took your 15 credits or 18 credits per semester, and you're, you have this many classes and this many projects and this much reading to do, then you get in the MHR program and it turns up just a little bit more. There's more reading, there's more meetings, there's more interaction with companies, there's more experiential stuff. What's the workload like? How does somebody get prepared for moving out of that undergrad position into the master's position?

Maz Aziz ([12:20](#)):

It's, it's a shock to the system, but it's by design. So, um, what we do is, like I said, for the fall semester, you might be there from seven to 8:00 PM. However I want, I tell students, look at what that will do for you in terms of preparation. You're gonna be in an internship at a Fortune 50 company with people from Cornell, from Ohio State, from all these great universities that have also good MHR programs. But what we see is our students go there. They have exceptional time management skills. They know how to deal with a, with a diverse workforce. Um, they know how to start initiate, um, lead a project, you know, all of these things. All of this extra work that we put in is in preparation to get that 70% placement. Um, when you come. So people, students come back with job offers, you know, and these are high paying job offers. When I when you say HR, most, most people going straight into HR and making around 50, 55,000 are students, you know, going into offers around 92 is the average currently. So all that

preparation, you know, leads to that outcome that we're looking for. You know, and, and the key for us, we want to be known for quality. That's why these companies come here.

Kasie Whitener ([13:26](#)):

The companies that you're working with, they're hiring, you said, I think it was 70% of the students' placement is gonna be in the companies where they've interned. Correct?

Maz Aziz ([13:34](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. So we have these established relationships. We don't limit the students to those companies. But as a baseline, a lot of students coming out of undergrad have that uncertainty. What now? Right. You know, I knew I had it. Like when I graduated, I was like, okay, now what? Now we eliminate that uncertainty. So as a baseline, you'll have 20 to 25 companies that come and are recruiting you, specifically knowing that this program puts you through a rigorous, um, pre-enrollment professional development, a rigorous, um, orientation and a program. So they have trust in us that we're producing high quality students. So what you'll gain as a student is you're, you're gonna become highly professionalized. You're gonna be elevated in every aspect of your professional self, your education, your knowledge. And, um, you will hit the ground running. You will not be nervous when you go into the internship.

Maz Aziz ([14:20](#)):

I was texting with a student, you know, and she's like, I'm the only one that has a cubicle. I'm the only one that's working on these level projects. The other students from other universities are working on projects, but it doesn't seem like it's as relevant as mine. Right. So we, we produced that level, very confident. You can tell the demeanor of our students. We had a AI conference that the Center for Executive Succession ran last, uh, semester. And we had people from Cornell, we had Chief Human Resource Officers, VPs, and our students were mingling with these, you know, folks with ease. You know, they were leading them around, they were discussing, they were sitting at the same round tables having relevant discussions because beyond the classroom, we also have professional development workshops on Fridays is what we do. Um, Sylvia holds those. So in the first semester, it's about resiliency, time management, because they're new in the program in the spring, it's about managing, uh, generational differences in the workforce, storytelling with data. So very relevant topics beyond the classroom that executives come and teach these students. On Fridays, um, uh, pat Wright, um, also brings in CHROs. We have usually 10 CHROs that come in, our students in interacting with these leaders of HR when some of their employees don't get that time with them. So our students are very comfortable, you know, in navigating those kind of environments.

Kasie Whitener ([15:37](#)):

I love the possibility of practicing and what feels like a safe environment because you're, you've got the scaffolding. Exactly. And yet it's that practice and again, and again and again. Yes. And knowing what's expected of them, that really helps them when they do go out on their own to have that level of confidence.

Maz Aziz ([15:53](#)):

Correct. Yeah. It's, it's a, it's a testing environment. It's a safe zone where they can make mistakes and learn from them. We tell a lot of the executives told us, uh, recently in the regular and Emory board, we want them to fail, but want them to fail forward. Right. We want you to learn, we want you to make

those mistakes in that one year and a half. That way when you come to us, we know you're not gonna be perfect, but you know how to fail. And that becomes feedback instead of just failure feedback and you move yourself forward.

Kasie Whitener ([16:20](#)):

One of the other challenges for undergrads, not only, you know, what am I supposed to do? Where am I supposed to go? <laugh> Um, but is to see like, how do I see myself in these businesses? Where do I fit in? How can I contribute? How can I be a meaningful contributor at this company or that company? And a lot of times it's that search that leads to high turnover. Yes. The first couple of years coming right outta undergrad. So in your MHR program, as you all are thinking about these soft skills and thinking about helping them to get placement in these companies, is it a little bit about also helping them see how their skills can be put to use in specific environments?

Maz Aziz ([16:55](#)):

Yeah. So the companies actually tell us that soft skills right now are more important than hard skills. In the past, hard skills will get you the job. Soft skills will get, get you promoted. But right now, um, soft skills is what gets you the job. Uh, we hear this time and again, they say, we can teach 'em the job. We can't teach 'em to be professionals. We don't, we can't teach 'em a time management in that short span of orientation or whatnot. So that's what we, we come in as a program. So it's part of that resiliency. That's why we throw so much. It's all of it is by design. And these students really pick up these skill sets as they move forward. Um, it takes a village, you know, it takes the Moore School, it takes the management department. It takes MHR program. Uh, the faculty are integral to that.

Maz Aziz ([17:35](#)):

The, all the staff, the office of career management. So you are well taken care of in this program as in every graduate program at the School of Business. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. Um, I was just, uh, doing orientation with the MBA program and they had a case study for these students and they were coming in fresh first day. And it was impressive to see these undergraduate students, which a lot of 'em came from school of business, you know, the more school. And they're just given solutions to world problems, you know, and I was very impressed with the process that they did. So we as a suite, as a, you know, graduate suite at the Moore School are very integrated. We work with each other. We meet weekly. We learn from each other. The MBA program does something maybe better than us. You know, the MAC program, econ, all of these things. Um, our students held a formal for all the programs last. We have a student association. So they are formal on their own. They integrate. And that's, that helps you build that massive network. Right. You know, that really helps you excel in your career. You're not just learning from a an MHR, you're learning from a, an MBA student that's coming from undergrad, A-P-M-B-A student that's in the workforce. Right. You know, and it's a massive network if you come to this, um, school of business. I

Kasie Whitener ([18:42](#)):

Tell my students all the time, I undergrads, to really think about leveraging their alumni network. Yes. Because once you come out of here, you're all Gamecocks. Yes. This Carolina alumni network is going to be how you're able to make connections. And even if you don't know somebody at the place you're trying to get into, somebody that graduated from Carolina may very well know somebody to get in there with you. So it's great to see that MHR program also leaning in Yes. To the alumni network and feeling

like, Hey, this is, we're all gonna come outta here together and we're gonna be successful in the workforce.

Maz Aziz ([19:12](#)):

Yeah. Alumni are fantastic. I went to recruit in, uh, Texas and I called some of the alumni and we went, I think, to Baylor University. So when we presented to in classrooms to students, you had an incoming student that agreed to come. So this person hasn't even started. And she talked about her experience about transition into the program and how she was recruited the admissions process. Then we had a, um, an alumni that's two years outta the program, then alumni, five years of that program. So it gives that student sitting in thinking about this program, they see their career path. Right. What it looks like, um, which is fantastic. Alumni are fantastic. And

Kasie Whitener ([19:44](#)):

To see how well they'll be supported while they're in it. Correct. Yes. It's amazing. All right, so let's talk numbers. Okay. How many students get admitted to the program every year and how many are graduating? Right. Um, and as they're leaving the program, we, well, we already talked about placement numbers. Yeah. Um, but gimme some idea of like, if I'm an applicant, how many applications are you guys getting? How many are you accepting?

Maz Aziz ([20:05](#)):

So, uh, we have roughly, we take 46 students, 40 to 46. Um, like I said, we're concerned about quality. Um, usually currently the, uh, admission, whatever the acceptance rate is around 48 or 46%. So half don't make it. Um, it is very selective. Um, but sometimes what we do, if you're very competitive and you to make it this round, what we do is we work with you even, you know, beyond that. And we help you get better to apply for the next cohort. So we create a kind of a two year pipeline. We work with you. Um, so 46 students. Um, the demographics are usually 70% female, 30% male. Um, diversity is around 30, 28, 30%. Um, underrepresented. Um, in terms of placement, it's a hundred percent six month outta the program. Uh, salaries are in the high nineties currently. It's been kinda edging up, you know, last three years.

Kasie Whitener ([21:01](#)):

Say that again. As far as placement?

Maz Aziz ([21:03](#)):

Placement is is, uh, a hundred percent. A hundred percent, yeah. Usually three months outta the program. Uh, all the students have jobs. Um, depending on the cohort, it could be between 60 and 80 by grad. Actually, no, it's around 95 at graduation. And then there's usually a couple that are just, you know,

Kasie Whitener ([21:19](#)):

Not quite sure.

Maz Aziz ([21:19](#)):

Yeah, yeah, yeah.



Kasie Whitener ([21:20](#)):

Not quite committed yet. That's really exciting stuff. This is a, a strong program for the Moore School. Yes. Uh, it's gotten stronger since you've been there over the last three years. And excited to tell my undergrads this is a pathway for you as well. Yeah. Would you recommend our Moore School undergraduates go out and work for a year before they apply for this MHR program? Would you think of them or would you consider they should consider going straight in?

Maz Aziz ([21:43](#)):

I think they should go straight in, but in their junior year, maybe and senior year, go get HR relevant or any internship. We, when we talk professionalism, it's, it's an abstract thing for a 20-year-old, they've never been in the workforce. So sometimes people hold that against these students, which to me is baffling. Right. So we educate the students, get an internship because once you go in a professional environment, you'll get it, you know, you'll understand. It'll dictate you act a certain way. And then beyond that, once you're admitted into the program, that part of that pre-enrollment development is we make it a condition of admission that you get more internships and work experience and we facilitate you getting those. So a lot of the students, we have contacts within the state or outside of the state, and we get these students jobs. There are students right now interning in New York that haven't even started the program. And we got 'em jobs, you know, with leading corporations. So we'll help you, you know, you know, to get those internships. That's exciting. So internships more than experience probably.

Kasie Whitener ([22:37](#)):

This is exciting. It's fun to watch programs grow. It's fun to watch things be successful at the Moore School, so

Maz Aziz ([22:44](#)):

It's fantastic.

Kasie Whitener ([22:45](#)):

Thank you, Dr. Maz Aziz.

Maz Aziz ([22:46](#)):

Thank you very much for having me. Really appreciate it.

Kasie Whitener ([22:48](#)):

Appreciate you. When you learn more, you know more, and when you know more, you do more. This has been more impact. Thanks for listening.