

Public Abstract

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Title:A Utilization-Focused Program Evaluation of the Graduate Safety Program at University of Central Missouri

Since 1970, the University of Central Missouri's (UCM) occupational safety management program has produced 969 alumni. During this 44 year time period, no comprehensive assessment of the program has been conducted by the department. Faculty and administrators are not certain how well the program has prepared entry level safety management students for employment.

Academic departments are under pressure to demonstrate that they offer a quality product. The cost of attending college continues to rise. The information collected from this research will be the baseline for an assessment activity that will be ongoing within the School of Environmental, Physical and Applied Sciences for the Occupational Safety Management graduate program.

The results of the research (online survey of alumni and review of historical documentation) reflected the graduate Occupational Safety Management program has remained viable over this 44 year period by concentrating on the practitioner skills aspect of industrial safety and safety management. It is critical to continue to assess the program's strengths and weaknesses to remain viable for the foreseeable future due to more universities moving to online programs to fill the need for distance learning.

With the reputation of the program, long history and strong alumni base with the availability of the program online, it is likely that potential students will select one of the few remaining strong programs in the country. The online survey reflected that alumni satisfaction has remained steady and consistent over all four time periods (1970-1980, 1981-1990, 1991-2000, 2001-2014). The general studies safety course that was re-approved in 2005 has played an indirect role in the student numbers in the occupational safety management program.

The primary information to be gained from this research study is that the Department of Safety Sciences has more than adequately prepared students for a career in occupational safety management and maintained the quality of education over the past 44 years. The Department of Safety Sciences should continue the focus on practitioner skills and knowledge, as practitioner skills have been found to be preferred in not only the current study, but also in other similar studies that have been reported. Communication skills (written and verbal) were very highly rated by alumni in several survey questions as to their importance in their career. Safety leadership and ethics were rated the highest by the majority of alumni. The overall effect of reducing internship hours and adding a research class has enabled students to work a full summer and receive field experience with less credit hours to pay. These results validate the direction the Department has guided the occupational safety management program over the last 44 years. The overall effect has been maintaining the quality of the program even though the demands on entry level safety professionals is much higher than it was in the early mid-1970s.

University administrators are looking for validation of the quality of academic programs they offer. Such assessments are valuable for both internal and external reviews. In the current state of financial difficulties and constant reviews by internal and external constituents, such research is not only useful but vital.