

# COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS

## Office of Career Services

Room 420, International Affairs Building • 420 West 118<sup>th</sup> Street • New York, NY 10027

Phone: 212-854-4613 • Fax: 212-854-6190 • [www.sipa.columbia.edu/ocs](http://www.sipa.columbia.edu/ocs)

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## OVERVIEW

### WetFeet Insider Guide – Careers in Human Resources

#### *The Industries*

“Human resources is a general term meant to cover a wide range of activities. It is also increasingly referred to by the pretentious term *human capital management*. Some of the work that falls to HR professionals includes hiring and firing employees, creating organizational charts and shaping corporate culture after a merger or acquisition, managing employee communications, settling employee disputes, creating benefits programs, navigating government regulations, dealing with legal issues such as sexual harassment and occupational safety, setting up policy and programs for measuring performance, and compensating, recognizing, and training employees. In other words, HR doesn’t consist of a single activity or function but a huge network of them.”

“Long considered a support role, HR has recently assumed an increasingly strategic dimension in business as managers recognized employees as a source of competitive advantage...Meanwhile, globalization has complicated the HR role, creating new challenges, such as managing employees and overseeing employee regulations in different countries and cultures.”

#### *Some Trends in the Field*

##### *Demographic Transformations*

A number of long-term demographic trends are affecting the role of HR. As Baby Boomers retire, the workforce is expected to shrink, with the possibility of a corresponding decline in economic output. Family patterns are changing as well, with a growing number of single-person households and couples without children. Also, Hispanics have become the largest minority group in the United States, and the number of Asian Americans is also rising quickly. The effects of these trends on the workplace may not be immediately clear. What is clear is that it’s the HR department’s role to adapt to changing demographics.

##### *Rising Health-Care Costs*

Rising health-care costs are considered by many to be the most important overall trend affecting HR professionals. The rising cost of providing health-care benefits creates a challenge for employers that want to attract qualified candidates with excellent benefits, without passing rising health-care costs on to customers.

##### *Shortage of Highly Skilled Workers*

Experts forecast a labor shortage, thanks to generations moving through the workforce that are smaller than the one leaving it. In particular, highly skilled workers will be harder to find, as job growth will be concentrated in sectors such as education, health services, and professional and business sectors that require a skilled labor force.

#### *Breakdown by Industry*

*In-House HR Staff* in larger organizations may be divided into separate specialized job functions, such as: staffing, employee relations, compensation and benefits, training, and information systems. In smaller organizations, one person may work on many of the above functions.

*Staffing Firms* are firms that replace or supplement in-house HR functions. This group of firms includes companies like Manpower and Kelly as well as executive-recruitment firms, such as Heidrick & Struggles, that

place higher-level candidates into full-time positions and charge clients a percentage of the candidate's first year salary.

*HR Consulting* is a huge business. Most of the major consulting firms offer service lines related to HR such as, creating more effective organizations, managing change, developing training programs, and managing health-care programs for their clients.

*Compensation and Benefits Consultants* are part of HR consulting firms and work on such things as policy development, the selection of health care providers, and communicating programs to employees.

*HR Information Systems (HRIS)* include service bureaus like ADP for payroll, and IT firms such as PeopleSoft that offer software and systems for operating the company's payroll, employee information, human resources management, and recruitment systems.

*Professional Employer Organizations (PEOs)* provide employee services that fall somewhere between in-house staff, consultants, and service bureaus. Basically, PEOs outsource the administrative part of the HR function and sometimes more, primarily from small and mid-sized businesses, handling everything from payroll taxes to benefits to regulatory compliance and tax administration.

### ***Top Firms***

#### *Staffing Firms*

Adecco S.A.  
Heidrick & Struggles International, Inc.  
Korn/Ferry International  
Kelly Services, Inc.  
Manpower Inc.

#### *PEOs and Payroll Accounting Firms*

Administaff, Inc.  
Automatic Data Processing, Inc.  
Ceridian Corporation  
Gevity HR, Inc.  
Paychex, Inc.

#### *HR Consultancies*

Hewitt Associates, Inc.  
Mercer Human Resource Consulting  
Towers Perrin  
Watson Wyatt & Company Holdings

### ***On the Job***

#### *Common Titles*

Human Resources Assistant  
HR Generalist  
HR Manager  
Benefits Administrator  
Benefits Analyst  
Compensation Analyst  
EEO Specialist (affirmative action coordinators)  
Labor Relations Manager

Training Manager  
Recruiter  
VP of Human Resources

### ***The Workplace***

Many HR workers put in about 40 hours per week; however, people in manager, consultant, or vice president positions are expected to work longer, about 50 hours per week. Consultants work different hours depending on the client load. The size and type of organization you work in, your duties and your job level will determine your salary. Many graduates with a master's degree begin work as a generalist in a division or an analyst in one of the specialty areas.

*For more information, please refer to WetFeet's Insider Guide to Careers in Human Resources at the Office of Career Services Front Desk.*