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Article

Human resource management professional talent development: A comparative analysis of undergraduate talent cultivation curricula at QS universities in China and north America

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Abstract: The development of world-class universities is a key strategy for advancing higher education globally. Universities are increasingly focusing on designing and optimizing their curricula to cultivate talent that can meet the evolving demands of economic and social development. This study analyzes and compares the undergraduate curricula for Human Resource Management (HRM) at five QS-ranked universities in China and North America (the United States and Canada). The research highlights the following key findings: (1) In terms of total graduation credits, Sichuan University in China requires 155 credits, which is higher than the four North American universities; (2) the HRM curricula at these five universities are distinct, with Ohio State University, Michigan State University, and the University of Saskatchewan placing greater emphasis on core business courses related to HRM; (3) the HRM courses offered at the four North American universities are rarely found in HRM curricula at other Chinese universities, which may limit students' international perspectives and their global competitiveness in the HRM field.

Keywords: human resource development; talent cultivation; comparative education; world-class universities; curriculum system

1. Introduction

1.1. Research background

With the increasing trend of economic globalization and regional economic integration, the international competitiveness of countries has essentially become a comprehensive contest based on economic and technological strength. Among the factors driving economic and technological development, the quality of human resources plays a dominant role. Universities are key providers of high-quality human resources for society, meaning the economic development of a country is closely tied to the talent cultivation outcomes of its universities. Furthermore, the level and quality of education at world-class universities are not only crucial pillars of a country's higher education system but also essential tools for reflecting a nation's comprehensive strength and international competitiveness in the economic and technological arenas.

Various scholars have offered differing definitions of what constitutes a world-class university. For instance, Wang et al. [1] referenced John Vaugh, Executive Vice President of the American Council on Education, who argued that a world-class university must achieve global excellence in educational quality, offer a broad range of academic disciplines, and be recognized by most universities worldwide. Tian [2] focused on the differences in talent development, scientific research, and social service

competencies among world-class universities in China, the United States, and Europe. His research found that U.S. universities have a higher degree of internationalization in talent development compared to China, while European universities place less emphasis on social service competencies than their counterparts in China and the U.S. Zhang and Du [3] compared four world-class universities from different countries, analyzing factors such as educational positioning, curriculum, and disciplines. They concluded that talent development in these universities emphasizes its connection to socio-economic contexts, driven by the goal of supporting national or regional economic development. These universities adopt modular curriculum structures and integrate industry and education in a collaborative manner.

It is undeniable that universities sit at the top of the educational pyramid, playing a key role in cultivating high-quality talent for the economic development of a country or region. Economic globalization has accelerated the international mobility of professional talent, influencing talent development systems, standards, and university education models. Fang [4] conducted a survey of university students in Guangdong Province before graduation, revealing that core professional courses are increasingly failing to meet the demands of employers in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. To enhance the competitiveness of social industries, the talent cultivated by universities is crucial. If the curriculum planning and course design for talent development are not comprehensive and in-depth, they will fail to keep pace with economic development and adequately serve society. This will directly impact graduates' employability and significantly influence the future prospects of the country [5].

1.2. Research motivation and objectives

The development of a well-designed curriculum system for talent cultivation within universities is a crucial step toward achieving high-quality talent development. While comparative studies of HRM curriculum areas have been conducted in China, few scholars have undertaken cross-national comparative studies of HRM undergraduate programs. Most existing research tends to focus on teaching reforms and professional development, rather than comparing national HRM curriculum systems. Research in comparative education seeks to explore and enhance the foundations and prerequisites for a more comprehensive school talent development curriculum system. Curriculum planning and design play a crucial role in the teaching process. Universities must continuously reassess deficiencies in the planning and design of existing professional talent cultivation curricula. They should focus on the needs of the modern market economy and contemporary enterprises, actively seeking improvements to adapt to and respond to evolving economic models. Only by doing so can they meet the fundamental requirements for talent in the knowledge economy and technological era. Cultivating contemporary HRM talent and ensuring its quality is decisive, making this an urgent issue that cannot be postponed.

In this context, this study focuses on five universities ranked in the top 500 of the QS World University Rankings for 2023, offering undergraduate HRM programs and having readily available data on their talent development curricula. After filtering, the five selected universities are Sichuan University (China), Purdue University (USA),

The Ohio State University (USA), Michigan State University (USA), and the University of Saskatchewan (Canada). The United States, as the most industrially and technologically advanced country in the world today, holds a unique economic and political position on the global stage. Its development in higher education has garnered global attention, making it the primary focus of this research.

The QS World University Rankings is considered one of the more objective global university ranking systems. Prior to 2023, it evaluated universities based on six indicators. However, starting in 2024, three additional indicators were introduced, and the weightings of these indicators were adjusted. These indicators include academic reputation (30%), employer reputation (15%), faculty-student ratio (10%), citations per faculty (20%), international faculty ratio (5%), international student ratio (5%), international research network (5%), employment outcomes (5%), and sustainability (5%) [6].

By selecting these five universities as the subjects of this study, we can analyze the strengths of HRM curriculum planning at QS-ranked institutions while gaining comparative insights into the differences between China and North America (the U.S. and Canada). This comparison will help reveal the characteristics and advanced features of HRM program curricula at these institutions. Given that many Chinese universities still lack a comprehensive HRM undergraduate curriculum system, analyzing the HRM programs at these five universities may provide valuable references for future curriculum planning in China. This study aims to contribute to filling the gap in research on HRM curriculum development.

The specific research objectives are as follows:

- To understand, compare, and analyze the differences in talent development goals, content, and curriculum design of HRM undergraduate programs at the five QS-ranked universities.
- To compare and analyze the differences in the curriculum system designs at each university, considering factors such as credit requirements, course offerings, and specialized courses.
- To propose recommendations for future improvements and reforms in HRM program curriculum planning based on the comparison and analysis results.

2. Literature review

2.1. Current status of universities in China and north America

In recent years, world-class universities have become a prominent subject of academic research, with scholars increasingly examining aspects such as institutional systems, missions, concepts, and characteristics. Liu [7] noted that while some of China's top universities have entered the QS World University Rankings, they still lag behind truly world-class institutions in terms of academic output and the cultivation of high-level talent. Liu et al. [8] highlighted that, although Chinese universities have gradually narrowed the gap with universities in developed countries under the "Double First Class" initiative, the inefficiency of China's international talent cultivation system remains a significant challenge.

The United States is a global leader in higher education, holding a central position in the global educational system due to its large number of high-quality universities.

These institutions are renowned for their academic excellence and educational features [9]. Wen [10] and Zhang and Wang [11] conducted comparative studies of higher education in China and the U.S., focusing on differences and characteristics in higher education structure, scientific talent development, and undergraduate curriculum systems. They concluded that U.S. universities benefit from high autonomy, flexibility, and independence in governance, curriculum design, and institutional development. This allows for clear educational positioning and an open educational philosophy. Huang et al. [12] used the University of Toronto in Canada as an example, noting that its teaching model is student-centered, interest-driven, and incorporates a credit system with a "wide access, strict exit" policy, alongside deep collaboration between universities and industries. As another global leader in higher education, Canada emphasizes internationalization and aims to be a leader in global higher education. The number of international students in Canada has increased significantly, contributing to the country's economic achievements [13].

2.2. Problems with HRM programs at Chinese universities

The HRM program should be a logically structured, interdisciplinary field. As the importance of human resources continues to grow in China's development, the demand for HRM professionals is increasing. However, within the context of economic globalization, several issues exist within the domestic HRM talent development system. These include poorly structured curricula, insufficient student engagement, and a need to strengthen faculty members' professional knowledge systems [14]. Additional problems include outdated teaching methods, limited critical thinking skills among students, weak curriculum design and planning, and a lack of teaching experience [15]. The HRM talent cultivation model is overly restricted, with a simplistic curriculum structure and a lack of internationalized courses. As a result, the training of internationally minded professionals has not kept pace with societal demands [16].

Fang [17], in comparing the undergraduate HRM talent development curriculum systems between Guangdong (China) and Taiwan, observed that universities in Guangdong typically limit HRM education to six core modules: Human resource planning, recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, compensation and benefits, and employee relations management. In contrast, universities in Taiwan offer a more internationally oriented HRM curriculum, with a broader and more comprehensive range of courses. These programs are characterized by their responsiveness to social trends and business needs, with all faculty members being experts in the HRM field.

As a key driver of talent cultivation, the quality of curriculum system planning in universities significantly impacts both social and talent development. The quality of professionals trained by universities is closely tied to curriculum system planning, and its importance is undeniable. However, many universities in China are often criticized by both the public and enterprises, primarily because the talent they produce does not align with the needs of the job market. There is often a mismatch between the professional skills developed by universities and the expertise required by enterprises [18,19]. The root cause of this issue lies in the lag in the development of higher

education structures, talent cultivation models, and the lack of targeted curriculum systems. These problems have hindered the development of HRM professional education.

Universities should reform their talent development models by focusing on training objectives and curriculum planning, adopting an employment-oriented approach to strengthen students' professional skills. This will better equip HRM students to meet societal needs upon graduation [20]. Curriculum planning should evolve with the times, offering students greater autonomy in course selection. Curriculum design is a key factor influencing the quality of education and should align with talent development programs. In planning talent cultivation strategies, universities must closely connect with the needs of society and businesses. Furthermore, curriculum planning should adapt to regional industrial and economic development, creating distinctive and specialized courses [21].

Currently, there is a gap between HRM programs at Chinese universities and those at QS world-class universities. Reflecting on why graduates from top universities are significantly stronger in professional knowledge, skills, and employability compared to those from other institutions, the curriculum system for talent development is an area worth investigating. This is also the focus of the present study.

3. Research methodology

This study employs content analysis and comparative research methods to explore the features and differences in the HRM undergraduate curriculum development plans of five QS-ranked universities. Content analysis involves categorizing and analyzing the course modules of each university's talent development program. The analysis includes: (1) General education modules, covering both required and elective courses; (2) core courses, comprising foundational, professional, and practical courses; and (3) professional electives and free electives.

Bereday's comparative research method follows a two-level, four-step analytical model. The two levels are area studies and comparative studies, with each level containing two specific aspects. The four-step process includes the descriptive phase, explanatory phase, juxtaposition phase, and comparison phase [22]. Description phase: This phase involves systematically outlining the structure of the HRM undergraduate programs at the five universities, providing detailed information on the courses and modules offered. Interpretation phase: In this phase, the reasons behind the various phenomena observed in the descriptive phase are further explained, including their significance and implications. Juxtaposition phase: This phase involves organizing and visualizing the data collected in the previous two phases, creating charts or comparisons to analyze and identify the similarities and differences from a consistent perspective. Comparison phase: This is the core of the comparative research. It entails making objective judgments, conducting accurate analyses, and drawing logical conclusions. The goal is to understand the similarities and differences in HRM curriculum planning, identify general or specific patterns, and highlight the strengths of each program. This phase also provides an opportunity for mutual learning and improvement.

Comparative research in education is valuable for gaining a deeper understanding of the educational realities in different countries. It helps identify the similarities and differences between various educational systems, contributes to a better understanding of the essence of educational phenomena and universal educational principles, enhances knowledge of educational conditions both locally and internationally, fosters the discovery of new insights, and supports the development of educational policies [23].

4. Data analysis and discussion

4.1. Basic information of the five QS universities

4.1.1. Overview of the five QS universities

This study reveals that the five selected QS universities are all comprehensive public institutions with over a century of history (as shown in **Table 1**). SCU, located in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, is a leading research-oriented university in Western China, with a strong focus on high-level talent development. The HRM program is part of the School of Business [24].

Table 1. Basic information of the five QS universities.

Country	School name	Province (State)/City	Founded	QS ranking			Academy	Total credits required for graduation
				2021	2022	2023		
China	SCU	Sichuan/ Chengdu	1896	531–540	=451	=406	Business Schools	155
US of America	PU	Indiana/West Lafayette	1869	109	116	=129	Purdue Polytechnic Institute	120
	OSU	Ohio/ Columbus	1870	108	120	140	Fisher College of Business	122
	MSU	Michigan/ East Lansing	1855	157	157	159	Broad College of Business	120
Canada	USask	Saskatchewan/ Saskatoon	1907	=465	458	=473	Edwards College of Business	120

Note: (1) This data was compiled by the researcher. (2) The "=" symbol in the QS ranking indicates that two or more universities share the same rank.

PU, a renowned top-tier university in the United States, is located in West Lafayette, Indiana. The HRM program is housed within the Purdue Polytechnic Institute, specifically in the Department of Technology Leadership and Innovation [25]. OSU, located in Columbus, Ohio, offers its HRM program through the Fisher College of Business [26]. MSU, known as the "Public Ivy," is located in East Lansing, Michigan, and its HRM program is part of the Broad College of Business [27].

USask, located in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, is the largest higher education institution in central Canada. The HRM program is offered through the Edwards School of Business [28–30].

SCU has shown significant progress in recent years. While it was ranked between 531–540 in 2021, it has consistently ranked within the top 500 in subsequent years. In contrast, the other four universities have experienced a decline in their rankings, with OSU showing the most noticeable drop.

4.1.2. Talent development goals of the five QS universities

The talent development goals and missions of these universities all emphasize cultivating students' foundational professional knowledge, technical skills, theoretical understanding, critical thinking, and global perspectives. Internationalization and globalization are common dimensions in the talent development goals of these five QS universities, incorporating a global outlook into their talent training programs. This approach is largely driven by the wave of economic globalization. For example, SCU aims to develop applied, multidisciplinary professionals; PU focuses on cultivating leaders with a broad perspective; both OSU and MSU emphasize training business leaders; and USask focuses on nurturing students' critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to apply knowledge, preparing them to become global leaders in the HRM field.

4.1.3. Total credits required for graduation at the five QS universities

In terms of talent development programs, the total number of credits required for graduation varies across the five QS universities. SCU has the highest requirement, with 155 credits, while the four North American universities require between 120 and 122 credits. The differences in credit requirements are influenced by factors such as the education policies in each country and the specific talent development goals of the institutions. Notably, Chinese universities generally require more credits for graduation than their counterparts in advanced Western countries. While demanding more coursework may be seen as beneficial, it is important to consider whether the sequencing of courses, the interrelation between them, and the competencies required by employers align with the objectives of HRM talent development.

4.1.4. Course module design at the five QS universities

Table 2. Course module system and graduation credit requirements at the five QS universities.

Course category \ **School**			**SCU**		**PU**		**OSU**		**MSU**		**USask**	
			Credits	Ratio	Credits	Ratio	Credits	Ratio	Credits	Ratio	Credits	Ratio
General education module		Required	36	23.23%	51	42.50%	62	50.82%	28	23.33%	3	2.50%
		Elective	9	5.81%	9	7.50%			6	5.00%	12	10.00%
Professional	Discipline basic module	Required	33	21.29%			22.5	18.44%	56	46.67%	39	32.50%
		Elective	10	6.45%					3	2.50%		
	Professional course module	Required	23	14.84%	45	37.50%	18	14.75%	3	2.50%	15	12.50%
		Elective	12	7.74%	15	12.50%	3	2.46%	12	10.00%	9	7.50%
	Business core module	Required					10.5	8.61%			24	20.00%
		Elective										
	Practical course module	Required	17	10.94%					3	2.50%		
		Elective	11	7.10%								
Free elective module			4	2.58%			6	4.92%	9	7.50%	18	15.00%
Total			**155**	**100%**	**120**	**100%**	**122**	**100%**	**120**	**100%**	**120**	**100%**

Note: OSU requires a minimum of 121 credits for the B.S.B.A. degree, with a total of 122 credits required for their talent development program.

The course module structures at the five QS universities vary significantly. The

undergraduate HRM programs can generally be divided into three types of modules: General education modules, professional modules, and elective modules. Professional modules include foundational discipline courses, specialized courses, core business modules, and practical training modules (as shown in **Table 2**). PU has a slightly different structure, offering only two categories: General education modules and professional course modules. This reflects the diverse perspectives in curriculum planning for talent cultivation programs, though it also introduces increased complexity in analysis.

4.2. Course module design and credit requirements

4.2.1. General education modules

From the breakdown of general education credits required at each university (as shown in **Table 2**), it is evident that OSU (62 credits, 50.82%) and PU (60 credits, 50.00%) have the highest requirements. Both universities allocate over 50% of the total credits to general education courses.

OSU's general education module is divided into five categories: Writing and related skills, quantitative and logical analysis, social sciences, arts and humanities, and social diversity. These courses are designed to help students develop communication, expression, reading, and critical thinking skills. The goal is to foster an understanding of modern scientific principles, theories, and methods, as well as the relationship between science and technology. The module also focuses on human society, human behavior, culture, institutions, and the interaction between individuals, groups, and society. Furthermore, it aims to cultivate an appreciation of cultural diversity, helping students bridge racial, cultural, ideological, and national boundaries. This approach seeks to deepen HRM students' understanding of society's traditions, achievements, aspirations, challenges, and its relationship with nature.

PU's HRM program, offered through the Polytechnic Institute, follows a similar structure to OSU's, with an emphasis on helping students understand global business practices and cultural diversity. The program is designed to enhance HRM students' communication skills, critical thinking, reasoning, and value discernment abilities. The curriculum encourages students to broaden their knowledge and perspectives, integrating insights from different fields into HRM practice. This prepares students to navigate a diverse, globalized society and the evolving landscape of higher education. However, PU places a stronger emphasis on innovation and technology compared to OSU's curriculum.

4.2.2. Professional course modules

Professional courses are designed to provide students with the foundational theoretical knowledge needed to analyze and solve practical problems within their chosen field. The configuration of professional course modules varies across the five QS universities, as shown in **Table 2**. PU has the most extensive requirements, offering 15 mandatory courses totaling 45 credits (37.5%) and 6 elective courses totaling 15 credits (12.5%). This represents the most comprehensive structure among the five universities. Following PU, SCU requires 11 core courses totaling 23 credits (14.8%) and mandates at least 12 credits (7.7%) of elective courses.

USask and OSU have relatively similar course configurations. USask requires 15

credits (12.5%) of mandatory courses and at least 9 credits (7.5%) of electives. OSU, on the other hand, mandates 6 required courses totaling 18 credits (14.8%) and requires at least 3 credits (2.5%) of electives.

PU offers the most comprehensive professional course structure, while MSU takes a different approach. MSU places a higher emphasis on business core courses, which constitute 45.8% of the total curriculum, reducing the emphasis on other types of courses. It is important to note that the number of professional courses does not necessarily reflect the strength of an HRM program. More crucially, it is essential to assess whether the courses align with the contemporary HRM needs of employers in the business sector. What matters most is whether the curriculum equips students with the professional capabilities required by HRM employers. MSU, for example, places a strong emphasis on foundational business knowledge and skills, offering HRM students increased access to business resources, learning experiences, and development opportunities.

4.2.3. Business core course modules

Among the five QS universities, only three have established a specific "Business Core Course" module, which can be compared and analyzed (as shown in Table 2). MSU offers the most comprehensive business core module, with 19 courses totaling 55 credits (45.8%). USask offers 13 courses totaling 39 credits (32.5%), while OSU also offers 13 courses but totals only 33 credits (27.0%). Although USask and OSU both offer 13 courses, the credit distribution differs: OSU's courses are worth between 1.5 and 3.0 credits each, whereas each of USask's courses is worth 3 credits.

The business core courses at OSU, MSU, and USask include subjects such as accounting, economics, marketing, and business law. These foundational business courses are beneficial for HRM students, as they help develop critical thinking, analytical skills, value judgments, and problem-solving abilities when addressing organizational challenges. These courses form the basis for more advanced professional learning and provide students with the knowledge they need to navigate complex business environments.

Although PU and SCU do not have explicit "business core courses," a closer analysis reveals that their general education or foundational discipline modules include similar courses. However, the number and specificity of these courses at PU and SCU are not as extensive as those offered by OSU, MSU, and USask.

As shown in **Table 1**, the HRM programs at OSU, MSU, USask, and SCU are housed within their business schools. In their first and second years, students complete the foundational business courses required by the business school, which help them gain an understanding of core business disciplines such as human resource management, business administration, marketing, finance, accounting, and economics. In their third and fourth years, students choose their professional direction and specialization. From this, it is evident that HRM programs within business schools involve a significant amount of foundational business knowledge. However, SCU's approach in this regard is less extensive than that of the other universities, which is linked to national education policies [31] and the demand for talent in the industry in the country where SCU is located [32].

4.3. Required and elective courses and credit requirements

Required courses are those that students must take as part of their academic program. These courses provide the essential foundation of knowledge and skills within a specific discipline, ensuring a systematic and comprehensive understanding of the field. Elective courses, on the other hand, are designed based on professional needs, talent development objectives, and students' personal interests. Elective courses typically focus on more specialized, in-depth, and current knowledge or skills, offering greater flexibility. Elective courses are generally divided into "designated electives" and "free electives." Designated electives require students to complete a certain number of courses within a specific module, while free electives allow students to choose courses according to their interests and needs.

In terms of credit distribution for required courses, SCU has the highest requirement, with 112 credits (72.3%), the highest among the five universities. The credit distribution for required courses is as follows: OSU leads with 81.1% (99 credits), followed by PU at 80.0% (96 credits), SCU at 72.3% (112 credits), MSU at 71.7% (86 credits), and USask at 67.5% (81 credits). Interestingly, while SCU has the highest number of required credits, its percentage (ratio) is lower than those of OSU and PU. This discrepancy can be explained by the total number of credits required for graduation: SCU requires 155 credits, while OSU and PU require 122 and 120 credits, respectively.

However, it is important to critically consider whether a higher number of required courses and credits leads to better development of professional competence. A larger number of required courses may increase students' academic load, which could limit their ability to select courses based on personal interest. This might hinder the depth of their understanding of the field. On the other hand, elective courses are vital for helping students build a well-rounded knowledge base in HRM. A higher credit allocation for electives reflects a greater opportunity for students to choose courses freely, allowing them to broaden their knowledge and pursue their personal interests. This flexibility is important for fostering individual growth and preparing students to meet the diverse needs of society.

At PU, the following courses are part of the elective offerings: Introduction to Sociology, Elementary Mathematics—Functions and Trigonometry, Foundations of Human Resource Development, Introduction to Organizational Behavior, Project Management, and Principles of Economics.

OSU offers a range of elective courses from which students must choose at least 6 credits from one or more of the following four categories:

a) Other General Education (Gen Ed) Courses: Approved courses in various fields.
b) International Education: Courses designed to help students gain and develop a broad, cross-cultural understanding, enhancing global awareness.
c) Service Learning: Courses that provide students with opportunities to apply academic knowledge through civic engagement in communities.
d) Interdisciplinary Seminars: Courses designed to allow students to explore topics of interest through academic activities and interaction with peers from different disciplines.

Both OSU and USask include business-related courses, such as Business

Communication, Financial Management, Market Analysis, and International Business, within their "Business Core Course Modules." These courses aim to establish a foundation for business judgment and decision-making abilities, which are essential for HRM professionals.

Regarding universities with fewer or no "Practical Course Modules," SCU offers a variety of practical courses as part of its talent development plan, including Graduation Internship, Graduation Thesis, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Simulated Recruitment, and Simulated Collective Bargaining. MSU offers a Graduation Internship and allows students to count other work experience toward practical course credits. The other three universities do not offer similar practical courses. They focus more on professional knowledge and general education courses, allowing students to select courses based on their needs, interests, and academic goals. This approach is designed to promote students' overall development according to their individual preferences and career objectives.

4.4. Comparative analysis of talent development course modules—specialized courses

The talent development curriculum at the five universities includes specialized courses, each offering unique courses tailored to specific areas. For instance, SCU offers courses such as Human Resource Economics and New Theories of Human Resource Management; PU offers Global Human Resources, Human Resources Capstone, and Foundations of Human Resource Development; OSU offers Human Resource Management in a Market Economy, Negotiation & Conflict Management, and Staffing: Concepts & Competencies for Acquiring Talent; MSU offers Capstone for Management Majors, Diversity in the Workplace, and Special Topics in Human Resource Management; and USask offers courses such as Collective Agreement Arbitration, Organization Structure & Design, and Leadership. These specialized courses are seldom found in HRM talent development programs at other universities in China.

The capstone course, also known as the integrative course, summative course, or final project course, was developed as part of undergraduate education reforms in U.S. universities. It is designed to "integrate students' knowledge and skills, cultivate interdisciplinary perspectives, and enhance overall competence." These courses are typically delivered through experiential learning, team collaboration, and diverse assessment methods, gradually helping students integrate their knowledge [33]. The core concept of the capstone course aligns with the evolving needs of both higher education institutions and society, playing an important role in guiding students' career development. These courses have gained significant popularity and are widely endorsed by students. However, many universities in China have yet to develop similar courses. Therefore, determining how to design such specialized courses remains an important topic for future research in curriculum development.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The UK's Times Higher Education (THE) and the French human resources consultancy firm Emerging collaborated to release the 2025 Global Employability University Ranking and Survey (GEURS) on 14 November 2024. This ranking is entirely based on the perspectives of international employers [34]. The evaluation criteria not only assess the academic and teaching capabilities of universities but also incorporate factors from the employers' perspective, such as employer reputation, alumni outcomes, partnerships with employers, employers' presence on campus, and graduate employment rates [35]. It is evident that universities with higher global rankings tend to produce graduates with stronger employability, making it easier for them to secure good jobs. The purpose of this ranking is to reveal the quality of university education, reflect students' learning outcomes, their level of knowledge mastery, and their recognition in the global job market, as well as their future employability and the quality of employment they achieve. It provides insight into the performance of universities in talent cultivation program planning and employability.

5.1.1. SCU's HRM course design lacks an international business perspective

Drawing upon the experiences of top QS-ranked universities in HRM curriculum design, it is crucial to develop a well-structured talent development system that enhances students' employability and meets the basic needs of employers. This is an area that warrants further research. The five QS universities place a strong emphasis on their talent development goals, which reflect their educational philosophy, mission, and professional development priorities. SCU focuses on training applied, interdisciplinary HRM professionals who can work in both domestic and international companies. In contrast, PU seeks to cultivate students who are broad-thinking leaders, focusing on high-tech applications, business acumen, and leadership to enhance HRM performance.

OSU, MSU, and USask emphasize the importance of students gaining interdisciplinary management perspectives, understanding organizational operations from multiple viewpoints, and solving global HRM challenges, thus preparing students to become HRM leaders capable of tackling future business challenges. In contrast, SCU's curriculum lacks sufficient business courses to develop HRM from the perspectives of different countries and cultures, which may limit students' global competitiveness. At the same time, we observe that most universities in China place a strong emphasis on 'practical course modules,' a focus that is closely tied to China's educational policies and its strategy to become the global manufacturing center. This connection warrants further exploration by researchers interested in delving deeper into the topic.

5.1.2. Total graduation credits required: SCU has the highest requirement

The curriculum system for talent cultivation is not just about planning or implementation; more importantly, it involves a process of interconnection, integration, and interaction throughout the actual stages of planning, action, and evaluation. In terms of total graduation credits, PU, MSU, and USask all require students to complete at least 120 credits to be eligible for graduation. In contrast, SCU requires 155 credits, which is 28 credits (18.1%) more than the other four North American universities. SCU has allocated more credits to practical course modules and placed a greater emphasis on general education and foundational discipline

courses. This difference may be influenced by the strict curriculum standards set by the Ministry of Education of China, which outlines specific credit distributions for professional programs. According to these standards, the total number of credits for a program should be between 140 and 160, with no more than 85% of credits allocated to theoretical courses, at least 25% for professional electives and general education courses, and at least 15% for practical courses [36]. It is evident that Chinese universities tend to require higher total graduation credits compared to the basic requirements in Western countries. However, the total number of graduation credits should be carefully planned based on the university's development goals, the needs of the HRM discipline, and factors such as course quality, students' capacity for learning, and employer requirements.

5.1.3. Different focuses in talent development curriculum modules

Regarding the structure of the talent development curriculum modules (as shown in **Table 2**), SCU and USask divide their programs into six modules, while OSU and MSU have five modules, and PU divides its program into four modules. SCU, PU, and OSU place more emphasis on general education and foundational discipline modules, while OSU, MSU, and USask focus more on business core modules. Despite differences in course module structures, all universities maintain a core focus on HRM. The first two years are typically dedicated to general education, foundational courses, and business management courses, which form the basis of the professional program. The focus shifts to HRM core courses in the third and fourth years, along with a few remaining business management courses. An interesting observation is that SCU concentrates its courses within the first three years, whereas the four North American universities tend to distribute credits more evenly across the years. For example, PU allocates 30 credits per year, or 15 credits per semester, across four years.

5.1.4. Professional course planning: PU places the highest emphasis

When it comes to professional course module planning, PU stands out as the university with the highest credit allocation, offering a total of 60 credits (50%). This includes 15 mandatory courses (45 credits, or 37.5%) and 5 elective courses (15 credits, or 12.5%). In comparison, the credit allocation for professional courses in the other four universities ranges from 12.5% to 22.5% of the total credits in their talent development programs. The talent cultivation programs planned by the analyzed sample universities are built on the subject knowledge of HRM, with a focus on student learning outcomes. These programs include defining the core competencies to be developed in students, resource allocation, curriculum planning, assessment of learning outcomes, and strategies for improvement when learning outcomes fall short of expectations, all contributing to a comprehensive structure. Thus, it can be said that the professional courses exhibit a tightly structured framework.

5.2. Recommendations

A university diploma is often seen as a gateway to various professions. However, some universities still fail to prioritize the development of students' professional skills, leading to limited learning outcomes. These "learning outcomes" not only disappoint students, parents, and society—who have invested time, effort, and money—but also result in universities, entrusted with the mission of education, receiving an

"unqualified" report card. Universities should not merely focus on offering academic knowledge and awarding degrees; they should actively assist students in summarizing their learning experiences before graduation and preparing them for future employment or further studies. By doing so, universities can, on one hand, prevent a disconnect between academic institutions and the needs of employers, and on the other hand, bridge the gap between academia and the business world. Finally, universities can ensure that students are ready to meet the demands of enterprises immediately after graduation.

Talent is a critical resource, and the development of higher education is closely tied to the growth of academic disciplines. In the process of becoming an educational powerhouse, universities should comprehensively consider their development goals, the state of their disciplines, and current societal needs when designing talent development plans. The focus should be on cultivating high-quality talent, following the principles of "few but excellent" and "focused and specialized." Curriculum design should be clear, well-structured, and ensure a comprehensive range of course categories while also strengthening students' soft skills, leadership abilities, and the international perspective of HRM, which is essential for developing a global workforce. This approach will help HRM students develop a global mindset, international leadership skills, and the ability to solve problems in a global context, making them more competitive in a fast-paced, highly competitive, and internationalized environment.

Secondly, the structure and proportion of different types of courses in talent development programs at Chinese universities should provide students with more flexibility in course selection. It is essential to incorporate relevant sociology and psychology courses into the curriculum to help students better integrate this knowledge into their HRM studies. When necessary, Chinese universities could consider adopting the "Capstone Course" model, as seen in U.S. universities, to strengthen collaboration with industry partners. They could also learn from international programs like the "Co-op" model, which offers students more opportunities for practical experience and international internships. Building specialized courses that integrate real-world experiences would also be beneficial.

Finally, the limitations of this study are as follows: (1) It is limited to the talent development curriculum systems of five QS-ranked universities; (2) the research design is based only on universities ranked within the top 500 globally; (3) it includes universities offering undergraduate HRM programs; and (4) it focuses on universities that provide comprehensive information on their talent development courses, comparing universities in China, the United States, and Canada. This study relies on a small sample of universities and uses secondary data analysis. Secondary data often carries uncertainties regarding reliability and validity, which limits the ability to generalize the findings. Therefore, future research should expand the analysis to include universities from a wider range of countries and regions, or incorporate different types of domestic and international universities and their talent development models as study subjects. A more rigorous, in-depth study using cross-comparisons and various research methods, such as meta-analysis, content analysis, questionnaire surveys, and interviews, would contribute to the further development of research in this field.

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