

Universities Try to Serve a Generation of Those Who Seek to Do Good

Institutions add courses and degree programs in nonprofit management

By ERIN STROUT

The young adults choosing careers today watched as the Twin Towers fell, as Katrina swept onto land, and as the Asian tsunami left devastation in its path. They have led protests against the genocide in Darfur. And they spent most of their teen years with the United States at war.

Those same young adults — many of them college students — have seen nonprofit organizations step in to help during times of turmoil. Combine that with service-learning requirements and a rise in volunteerism during high school, an extraordinary increase in the number of charities created over the past two decades, and the anticipated retirement of baby-boomer nonprofit executives, and it adds up to high demand for undergraduate programs in nonprofit management.

"People my age have been really moved by what they've seen locally, nationally, and even internationally," says Megan Pfeiffer, a senior earning a degree in nonprofit management at Arizona State University. "We're more exposed to the critical needs that are apparent in the world and how the third sector has filled the gap in those needs."

For many years, the only way to earn the credentials needed to lead a nonprofit organization was to get a graduate degree or enroll in a certificate program. Not so anymore. A handful of colleges, including Arizona State and the University of Minnesota, are rolling out programs that offer undergraduate degrees in nonprofit leadership.

The exact number of undergraduate degree programs is unknown, but the ranks of colleges that at least offer courses are growing, according to the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council. The group's membership increased from 35 to 47 universities in the past six years. That growth prompted it late last year to release the first-ever curricular guidelines for undergraduate study in nonprofit leadership.

"The guidelines are really in response to student demand," says Robert F. Ashcraft, chair of the task force that created them and director of the Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management at Arizona State's Phoenix campus. "It's our first stake in the ground at a time when the velocity of growth in the sector continues to be remarkable."

A Void to Be Filled

The philanthropic sector, in particular, has a high need for new graduates. The number of charity groups in the United States has tripled over the past 20 years and continues to grow. But the sector will have a dearth of leadership soon. One industry estimate released by the Bridgespan Group, a consulting and research organization that serves nonprofit groups, says that by 2016, philanthropies will need to fill 640,000 senior-management jobs left vacant by retiring baby boomers.

Maureen F. Curley, president of Campus Compact, a coalition of about 1,100 college presidents "committed to fulfilling the civic purpose of higher education," says the opportunity for new graduates to lead philanthropic organizations makes it a more appealing career path than in the past.

"This generation has more experience than any other already because of the community-service requirements they grew up with in high school," she says. "And they feel like they can make a difference by not just being one of the masses in the corporate world."

The new undergraduate curricular guidelines outline ways to educate students about how to set up their

own philanthropic organizations, raise private donations, and manage finances. They also include lessons in marketing, leading employees and volunteers, and evaluating programs.

The guidelines also suggest ways that colleges can make courses in philanthropy, volunteerism, and the role of nonprofit groups part of general-education requirements for all students.

"Higher education is seeing the need to step up," Ms. Curley says. "These students must graduate with an understanding of the system and the skills to function in that system."

Into the Work Force

The Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities started offering a nonprofit-management major this academic year. Before the program began, undergraduates pieced together relevant courses to earn the credentials they needed to enter the field. Students campaigned to have the program added for a degree.

Robert W. Ruekert, associate dean of undergraduate programs at Carlson and a marketing professor, helped design the curriculum, which includes nonprofit budgeting and finance, leadership, management, governance, and entrepreneurship courses.

"Going into this field doesn't mean you're going to spend your career licking envelopes anymore," Mr. Ruekert says. "Take a look at some of the nonprofits out there like hospitals or colleges, which make millions each year. There are tremendous opportunities to earn a very good living."

Thomas DeMarco, a freshman at the University of Minnesota, chose to go there because it was among the few universities with a major in nonprofit management. In high school he volunteered for Habitat for Humanity, a homeless shelter, social-justice groups, and his church.

He says he is most looking forward to spending a semester abroad in South America before he graduates. There he plans to combine his Spanish and nonprofit-management skills to do "some kind of community project that requires hands-on work."

After graduation, Mr. DeMarco hopes to eventually create his own charity group, although he is not sure what its focus will be. That plan is popular with many students at Minnesota.

"Going into this field may not mean that I'll ever make a million dollars," Mr. DeMarco says. "But I get to do something that I love and use my business education toward the betterment of society."

Practical Experience

Even universities that do not offer degree programs in nonprofit management to undergraduates are starting to incorporate lessons in philanthropy in other course work and programs.

Campus Compact and Fidelity Charitable Gift Funds began a program in December called Students4Giving, which gave student groups at five institutions \$15,000 each. The students invest the money and decide which charities in their communities should receive grants.

To apply for the program, students and faculty members were asked to submit proposals outlining how Students4Giving's activities could become part of course work, what goals would be set, and how the participants would evaluate results.

From among 35 institutions, the five chosen were Boston University, California State University at Fresno, Portland Community College, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Whitworth University.

Lynn W. Blanchard, director of the Carolina Center for Public Service, at Chapel Hill, says students there are required to raise additional money and to decide where to invest the money among 13 options. Fidelity requires that each group donate 50 percent to 75 percent of the money by May. Any remainder may be used the following semester.

The course at Chapel Hill had 15 spots available, and 30 students applied for it.

"The more hands-on experience is useful because now students know firsthand what challenges nonprofit leaders face," Ms. Blanchard says. "It just takes their education to a new level."

The courses offered at Arizona State are also full, Mr. Ashcraft says.

It is too soon to tell how the undergraduate degrees from Arizona will boost students' careers in the field. But a recent study there showed that graduates who had taken at least some course work in philanthropy advanced to higher positions about 18 months sooner than other nonprofit staff members.

"I don't think that it's a preferred credential yet, but it's heading in that direction," Mr. Ashcraft says. "I think that the big nonprofit organizations will start looking to hire out of universities offering undergraduate programs. We'll become their 'preferred providers.'"

Students like Ms. Pfeiger at Arizona State certainly hope that happens. She transferred to the university from a community college because of the opportunity to study philanthropy. She wants to continue the work she has done as a volunteer for faith-based organizations and is specifically interested in fund raising for them.

"I know that I'm not meant to be a missionary, but I enjoy talking with donors, and my classes in fund raising have taught me a lot," she says. "It's really exciting to see this program take off. We need more professors and classes, but it's cool to see it grow."

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