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Peter C. Weber & Carol Brunt

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Continuing to build knowledge: Undergraduate nonprofit programs in institutions of higher learning

Peter C. Weber ^a and Carol Brunt ^b

^aMurray State University; ^bUniversity of Wisconsin-Whitewater

ABSTRACT

As student demand for nonprofit management education (NME) grows, new program offerings proliferate. While longitudinal data track the development of graduate NME programs, their curricula and location, we know less about the trajectory of undergraduate programs. Preliminary research finds evidence of undergraduate programs that are more diverse and span a greater number of locations than ever before. As a compilation, these findings facilitate analysis of the institutionalization of NME by expanding the focus beyond courses to include program development (certificates, majors, and/or minors). The results enable data-driven discussions, highlighting NME distinctiveness in facilitating the development of student engagement with community.

KEYWORDS

Nonprofit management education; undergraduate; USA

Introduction

Research in teaching, administration, and the development of nonprofit management education has dramatically increased over the past decade. Scholars have mapped and analyzed nonprofit education programs in an effort to identify disciplinary characteristics, patterns of emergence, and perception of various stakeholders. These studies are rapidly growing in number and sophistication. A periodization of articles included in a recent, comprehensive review (Ma, 2015) shows that, in the 2004–2015 period, 33 articles have been published against the 18 in the 1993–2003 period. Much of this effort has focused, however, on graduate level education because of how nonprofit management education emerged and developed over the past five decades. In fact, university-based nonprofit education programs were a response to the need for more professional leadership and management in the nonprofit sector, a result of the broader transformation of the nonprofit sector, the emergence of management education, and the growing interest in professional education (O'Neill, 2005; Weber & Witkowski, 2016).

Influenced by these contextual factors, the logic of the emergence of nonprofit education programs was centered on the professionalization of

nonprofit management and focused on graduate education. Scholars invested in establishing the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies have, from a disciplinary perspective, focused on knowledge production (Ma & Konrath, 2018; Smith, 1993) and autonomy (or boundaries) of the field (Young, 1999).¹ Implicitly and explicitly, therefore, the emphasis on knowledge production served the purpose of establishing disciplinary legitimacy by investigating the scope of academic journals (Brudney & Durden, 1993; Bushouse & Sowa, 2012), focus of doctoral programs and research (Allison et al., 2007; Jackson, Guerrero, & Appe, 2014; Shier & Handy, 2014), and research orientation of academic centers (Sommerfeld & Austin, 2014; Young & Chapman, 2006; Young, 1998). Likewise, debates over the field's autonomy have taken the form of the so-called "best place debate," that is, they address the question of which academic unit should serve as the umbrella for nonprofit-oriented programs, with typical tensions emerging between liberal arts, business, and public affairs/policy schools (Mirabella & Wish, 2000). Implicitly, these debates focused on the nature of nonprofit studies education, as location appeared to provide clues to the interdisciplinary, managerial, or policy emphasis of these programs. At the same time, the blurring of sectoral boundaries and the new public governance fostered an attention to the forms and processes of an integration of nonprofit-specific content into public administration curriculum (Gelles, 2016; Saidel & Smith, 2015).

While not systematically analyzed against a clear set of criteria, the independence, autonomy, and institutionalization of the field were underlying concerns of these authors. Over the course of the past four decades, scholars, practitioners, and academic managers have participated in ongoing discussions over the development of nonprofit education programs. Most notably, the Benchmark Conferences, initially convened at 10-year intervals (1986, 1996, 2006) and then more frequently with the 2011 Benchmark 3.5 conference and the subsequent biennial conferences organized by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC), aimed to provide an avenue for discussion of current and future challenges of a relatively new field (Ashcraft, 2007; Ma, 2015; Mirabella, 2015). Scholars have thus analyzed from an infrastructural rather than content perspective the close connection between establishment of the legal framework of the nonprofit sector and the emergence of a field of research (Hall, 1992a, 1992b, 1999; Katz, 1999), scholarly associations such as the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Associations (ARNOVA) (Smith, 2003), academic journals (Hall, 1993; Smith, 2013), and more recently accreditation (Hoffman, 2016; NACC, 2016; Schmidt & Norris-Tirrell, 2016).

Both the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) and the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs and Administration (NASPAA) have launched accreditation processes for stand-alone nonprofit programs. NASPAA expanded its focus beyond graduate programs in public policy,

affairs, administration, and management and accredited its first nonprofit management program in 2018 in an explicit effort to “make NASPAA more inclusive of nonprofit” (NASPAA, 2018). In the same period, NACC started the accreditation process of the first cohort of programs responding to the need for quality control and to provide academic administrators with a roadmap to build programs that address the needs of the nonprofit sector (Hale & Irvin, 2016). While we are still in the early stages of these processes, basic nodes of tension are emerging between theory and practice on the one hand, and risks and benefits of a process that could lead to homogenization of the field.

Against this background, our knowledge of undergraduate education is limited. The purpose here is to provide a more precise understanding of the size and scope of nonprofit education at the undergraduate level. We find that while impressive if analyzed by using courses as a unit of analysis, the field is much smaller if seen from the perspective of academic programs. Historical and practical developments likely explain a field that is competency-based rather than the expression of an institutionalized discipline. In what follows, we review the development of nonprofit education at the undergraduate level, propose an alternative approach to mapping undergraduate programs, and analyze the contours and characteristics of stand-alone academic majors to gain a better understanding of the state of undergraduate nonprofit education.

Undergraduate nonprofit education

The ongoing discussion on nonprofit education has not focused to a meaningful extent on undergraduate programs. There are only few exceptions. Roseanne Mirabella (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2001) has included undergraduate courses in her pioneering effort to map nonprofit management education. Other scholars have analyzed delivery models of nonprofit management education (Dolch, Ernst, McClusky, Mirabella, & Sadow, 2007), the role of the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (NLA; previously, American Humanics) (Ashcraft, 2001), and explored the development of undergraduate nonprofit-focused programs through specific case studies (e.g. Gassman, Edginton, Fisher, & Widner, 2019; Rinella, 2016). Moving outside the programmatic and institutional focus, a rich literature exists on teaching methodology, with a particular emphasis on experiential learning and service learning, and – more specifically – student philanthropy (Campbell, 2014; McDonald, Miller, & McDougale, 2017; Millisor & Olberding, 2009).

In her original effort to map nonprofit management education in the US, Mirabella (Mirabella, 2007; Mirabella & Wish, 2001) explicitly focused on graduate education. She tracked the growth of these programs over time, and

her work shows a steady increase in course offerings with a focus on nonprofit organizations at American institutions of higher education. Expanding this focus to undergraduate programs in subsequent articles, she notes that, over the period 1996–2014, the number of universities offering nonprofit management and philanthropic studies undergraduate courses increased by an impressive 131%, from 66 in 1996 to 153 in 2014 (Mirabella, 2015, p. 3). By contrast, in the same timeframe, universities offering similar courses at the graduate level increased by 94%, from 128 in 1996 to 248 in 2014 (Mirabella, 2015, p. 3). Intentionally, Mirabella's (2015) census of nonprofit management programs casts a wide net by focusing on courses rather than degree-awarding programs in order to gauge the establishment of the field and the impact of institutional location and degree program on the delivery of these courses. Hence, Mirabella's (2015) data provide an important perspective on the increased importance in undergraduate education, across disciplines, of courses focused on nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, and volunteering. Mirabella (2015) uses the shorthand "undergraduate concentration" when referring to institutions with at least three courses with an explicit focus on nonprofit or philanthropy (Dolch et al., 2007, p. 30S). From this perspective, while undergraduate concentrations increased in the 1996–2014 timeframe from 26 to 85, they declined from 97 to 85 in the 2011–2014 period (Mirabella, 2015, p. 3). Mirabella (2015) links this decline to the steady numerical decrease of universities affiliated with the NLA, whose affiliates historically represented the large majority of these concentrations (Dolch et al., 2007).

Research shifting the attention from courses to programs and/or delivery models has by necessity focused on the NLA (Altman, Carpenter, Dietrick, Strom, & VanHorn, 2012; Ashcraft, 2001). Established in 1948 as American Humanics, the organization prepared professionals for careers in youth agencies and only in the 1980s expanded its focus to nonprofit management (Ashcraft, 2001, pp. 43–45). The increase of affiliated institutions that began in the mid-1990s, with an impressive growth from 12 in 1995 to 72 in 2000, was followed, however, by a decrease with 34 campus affiliates in 2019 (Ashcraft, 2001, p. 45; Dolch et al., 2007, p. 31S). The NLA provides a competency-based certification (Certified Nonprofit Professional, or CNP) to students, primarily although not exclusively undergraduate. The NLA's 10 core competencies focus on the attitudes, skills, and knowledge required by nonprofit professionals and include, for instance, competency areas such as communication, finance, legal issues, and cultural awareness. (Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, 2012). NLA campus directors verify that students attained the core competencies, which is demonstrated through experiential learning, internships, and other applied experiences (NLA, n.d.).

This long history explains the influence of the NLA on the development of undergraduate programs focused on nonprofit organizations. Dolch and co-

authors (Dolch et al., 2007) have analyzed various delivery models of nonprofit education, distinguishing between academic majors, academic minors, and certificates. While the delivery models significantly vary, programs share similarities in content (driven by the 10 core competencies), teaching methodology (NLA emphasized the centrality of service learning), and structure (requiring a minimum of 300 hours of internship). The affiliation with the NLA explained the similarities across the various programs Dolch analyzed in depth and the fact that approximately two-thirds of the 117 programs offering nonprofit courses were affiliates of the NLA testifies to the organization's centrality in undergraduate education. At the same time, the competency-based approach of the NLA also influenced the shape of undergraduate education. As Dolch et al. (2007) notes, half of the programs offering the CNP credential do not list more than one or two courses specifically focused on nonprofit management, and extensively rely on elective courses (with other disciplinary focus) to meet the competency areas of the certificate (p. 315).

In this paper, we aim to address the gap of knowledge of undergraduate nonprofit education. We complement the work of Mirabella (2007, 2015) and Mirabella and Wish (2001) by focusing on the size and scope of undergraduate nonprofit and philanthropic studies education. The first step of this effort is to assess the state of undergraduate education at a program level, thus using a more restrictive category than that used by Mirabella. In this, we differ from the work of Mirabella (2007, 2015), Mirabella and Wish (2001), and Dolch et al. (2007) who used courses as criteria of selection, and identified undergraduate programs with a nonprofit concentration (3+ courses with an explicit focus on nonprofit management). Our more restrictive criteria aim to shift the focus from an attention to nonprofit and philanthropic studies as a field to the process of institutionalization, where institutionalization in formal organizational structures occurs in response to societal expectations (for example, formative work from Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Clegg, 1989). A parallel process is underway in public administration and public affairs programs with the integration of nonprofit management into the curriculum of MPA programs (Saidel & Smith, 2015), although not without difficulties (Gelles, 2016). In the context of a growing and increasingly professionalized sector, formal academic qualifications in nonprofit studies find a ready market (O'Neill, 2005). Resource allocation may offer an important signal of program development for those seeking formal academic qualifications. This shift of focus explains the move from course-centric analyses highlighting the impact of institutional and degree location on course content and delivery to the allocation of institutional resources to a specific field.

Methodology & terminology

Methodologically, shifting the focus from course-centric analyses to stand-alone academic programs awarding a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts in the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies requires a different approach to data on nonprofit education. The process also requires a definitional clarification. We distinguish between academic programs, academic majors, academic minors, and concentrations (or emphases). Academic programs refer to any type of course sequence leading to a degree, major, minor, or concentration and involve a commitment of institutional resources (faculty time, staff, etc.) with at minimum an individual identified as program coordinator or director. An academic major is a sequence of core courses in a specific field of studies to which the student commits. An academic minor is a relative short sequence of courses (generally totaling 21 or 24 academic credit hours) in a specific field. The Baccalaureate Degree thus typically consists of a combination of university (or general) studies courses, academic major courses, and a minor to reach 120 academic hours required for graduation. Concentrations, specializations, or emphases (the terminology varies) exist within the academic major and complement a core sequence of courses with a specific focus (the concentrations, specialization, or emphasis) in one or more areas to be selected from options within or related to the field.

In our data collection on undergraduate programs, we relied primarily on the Database on Nonprofit Management Education compiled by Roseanne Mirabella at Seton Hall (<http://academic.shu.edu/npo/>). This online database contains lists of all colleges and universities with nonprofit management courses in the United States, providing summary pages with interactive links and information about these universities' and colleges' programs. As a repository of program data, it is updated regularly based on submissions from nonprofit management education program managers whose contributions are encouraged through relevant lists serves, such as those of the ARNOVA and International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) (Mirabella, 2007, p. 12S). By necessity, the database relies therefore on self-reported data that are double-checked at intervals by a project manager at Seton Hall University. We integrated this database with information from the NLA website because of its centrality in undergraduate education. We compared the Seton Hall master lists with the list of NLA-affiliated programs, as they appear on the website (<https://www.nonprofitleadershipalliance.org/join/campus-partner/>). In this way, we integrated the two datasets in our list.² As these are public datasets, the data are readily available and accessible, and require no special permission or expenditures to gain access to it.

The process of data review and analysis required a move from master lists of colleges and universities with nonprofit management courses to stand-

alone academic majors in the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies. This process occurred in three main stages. First, we narrowed the focus from all entries in the combined dataset to universities and colleges offering a major, minor, or certificate program or some combination thereof. All programs identified at this stage were cross-referenced with the institutional websites during the spring of 2018 to capture any recent programmatic changes. Second, we moved from this group of institutions to those universities and colleges offering an academic major, either stand-alone or with a nonprofit concentration in another major. This classification is consistent with the categorization used by scholars such as Mirabella (2015) and Dolch et al. (2007). These academic programs have varied disciplinary affiliation and focus, including undergraduate degrees in Nonprofit Management and academic majors in Leadership Studies, Liberal Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, or Political Science with a nonprofit concentration or emphasis. Lastly, we narrowed our focus to stand-alone programs. Consistent with the NACC Accreditation process, we took a “nonprofit/philanthropy-first philosophy and perspective” (<http://www.nonprofit-academic-centers-council.org/accreditation/>), thus focusing on academic majors with the terms “philanthropy” and/or “nonprofit” in the title.³ This approach allows us to identify programs and academic majors with an explicit focus on nonprofit and philanthropic institutions. While these selection criteria do not do justice to the incredible variety of the field, it provides a helpful framework for an examination of the growth of nonprofit and philanthropic studies.

Mapping of undergraduate nonprofit programs

Using data compiled from Seton Hall and NLA databases, we narrowed the focus from all entries in the combined dataset to universities and colleges offering a major, minor, or certificate program, or some combination thereof. We found a total of 104 universities or colleges with undergraduate nonprofit programs offering an academic major, academic minor, or undergraduate certificate program, or some combination thereof.

Table 1 relativizes the numerical growth of undergraduate courses with a focus on nonprofit organizations described by Mirabella (2015). A total of 170 minors, majors, and certificates are offered across 104 institutions, as numerous universities and colleges in this initial sample offer some

Table 1. Universities/colleges with undergraduate nonprofit programs.

Universities with academic major	43
Universities with academic minor	79
Universities with undergraduate certificate	48
Universities offering at least one or some combination of the above	104

combination of majors, minors, and/or certificates. The centrality of minors and certificates in the offering of undergraduate programs can be related to the influence of the NLA. It should be noted, as we show in Table 4, that undergraduate nonprofit programs developed in clusters of delivery models and rarely do universities or colleges offer just an academic minor.

Here, we are primarily interested in academic majors, as they signal the institutionalization of a discipline in the academic setting. We therefore focused on the 43 academic majors, either stand-alone or with a nonprofit concentration in another major. Then by excluding academic majors with nonprofit concentrations and emphases, as well as three academic majors that appear to have been discontinued (as they are currently not accepting applications according to their websites), we identify 26 nonprofit academic majors in nonprofit or philanthropic studies with the term “nonprofit” or “philanthropy” in the title. We thus direct our analysis to these 26 stand-alone nonprofit academic majors, sorting the data by state and institutional location. The findings are presented in Table 2, which, following the American Census Bureau and the Office of Management and Budget, defines as “urban” an area with a population of 50,000 or more and as “micro” an area that contains an urban core of at least 10,000 persons but less than 50,000 (<https://www.hrsa.gov/rural-health/about-us/definition/index.html>).

Of the institutions identified as offering the 26 nonprofit academic majors, the data points to other interesting details of geographic distribution. Within the Midwest, where the majority of the programs are located, Michigan and Missouri host three and five programs, respectively. Indiana and Illinois each offer two nonprofit academic majors. These four states represent 79% of programming in the Midwest and 42% of the total nonprofit majors under review. Examining the data by urban area, we find that the Northeast region has no programs in micro areas. In the Midwest region host to the majority of nonprofit programs, 40% of those programs are found in micro areas. This suggests that both metropolitan and rural areas have access to nonprofit studies at a major level of programming. There is one nonprofit major in the West and it is located in an urban area. There are eight nonprofit academic majors consistent with our definition in the Southern region of the US, two of which are found in micro areas.

The institutional location of the undergraduate programs is an important marker in understanding the landscape of nonprofit studies at the undergraduate level in the United States.⁴ The most common identification of institutional location is by College or School, and this designation is reflected in Table 3.

Forty percent (38.5%) of the programs are located within a College of Arts and Sciences or College of Human Sciences/Services followed by a school of public affairs and administration (23%). The business schools represented

Table 2. Geographical distribution of institutions by Region, State, and metropolitan size.

Region/state	Institution	Undergrad majors per state	Urban/micro area
Northeast:			
Maryland	Coppin State College – <i>BS in Nonprofit Leadership</i>	1	Urban
New Jersey	Rutgers University – Newark – <i>BA in Public and Nonprofit Administration</i>	1	Urban
Ohio	Cleveland State University – <i>BA in Nonprofit Administration</i>	1	Urban
Midwest:			
Illinois	Northern Illinois University – <i>BS/BA in Nonprofit and NGO Studies</i>	2	Micro Urban
	North Park University – <i>BS/BA in Nonprofit Management</i>		
Indiana	IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy – <i>BA in Philanthropic Studies</i>	2	Urban Urban
	Indiana University-Bloomington – <i>BS in Public Affairs, Nonprofit Management and Leadership Major</i>		
Michigan	Eastern Michigan University – <i>BA in Public and Nonprofit Administration</i>	3	Micro Micro
	Central Michigan University – <i>BA/BS in Public and Nonprofit Administration</i>		Urban
	Grand Valley State University – <i>Public and Nonprofit Administration Major</i>		
Minnesota	University of Minnesota – <i>BS in Public and Nonprofit Management</i>	1	Urban
Missouri	Rockhurst University – <i>BA in Nonprofit Leadership Studies</i>	5	Urban Micro
	Missouri Valley College – <i>BA in Nonprofit Management</i>		Urban
	Lindenwood University – <i>BA in Nonprofit Administration</i>		Micro Urban
	William Jewell College – <i>BA in Nonprofit Leadership</i>		
	Evangel University – <i>BBA in Nonprofit Business and Social Enterprise</i>		
South Dakota	South Dakota State University – <i>BS in Leadership and Management of Nonprofit Organizations</i>	1	Micro
West:			
Arizona	Arizona State University – <i>BS in Nonprofit Leadership and Management (NLM)</i>	1	Urban
South:			
Florida	University of Central Florida – <i>BS/BA in Nonprofit Management</i>	1	Urban
Georgia	Toccoa Falls College – <i>BS in Nonprofit Business Administration</i>	1	Micro
Kentucky	Murray State University – <i>BA/BS in Nonprofit Leadership Studies</i>	1	Micro
North Carolina	High Point University – <i>BA in Nonprofit Leadership and Management</i>	2	Urban Urban
	Salem College – <i>BA in Not for Profit Management</i>		
Oklahoma	University of Oklahoma – <i>BA in Public and Nonprofit Administration</i>	1	Urban
Texas	Baylor University – <i>BBA in Marketing, Nonprofit and Social Enterprise Marketing</i>	2	Urban Urban
	University of North Texas – <i>BS in Nonprofit Leadership</i>		

Table 3. Institutional location of undergraduate programs.

Institutional location of undergraduate nonprofit management programs (2017)	<i>Major</i>
Arts and Sciences + Human Sciences/Services (3)	10
Business	5
Public Affairs and Administration	6
Other college or school	5
Total	26

Table 4. Total number of undergraduate programs by major, minor, and certificate.

Major	Minor	Certificate	Graduate program	Combination	How many schools
X				Major	7
	X			Minor	26
		X		Certificate	14
X	X			Major, minor	12
X		X		Major, certificate	2
X			X	Major, graduate program	1
	X	X		Minor, certificate	14
	X		X	Minor, graduate program	5
		X	X	Certificate, graduate program	1
X	X	X		Major, minor, certificate	13
X	X		X	Major, minor, graduate program	4
X		X	X	Major, certificate, graduate program	0
	X	X	X	Minor, certificate, graduate program	1
X	X	X	X	Major, minor, certificate, graduate program	4

about 1/5th of the programs (19%) as did other colleges or schools such as urban affairs, leadership, and philanthropy collectively. Similar to Mirabella’s findings (Mirabella, 2007), the combination of Colleges of Arts and Sciences and Schools of Public Affairs and Administration house the greatest number of programs (61.5%).

Both variations and clusters in nonprofit-focused programs’ geographical location add an additional analytical layer, as the emergence of these programs is influenced by a variety of factors. At a general level, national trends such as the need of professional leadership in the nonprofit sector, increasing awareness of the nonprofit sector as a major employer, and new public governance explain the establishment of nonprofit educational programs (O’Neill, 2005; Saidel & Smith, 2015; Weber & Witkowski, 2016). While these factors seem to be particularly relevant at the graduate level, they may provide insights on the logic of emergence of some undergraduate programs, as for example the undergraduate programs offered at some large, well-known institutions in the field such as Indiana University-Bloomington, Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, and Arizona State University were added after their graduate programs were well established. This development may suggest that the emergence of undergraduate nonprofit programming is the result of an accumulation of resources and

expertise, which decreases the costs of launching a new academic degree. These undergraduate programs also benefited from the financial support of both local and national donors, such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and its Building Bridges Initiative and the Lilly Endowment, Inc (Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University, 2004; Heidrich & Long, n.d.). At the same time, the needs of the local and regional nonprofit sector may stimulate and influence the development of nonprofit educational programs at the undergraduate level. We have a clear example of this type of development only at the graduate level through backyard research such as by Donmoyer, Libby, McDonald, and Deitrick (2012).

Additional factors influencing the establishment of undergraduate nonprofit programs are complex to disentangle. The list of institutions offering academic majors (see Table 2) includes multiple small, private colleges. At both William Jewell College and Salem College, past affiliation with American Humanics may explain the programmatic interest in nonprofit education and the development of academic majors. Additionally, many of these institutions share religious roots or affiliations (e.g. North Park University, Lindenwood University, Evangel University, William Jewell College, Toccoa Falls College, High Point College, Rockhurst University, and Baylor University) thus suggesting a connection with the traditional emphasis of these institutions on notions of service and volunteering and the development of nonprofit programs; in at least the case of Rockhurst University this natural alignment facilitated the formalization of this element of their educational mission into an academic program focused on nonprofit organization (Rinella, 2016, pp. 61–62). In other instances, strong faculty or administrative advocates for nonprofit education explains the development of academic majors. For example, at Murray State University, Dr. Robert K. Long, the former W. K. Kellogg Foundation vice-president in charge of the Building Bridges Initiative, served as Distinguished Visiting Professor from 2008 to 2017 and was instrumental in adding an academic major to an already existing academic minor in nonprofit leadership.

Characteristics of institutionalization of undergraduate nonprofit programs

Data show that rarely do universities exclusively offer an academic major in nonprofit/philanthropic studies. Table 4 shows that this is the case at only seven institutions. In itself, this data is not surprising because of the required commitment of institutional resources (faculty, staff, recruitment, etc.) to establish and maintain a fully operational academic major. Likewise, the high number of institutions offering only an academic minor (26) or a certificate (14) point to the limited amount of resources typically required by this type of program delivery, which can also rely on the expertise and institutional resources devoted to other

programs. Conversely, [Table 4](#) shows that relatively more institutions offer clusters of programs – majors + minors (12), minors + certificates (14), or majors + minors + certificate (13) – suggesting that institutionalization occurs incrementally by building up expertise, institutional commitment, and program delivery. The academic majors offered at Salem College (NC), Murray State University (KY), and Rockhurst University (MO) provide good examples of this incremental development. Salem College established an undergraduate minor in nonprofit studies in 1994, to which was then added an academic major in 2006 and an advanced certificate in 2009 (Seton Hall University, [2019](#)). Likewise, Murray State University's program was launched as an academic minor in the mid-1980s, to which was added an academic major in the fall of 2011. Rockhurst University's programs developed across multiple colleges and schools from an American Humanics certificate and Human Service Agency Administration Minor in 1976 to a Nonprofit Leadership academic major and minor, as well as the NLA CNP Credential and Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP) Fundraising Certificate in 2003 (Rinella, [2016](#), pp. 62–69). These cases are illustrative of broader patterns emerging from data from the Seton Hall Database showing that institutions develop nonprofit programs at the undergraduate level incrementally by building up resources over time before establishing an academic major. While these cases share the trajectory from academic minor to major, other institutions like the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy first invested and developed in graduate programs (both masters and PhD levels) before adding an undergraduate option (Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, [n.d.](#)). Although the trajectory here is from graduate to undergraduate offering, the approach reflects the need to build up resources, expertise, and infrastructures over time before offering a wide range of degree options.

Interestingly, the table shows that there is no strong connection between undergraduate and graduate programs, although 16 institutions offer some program delivery form across graduate and undergraduate levels. It is worth pointing out that four institutions (Arizona State University, North Park University, University of Central Florida, and Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy) offer all types of delivery models: undergraduate academic major, minor, and certificate as well as graduate masters and certificate.

Another interesting perspective on undergraduate nonprofit programs focuses on the question of homogenization of programs. Undergraduate programs can be categorized according to the Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) codes. The CIP Codes were developed by the Department of Education's National Centre for Educational Statistics (NCES) in 1980 as a means of tracking and assessing educational programs. They do not reflect a specific degree or program titles but are a statistical coding tool and a federal government standard on instructional program classification. It is a standard that has also been adopted by Statistics Canada.

Measured against a set of operational criteria, the codes are organized into three levels. The first level is comprised of two numbers that represent a general description of related programs such as psychology, education, or engineering. Beneath the general groupings, there are multiple four digits series representing “intermediate groupings of programs that have comparable content and objectives” (NCES, 2010, p. 2). Each of the four-digit series has at least 1 six-digit code that is the specific instructional program. It is at this level that detailed program descriptions are provided by NCES. A review of code 52 provides an illustration of the cascading levels. At the first level, code 52 is identified as “Business, Management, Marketing, and Related Support Services.” Beneath this general code, are the four-digit intermediate groupings, such “52.02 Business Administration, Management and Operations” which serves as a header to 14 different specific instructional programs, among which we find “52.0206 Nonprofit/Public/Organizational Management.” As is evident, the specific instructional code for nonprofit management is firmly embedded within the business administration and management groupings.

In Table 5, we present the 26 stand-alone academic majors that are the focus of our analysis identified by their CIP Code at the six-digit level.

Table 5 shows that the large majority of stand-alone academic majors are classified in the category 52.0206. This CIP Code is identified as “Nonprofit, Public and Organization Management,” and according to the official classification identifies,

A program that prepares individuals to manage the business affairs of non-profit corporations, including foundations, educational institutions, associations, and other such organizations, and public agencies and governmental operations. Includes instruction in business management, principles of public administration, principles of accounting and financial management, human resources

Table 5. Nonprofit major program classification by CIP code.

CIP code	Title	Number of universities
52 Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services		
52.0206	Non-profit/Public/Organizational Management	15
52.0213	Organizational Leadership (South Dakota State)	1
52.1401	Marketing/Marketing Management, General (Baylor)	1
44 Public Administration and Social Service Professions		
44.0000	Public Administration and Social Service Professions (Northern Illinois + North Texas)	2
44.0201	Community Organization and Advocacy (Coppin)	1
44.0401	Public Administration (Indiana Bloomington + Oklahoma)	2
44.0702	Youth Services/Administration (Murray State)	1
44.9999	Public Service (Rutgers – Newark)	1
30 Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies		
30.9999	Multi/Interdisciplinary, Other (Lilly School)	1

The CIP code of the program offered by Arizona State University was not located. Upon enquiry, university administrators referred the O*Net codes.

management, taxation of non-profit organizations, and business law as applied to non-profit organizations. (<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/cip2000/ciplist.asp?CIP2=44>)

This description, as well as its categorization under the two-digit code 52 “Business, Management, Marketing and Related Support Services,” points to a development noticed by many commentators and scholars that have described a narrowing of the field of nonprofit/philanthropic studies to its more managerial components (Mendel, 2014; Millesen, 2014). Furthermore, the fact that nonprofit management and public management are both classified under this same CIP Code contrasts with the long-term efforts of nonprofit and philanthropic studies to establish itself as a separate and independent field, as argued by scholars such as Young (1999). This trend seems to parallel, as Weber and Witkowski (2016) observed, the marketization and professionalization of the nonprofit sector. While this convergence toward nonprofit management (as opposed to the more broadly conceived nonprofit/philanthropic studies) has been criticized by some as a worrisome narrowing of focus (Mendel, 2014), it also testifies to an apparent homogenization of the field, a process of institutional isomorphism that could be an intrinsic component of the institutionalization of the field (Ma, 2015). From another perspective, program integration across the sectors presents its own challenges both practically and theoretically. Gelles (2016) poses salient questions in an urgent call to be mindful of potential for compromise of nonprofit sector knowledge generation in the process of hybridization.

At the same time, however, it is interesting to note a certain diversity in Table 5. In fact, in spite of the table’s exclusive focus on stand-alone nonprofit academic majors, only 15 out of 26 are classified in the category that explicitly refers to “nonprofit” in the title and description. A search of the terms “nonprofit” and “non-profit” within the CIP Codes leads to only four other CIP Codes (besides 52.0206 and the general description of the two-digit 52 CIP Code), and these are 52.0301 (Accounting), 19.0203 (Consumer Merchandising/Retailing Management), 23.1303 (Professional, Technical, Business, and Scientific Writing), and 52.0101 (Business/Commerce, General).⁵ Of the other programs included in Table 5, none refers to the CIP Codes using “nonprofit” or “non-profit” in the description; rather, one program is identified by the marketing/marketing management code, two programs are classified as human services, one as multi-disciplinary, one as youth services and administration, and one as community organization and advocacy. The Arizona State University program is classified using O*Net which is a national occupational classification database supported by the US Department of Labor rather than an educational classification such as CIP codes.

The diversity of these CIP Codes may reveal something about the nature, philosophy, and evolution of these academic majors. In fact, CIP Codes are usually assigned at the time of creation of an academic major and are not necessarily changed over time even if the major itself adapts and evolves. CIP codes thus may point to the institutional origin of a program; for example, a new academic major located in a public administration/affairs school is likely to gravitate toward the two-digit code 44 Public Administration and Social Service Professions. This is the case of the academic major offered by the University of Oklahoma, which was originally called “Public Affairs & Administration” but changed its name to “Public and Nonprofit Administration” on September 1, 2016 (University of Oklahoma, 2018).

At the same time, a CIP Code may point to the original focus of an academic program. For example, Murray State University’s program in Nonprofit Leadership Studies (NLS) is coded as 44.0702, which is “Youth Programming and Administration.” Originally named “Youth Agency Administration” (shortly after changed to “Youth and Nonprofit Leadership”), the program was launched as an academic minor in the mid-1980s. Over the past 20 years, the program rapidly grew in response to the changes in the nonprofit sector and the demand for nonprofit leadership and management education. These developments mirror an expansion of the curriculum and a change of the program’s name to “Nonprofit Leadership Studies” in 2013. Therefore, while the academic major in terms of both content and name is squarely part of the 26 stand-alone nonprofit academic majors, the CIP Code points to its roots in youth programming and administration.

Lastly, at least in one case, the CIP Code points to the characteristic philosophy of an academic program. The Bachelor of Arts in philanthropic studies offered by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy is classified under the two-digit code 30 “Multi/Interdisciplinary Studies.” While the diversity and nature of the field has typically been described as multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary, the approach of the IU School of Philanthropy has made this interdisciplinarity a sign of distinction. Both the school (and its predecessor, the Center of Philanthropy) and the degrees in philanthropic studies have been developed in appreciation and awareness of the multiple disciplinary contributions to the field with a particular attention to the liberal arts (Burlingame, 2009; Payton, 1994). Further exploration and research could provide similar insights into other nonprofit Majors and contribute to our growing understanding of the evolution of nonprofit studies as an academic field.

Concluding thoughts

An examination of stand-alone academic programs awarding a Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts in the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies

changes our understanding of the institutionalization of the field from the larger perspective gleaned from an exploration of nonprofit course offerings. This more narrow focus relativizes the growth of undergraduate nonprofit education at the level of stand-alone academic programs. The 26 academic majors we identify are distributed across the United States, serve both metropolitan and rural areas, and are located in a broad range of academic units. The diversity of institutions offering these programs – ranging from small, private and religiously affiliated schools to the flagship campuses of large public university systems – raises interesting questions on the logic of emergence and institutionalization of these programs. The variety of analytical lenses used in the study allows us to make some preliminary inferences about the field of nonprofit studies:

- (1) Academic majors emerged as a result of an incremental process that allowed institutions to build up structures, expertise, and resources either through undergraduate minors, certificates (in many cases affiliated at one point or another with American Humanics, the predecessor of the NLA), or through graduate programs. This seems to have been the case, for example, in institutions as different as the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, Murray State University, Rockhurst University, and Salem College;
- (2) Academic majors emerged as the result of an integration of nonprofit-specific content into majors in public affairs, which eventually changed the name to include “nonprofit” and reflect the expanded curriculum. This development follows a logic of integration analyzed at the graduate level (Saidel & Smith, 2015) and appears to have been the case for instance at the University of Oklahoma;
- (3) Affiliation with American Humanics or NLA explains the interest particularly in small, private colleges for nonprofit education. A large majority of the institutions such as Murray State University, Salam College, and William Jewell College now offering an academic major in nonprofit studies were at one point affiliated with the NLA;
- (4) The presence of multiple small, private colleges with either religious roots or affiliation suggests an affinity between institutional missions and values centered on service create a fertile ground for the development of nonprofit programs. To different degrees North Park University, Lindenwood University, Evangel University, William Jewell College, Toccoa Falls College, High Point College, Rockhurst University, and Baylor University all emphasize service, community, and social justice in the mission, vision, and value statements.
- (5) Faculty advocates and champions within university administration play a major role in the establishment of an academic major. The clearest example is Murray State University because of Dr. Long

preeminent role in supporting nonprofit education first nationwide and then within this institution.

Other context-specific factors likely play a role in the development of undergraduate programs. Size and needs of local nonprofit sectors, opportunities emerging from unplanned availability of expertise and resources, and overall mission and position of colleges in local communities certainly influence program development but are harder to disentangle.

As much of current research on nonprofit and philanthropic studies has focused on the development of the field, our inferences drawn from this study facilitate our own contribution to the field discussion. This process of program development typically involves the emergence of a paradigm (a set of coherent ideas), talented individuals, and the “institutionalization of the basic structures for the preservation and extension of ideas in the area” (Clark, 1972, p. 658). As discussed in the introduction, much research has been conducted on the paradigm and knowledge production. The third element – institutionalization – can be further differentiated in five stages: the solitary scientist, amateur science, emerging academic science, established science, and big science (Clark, 1972, pp. 661–669). The institutionalization of the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies roughly mirrors the ideal process that Clark identifies. The beginning of the scholarly interest in nonprofit organizations is often identified with the work of individual scholars such as Merle Curti in the 1950s and 1960s, who although supported by foundation grants and interest operated firmly from within the disciplinary boundaries of history and with no institutional support from universities (Hall, 1999; Katz, 1999). The efforts of Curti, as the solitary scientist to use Clark’s terminology, were followed by the building of the professional organizations that to this day represent the key infrastructure of the field. This stage of amateur science, following the 1969 Tax Reform Act and Filer Commission, was characterized by the establishment in the 1970s of, among others, Independent Sector and the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars (AVAS; the predecessor of ARNOVA) (Hall, 1992b, pp. 411–415; Smith, 2003, 2013). Starting in the 1980s with a clear acceleration in the 1990s and the turn of the century, the field witnessed an expansion of the scholarly community with the establishment of tenure-track professorships, endowed chairs, and a booming of graduate education, characteristics of Clark’s following two stages of institutionalization – emerging academic science and established science (see, e.g., Hall, 1992b, pp. 415–422; Mirabella, 2007). Within these various stages, much attention has been devoted – as we have seen – to professional organizations, graduate programs, and professional community. Arguably, however, undergraduate education becomes a key component in any effort to bring to scale the field as a recognition of the general value of the field, its professional community, and the latter’s working norms.

An analysis of stand-alone undergraduate academic majors shows that to a large extent this is still a work in progress.

At the same time, however, an institutionalization leading to institutional isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) may not be the desired outcome for the field. The tension between homogenization on the one side and diversity of perspectives and potential for innovation has been at the core of recent debates over accreditation. The NACC Accreditation process has been mindful of the diversity of the field and emphasized constructive potential of heterogeneity for the building of the field by “tak[ing] a reactive review standard rather than proscriptive to participating institutions seeking the imprimatur of the NACC” (<http://www.nonprofit-academic-centers-council.org/accreditation/>) and being “flexible enough to meet a changing environment” (Hale & Irvin, 2016, p. 3). As further accreditation of the field occurs, concerns will continue to arise over risks of losing the innovative potential afforded by a more interdisciplinary approach, a heterogeneity among programs is not easy to categorize as course offerings align with accrediting bodies within discipline. While this may not be in Mirabella’s words “a problem in need of a solution,” it is recognized that there may be a need for greater commonality of mission among programs in an emerging field (Mirabella, Hoffman, Teo, & McDonald, 2019, p. 81).

Notes

1. Similar efforts are underway outside the United States (see, e.g., Onyx and Nowland-Foreman (2017) on Australia and New Zealand, Harris (2016) on Great Britain, and Okada, Ishida, Nakajima, and Kotagiri (2017) on Japan).
2. The NLA-affiliated programs have now been added to the Seton Hall database.
3. The NACC accreditation process defines a “stand-alone” program as a “full degree program with a primary focus on the nonprofit and philanthropic sectors” (Hale & Irvin, 2016, p. 2).
4. The publication of this paper in a public affairs journal in no way suggests public affairs and administration as the preferred location of nonprofit studies programs.
5. In all cases, nonprofit/non-profit is used in the CIP Code description in the context of identifying industries within which certain skills can be applied.

Notes on contributors

Peter C. Weber is assistant professor and Director of Nonprofit Leadership Studies at Murray State University. His research focuses on the historical patterns that shape and influence current nonprofit and philanthropic practices, both nationally and internationally. He has published his work in peer-reviewed journals including the two premier journals of the field, *Voluntas* and the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*.

Carol Brunt is assistant professor at the College of Business and Economics, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater (UWW). Carol is responsible for leading the development and implementation of UWW’s new nonprofit programming. She brings rich practical experience to academia. She has held multiple roles as researcher, program manager, and director in both

the Canadian nonprofit and international development sectors. Her practical experience informs her academic research, which has been presented at management conferences including the Academy of Management (AOM), the African Academy of Management (AFAM), and the Association of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER). Her publications include the recent release of *Human Resource Management in International INGOs: Exploring Strategy, Practice and Policy*, by Palgrave-Macmillan UK.

ORCID

Peter C. Weber  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1949-826X>

Carol Brunt  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2337-7009>

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