Introduction

Robert F. Ashcraft,[1]
Melissa M. Stone,[2] Guest Editors

[1]Arizona State University, [2]University of Minnesota

THIS SPECIAL-THEME ISSUE OF *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* is devoted to selected papers from the BenchMark 3.5 Conference on Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies held March 24 to 27, 2011, in San Diego and hosted by the University of San Diego's Institute for Nonprofit Education and Research. The conference tagline, "Nonprofit Educators: Learning, Leading, and Creating the Future," describes both the intended audience and the content approach used by the planning committee.

As the fourth conference of its type offered since 1986, the name "BenchMark 3.5" was coined following the closing session of the 2006 BenchMark 3 Conference held in Tempe, Arizona, and organized by leaders from Arizona State University. At the Tempe conference, the opinion of participants was that the field of nonprofit and philanthropic studies was evolving too quickly to wait a full decade for the next conference. Thus, plans were made to convene five years later, and BenchMark 3.5 was born.

The history and results of the first three conferences (held in 1986, 1996, and 2006) are detailed in two edited books (O'Neill and Fletcher, 1998; O'Neill and Young, 1988) and one special journal issue (Ashcraft, 2007). The first two conferences, organized by leaders from the Institute for Nonprofit Organizations at the University of San Francisco, focused on nonprofit management education. The 1986 convening was an invitation-only event, whereas the 1996 conference was open to all interested educators, scholars, and practitioners. The 2006 convening was also developed as an open conference but with an expanded theme that sought to benchmark where the field has come, where it is presently, and its future trajectory. The 2011 conference was organized by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC), headquartered in Cleveland, Ohio,

Correspondence to: Robert F. Ashcraft, Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation, Arizona State University, 411 N. Central Ave., Suite 500, Phoenix, AZ 85004-0691. E-mail: ashcraft@asu.edu

Published online in Wiley Online Library (wileyonlinelibrary.com) DOI: 10.1002/nml.21052

with the support of two of its institutional members, Arizona State University's (ASU) Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation (formerly the ASU Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management) and the University of San Diego's Institute for Nonprofit Education and Research. Because of NACC's leadership role in developing and promoting high-quality nonprofit education programming, evidenced by the release of various editions of its curricular guidelines for undergraduate and graduate degree programs, it made sense that this infrastructure organization would be the organizing entity for BenchMark 3.5.

The 2011 convening solicited participation from those involved in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise education, a wide range of experimental and "beyond-the-classroom" pedagogical experiences, and, again, international perspectives.

Just as the 2006 conference expanded its reach to include more of an international presence and philanthropic studies, the 2011 convening solicited participation from those involved in social entrepreneurship and social enterprise education, a wide range of experimental and "beyond-the-classroom" pedagogical experiences, and, again, international perspectives. The broadened scope reflects how the field has evolved since prior conferences, often parallel yet complementary to nonprofit management education and philanthropic studies programs, at many colleges and universities.

BenchMark 3.5 attracted 225 participants, representing a diverse collection of educators, scholars, and practitioners from across the spectrum of education levels, types, and delivery systems. Twenty-one representatives attended from universities outside the United States. Sessions included both peer-reviewed paper sessions and participant-organized think tanks and colloquiums. They included U.S. and global perspectives ranging from approaches to pedagogy by those who teach to the matter of institutionalizing curriculum and nonprofit academic centers as discussed by a panel of university deans and administrators. Some sessions were organized using group process approaches not always associated with traditional academic conferences. This included, for example, the use of the World Café process and a Technology Carnivál that engaged participants in self-organizing around their own interests in selected topics, such as using social media in the classroom. BenchMark 3.5 also served as a platform for other groups to meet, evidenced by a pre-meeting of campus directors from the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (formerly American Humanics, Inc.). Moreover, several members of the Ashoka Changemaker Campus Consortium participated in BenchMark 3.5 sessions as part of their interest in social entrepreneurship education. Informal gatherings of current students and alumni of programs occurred throughout the conference.

We are grateful to the members of the BenchMark 3.5 steering committee who so ably served in various roles to assure the conference's success: Robert Ashcraft, conference chair (Arizona State University); Teri Behrens (Grand Valley State University); Will Brown (Texas A&M University); Dwight Burlingame (Indiana University); Robert Donmoyer, Logistics Committee liaison and Proposal Review

Committee (University of San Diego); Kathleen Fletcher, Proposal Review Committee (University of San Francisco); Jenny Harrow (City University London); Jack Krauskopf (Baruch College, City University of New York); Myles McGregor Lowndes (Queensland University of Technology); Stuart Mendel (Cleveland State University); J. Patrick Murphy (DePaul University); David Renz (University of Missouri–Kansas City); Keith Seel, Proposal Review Committee (Mount Royal University); Sean Shacklett (Nonprofit Academic Centers Council); John Palmer Smith (University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, retired); Max Stephenson (Virginia Tech); Melissa Stone, Proposal Review Committee (University of Minnesota); and Dennis Young (Georgia State University).

Nine of the more than eighty papers presented at BenchMark 3.5 are included in this issue of *NML*. The first of these, which set the tone and discussion themes for the entire conference, is "Enacting Our Field," the keynote speech given by Alnoor Ebrahim. He notes our tendency to characterize our field as a set of binary distinctions, notably for-profit versus nonprofit, government versus nongovernmental, funder versus grantee, local versus global, North versus South, and secular versus faith based. Within these distinctions, Ebrahim asks us to think about what is important for theorizing about our field and for acting within it—because, he argues, teaching sits at the nexus of theory and action. Through teaching, he states, we "actively constitute and enact our field." For example, in using terms such as *market failure* or *government failure,* we imply that nonprofits must always act in relationship to these other sectors. However, students who want to change the world do not think in terms of single sectors but in terms of action, often comprising work within and across all sectors. He carries this and other themes into a discussion of the structure of our field and calls for more theory, practice, and pedagogy that accentuate cross-border management and leadership where crossing borders refers not just to sector divides but those other bifurcations such as North and South, funder and grantee, and secular and faith based.

Ebrahim notes our tendency to characterize our field as a set of binary distinctions, notably for-profit versus nonprofit, government versus nongovernmental, funder versus grantee, local versus global, North versus South, and secular versus faith based.

The second contribution is a plenary speech given by Steven Rathgeb Smith. In "Changing Government Policy and Its Implications for Nonprofit Management Education," Smith echoes a theme similar to Ebrahim's but with a particular emphasis on how changes in government policy around the world have eroded boundaries between the sectors and helped to increase hybridity, as demonstrated in cross-sector partnerships and organizational forms in which nonprofits incorporate characteristics of public sector agencies or for-profit businesses. Because of these changes in the landscape of nonprofit organizations, Smith calls for an integrated model of nonprofit education in which, for example, nonprofit content is integrated into the core curriculum of professional schools and not segregated into specialized courses. In addition, he highlights the need for courses on community engagement strategies and program evaluation from a more integrated perspective. Similar to Ebrahim, Smith also argues that students are likely to engage in cross-boundary work and pursue careers that span sectors; hence they need expertise in public policymaking, business management, and integrative leadership.

In the seven articles that follow these speeches, two present big-picture overviews of issues in the field and five "From the Field" contributions provide deeper discussions of how specific programs have grappled with the challenges of delivering nonprofit education. The first article, "The Development of Education for Social Entrepreneurship and Nonprofit Management: Diverging or Converging Paths?" by Roseanne Mirabella and Dennis R. Young, gives readers an overview of the field of nonprofit management education and then zeroes in on a particular issue concerning the rise of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise curriculum in the United States. The article presents important and interesting data on courses in the social entrepreneurship arena offered by schools of public affairs, business schools, and religiously oriented institutions. Syllabi from these courses are analyzed for course content and demonstrate significant differences in emphases among the three types of schools. Based on this analysis, Mirabella and Young present several future scenarios concerning the likelihoods that social entrepreneurship curriculum will converge toward content associated with traditional nonprofit management education, develop into blended models of nonprofit–business content, or diverge between business and nonprofit models of curriculum content.

Smith calls for an integrated model of nonprofit education in which, for example, nonprofit content is integrated into the core curriculum of professional schools and not segregated into specialized courses.

In "International Mappings of Nonprofit Management Education: An Analytical Framework and the Case of Sweden," Johan Hvenmark and Ola Segnestam Larsson propose a framework for mapping, comparing, and analyzing nonprofit management education in different countries and regions of the world. Findings from an empirical study of nonprofit education in Sweden show that Sweden has no formal, for-credit courses in nonprofit management education at its universities but does support a host of noncredit programs and courses specifically developed for nonprofit organizations by a variety of nonuniversity sponsors. To understand these findings, Hvenmark and Larsson argue, one must understand the historical and cultural place of nonprofits in Swedish society. From these insights, they develop a more general framework for situating a country's nonprofit education offerings in which one dimension concerns program and course credits, a second focuses on program and course content (general management versus targeted nonprofit distinctiveness), and a third delineates the types of organizations involved in arranging and providing programs and courses. The article concludes with a call for more international, comparative, and case-oriented research on nonprofit management education, based in the similarities and differences across nonprofit sector contexts.

The five "From the Field" articles concern specific programs or approaches rooted in the authors' experiences with constructing and sustaining these programs. Important issues raised by these experiences include developing meaningful relationships between the university and the nonprofit community, bridging the gap between theory and practice, and designing adaptive noncredit programs and models for international program delivery. Throughout these pieces, we hear echoes of the big themes addressed by both Ebrahim and Smith in their speeches.

The article by David Clifford and Claudia Petrescu, "The Keys to University–Community Engagement Sustainability," sets the stage for several articles that follow by providing an excellent overview of the key dimensions of any university–community partnership. These dimensions highlight the need to pay close attention to relationships internal to the university, external to the particular community and organizations with whom you are working, and personal to individual faculty members, including their competencies and career issues. Clifford and Petrescu then describe the experiences and challenges of a twelve-year-old program, the Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Communities, at Eastern Michigan University. They conclude with specific and successful strategies such as "partnering in" of community members, tying the institute to multiple programs on campus, and incorporating community engagement activities to faculty promotion and tenure.

"Bridging the Theory–Practice Gap in a Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies Master's Degree Program," by Robert Donmoyer and coauthors, deepens several of the points raised in the previous article. Here we have an insiders' view of how a program was established intentionally to address an issue that has plagued the field of nonprofit education from its beginnings: how to develop rigorous academic programs that speak to the needs of practice. Donmoyer and his colleagues trace the early history of their master's degree program in nonprofit leadership and management at the University of San Diego, providing detail on an initial community needs assessment to determine interest in the program and delivery options as well as to inform the content of the curriculum. The resulting program, as it strives to keep itself "tethered to practice," emphasizes a range of applied projects for nonprofit clients, uses a well-supported stable of practitioners as instructors, and relies on an active advisory board of practitioners. Especially important is the program's ongoing use of both formal and informal assessments to ensure that the theory–practice gap is indeed being bridged.

In "Nonprofit and University Strategic Partnerships to Strengthen the Sector," Regan Harwell Schaffer continues the theme of university–community partnerships in nonprofit education by highlighting a community research component integral to the program at Pepperdine University. In a thoughtfully designed approach to these partnerships, Schaffer describes how students, faculty, and community participants work together to first assess and then produce feasible recommendations to improve specific nonprofits. Students are able to apply a range of qualitative research methodologies and learn in the field how nonprofits deal with common management challenges. Program assessments have demonstrated significant increases in student understanding of these challenges, and partners report high satisfaction with end products.

The next article, "Needs Assessment and Curriculum Mapping: Enhancing Management Skills of the Nonprofit Workforce" by Lili Wang and Robert F. Ashcraft, takes up an important point made earlier by Hvenmark and Larsson—that not enough attention has been paid to describing and assessing noncredit educational programs for nonprofit managers. They argue that the unique characteristics of working nonprofit professionals demand tailored designs for both course content and delivery that differ from traditional for-credit courses. Furthermore, they suggest that because of the dynamic nature of managerial demands facing sector managers, periodic needs assessments are critically important to capture perspectives of employers, teaching faculty, and program participants. Using the Nonprofit Management Institute at Arizona State University as a case to illustrate the needs assessment process and demonstrate how the findings can guide curriculum development, Wang and Ashcraft report that stakeholders who participated in the needs assessment favored not only basic courses in management and governance but additional courses in topics such as marketing and social media, building collaborative relationships, and risk management and internal control, which reflect some of the newer skills needed to deal with a changing external environment. The study suggests that a regular needs assessment and curriculum review can keep course offerings relevant and responsive to new developments in the nonprofit sector and thus strengthen the quality of noncredit education in nonprofit management.

The final contribution, "Going Global: Strategies for Study Abroad at the School of Public Service, DePaul University, Chicago" by J. Patrick Murphy and Victor Meyer Jr., takes us back to some of the earlier themes raised by both Ebrahim and Smith as well as those encountered in other articles: strategies for the world of nonprofit education are increasingly global, and enacting these strategies entails carefully nurtured partnerships with institutions, nongovernmental actors, and individuals in other countries. Murphy and Meyer describe the approach taken by the School of Public Service at DePaul since it first began its international program in the late 1990s and usefully provide several models and examples of strategies for developing international nonprofit education programs.

They emphasize the importance of designing an overall mission for these programs within the home institution, keeping that mission as the primary guidepost, being attuned to benefits beyond meeting the mission, and regularly reviewing progress.

Given the ever-changing fields in which nonprofit management education, philanthropic studies, and social entrepreneurship find themselves, it is not surprising that interest is building for an ongoing education convening, building on the prior four conferences. Members of NACC have proposed meeting every other year, on the opposite years of the International Society for Third Sector Research's biennial conference. As such, a conference is being planned by NACC and hosted by DePaul University for the summer of 2013. Stay tuned!

References

Ashcraft, R. (ed.). "BenchMark 3: The Third Dicennial Conference on Nonprofit and Philanthropic Studies." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* 2007, *36*(4).

O'Neill, M., and Fletcher, K. *Nonprofit Management Education: U.S. and World Perspectives*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998.

O'Neill, M., and Young, D. *Educating Managers of Nonprofit Organizations*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1988.

ROBERT F. ASHCRAFT is executive director of the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation at Arizona State University and associate professor of nonprofit studies in ASU's School of Community Resources and Development. He is immediate past-president of the board of the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council.

MELISSA M. STONE is the Gross Family Professor of Nonprofit Management and professor of public affairs and planning at the Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota.