# Finding an academic home for fundraising: a multidisciplinary study of scholars' perspectives

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- *The high-demand, high-paying field of fundraising does not have an academic home in higher education, which hampers fundraising research and education. Recent advances in fundraising education and research can be attributed to four different disciplines: public relations, marketing, nonprofit management, and higher education administration. This disjointed approach has impeded the empirical study of fundraising, the development of theory in the field, and the education of future fundraisers. The purpose of this study is to begin the process to scientifically identify an appropriate academic home for fundraising that benefits fundraising practice, advances scholarship, and strengthens America's nonprofit sector. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 scholars from multiple disciplines who had published articles on fundraising in the three major nonprofit management and philanthropy journals. Findings show that there is no consensus among scholars about whether fundraising belongs in public relations, marketing, or nonprofit management. Although this study found no consensus among fundraising scholars about the appropriate academic home for fundraising, it does identify areas of agreement and disagreement on pertinent topics and provides a benchmark to guide further discussions about locating fundraising within an academic discipline.*
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## *Purpose of the study*

Although fundraising is crucial to the success and well-being of America's nonprofit sector, it has not yet found a home within an academic discipline. In fact, no academic discipline had "claimed fundraising as a part of its domain" prior to Kelly's (1998) proposal that fundraising be considered a specialization of public relations (p. 11). Recent advances in fundraising education and research can be attributed to four different disciplines: public relations, marketing, nonprofit management, and higher education administration. This disjointed approach has impeded the empirical study of fundraising, the development

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of theory in the field, and the education of future fundraisers.

The consequences of fundraising's lack of an academic home can be seen in the professional world. Properly trained fundraisers who are able to solicit major gifts are in short supply but high demand (Joslyn *et al.*, 2014). The shortage of trained fundraisers grows more serious by the year as the nonprofit sector continues to grow and fundraising becomes more complicated (Hall, 2010; Holtzman, 2006). As a result, skilled fundraisers have become some of the highest paid employees in the nonprofit sector (Tempel & Beem, 2002). According to the Association of Fundraising Professionals (2014), US fundraisers earned an average salary of $75 483 in 2013. Some senior fundraisers earn $500 000 or more (Daniels *et al.*, 2014). Many nonprofit groups cannot afford the top talent and are forced to hire "inexperienced or unqualified fundraisers out of desperation" (Hall, 2007b, para. 5).

Recent scholarly work has documented the dire circumstances of staffing the fundraising function. Iarrobino (2006) called turnover in the fundraising profession an "epidemic." The shortage of fundraisers has created a "revolving door," whereby nonprofits hire fundraisers away from other nonprofits at the same time another organization is raiding their fundraising staffs. Based on findings from a national survey of 1852 senior fundraising practitioners, or development directors, and 870 nonprofit executive directors, Bell and Cornelius (2013) stated, "Our data confirm that the supply of qualified development directors is smaller than the demand for them across the nonprofit sector" (p. 8). The researchers reported that the median length of vacancy of development director positions was 6 months, during which relationships with donors and amount of money raised languished. Bell and Cornelius concluded that "more work is needed to create a healthy and diverse pipeline of skilled, committed fundraising professionals" (p. 24).

Working with one of Bell and Cornelius's (2013) datasets, Haggerty (2015) conducted a secondary analysis of fundraising practitioners that focused on their turnover intentions. She found that 50% of the fundraisers planned to stay in their current position for 2 or less years. Multiple regression revealed that job satisfaction was the most consistent predictor of turnover intentions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, salary was not a significant predictor of short-term and long-term turnover intentions, nor were passion about an organization's mission, perceived organizational support, or feelings the fundraisers held about working with their executive directors. Haggerty recommended that nonprofits "need to be clear up front about what the job entails" (p. 145). She concluded, "While degree programs in nonprofit studies are expanding, they typically offer just a class on fundraising within the program, and consequently it is challenging for someone seeking a career in fundraising to find formal education opportunities to prepare them for the profession" (p. 146).

To resolve this situation and avoid what many nonprofit leaders view as an ongoing crisis, fundraising needs a program of formal education housed in an academic discipline and taught by full-time faculty at colleges and universities to expand the stream of qualified fundraisers.

Fundraising lacks a program of formal education because it "emerged solely outside the academy" whereby students were trained as apprentices under experienced practitioners (Kelly, 1998, p. 112). Almost 100 years after fundraising started as an occupation, training gradually moved into higher education (Kelly, 1998). However, even today, courses on fundraising predominately are taught by adjunct practitioner instructors instead of full-time professors— regardless of the disciplines in which the classes are taught (Hall, 2007a). Because practitioners assume most of the fundraising teaching load at colleges and universities, current education still resembles vocational training more so than academic preparation.

Learning from those who are practicing in the field may provide students with practical knowledge, but it leaves the study of fundraising in academic limbo. Kelly (1998) explained that adjunct instructors are not obligated, nor are they usually inclined, to develop theory, conduct research, or publish new knowledge on the subjects they teach.

Fundraising cannot advance in professionalism without progress in building theory, conducting research, and accumulating a scientific body of knowledge, which in turn will produce scholars who have developed an expertise in the field and competence in teaching the subject. The need for a scientific knowledge base was the major topic of discussion at the Council for Advancement and Support of Education's 1985 Colloquium on Professionalism (Kelly, 2002). Yet, today, there are no studies on such critical topics as cultivation, the use of negotiation in raising major gifts, and fundraising effectiveness—as opposed to efficiency.

The purpose of this study is to begin the process to scientifically identify an appropriate academic home for fundraising that benefits fundraising practice, advances scholarship, and strengthens America's nonprofit sector.

## Literature review

According to Kelly (1998), fundraising falls substantially short on the two most important criteria of a profession: (a) a body of knowledge based on theory and research and (b) a program of formal education (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Fundraising has a small body of knowledge based on theory and research (Donahue, 1995). Just as fundraising classes in higher education primarily are taught by part-time adjunct faculty, most fundraising literature is written by practitioners (Kelly, 1998). Kelly (1991) found that fundraising "has been ignored, or limited, as a research subject historically and within the current and growing body of literature on philanthropy," which has evolved from a variety of academic disciplines (p. 128). The result has been scholarship that "is insufficient and incomplete for understanding fund raising and philanthropy" (Kelly, 1998, p. 106).

Explaining his reasons for giving $1.5 million to establish the first endowed chair in fundraising, housed at the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, fundraising consultant Bob Hartsook (as cited in Hall, 2007c) said

*I've got a lot of respect for the fund-raising profession, but frankly there is a lot of crap out there. . . . I am a lawyer by training, and my profession is built on solid research. Fund raising is based on anecdotal stories (p. 53).*

Adrian Sargeant (as cited in Hall, 2007c), the first holder of the chair, said his top priority was building theory and research.

*I want to help expand the body of knowledge around fund raising. We like to think of ourselves as professionals, but we do not have an underpinning of research-based knowledge that you find in other professions like medicine (p. 53).*

As a result of the lack of theory building and research in fundraising, programs of formal education have not developed. In other words, these two criteria are intertwined: Without a program of formal education, few academics will conduct research and build theory, and the knowledge base will not support academic programs in higher education. Therefore, the current study turns to the relevant literature on fundraising research and education from the four disciplines most productive in the field—public relations, marketing, nonprofit management, and higher education administration—to examine the fruitfulness of each as an academic home for fundraising.

### Public relations and fundraising

Public relations have been described as "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Broom, 2009, p. 7). Kelly (1991, 1998) linked public relations and fundraising through the concept of relationship management. Specifically, Kelly (1998) defined fundraising as "the management of relationships between a charitable organization and its donor publics" (p. 8). She noted that because communication is the basis of relationships, "the

management of an organization's formal communication with donor publics is the defining characteristic of fund raising" (pp. 8–9). However, Kelly (1991) wrote that neither fundraising nor public relations have embraced the other either academically or in practice. While Waters (2007) found that "scholars have been slowly warming up to the idea that fundraising is a specialization of public relations" (p. 42), research on charitable nonprofit organizations has shown that public relations and fundraising are often separate and distinct functions (Swanger & Rodgers, 2013; Wilson & Kochhar, 2014). Nevertheless, fundraising can be seen as a specialization of public relations because its activities are capable of making not only short-term behavioral changes but also long-term changes that result in beneficial relationships between organizations and donors (Worley & Little, 2002).

Several public relations scholars have contributed to advancing knowledge on fundraising (e.g., Waters & Feneley, 2013), but Kelly (1991, 1998) is most closely associated with the endeavor as she has adapted multiple public relations theories to describe and explain fundraising. For example, Kelly (1995) used Grunig and Hunt's (1984) four models of public relations to conceptualize four models of fundraising: press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical. She reported that the most utilized model was press agentry, the oldest and least ethical model. However, the ideal model—two-way symmetrical, which focuses on communication as a means to achieve understanding—was not predominantly practiced. Kelly (1998) noted that "until fund raising finds an academic home with scholar teachers, the symmetrical model will remain underutilized" (p. 172).

In addition, Kelly (1998) argued that Hendrix's (1995) ROPE (research, objectives, programming, and evaluation) process model of public relations could be applied to fundraising by adding a stewardship step (ROPES) to reflect the common fundraising practice of maintaining long-term relationships with donors. Moreover, Kelly (1998) relied on public relations roles theory to explain four roles practiced by

fundraising practitioners: technician, liaison, expert prescriber, and problem-solving process facilitator. Subsequent research of fundraisers belonging to the Association for Healthcare Philanthropy found that they predominantly enacted the expert prescriber role, which can lead to compartmentalization of the function and produce "unrealistic expectations and dissatisfaction with the fundraising department" (Waters *et al.*, 2012, p. 256).

## Marketing and fundraising

The American Marketing Association defines the practice and discipline of marketing as "the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, marketing communication, and the distribution of ideas, products, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals" (Cant, 2004, p. 4). Ken Burnett (2002), a UK consultant who has written extensively on fundraising from a marketing perspective, called fundraising "an approach to the marketing of a cause that centers on the unique and special relationship between a nonprofit and each supporter. Its overriding consideration is to care for and develop that bond and do nothing that might damage or jeopardize it" (p. 38). Additionally, several scholars have applied marketing concepts to fundraising; however, the leading proponent of the marketing approach is Adrian Sargeant (1999), a British professor of nonprofit marketing who has written several books and conducted research on various facets of fundraising. Sargeant proposed a new conceptualization of the marketing mix that adds donor-specific notions of physical evidence, process, and people to the traditional four "Ps" of marketing.

One of Sargeant's (2001b) most significant contributions has been in the area of retention of annual giving donors, those individuals, corporations, and foundations who regularly contribute lower-level gifts. He introduced the concept of lifetime value, which measures a donor's worth to a charitable organization over time through prospect research. In doing so, he provided empirical evidence that

building loyalty in people who already are giving saves organizations money and time. Sargeant urged fundraisers to use lifetime values to formulate strategies to build long-term relationships with donors.

In 1992, Burnett (cited in Sargeant, 2001b) applied the concept of relationship marketing to fundraising "to champion a move toward dealing with donors individually, recognizing each donor as unique in terms of giving history, motivation for giving, and the overall standard of care expected from the charities being supported" (p. 180). Since the introduction of this perspective, the paradigm of fundraising as marketing has shifted from transactional to relational (Sargeant, 2001a). According to Sargeant (2001b), relationship fundraising is dependent on the choices of donors. They choose the type of communication they want to receive and are given greater flexibility in how often they are contacted. The goal is to treat the donor as an individual rather than break even financially on the first communication with the donor (Sargeant, 2001a).

The transactional approach to fundraising is characterized by a lack of donor segmentation and homogenous communication with all donors (Sargeant, 2001a; Sargeant & Jay, 2004a). Donors are asked to give right away, because the situation is urgent and the organization must maximize its return on investment as soon as possible. In contrast, the essence of relationship marketing is "the development and maintenance of long-term relationships with customers rather than a series of discrete transactions" (Sargeant, 2001a, p. 25).

According to Kelly (2008), the marketing perspective provides a limited view of fundraising. For example, Sargeant's (2001a, 2001b) work concentrates on annual giving donors and pays little attention to major gift donors, who provide the majority of dollars raised in the USA. The flaw is understandable given marketing's traditional focus on mass consumers of products and services. Furthermore, in countries such as those in the UK, major gift fundraising is a relatively new phenomenon. Sargeant (as cited in Hall, 2007c) stated, "In the United States, you are light years ahead in major-gift fund raising" (p. 53).

Sargeant continued his comparison between American and British fundraising practices, stating, "[U.S. fundraisers] are better at looking after the top end, and [U.K. fundraisers] are better with the lower end. In our country, all the money tends to come from lots of people giving comparatively little" (p. 53).

## Nonprofit management and fundraising

The discipline of nonprofit management focuses on educating students for a variety of jobs within nonprofit organizations from the perspective of a liberal arts curriculum (Dolch *et al.*, 2007). The literature on nonprofit management education suggests that fundraisers should receive a liberal arts-based education, including the development of communication and management skills, in addition to practical experience in the field; however, recommended curricula for both undergraduate and graduate students include only one course dealing specifically with fundraising. The Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (2015a, 2015b) published reports of suggested curricula for undergraduate and graduate education that included two foci: (1) understanding the role of the nonprofit/voluntary sector in society and (2) understanding the leadership and management approaches of nonprofit organizations. The first curricular focus is based on a liberal arts approach that encompasses courses in comparative perspectives on civil society, voluntary action, and philanthropy; foundations of civil society; ethics and values; public policy, law, advocacy, and social change; and community service and civic engagement. This liberal arts focus is preferred because some critics say that fundraising draws too much from professional schools, such as law, business, and public administration (Payton, Russo, & Tempel, 1991; Lindahl & Conley, 2002). The second curricular focus is designed to develop professional skills and requires courses in leading and managing organizations; nonprofit finance and fundraising; financial management; managing staff and volunteers; nonprofit marketing; assessment, evaluation, and decision-making methods; and professional and career development.

The curricula implemented at many universities appear deficient for making a strong case to house fundraising in the discipline of nonprofit management. The Nonprofit Academic Center Council (2004) reported that "more than 255 colleges and universities provide at least one class in nonprofit management, including 157 schools that offer at least one course within a graduate department" (para. 3). According to Dolch *et al.* (2007), 61 schools offer some type of concentration in nonprofit management, housed in a variety of academic units and disciplines: 23 in arts and sciences, 10 in public administration, six in business, one in business and public administration, and 21 in other units. These programs in nonprofit management offer limited courses focused specifically on fundraising.

Although there is little fundraising coursework, a study sponsored by the Kellogg Foundation found that graduates receiving bachelor's degrees in nonprofit management deemed fundraising/development, along with strategic planning, to be the most important skills that are needed to run a nonprofit (Larson & Wilson, 2001). The researchers interpreted these results to mean that the students wanted to take more fundraising classes during their educational experience.

According to Kelly (1998), nonprofit management scholars have produced few studies on fundraising, giving much more attention to philanthropy. In evidence, the authors of this study could not identify a leading scholar who concentrates on fundraising research and advocates placing the function in the nonprofit management discipline. Regardless, nonprofit management programs across the country currently are educating many students who plan to pursue fundraising careers.

### Higher education administration and fundraising

Fundraising also is studied by many students at the graduate level in the discipline of higher education administration, under the heading of "institutional advancement." Indeed, education departments produced 85% of the doctoral dissertations on fundraising between 1991 and 2006 (Caboni & Proper, 2007). Although it awards graduate degrees to numerous practitioners, higher education administration has minimal impact on fundraising scholarship. According to education scholars Timothy Caboni and Eve Proper (2007), of the 241 dissertations they examined, only 20% focused on theory, and the majority "were of marginal quality and a scant few made it into the research literature" (p. 16). Only 10% of the dissertations were published in a journal, and only 9% of the authors became full-time faculty members at research institutions. Providing insight into their negative findings, Caboni and Proper reported the following: "Most dissertation chairs were faculty members who had not studied fund raising themselves, as were committee members. This meant they were unable to guide their dissertators to the work that had previously been done" (p. 15).

Kelly (1998) criticized higher education administration for its poor performance in relation to fundraising, stating

> *Most faculty in the education discipline do not contribute to our knowledge about fund raising through their own work . . . yet the vast majority of all theses and dissertations on fund raising come out of that discipline" (p. 111).*

Institutional advancement is an umbrella concept advocated by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education, a professional association primarily representing colleges and universities (see case.org). The organizational term does not refer solely to fundraising but incorporates such disciplines as public relations and marketing. It also is limited to just one type of nonprofit organization, those with an education mission. For the reasons just outlined, this study does not consider the discipline of higher education administration as one of the options for fundraising's academic home and excludes it from the remainder of the study.

## Research questions

Based on the literature review, the following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: To what extent is there consensus among the scholars who have recently studied fundraising as to the academic discipline in which fundraising should be housed in colleges and universities?

RQ2: In what particular course of study do fundraising scholars believe fundraising practitioners should be trained?

RQ3: To what extent are fundraising scholars knowledgeable about the potential of the marketing, nonprofit management, and public relations disciplines to provide an appropriate academic home for fundraising?

## *Method*

Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted because of the exploratory nature of this study and the need for "a wealth of detail" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 134). Fifteen fundraising scholars were interviewed from a population of 22 scholars, which represent a 68% response rate. The population of interest was all scholars who have conducted research on fundraising. The population selected for study was US authors of peer-reviewed articles that mentioned fundraising in their abstracts and were published between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2007 in the following journals: *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, and *International Journal of Nonprofit & Voluntary Sector Marketing*. Since this initial selection was made, eight of the 22 scholars published additional research on fundraising in one of the three journals previously mentioned between 1 January 2008 and 31 December 2014. Practitioner authors were eliminated from the population unless they also were graduate students. Co-authors of the same article were included; duplications were removed. Seven scholars of the qualifying 22 declined to be interviewed because of time constraints or because they believed they did not know enough about the topic to participate.

The 15 participants formed a group that was sufficiently large and diverse to provide a range of opinions. Seven were women, and eight were men. They were affiliated with universities spread across the USA. A breakdown of their academic rank is as follows: five full professors, five associate professors, three assistant professors, one retired associate professor, and one doctoral student. Five of the participants published fundraising research within the past 8 years in one of the three academic journals identified previously. In addition, they represented a variety of disciplines, including the three major options for an academic home for fundraising. Discipline representation is as follows: five from accounting, three from marketing, three from public administration, two from public relations, and one each from management and economics.

Participants were recruited first by personalized letters sent via United States Postal Service, followed by telephone calls and e-mails to set up interview dates and times. Interviews were administered by telephone, and each participant was read an informed consent form and asked for a verbal agreement. Verbal consents were recorded in addition to the interviews.

An interview guide was followed, although the researchers asked follow-up questions to draw appropriate information from the participants. The interview guide consisted of 21 questions. Participants were asked about the academic preparation of fundraising practitioners and the discipline in which fundraising research and study primarily should be conducted. Participants also were asked to give their own definition of fundraising and answer questions regarding demographics, including professional experience. The interview guide was pre-tested with two faculty members and one fundraising practitioner.

Data analysis followed the phases identified by Marshall and Rossman (2006). These include "(a) organizing the data, (b) immersion in the data, (c)

generating categories and themes, (d) coding the data and analyze the data, (e) offering interpretations through analytic memos, and (f) searching for alternative understandings" (p. 156). Responses of the 15 participants were organized by individual questions as well as by categories and themes.

## *Results*

### RQ1: consensus among scholars about an academic home for fundraising

The data collected from interviews with the 15 fundraising scholars reveal a lack of consensus not only about an academic home for fundraising but also about the definition of fundraising and a theoretical basis for fundraising. They are in agreement on the need for more research on fundraising and—to a lesser degree—on the state of fundraising education.

Participants offered diverse opinions about the optimal location for fundraising's academic home—marketing, public relations, nonprofit management, general business, economics, a multidisciplinary approach, and no academic home—with most views closely aligned to the participants' own discipline (**Table** 1). For example, a marketing and

international business professor admitted a bias toward a business education because "understand [ing] how organizations function properly would be an important prerequisite to be able to understand how a not-for-profit can survive." Similarly, most participants seemed to favor a discipline traditionally housed in a business school (**Table** 2). However, because most of the participants were from business-related disciplines, this finding was not unexpected.

While most participants thought fundraising should be housed in one academic area, several participants advocated for a multidisciplinary fundraising education. For example, a public relations professor noted that students who wanted to learn about fundraising should supplement their study of public relations with courses about nonprofit management because future fundraisers "definitely need to have a solid understanding of the nonprofit sector." Additionally, a doctoral student in public affairs with professional fundraising experience explained that fundraisers need a wide knowledge base that encompasses the liberal arts in order to understand relationships, practice effective written and verbal communication, and possess knowledge of the business world and business practices.

**Table 1.** Comparison of scholars' academic discipline with preferences for an academic home for fundraising by level of education

| Academic discipline of interview participant | Bachelor's degree | Master's degree | Doctoral degree |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Marketing | Marketing | Marketing | Marketing |
| 2. Public relations | Public relations | Public relations | Public relations |
| 3. Marketing | Marketing | Marketing | Marketing |
| 4. Public affairs | General business | Multi-disciplinary | Multi-disciplinary |
| 5. Public relations | Public relations | No best discipline | Public relations |
| 6. Marketing | Marketing | Marketing | Marketing |
| 7. Accounting | Marketing | Nonprofit management | Nonprofit management |
| 8. Accounting | General business | General business | General business |
| 9. Management | General business | General business | General business |
| 10. Accounting | No best discipline | No best discipline | No best discipline |
| 11. Accounting | No best discipline | Marketing | Marketing |
| 12. Accounting | General business | General business | General business |
| 13. Public administration | Multi-disciplinary | General business | No best discipline |
| 14. Public affairs | Multi-disciplinary | Nonprofit management | Economics |
| 15. Economics | Nonprofit management | Nonprofit management | Nonprofit management |

**Table 2.** Scholars' views regarding the discipline most appropriate for an academic home for fundraising by level of education

| Discipline | Bachelor's degree | Master's degree | Doctoral degree |
|---|---|---|---|
| Marketing | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| Public relations | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Nonprofit management | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| General business | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Multi-disciplinary | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Economics | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| No best discipline | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Total | 15 | 15 | 15 |

The lack of consensus on an academic home for fundraising is not surprising given the lack of consistency in scholarly definitions of fundraising. The definitions provided by participants can be grouped into two categories, one focused on relationships and the other focused on raising money. Of the 15 participants, five gave definitions that focused on relationship building. These participants mainly came from disciplines outside business schools. For example, a professor of public administration, with 4 years of professional experience, explained that fundraising is about "friend raising": "It is really about building relationships with people in the community . . . [and that] turns into financial support sometimes." Ten of the 15 participants provided definitions of fundraising that focused on raising money, and these scholars primarily represented business disciplines. For example, an accounting professor explained that fundraising is "the marketing and salesmanship in raising donations for nonprofits." A marketing professor said that fundraising was "doing activities that would increase support to the nonprofit through direct money coming in."

In addition to definitional differences, there was almost no consensus about the most fruitful theoretical framework for studying fundraising. Participants mentioned 24 different theories, ranging from altruism to economic dualism to resource dependency to stewardship. Surprisingly, five of the participating scholars admitted that they had not given much thought to the theoretical basis for fundraising. Findings suggest that most participants resort to a general theory within their own discipline to explain fundraising—with or without direct knowledge of the field. Only three theories were mentioned more than once: general marketing theory, relationship management theory, and organizational behavior/management theory.

The 15 scholars participating in this study, who account for a substantial amount of recent fundraising research, adamantly and almost uniformly asserted that there still is much to accomplish in building a body of knowledge based on theory and research for fundraising—the criterion commonly viewed as the most important to becoming a profession (e.g., Donahue, 1995). Six scholars said that there was little research being performed on fundraising; eight said that the research is improving, decent, or making strides; and one researcher reported that he did not have enough prior knowledge to comment on the subject. Not one participant said that fundraising research is at an acceptable standard.

Participants also were somewhat in agreement on the underdeveloped state of current fundraising education—the second most common criteria of a profession (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Of the 15 scholars interviewed, seven believe that there is not much fundraising education, three reported that they had insufficient knowledge to comment, two think that fundraising education is making progress and experiencing growth, two said that fundraising education is at par, and one claimed that there is too much focus on fundraising in nonprofit management programs. Representing the first view, a marketing professor said, "As far as an academic side of things, [the curriculum] is poorly developed at this point." Other participants echoed this sentiment, saying there are simply not enough classes being taught. A professor of marketing, who believes that fundraising should strive toward professionalism, said that the first thing that should be done is to offer more fundraising-specific classes in marketing and nonprofit management at universities.

Furthermore, many of the scholars interviewed believe that current curricula are not well balanced between practice and theory: Fundraising education is either too practical (i.e., not based on theory and research) or too theoretical (i.e., not linked to practical application). Overall, this study's findings indicate that fundraising education needs improvement.

## RQ2: course of study for fundraising practitioners

Results for the second research question were similar to the results for the first research question: There is no consensus on the type of educational background for students currently aspiring to be fundraising practitioners. The discipline mentioned most frequently by participants for undergraduate education was marketing (**Table** 3). For graduate education, a Master's of Business Administration was the degree program most highly recommended. Five of the participants in the study said that a student's course of study depends on the type of organization for which the student desires to work one day. For example, students wishing to raise money for a hospital should pursue health-related studies.

Table 3. Scholars' views regarding a course of study for fundraising practitioners by undergraduate and graduation education

| Course of Study | Undergraduate | Graduate |
|---|---|---|
| Marketing | 6 | 1 |
| Public relations | 2 | 1 |
| Nonprofit management | 2 | 4 |
| Multi-disciplinary | 1 | 1 |
| Economics | 1 | 0 |
| Finance | 1 | 0 |
| Journalism | 1 | 0 |
| MBA | 0 | 6 |
| MPA | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 15 | 14 |

MBA, Master's of Business Administration; MPA, Master's of Public Affairs.

A reoccurring theme in the participants' responses was that fundraising practitioners should be educated in more than one discipline and learn to do many different tasks well. More than half of the participants advocated this "jack-of-all-trades" approach to fundraising education, until they were asked to name one field as their top choice. Although they expressed specific opinions about the best educational background for practitioners, they usually were not willing to limit their responses to one specific area of study. This was a repeated theme. For example, a professor of business explained that having a background in business was not enough, fundraisers must also learn how to communicate. He suggested an "interdisciplinary curriculum" that could include "courses from a business, journalism, and communication side." Similarly, a public relations scholar felt that students could get exposure to other facets of fundraising through a combination of on-the-job experience and graduate education in either public relations or nonprofit management.

## RQ3: knowledge about the potential of public relations, marketing, and nonprofit management to provide an academic home fundraising

To answer the third research question, respondents were asked specifically about their views of the potential for public relations, marketing, and nonprofit management to be an academic home for fundraising. Beginning with public relations, other than the two participants representing the public relations discipline, scholars' knowledge about the potential of public relations to provide an academic home for fundraising was low. Only five of the participants other than those who were public relations scholars indicated that they knew about public relations and its potential to serve as an academic home for fundraising. Another five participants were unfamiliar with what public relations has to offer the field of fundraising. They spoke about relationship building and other core tenants of public relations theory

and practice but did not indicate that they were familiar with public relations as an approach to fundraising practice and research. Some scholars, all from business disciplines, professed to know about public relations practice and theory, but their knowledge was flawed or based on stereotypes. For example, they said that public relations is a subset of marketing, is salesmanship, or it is "spinning" the organization's position on issues. A few participants admitted that they did not know anything about public relations being a possible academic home for fundraising.

Regardless, 11 participants were receptive to the idea of educating practitioners and studying fundraising from a public relations perspective. On the other hand, four participants expressed strong opinions against focusing on public relations. For example, one professor of marketing said that public relations would not do justice to fundraising education because it does not provide "the tools and techniques needed for analysis, the strategic implications" and is "part of the four Ps of marketing. . . . Why are we looking at separating some of these disciplines out from their mother disciplines and . . . placing them elsewhere?" Additionally, an economics professor, who endorsed a combination of economics and marketing as an academic home for fundraising, indicated that public relations could contribute to fundraising only on a secondary level because he thought public relations was only concerned with "creating a very good image in the minds of . . . your external constituencies."

Turning to participants' opinions about marketing as a potential academic home for fundraising, 10 of the 15 participants expressed positive views, while five participants responded with neutral or negative views (readers should keep in mind that nine of the study's participants represented business disciplines, and one represented economics, which is closely associated with business). A public relations/communication scholar said that marketing would only be a viable option for fundraising if it included a communication component. The scholar noted that marketing focuses on consumers, but donors are not the same as consumers. Further, he

explained that fundraising should not be equated with sales because, "Fundraising is not a matter of looking for products within the nonprofit organization and then finding people to sell them to."

A marketing professor expressed a very different opinion about the relationship between fundraising and marketing. While he noted that communication and relationship building with donors were a part of fundraising, his view was that "fundraising is marketing." Additionally, he explained that students would receive "a more technical knowledge and a more thorough education" if fundraising were taught as marketing.

Finally, when asked their opinions about nonprofit management as an academic home for fundraising, nine of the 15 participants had positive opinions, while six had neutral or negative opinions. Most think that the discipline is a viable option but not as good as marketing or public relations, respectively. One professor of public relations/communication said that studying nonprofit management is helpful for students who want to work for a nonprofit organization but are still not quite sure what type of job they want in the nonprofit sector because of the wide range of topics covered. However, if a student has decided to go into fundraising, a degree in nonprofit management may be too general and not provide enough discipline-specific preparation. A professor of accounting agreed, saying

> *Nonprofit management is extraordinarily broad and fundraising is a very small part of nonprofit management. You cannot presume that someone who can manage well a nonprofit would also be an excellent fundraiser.*

Another professor of accounting said, "I still think they need to stay grounded in the business paradigm."

These opinions represent the views of most of the participants and a theme emerging from the study: Nonprofit management education is too broad to provide an academic home for fundraising. Public relations or marketing, respectively, are more viable option. Furthermore, some participants claimed

that nonprofit management is an inappropriate home for fundraising because it is too practitioner oriented. A professor of communication noted that a practitioner orientation is "very helpful in managing the day-to-day activities of a nonprofit." However, fundraising as a discipline needs insights from theory-based research that can advance knowledge in the field as a whole. However, a researcher in organizational behavior, with an undergraduate degree in journalism and a master's in nonprofit management, explained that the broad scope of an "intellectually stimulating" nonprofit management education coupled with on-the-job training and mentoring helped the researcher learn to be an effective fundraiser. This viewpoint underscores the value of practical education for fundraising practitioners. It also demonstrates that academic training, particularly in the discipline of nonprofit management, currently falls short of providing the same degree of necessary knowledge and skills as the existing apprentice system in the practice of fundraising.

## *Discussion*

The purpose of this study was to begin the process to scientifically identify an appropriate academic home for fundraising that benefits fundraising practice, advances scholarship, and strengthens America's nonprofit sector. Although this study found no consensus among fundraising scholars about the appropriate academic home for fundraising, it does identify areas of agreement and disagreement on pertinent topics and provides a benchmark to guide further discussions about locating fundraising within an academic discipline.

### Implications for fundraising practice and education

As noted in the introduction of this study, skilled fundraisers will be needed for the survival of nonprofits in the future. How future fundraisers are trained will have a direct impact on how they practice fundraising professionally. Furthermore, if there continues to be a lack of fundraising training, there will continue to be a lack of fundraisers. Results of this study suggest that a solution to the problem is not close at hand.

Whereas the findings of this study revealed no clear consensus among active fundraising scholars about an academic home for fundraising, the data show an even more profound impediment to situating fundraising within an academic discipline. Most of the scholars in this study reported that their discipline was the best fit for fundraising's academic home; however, most of the scholars also advocated an interdisciplinary approach to educating fundraising students. This contradiction indicates that scholars are aware that aspects of their own discipline can contribute to fundraising research and education but that their discipline is not the perfect fit.

While a broad-based education on the undergraduate level is a popular idea, believing that fundraisers can be educated in a variety of different disciplines still leaves fundraising homeless in academia. Additionally, these findings are an indication that scholars have yet to confront the intellectual challenge of situating fundraising within an academic discipline. The data from this study found that at least one-fourth of the interviewees mentioned that he or she had never considered the need for an academic home for fundraising. One marketing scholar remarked, "I had more opinions on this subject than I thought!" It is hoped that this research can begin a dialog across disciplines about the issue of an academic home for fundraising.

This research identifies three areas that ought to be addressed in any discussion about fundraising's academic home. First, scholars need to come to an agreement about the definition of fundraising. It seems likely that scholars could collaborate on a definition of fundraising that takes advantage of the strengths of all perspectives and fosters dialog about the proper home for fundraising. Second, scholars need to address the appropriate theoretical frameworks for fundraising research and education.

Surprisingly, about one-third of the scholars interviewed for this study were caught off guard by the idea of a theoretical basis for fundraising, suggesting they had given little thought to the matter. A core set of theories needs to be developed and tested through research to develop an encompassing paradigm of fundraising. Third, scholars should consider whether or not current fundraising education is too practical or too theoretical. In the authors' view, fundraising education seems to be taught more from a practical perspective than a theoretical one. However, both the practical and theoretical approaches to fundraising education need to be improved.

## Conclusion

Fundraising research and education are in the early stages of development, and much growth is needed to improve fundraising practice. This study should point scholars toward developing dialog between the fields that study fundraising. Most scholars seemed to believe that finding an academic home for fundraising is an idea worth pursuing, and it would move the discipline forward. Even though many had opinions about which discipline would be the best academic home for fundraising, most seemed to have an open mind about teaching fundraising from a different perspective. However, the lack of consensus among them highlights the deficiencies of public relations, marketing, and nonprofit management that have prevented these disciplines from becoming fundraising's academic home. In order for fundraising to find its academic home, one of these three disciplines needs to address its deficiencies and claim fundraising as its own. While this study did not find the academic home for fundraising, hopefully it will start a discussion about its importance.

### Limitations and suggestions for future research

The selection criteria used to identify participants for this study only took into consideration scholars who had published work on fundraising in certain academic journals from 2000 to 2007. If the criteria had been widened (e.g., included scholars who had published in other journals or had published articles beyond the 7-year period), the study's findings potentially would have changed. Additionally, this study only considered participants studying fundraising in the USA. There are many scholars in other countries doing fundraising work, especially in the UK and Canada. Their opinions would have added another dimension to this study.

Finding an academic home for fundraising is a worthwhile subject for future research. Future research should seek to discover what leading fundraising practitioners found valuable and not valuable about their educational experiences relative to fundraising practice. Additionally, more generalizable quantitative studies of fundraising scholars, and perhaps nonprofit and philanthropy scholars in general, are recommended to test the findings of this study.

## Biographical notes

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