

---

# Needs Assessment and Curriculum Mapping Enhancing Management Skills of the Nonprofit Workforce

*Lili Wang, Robert F. Ashcraft*

Arizona State University

*This article documents the needs assessment and curriculum mapping of a nonprofit management certificate program in the United States. Based on a survey of nonprofit leaders, we identify management skill sets critical to the nonprofit sector in a challenging economic environment. In addition, a survey of alumni and students assesses participants' view of skills and knowledge they need in their daily jobs or for career advancement. Results of the study not only help to inform the curriculum revamping of the selected program but also serve to inform the content of other education programs within the nonprofit professional development education arena.*

**Keywords:** *nonprofit management education, certificate, needs assessment, curriculum*

**T**HE NONPROFIT SECTOR IN the United States employs approximately 13 million full- and part-time employees, which accounts for 10 percent of the nation's workforce (Wing, Pollak, and Blackwood, 2008). In the past few decades, the nonprofit workforce has become increasingly professionalized. In response to this growing professionalism, numerous university-based nonprofit management education (NME) programs have emerged (O'Neill, 2005). From 1996 to 2006, the number of colleges

The authors thank Cristina Torres Archibeque, Laura L. Bush, and Sarah Hipolito for their research assistance.

---

Correspondence to: Lili Wang, School of Community Resources and Development, Arizona State University, 411 N. Central Ave., Suite 550, Phoenix, AZ 85004. E-mail: Lili.Wang@asu.edu

and universities providing courses in nonprofit management has increased 30 percent from 179 to 238, and the number of NME programs has increased 50 percent from 284 to 426. More than half of these programs offer credit-based degrees, certificates, and courses in nonprofit management; only seventy-five institutions offer noncredit courses, and fifty-six offer continuing education courses (Mirabella, 2007).

Prior studies of NME programs have examined their institutional locations, curricula, target students, program impacts, and so on (Fletcher, 2005; O'Neill, 2005; O'Neill and Fletcher, 1998; Wish and Mirabella, 1998). Most of these studies focused on undergraduate or graduate degree programs, concentrations, or credit-based certificates (Mirabella, 2007; Wish and Mirabella, 1998). Very few have examined the noncredit offerings for nonprofit professionals and continuous learners. The unique characteristics of these students, such as their working experiences, tight schedules, and learning styles, suggest that noncredit NME programs need to design their curricula and the formats of the courses differently from those of degree programs to meet the needs of their audience. In addition, the ever-changing operating environment for nonprofit organizations, such as the advancement of technology and the economic recession of the past few years, requires NME programs to review their curriculum periodically to ensure their courses provide up-to-date knowledge and training that are in sync with the demands of the nonprofit sector. For NME programs that offer short-term courses for nonprofit professionals and continuous learners, periodic needs assessment and curriculum review are particularly important because these courses provide practice-oriented training that students can directly apply to their daily work in the nonprofit sector.

In this study, we use a long-standing nonprofit management training and certificate program that offers short-term noncredit courses to nonprofit professionals and continuous learners in the United States—the Nonprofit Management Institute (NMI) at Arizona State University (ASU)—as a case to illustrate the needs assessment process and demonstrate how the findings can guide curriculum development. The study focuses on five main questions:

1. What skills or competencies do nonprofit leaders or employing nonprofit organizations perceive as important in the current economic environment?
2. Do nonprofit employers support training for their employees?
3. What skills and knowledge do practitioners perceive as most important for managing nonprofit organizations?
4. Who is interested in the noncredit certificate program?
5. What skills and knowledge are taught by the certificate program and what additional courses are needed?

After a brief literature review of the development of nonprofit curriculum in the United States, the key nonprofit skill sets, and the content and educational format of nonprofit courses, we provide an overview of the Nonprofit Management Institute. Then we present the methodology of the needs assessment survey and the main findings of the study. We conclude with the implications of this study on needs assessment and curriculum review of other NME programs and the development of curriculum guidelines for noncredit certificates in nonprofit management.

## Literature Review

The curriculum design of an education program is influenced by various internal and external factors, such as the field of knowledge, the development of research, societal and students' needs (Diamond, 1998), and professional associations' curriculum guidelines. In this section we review the development of nonprofit curriculum, the skills needed in the nonprofit sector and how they shape the content of nonprofit courses, the educational format for nonprofit professional trainings, and existing research on noncredit NME programs.

### The Development of Nonprofit Curriculum

The development of nonprofit management as a unique body of knowledge and a distinguished field of study dates back to the late 1970s in the United States, when the first nonprofit management programs emerged (O'Neill, 1998; Young, 1999). The later growth of the professional associations (such as the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action), academic journals (for example, *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* and *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*), and book publishing has further advanced the body of knowledge, which provides the contents of nonprofit curriculum.

The development of nonprofit curriculum also benefits from the advancement of scholarly research in the field, especially research on nonprofit management education. Early studies, such as those included in the edited books by O'Neill and Fletcher (1998) and O'Neill and Young (1988), and the reports by Mirabella and Wish (Mirabella and Wish, 1999; Wish and Mirabella, 1998), have examined various aspects of nonprofit management education, including the course offerings and delivery models of curricula. These studies promote the interest in nonprofit management education and offer references for institutions that are interested in developing NME programs. The graduate and undergraduate NME curricular guidelines developed by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) serve as benchmarks to further assist graduate and undergraduate

degrees in philanthropy, nonprofit management, or nonprofit sector studies in designing their courses, programs, certificates, and degrees.

### Nonprofit Skill Sets and the Content of Nonprofit Curriculum

The needs of a society and the needs of students determine the content and design of nonprofit management curricula (Larson, Wilson, and Chung, 2003). Professionals working for the nonprofit sector are expected to bring to their jobs a broader range of skills and abilities because they are required to handle more responsibilities as well as more challenging tasks on a daily basis. Several studies have examined the key skills and abilities that nonprofit employees are expected to have. For example, in 1994 American Humanics conducted a survey of top executives of youth and human service nonprofits in six cities to identify the human resource needs of entry-level professionals in these organizations (Renz, 1996). The study found that executives were looking for general skills and characteristics, such as written and verbal communication skills, interpersonal skills, and initiative, in entry-level professionals. Only a few mentioned fund-raising and budgeting knowledge and skills and leadership abilities.

Skills and abilities that are considered important for the nonprofit workforce vary by stakeholders. In a focus group study of alumni and current students of ten NME programs, Mirabella and Wish (1999) found that boundary-spanning skills and competencies were specified by all groups of stakeholders across academic settings, while stakeholders from business schools emphasized internal management skills more, and stakeholders in public administration programs rated external management skills more important. Tschirhart (1998) examined thirty-two knowledge and skill areas that might be taught in a concentration and a certificate NME program at Indiana University. She surveyed three groups of stakeholders: nonprofit managers, students planning careers in the nonprofit sector, and faculty who taught courses in nonprofit management. The study showed that the managers considered leadership, ethics and values, long-term planning, financial management, conducting effective meetings, and interpersonal skills as very important. However, students and faculty rated leadership, conducting effective meetings, conflict management, and total quality management significantly lower than did managers. In contrast, students rated computers and software skills higher than did managers. Students added the role of nonprofits in society, public-private partnerships, international non-governmental organizations, personal ethics, audience development, crisis management, donor compliance, staff supervision, and consulting

as the additional skills and knowledge they thought would be valuable to any nonprofit managers. The differences indicate the unique perspectives of various stakeholder groups and their potential contributions to discussions of NME curriculum design. The findings also suggest that it is critical to seek inputs from various stakeholders in needs assessment and curriculum review, as we have done in this study.

Prior research has also addressed the linkage between skills demanded and the design of nonprofit curriculum. Heimovics and Herman (1989) identified four roles that nonprofit managers play: the human resource developer, the service provider, the creative boundary spanner, and the strategic planner. The first two roles focus on internal management; the latter two focus on external management. The authors argued that nonprofit curricula need to be competency based to help develop skills associated with these roles. For example, "human resource development in the nonprofit organization," which is related to the human resource developer role, focuses on developing human relation skills such as group facilitation, conflict resolution, listening and helping, counseling, and coaching. "Elements of organizational control and productivity," which are associated with the service provider role, should address competencies in information control and management, budgeting and program evaluation, fund-raising techniques, and others. "Environmental analysis and organizational change," which is related to the boundary spanner role, should equip the student to undertake environmental analyses, behave skillfully in a community's political and funding arena, and become adept at the techniques of persuasion and public address. "Essentials of strategy formulation for nonprofit organizations," which are associated with the strategic planner role, should prepare the student with strategic planning and marketing skills.

Societal and students' needs are likely to change in response to the changing operating environment of the nonprofit sector. Resource development or fund-raising skills were once not considered must-have expertise for entry-level nonprofit professionals (Renz, 1996), but recent studies have consistently shown that these skills are regarded as the number one training need of nonprofit students and professionals. For example, Larson and coauthors (Larson, 2002; Larson and Wilson, 2001; Larson and others, 2003) surveyed alumni and students from six NME graduate and certificate programs affiliated with the Building Bridges Initiative funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation to assess the extent to which nonprofit courses reflect the needs and interests of nonprofit practitioners. They found that students rated fund-raising and development and strategic planning as the topics most important for managing a nonprofit organization. Other course topics considered important

---

*Managers considered leadership, ethics and values, long-term planning, financial management, conducting effective meetings, and interpersonal skills as very important. However, students and faculty rated leadership, conducting effective meetings, conflict management, and total quality management significantly lower than did managers.*

---

included governance, budgeting and accounting, legal structure, ethnics and values, evaluation and accountability, proposal writing, policymaking, and marketing. In another study of training needs of nonprofit administrators in the Miami Valley region of Southwestern Ohio, Dolan (2002) also found that training in fund-raising leads the list, followed by grant writing, volunteer administration, planning, building and maintaining cooperative ventures, communication, and computer skills. These studies suggest that we should periodically review the training needs of nonprofit professionals and students and adjust nonprofit curriculum accordingly to better serve the workforce in the sector.

### Educational Format of Nonprofit Training

In addition to the content of nonprofit curriculum, educational format is another important factor to consider when designing a nonprofit training program. To build the skills and capacity of their employees, most nonprofits provide some form of training, either in house or through external academic institutions (Dolan, 2002; Renz, 1996). Studies have consistently shown that workshops or short-term format of training is preferred. Tschirhart (1998) found that nonprofit managers were more interested in workshops than academic courses, and shorter workshops and courses generally attracted more interest than longer ones. The most likely used educational format was a one-day workshop or seminar in response to issues of cost and time away from work, noted as the biggest barriers managers perceive in pursuing education. Dolan (2002) argued that traditional classroom training in graduate programs was not practical for nonprofit organizations. He also found that nonprofit administrators preferred short-term training formats, especially half-day and daylong seminars that take a short amount of time to supply significant pieces of information for immediate needs.

---

*Students rated fund-raising and development and strategic planning as the topics most important for managing a nonprofit organization.*

---

### Noncredit Nonprofit Management Education

As the literature review shows, most studies of NME focus on graduate, undergraduate, or credit-based certificate programs. Very few have examined noncredit offerings in nonprofit management at U.S. colleges and universities, and thus little detailed information is known about these programs, which typically train nonprofit professionals or continuous learners. In a study of all U.S. institutions of higher education offering noncredit or continuing education programs in nonprofit management, including thirty-three colleges and universities offering thirty-six certificates, Lee (2002) found a great variation in the nomenclature, curricula, requirements, finance, duration, and management of these programs. In terms of the ratio of required core classes and elective classes, nearly half the certificates consisted of core classes only,

two certificates required no core classes, and the rest had a mix of core and elective classes. For those that required core classes, half the programs shared some common curricular topics, including financial management, fund-raising, strategic planning, boards of directors, marketing and communications, personnel and human resources, and program evaluation. To strengthen their connection with the “real world,” eight programs had advisory committees, all of which were dominated by nonprofit practitioners. Other members serving on these committees typically included faculty, university staff, and faculty not affiliated with the institution offering the certificate. Lee argued that the study indicated the absence of a pedagogical consensus regarding what a noncredit certificate in nonprofit management should be and suggested developing basic professional standards and curriculum to enhance the value and credibility of noncredit certificates in nonprofit management that are issued by American colleges and universities.

Additional studies on this type of program, including the training needs of its participants, course offerings, educational format, and program impact, are needed to help us better understand its role or contribution in nonprofit management education. The present study helps fill the gap in the literature. Using the case of the Nonprofit Management Institute at ASU, we identify the skills and knowledge that nontraditional students of the nonprofit management program consider important to their careers and the course offerings that provide these skills and knowledge.

### **A Case of Noncredit Training and Certificate Program in Nonprofit Management**

The Nonprofit Management Institute was launched in 1993 by ASU and the Valley of the Sun United Way, in Phoenix, Arizona, in response to the increasing demand for short-term, workshop-oriented training for nonprofit professionals (Ashcraft, 1999). It is designed as a fee-based, noncredit, nondegree training program to enhance the management skills of those paid and unpaid staff serving nonprofit organizations in the region. The majority of its participants are working nonprofit professionals who seek knowledge in selected topics of nonprofit management. Increasingly, however, individuals representing government agencies or private businesses, and those who are currently not working in the nonprofit sector but are interested in a career change or are consulting for nonprofit organizations, are enrolled in the courses. Some NMI participants choose to enroll in one or more workshops based on interests and needs. Others choose to bundle a prescribed series of courses that allow them to earn the NMI certificate in nonprofit management. Since its inception, 240 participants have fulfilled the full NMI certification requirements.

NMI offers sixteen courses, all of which are available in a face-to-face short-course format. The face-to-face courses are offered over a Friday and Saturday in downtown Phoenix. Since NMI is the only noncredit, extended NME program in Arizona, it is not unusual for participants from other parts of the state to pursue the certificate. To extend the reach of the program, NMI has started to offer courses online. So far, NMI has developed five certificate courses online and is in the process of developing all courses for an online, Web-based format. Online courses take place asynchronously over three consecutive weeks and require five hours of study and participation per week. In face-to-face courses, successful course completion is based on attendance and participation. In online courses, successful completion is based on discussion board participation and submission of brief assignments.

A certificate in nonprofit management is awarded to students who complete ten required courses and two electives. The ten required courses include "Human Resource Management," "Financial Management Principles for Nonprofit Organizations," "Leadership and Ethics in the Nonprofit Sector," "Basic Fundraising and Resource Development," "Strategic Planning in Nonprofit Organizations," "Results-Oriented Program Evaluation," "Law and Legal Issues Affecting Nonprofit Organizations," "Effective Board Governance," "Advanced Financial Management," and "Diversity Strategies for the Nonprofit Organizations." These required courses help NMI participants understand the operating environment of nonprofit organizations, enhance their skills in managing the relationship between nonprofits and their environment (fund-raising and resource development), improve their efficiency in running a nonprofit (human resource and financial management, board governance, leadership and ethics, program evaluation), and enable them to span the boundary between internal and external management (strategic planning and legal issues). In addition, students can choose two topics from six available courses, such as marketing, social entrepreneurship, volunteer management, advanced fund-raising, and so on, to fulfill the requirement of the certificate program.

The core faculty of the NMI program is composed of sixteen instructors, most of whom are nonprofit practitioners or private consultants with identified area of expertise, such as accounting, law, and fund-raising. An advisory board (or Community Leadership Council) of nineteen members guides the NMI program. Two faculty members from ASU serve on the advisory board, and the rest of the members represent local community, nonprofit organizations, and financial management businesses.

## Surveys and Samples

To understand the skills and knowledge needed in the nonprofit sector and to offer courses that reflect these needs, the NMI program



started a needs assessment and curriculum review in 2010. It was conducted in two steps: a survey of NMI instructors and advisory board members in February 2010 and a survey of NMI alumni and students in February 2011.

An online survey was sent to NMI instructors and advisory board members via SurveyMonkey in February 2010. Sixteen responses were received. The survey asked NMI instructors and advisory board members to identify the courses that are necessary for any nonprofit leader (required courses) and the courses that are useful but not necessary (elective courses), the skill sets nonprofit employees need for their professional development, the observed hiring trends in the nonprofit sector, whether the organizations they work for would be able to or willing to pay for professional development, and topics or courses that should be added to NMI curricula.

For the NMI student and alumni survey, the investigators developed an online questionnaire to assess participants' perception of the needs of nonprofit management training. In addition to a number of questions on respondents' demographics, such as age, gender, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity, the survey asked whether the respondent was currently working in the nonprofit sector, the type of nonprofit the respondent worked for and the position, how the respondent learned about the NMI, whether his or her employer was aware of the certificate program, whether senior managers recommended or supported the training, whether the employer paid for the training, the knowledge and skills the respondent was trying to attain from the courses, additional courses the respondent would like to see offered, whether the courses were helpful and relevant to his or her daily work, and his or her preferences for online courses.

The survey was administered through the Qualtrics system between February 15 and February 24, 2011. The original e-mail message describing the study and encouraging recipients to complete an online survey was sent on February 15 to 427 people who had participated in NMI since winter 2007. A total of 351 people received the survey because seventy-six of the participants' e-mail addresses were no longer active. A reminder e-mail was sent on February 23. A total of 116 NMI participants responded to the survey, for a response rate of 33 percent. One-fifth (twenty-three) of the respondents were alumni who had completed the NMI certificate.

To test the representativeness of the respondents, we conducted statistical analyses to compare the key demographic characteristics—gender, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment—of the survey's respondents and nonrespondents. Chi-square statistics were applied in the analyses. Results show that the respondents were representative of NMI participants because no statistically significant differences were found between respondents and nonrespondents of the survey (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Comparison of Respondents and Nonrespondents of the Survey**

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>Respondents N (%)</i>	<i>Nonrespondents N (%)</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Gender (Female)	95 (82%)	171 (83%)	0.73
Ethnicity			0.28
African American	8 (7%)	12 (7%)	
Asian Pacific Islanders	1 (1%)	8 (5%)	
Hispanic/Latino	16 (14%)	19 (12%)	
Native American	2 (2%)	4 (2%)	
White/Caucasian	89 (77%)	118 (73%)	
Education			0.45
Associate's degree or less	31 (27%)	29 (23%)	
Bachelor's degree	37 (32%)	55 (44%)	
Master's degree	40 (34%)	34 (27%)	
Doctoral degree	8 (7%)	7 (6%)	

*Note:* The total percentage may not add up to 100% due to rounding error. The total number of nonrespondents varies for each variable due to missing values. No statistically significant differences are found between respondents and nonrespondents.

## Findings

The responses from the instructors and advisory board members show that more than ten (of sixteen) respondents indicated “Financial Management Principles,” “Leadership and Ethics in the Nonprofit Sector,” “Human Resource Management,” “Basic Fundraising and Resource Development,” “Laws and Legal Issues,” and “Effective Board Governance” should be required courses. They also identified seven main skill sets that are missing or in need of professional development among employees working in the nonprofit sector: financial literacy, verbal and written communication, knowledge of laws and regulations pertain to the nonprofit sector, general leadership skills, information technology, volunteer management, and fund-raising and donor cultivation.

In terms of hiring trends, one-third of the respondents commented on the impact of the recent economic downturn on nonprofit job market. In general, there are fewer openings, less turnover, and more professionalism in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit organizations now prefer experienced professionals to new or recent graduates. Layoffs in other sectors have also increased competition for nonprofit jobs. However, still in great need are experienced fund development professionals. Despite their tight budgets, most (63 percent) organizations are still able or willing to pay for professional development, and some may consider paying (23 percent). The instructors and advisory board members suggested that communication, risk management and risk analysis, and information technology (such as the role of social media in today's nonprofit organizations) were among the courses that NMI should add to its current curriculum.

The survey of NMI alumni and students also yielded some interesting findings. To better understand who is interested in the program (the program's participants) and to address one of the study's research questions, we first analyzed participants' sociodemographic profiles. We found that the majority (47 percent) of the respondents are in their midcareers (ages 36–50) and only 15 percent are in their early careers (ages 20–35). The gender difference of NMI participants (> 80 percent female) is higher than that in the national workforce composition, which is about 68 percent female for the nonprofit sector and 46 percent for the total U.S. workforce (Halpern, 2006). However, it is consistent with the findings of some other studies (Larson, 2002; Larson and Wilson, 2001; Wilson and Larson, 2002). Our analysis also shows that the majority of the respondents have already earned their bachelor's (32 percent) or master's degrees (34 percent), and some (7 percent) even have doctoral degrees. The variation in participants' career levels and educational backgrounds suggests that NMI instructors need to adopt pedagogic strategies that tailor to a variety of interests and learning styles. Respondents are predominantly white/Caucasian (77 percent), followed by Hispanic/Latino (14 percent), African American (7 percent), Native American (2 percent), and Asian Pacific Islanders (1 percent). The diversity observed in our sample is similar to the racial/ethnic composition of the nonprofit sector workforce, which is approximately 82 percent white, 10 percent African American, 5 percent Hispanic/Latino, 3 percent other, and 1 percent Asian Pacific Islanders (Halpern, 2006). The higher proportion of Hispanic and Native American population in the state of Arizona is reflected in our sample. The diversity of nonprofit workforce in Arizona implies the need or interests in addressing the inclusiveness issue at workplace.

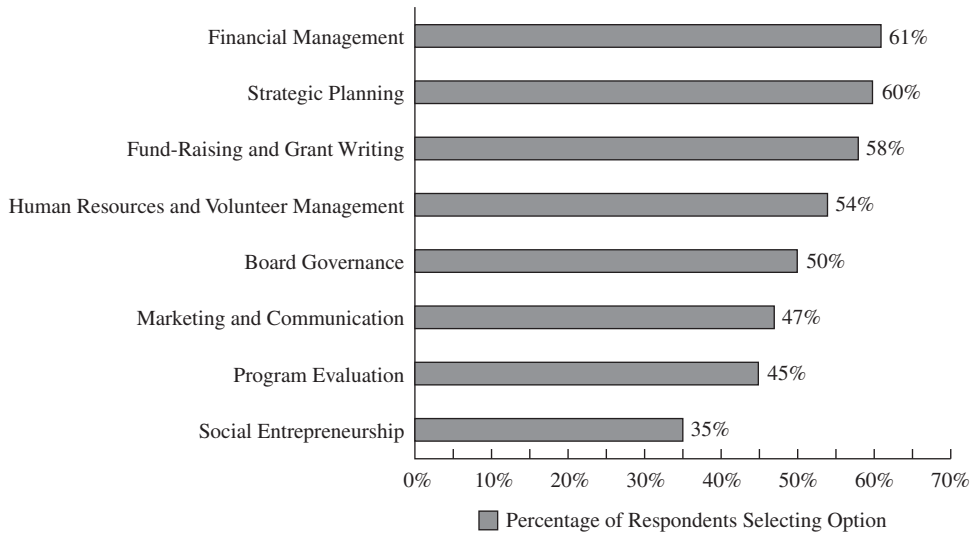
About 85 percent of the respondents are currently working in the nonprofit sector, and the remainder either work in the business sector or are self-employed. Among those who work in the nonprofit sector, more than one-third work for human and youth service organizations, which is the largest nonprofit subsector in Arizona, one-fifth work for health care nonprofits, and 13 percent work for nonprofit educational institutions. The remainder work for arts and culture nonprofits (8 percent), community improvement or public or societal benefit organizations (7 percent), religious-related organizations (7 percent), and environment- or animal-related organizations (6 percent).

One-third of the NMI alumni and student respondents hold the positions of executive director, president, or vice president of their organizations, followed by program manager (20 percent), chief operating officer or director of administration (11 percent), development director (9 percent), human resources or volunteer manager (7 percent), chief financial officer, director of marketing or public relations, or staff (5 percent for each), and volunteers (4 percent).

---

*There are fewer openings, less turnover, and more professionalism in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit organizations now prefer experienced professionals to new or recent graduates.*

---

Figure 1. Training Needs as Identified by NMI Participants (N = 116)<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Only training needs selected by more than 35 percent of respondents are shown.

As Figure 1 shows, a majority of the students and alumni take NMI courses to attain knowledge and skills in financial management (61 percent), strategic planning (60 percent), fund-raising and grant writing (58 percent), human resources and volunteer management (54 percent), board governance (50 percent), marketing and communication (47 percent), program evaluation (45 percent), and social entrepreneurship (35 percent). Some participants are also interested in learning grant evaluation, community collaboration, nonprofit laws, lobbying, diversity and inclusiveness, and general career development in the nonprofit sector. Based on the skills and knowledge they seek, the respondents have identified a handful of additional topics and courses that they would like to see offered through NMI, such as foundation grant making, marketing and social media, building collaborations, effective communication, managing faith-based organizations, special events fund-raising, risk management and internal control, advanced human resource and volunteer management, and advanced fund-raising. Close to 90 percent of the respondents feel that NMI courses can help them attain the skills they need. Most respondents agree that NMI courses are relevant to their daily work (94 percent).

In terms of course delivery method, most of the respondents have taken only face-to-face courses, and 28 percent have taken NMI courses offered online. More than one-third of the respondents have expressed interest in having more NMI courses offered online. Interestingly, more than half of the participants learned about the NMI

program from their colleagues (52 percent), followed by ASU's NMI website (23 percent), e-mail or ASU Lodestar Center's e-newsletter (12 percent), family or friends (4 percent), and their employers or other sources. About three-fourths of the respondents reveal that senior managers in their organizations are aware of the NMI Certificate in Nonprofit Leadership and Management and recommend or support them in taking NMI courses. About 60 percent of the respondents' employers pay for all or part of their NMI course tuition.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Nonprofit management education in the United States has advanced significantly in the past few decades. Most of the development in NME is in degree programs, concentrations, and credit-based certificates. The paucity of published research on noncredit certificates in nonprofit management indicates that little attention has been paid to such training certificates that offer short-term courses to nonprofit professionals and continuous learners. Because prior studies show that nonprofit practitioners generally prefer training offered through short-term workshops or seminars (Dolan, 2002; Renz, 1996; Tschirhart, 1998), the noncredit certificate programs in nonprofit management can potentially play a significant role in educating the nonprofit sector's current and future workforces. To better serve the nonprofit community, institutions offering noncredit certificates need to understand the skills and knowledge that nonprofit organizations and students of these programs, mostly nontraditional learners, need to ensure that the courses taught provide desired skills and knowledge.

The Nonprofit Management Institute at ASU recently conducted surveys of key stakeholders—instructors, advisory board members, alumni, and students—to review its course offerings based on the assessment of skills and knowledge needed for nonprofit jobs in the changing economic environment. The results of the surveys indicate that nonprofit employees need additional professional development training in general management skills as well as skills and knowledge specific to the nonprofit sector. Most nonprofit professionals and continuous learners taking short-term noncredit courses to attain knowledge and skills in financial management, strategic planning, fund-raising and grant writing, human resources and volunteer management, board governance, marketing and communication, program evaluation, and social entrepreneurship. Financial management, fund-raising, and human resources and volunteer management are three topics considered important by both nonprofit leaders and nonprofit practitioners. The findings are consistent with the literature (Dolan, 2002).

The needs assessment and curriculum review also show that current NMI courses are relevant to nonprofit practitioners' daily

---

*The noncredit certificate programs in nonprofit management can potentially play a significant role in educating the nonprofit sector's current and future workforces.*

---

work. The additional courses that the NMI and other NME programs could offer include foundation grant making, marketing and social media, building collaborations, managing faith-based organizations, and risk management and internal control, which reflects the new skills and knowledge needed in response to the rapid advancement of information technology, increasing collaborative governance, and growing role of faith-based organizations in service delivery. In terms of educational format, nonprofit professionals and continuous learners prefer short-term courses, and a growing number of participants are interested in online offerings. Therefore, developing online courses should be one of the priorities of NMI and other noncredit-based NME programs.

The study suggests that a regular needs assessment and curriculum review can keep the course offerings relevant and responsive to new developments in the nonprofit sector and thus strengthen the quality of noncredit education in nonprofit management. This is particularly important to programs for nonprofit professionals and continuous learners, because these participants expect to learn the most up-to-date information and therefore gain immediately usable knowledge that they can apply directly in their work. Participants' feedback regarding the relevance of short-term nonprofit management courses to their daily work and senior nonprofit managers' awareness and recommendation of a noncredit certificate program can be applied as indicators of the quality of a program.

Surprisingly, even in today's stringent economic environment, many local nonprofits (and their senior managers) still recommend or support their employees in taking external training courses, which indicates the importance and market needs of workforce development and the trend of professionalism in the nonprofit sector.

One limitation of the study is the relatively low response rate from NMI students and alumni. The comparison of key demographic profiles of the respondents and nonrespondents, however, indicates that our sample is representative of nonprofit professionals taking NMI courses. The fact that our findings are consistent with the literature further suggests that the low response rate may not have biased the results.

Future studies of noncredit certificates in nonprofit management can compare them to credit-based certificates regarding curriculum, certificate requirements, student and faculty composition, and educational format. Such comparison would provide additional information to help us assess the value of noncredit certificates in enhancing management skills of the nonprofit workforce. In the near future, the nonprofit field may need to develop curriculum guidelines or other educational standards to increase the credibility of noncredit certificates in nonprofit management education, similar to guidelines that have been developed for undergraduate and graduate degrees in the field.

## References

- Ashcraft, R. F. "Nonprofit Management Education: An Analysis of Three Intra-Institutional Views." Paper presented at the 28th annual conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Arlington, Va., November 4–6, 1999.
- Diamond, R. M. *Designing and Assessing Courses and Curricula: A Practical Guide* (rev. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.
- Dolan, D. A. "Training Needs of Administrators in the Nonprofit Sector: What Are They and How Should We Address Them?" *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 2002, 12(3), 277–292.
- Fletcher, K. "The Impact of Receiving a Master's Degree in Nonprofit Management of Graduates' Professional Lives." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2005, 34(4), 433–471.
- Halpern, R. P. *Workforce Issues in the Nonprofit Sector: Generational Leadership Change and Diversity*. Kansas City, Mo.: American Humanics, 2006.
- Heimovics, R. D., and Herman, R. D. "The Salient Management Skills: A Conceptual Framework for a Curriculum for Managers in Nonprofit Organizations." *American Review of Public Administration*, 1989, 19, 295–312.
- Larson, R. S. *Building Bridges Initiative Cluster Evaluation: Nonprofit Management Alumni Survey Report*. Mokena, IL: CenterPoint Institute, March 2002. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from <http://www.centerpointinstitute.com/projects/bridges/papersreports/AlumniSurvey.pdf>.
- Larson, R. S., and Wilson, M. I. *Building Bridges Initiative Cluster Evaluation: Survey of Nonprofit Management Students*. Battle Creek, Mich.: W. K. Kellogg Foundation, March 2001. Retrieved January 15, 2011, from <http://www.centerpointinstitute.com/projects/bridges/papersreports/StudentSurvey1.htm>.
- Larson, R. S., Wilson, M. I., and Chung, D. "Curricular Content for Nonprofit Management Programs: The Student Perspective." *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 2003, 9(3), 169–180.
- Lee, M. "Noncredit Certificates in Nonprofit Management: An Exploratory Study." *Public Administration and Management*, 2002, 7(3), 188–210.
- Mirabella, R. M. "University-Based Educational Programs in Nonprofit Management and Philanthropic Studies: A 10-Year Review and Projections of Future Trends." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2007, 36(4), 115–275.
- Mirabella, R. M., and Wish, N. B. "Educational Impact of Graduate Nonprofit Degree Programs." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 1999, 9(3), 329–340.
- O'Neill, M. "Nonprofit Management Education: History, Current Issues, and the Future." In M. O'Neill and K. Fletcher (eds.),

- Nonprofit Management Education: U.S. and World Perspectives*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998.
- O'Neill, M. "Developmental Context of Nonprofit Management Education." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 2005, 16(1), 5–17.
- O'Neill, M., and Fletcher, K. (eds.). *Nonprofit Management Education: U.S. and World Perspectives*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1998.
- O'Neill, M., and Young, D. R. (eds.). *Educating Managers of Nonprofit Organizations*. New York: Praeger, 1988.
- Renz, D. "Educating and Preparing the Early-Career Professional: The Needs and Expectations of Practicing Nonprofit Executives." Paper prepared for conference on Nonprofit Management Education 1996: A U.S. and World Perspective, Berkeley, Calif., March 14–16, 1996.
- Tschirhart, M. "Nonprofit Management Education: Recommendations Drawn from Three Stakeholder Groups." In M. O'Neill and K. Fletcher (eds.), *Nonprofit Management Education: U.S. and World Perspectives*. New York: Praeger, 1998.
- Wilson, M. I., and Larson, R. S. "Nonprofit Management Students: Who They Are and Why They Enroll." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 2002, 31(2), 259–270.
- Wing, K. T., Pollak, T. H., and Blackwood, A. *The Nonprofit Almanac*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, 2008.
- Wish, N. B., and Mirabella, R. M. "Curricular Variations in Nonprofit Management Graduate Programs." *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*, 1998, 9(1), 99–109.
- Young, D. R. "Nonprofit Management Studies in the United States: Current Development and Future Prospects." *Journal of Public Affairs Education*, 1999, 5(1), 13–23.

LILI WANG is an assistant professor of nonprofit studies in the School of Community Resources and Development at Arizona State University.

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.