

## **Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, and Policy**

Over the past 50 years, governments at all levels have increased the roles played by nonprofit organizations in the delivery of services. Any research program dedicated to promoting public service has to recognize the central roles played by nonprofits in governance.

All indicators, including the increasing number of nonprofits in the DC and Northern Virginia area and the expanding financial impact of nonprofit organizations, suggest a considerable pool of demand for a George Mason center dedicated to serving the nonprofit sector. According to a recent Urban Institute report, the number of public charities in the U.S. grew by 60 percent between 1997 and 2007, with nonprofit revenue almost doubling during this period. In the DC metro area, the density of nonprofits (i.e., number of nonprofits per resident) is more than twice the national average, with significant numbers of nonprofits focused on local, national, and international issues. In Fairfax County, nonprofit employment was up 59% from 1995 to 2003. Thus, the financial scope and impact of the region's nonprofit sector are enormous. The demand for technical expertise and governance training is greater than ever. Mason must establish itself as a regional and national powerhouse in order to capitalize on this growing need.

### **Benefits to the Public Sector and the University**

The new Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, and Policy promises to provide greater leadership for the nonprofit sector both in the Washington area as well as nationally.

The Center would capitalize on our university's historic strength in nonprofit studies. In 1994, Mason was among the first universities in the country to receive one of the prestigious W. K. Kellogg Foundation grants to strengthen nonprofit management education. In the years that followed, Mason developed a vibrant Nonprofit Management Studies Program that is now among the largest and most well-established graduate nonprofit management programs in the region and the nation. In fact, Mason's nonprofit management program ranked fifteenth nationally in a recent report by *U.S. News and World Report*.

Our ability to fully capitalize on the growing demand for nonprofit graduate training would be enhanced. The Center would bring greater coherence to the

disparate nonprofit initiatives across the university, thereby elevating our visibility and presence in the community.

Promoting greater interaction with public and nonprofit officials will also have significant benefits for our students and teaching. First, it will provide greater opportunities for internships, research assistantships and other applied projects for our students. Second, by building more partnerships with leaders of government and nonprofit agencies, we will gain the opportunity to have them serve as clients for capstone projects in our classes. Third, our faculty will gain new insights and research opportunities by virtue of the activities of the new Center.

### **Center Activities**

The new Center would be housed and staffed by the Department of Public and International Affairs. Alan Abramson would be the Director of the new center, with the close support of our nonprofit faculty including Stefan Toepler and Lehn Benjamin.

We expect to achieve economies of scale and synergies by co-locating and managing the activities of all of our centers under a single administrative initiative. The activities of the Center for Nonprofit Management, Philanthropy, and Policy fall into four categories. The first are grants and contracts for service to the nonprofit sector. The second category is research, which would include a focus on the nonprofit sector in Virginia, as well as analysis at national and international levels. The third is training and education for those who work in or around the nonprofit sector. The final category is outreach to the range of communities and organizations that are interested in the Center's activities.

We already have activities underway in some of these areas. For instance, we have a contract with Fairfax County to provide training and technical assistance to nonprofits engaged in social service provision with the county. We also are working on a research grant from the Smith Richardson foundation that focuses on the roles played by nonfederal actors, including nonprofits, in the implementation of the Obama Administration's Recovery Act stimulus programs.

Going forward, the new center would focus its efforts especially on: foundations and philanthropy; nonprofit governance and accountability; the role of civil society in democratization globally; and the U.S. system of shared governance in which all three sectors – nonprofit, government, and business – play a role in addressing social problems. Coordination of efforts around these broad areas would build on

the existing strengths of the Nonprofit Management Studies Program and incorporate other initiatives on campus:

- ***Foundations and Philanthropy***: The practice of philanthropy has changed significantly in recent years and is a fertile area of research: Donors are no longer satisfied simply giving to a worthy cause but want to play an active role. Donor-advised funds are increasingly popular, and foundations have developed new grant-making approaches modeled after venture capital efforts. Some Mason faculty initiatives include: co-editing of *The Legitimacy of Philanthropic Foundations: US and European Perspectives*, an outcome of a Russell Sage Foundation and SSRC-supported project (Toepler); chapters in a recently-published, edited volume on foundations' contributions to society (Toepler and Benjamin); and drafting of a chapter on Washington-area foundations for a forthcoming edited volume on foundations in different U.S. regions (Abramson and Toepler).
- ***Accountability, Governance, and Effectiveness***: In the last 15 years, concern over nonprofit accountability, governance, and performance – including nonprofit partnerships with government and business – has increased exponentially. Research in this area is burgeoning, and the demand for professional training on these issues has increased. Examples of Mason faculty effort in this area are: a major project with Fairfax County government to strengthen nonprofits serving county residents (Abramson and Benjamin); an examination of the impact of performance measurement on nonprofit practice (Benjamin); research on the implications for nonprofits of changes in the federal budget (Abramson); and analysis of the supportive, “infrastructure” organizations, including umbrella associations, management assistance groups, and educational and training institutes, that seek to strengthen nonprofit performance (Abramson).
- ***Global Civil Society***: We are witnessing what some would call a global associational revolution (Salamon, 1993), as the number of nonprofits increases dramatically in many countries around the world. Civil society organizations have been important players in democratization and development efforts globally. Some initiatives by Mason faculty include: contributions to an edited volume on global civil society (Toepler); evaluation of a peer learning network of NGO leaders in Cape Town, South Africa (Benjamin); co-editing of an *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society, Philanthropy, and NGOs* and potentially an internationally-oriented *Companion to Nonprofit Studies* (Toepler).

- ***Shared Governance***: As the new Center focuses its activity in the broad areas of concern to nonprofits and philanthropy described above, it will also link to other important work within the Department of Public and International Affairs on “shared governance.” While traditional approaches in public administration have emphasized the central role of government in addressing social problems, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is actually all three sectors – government, nonprofit, and business – which is engaged in social problem-solving. There is significant faculty interest in examining the various shared governance arrangements that are being used in different policy areas in the U.S. and elsewhere; exploring the strengths and weaknesses that each sector brings to social problem-solving; and identifying best practices for the cross-sector collaborations that are required to address many social problems. We expect that the new Center will be a full partner in this emerging work on shared governance. Some examples of current faculty work on shared governance include: study of federal management strategies in a system of shared governance (Abramson, Benjamin, Conlan, Posner, Regan, Toepler); project on collaboration with CGI (Posner); project on government contracting with IBM (Posner); work on intergovernmental relations (Conlan); studies of accountability and public-private partnership (Posner); research on collaboration and interorganizational theory (Mahler); studies on other aspects of shared governance (Regan and Hackler).