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Training to Lead Nonprofits

By CATE DOTY

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KORBI ADAMS says she learned about nonprofit work from her high school clarinet teacher, who also directed her youth orchestra and would include Ms. Adams in her fund-raising activities.

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Nancy Crase for The New York Times

A NEW FIELD At Arizona State University, from left, Jonathan Pasquinelli, Jennifer Speer, Rachael Mangum and Kasarah Brown learn skills, like fund-raising, that are vital to nonprofit organizations.

“The community engagement stuff — it lit my fire,” said Ms. Adams, now 22. “I thought that was what I wanted to do: to combine arts and an outreach in nonprofit management.”

Ms. Adams decided to attend [Arizona State University](#), where she majored in music and received a certificate for courses she took under the American Humanics program,

which was founded in 1948 to encourage community work, including nonprofit administration, and is available at colleges around the country.

A 2008 graduate, she is now in what she calls her dream job, an education assistant at Childsplay, a nonprofit theater in Tempe, Ariz., where she works in arts education. “I’m learning how to very carefully mind the budget,” she said, noting that working with grant money requires carefully hewing to the bottom line.

The do-good desires of Ms. Adams and many members of her “Gen Y” cohort have sparked a surge in nonprofit

management and leadership courses at colleges and universities, building on the example of the American Humanics certification program. More than 230 colleges and universities across the United States offer courses in those areas, up from 179 a decade ago, a 2007 study at [Seton Hall University](#) found.

Last year, [Arizona State created the first named undergraduate degree in nonprofit management](#). About 100 students are enrolled in the program, with the first graduates expected in 2011. Other institutions, like the [University of Minnesota](#), are considering similar programs.

“There are people like myself who will be retiring in the near future,” said Paulette Maehara, the chief executive of the Association of Fund-Raising Professionals, who started her career in 1977 as a fund-raiser for the March of Dimes. “It is a serious concern because we can’t keep up with the demand. Getting more people in the pipeline is one of our top priorities.”

A 2006 survey of nonprofit executives done by the Meyer Foundation and CompassPoint found that 75 percent said they would be leaving their jobs within five years. Many

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nonprofit educators hope they will be followed by idealistic college graduates armed with an industry-standardized set of skills..

“We’re getting students that want to know at the end of the day that they’ve made the world a better place,” said Robert Ashcraft, the director of the Lodestar Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Innovation at Arizona State. **“They can’t imagine themselves in a cubicle in a corporation.”**

Those in the nonprofit sector say the growth was sparked by a generation that came of age in post-9/11 America, not unlike the volunteerism of the baby boomers during the Vietnam War era.

Another Arizona State graduate, Jessica Brzuskiwicz, is finishing an internship at the [American Cancer Society](#) in Portland, Ore. She has interviews lined up in the nonprofit and government sectors, but would prefer to stay in the nonprofit world, she said.

“Perhaps in our generation there has been a shift of values and that giving back, creating sustainable communities and just feeling good with your work are now what young people are looking for when they enter the work force,” Ms. Brzuskiwicz said.

Many teachers and practitioners say that nonprofit management courses have been around long enough to constitute a discipline and field of study. Last year, the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council released a set of undergraduate curriculum guidelines for the study of the nonprofit sector and philanthropy, which signaled to educators a standardization of what should be taught across schools.

“It will be much more systematic in the sense of how we approach issues,” said Dwight Burlingame, the director of the Center on Philanthropy at [Indiana University](#), who helped create the guidelines. “It’s not just by the seat of the pants. We’ve had enough research now to demonstrate what works and what doesn’t work.”

What does work, Mr. Burlingame said, is a focus on the activities unique to the nonprofit sector: fund-raising, community engagement, nonprofit ethics and law and volunteer management.

“It’s not that we don’t still need volunteerism and the whole notion of voluntary action,” Mr. Burlingame said. “But having it guided by professionals who have been professionally trained will bear positive fruit for the sector.”