Nonprofit Studies and the Baruch MPA: A Short History

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I was fortunate to help re-define the field of Public Administration from just government to both governmental and nonprofit organizations. In the mid-1970s, I started teaching what has been called the first graduate course in nonprofit management in an accredited school of business or public administration. By the early 1980s, I was teaching other public affairs faculty members around the country – like a group of faculty members in Illinois – what to include in such a course and what instructional materials were available.”

~ Fred Lane quoted in a Baruch College Faculty Spotlight, June 2015 https://tinyurl.com/June2015Spotlight
Introduction

In the mid-1970s, Fred Lane began offering a Special Topics course at Baruch on the management of nonprofit organizations, reputed to be the first such graduate course to be taught in an accredited school of business or public administration in the US. The first official appearance of the course, with its own course number, was in Fall 1978.

This short history of the 50 years of nonprofit studies in the Baruch MPA seeks to bring together the histories of public administration education and nonprofit education to highlight the intersection of the two, and their joint development from the late 1970s and early 1980s. The rise of the nonprofit sector in public affairs have profoundly shaped both the content of the curriculum of the Baruch MPA and the demographics of the student body. Beginning with short reviews of public administration and nonprofit education in the USA, the paper then explores the impact on the Baruch MPA and speculates how continuing debates about the design and delivery of public goods and services are likely to shape the future of the degree.
A Short History of Public Administration Education

Prior to 1911, the philanthropist Mary Averell Harriman proposed to fund schools of public administration at Harvard, Yale, and Columbia. All three university presidents turned her down, indicating that professional public administration was not an appropriate field of study at a university.

Although there were these and other important precedents, the development of public administration in American higher education is generally thought to have started in 1911 with the founding of the Bureau of Municipal Research, “the training school for public service” in New York City, supported by Harriman. At some point, this operation moved to Syracuse University, which established the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs in 1924, America’s oldest separate school of public affairs and administration. The University of Southern California is the second oldest school, founded in 1928.
The University of Michigan began its Institute of Public Administration in 1914, and offered what is likely the first professional master’s degree in this field, focussed on municipal administration. By 1995, this program turned into what was to be named the Gerald R. Ford School of Public Policy. Other important early academic coursework took place at Johns Hopkins University, the University of California at Berkeley, Stanford University, Georgetown University, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Harvard University, and what is now Baruch College of The City University of New York. The Baruch story, however, is less well known.

Baruch’s commitment also begins in 1911 when New York City employees were admitted to City College of New York under a special program in its then two-year-old evening session. Later, courses were established specifically intended to improve the efficiency of city employees and to help them qualify for promotion within the civil service system. Typically called “City Downtown,” the School of Business and Civic Administration was founded in 1919 at City College’s original location at 23rd Street and Lexington Avenue. In 1951, the Master of Public Administration program was initiated, and in 1953 the first MPA was awarded.

Separated from City College, Bernard M. Baruch College was created within the CUNY system in 1968. A separate Department of Public Administration followed in 1973, the same year that Clyde J. Wingfield, Baruch’s president, became president of NASPAA, the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration. In 1980, Baruch became the first MPA in New York City to be accredited (originally called “peer reviewed”) by NASPAA. In 1982, Baruch joined in a partnership with the National Urban Fellows, Inc., to offer a unique, national MPA program for individuals from groups underrepresented in public service.

Mid-career master’s degree programs in public administration were not uncommon, like those at Syracuse and Harvard, but they were residential. In the mid-1970s, American University became the first university to offer an “executive” MPA program for accomplished, working professionals in public service. It was called “The Key Executive Program.” The University of Hartford followed with the second EMPA program, but it subsequently folded. In 1984, Baruch began its Executive MPA Program, taught exclusively on Saturdays. This then is the nation’s second oldest EMPA, or XMPA as it is commonly called at Baruch.

In the 1980s, the definition of public administration was enlarged to include nonprofit organizations in addition to government. But this was not so new at Baruch. In 1915, the Board of Trustees of City College authorized a vocational course in “philanthropy” for “municipal students.” In the mid-1970s, the Baruch course specifically in the management of nonprofit organizations was the first such graduate course to be taught in an accredited school.

With the encouragement of Baruch President Matthew Goldstein, Provost Lois Cronholm, and a presidential commission, Baruch College created a separate School of Public Affairs in 1994, 83 years after it first started education for public affairs. From its beginning, the new school emphasized the management of governmental, nonprofit, health care, and educational organizations as well as public policy.
A Short History of Nonprofit Management Education

Formal education in nonprofit management can be traced back to degrees such as the Bachelor and Master of Humanics degree established by Springfield College in 1905 and the Bachelor of Association Science established by Chicago YMCA College in 1911. These were among a wide range of programs aimed at educating in what was identified variously as philanthropy, voluntary action, and associational life. Other initiatives were directly related to services provided by religious organizations. In 1952 Notre Dame University established an Institute on Practical Business Problems of Religious Sisterhoods, which transformed in 1954 into an MBA focusing on managing religious institutions and later, as more lay people became involved in the management of these institutions, into a Master of Science in Administration.

The field began to significantly expand in the 1970s, when Congress, concerned about the lack of oversight of philanthropic organizations, created the Commission on Private Philanthropy and Public Needs (aka the Filer Commission) in 1973 to examine the sector. One outcome of the Commission was the creation of the Independent Sector, a national membership organization bringing together nonprofit service organizations, foundations, and the academy to strengthen sector organizations. Various commentators—including Peter Dobkin Hall who taught at Baruch for several years—refer to this period as “the invention of the nonprofit sector”, the generating of a sector identity that brought together the disparate legal forms and industry areas that previously may not have seen themselves as organizational cognates.
A key factor in this period was the changing relationship between government and the nonprofit sector and the emergence of public service reform through “New Public Management”, “Third Party Government” and “Reinventing Government” approaches to the provision of public goods and services. The outsourcing, privatization, and public-private partnership implications of these “top-down” approaches – combined with wider “bottom-up” economic, social and demographic trends that bolstered voluntary and associational dynamics -- resulted in the dramatic expansion of the size and scope of the nonprofit sector, and the subsequent need for a more professionalized approach to governance, fiscal management, accountability and performance measurement.

In the academy, the Association of Voluntary Action Scholars (AVAS) was founded in 1971, to support interdisciplinary research in the field. In 1990, AVAS was renamed the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) to reflect a broadening of the perspective from voluntary action to a more holistic sectoral approach. ARNOVA, and its international partner, the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR), founded in 1992, have been the drivers of an exponential growth in scholarship in the field through the many textbooks and some seven major journals published in the US that focus on the sector.
The flourishing research community was also reflected in the growth of university-based programs designed to educate nonprofit leaders, with a focus on board/committee development, fundraising principles and practices, human resource development and supervision. In the mid-1980s, a group of nonprofit education program directors began a series of benchmark meetings to establish standards for nonprofit education, which culminated in 1991 in the creation of the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC). To date, NACC has published three editions of its graduate and two editions of its undergraduate Curricular Guidelines.

Since 1990, researchers at Seton Hall University have documented the rise of nonprofit education program in US universities and colleges. A first survey in 1990 found 17 programs that offered a graduate concentration (three or more courses) in nonprofit studies. The current online listing identifies 274 concentrations, and the broader definition of nonprofit education identifies 401 institutions that offer undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate degrees and certificates that focus on nonprofit management, philanthropy, volunteerism, social enterprises, nonprofit organizations, advocacy, and social change.

In the mid-1980s, The University of San Francisco was the first school to offer a specialized, standalone Master in Nonprofit Administration, but it was not until the early 2000s that saw the substantial rise in these degrees (Notre Dame, for example, in 2005 launched its Master of Nonprofit Administration). These newer standalone degrees coexist with concentrations/specializations within other degree programs, primarily in public administration, business administration and social work. Any current listing of degrees illustrates the potpourri of titles in this field, which include MA, MSc, MPA, MBA, MSWs in Community Engagement Nonprofit Administration, Nonprofit Leadership and Administration, Nonprofit Organizations, Philanthropy, Philanthropic Studies, and Social Enterprise. The continuing debates about education in the sector include a concern about the lack of a clear “brand”, and a need for greater clarification of the relationship between the interconnected disciplines.

Formal accreditation of degrees is a relative latecomer to nonprofit studies. In 2017, NACC introduced an accreditation program for standalone nonprofit studies. This accreditation, which does not yet fully meet the standards of the Council on Higher Education Accreditation, has accredited 12 graduate and two undergraduate programs. Concurrently, the Commission on Peer Review and Accreditation (COPRA) of NASPAA has started to grant accreditation to standalone master’s programs in nonprofit management. In 2018, the Master of Nonprofit Management at the University of Central Florida became the first such program accredited by COPRA/NASPAA.

The debate continues in the field about whether the emphasis should be on standalone degrees or on intersectoral approaches, and whether the different subfields/industries (health, social services, community development, arts and culture, etc.) are equally well-served. We also have the rise of social enterprise discourses, in both the for-profit and nonprofit sectors (the majority of social enterprises have nonprofit legal status, or a nonprofit affiliate/subsidiary), and of corporate social and community responsibility that are adding new layers to our understanding of how best to frame education about the delivery of public goods and the public good.
While the focus in this short history is graduate education, it is worth noting the evolution of the most widely known undergraduate-level program in nonprofit management. What is now known as the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance (NLA) began in 1948 as American Humanics. Its early focus was to partner with higher education institutions to provide training and internships in nonprofit management in conjunction with undergraduate studies. Baruch was for many years a partner institution and had a strong Humanics undergraduate nondegree program. In 2012 American Humanics rebranded as the NLA and began to offer a Certified Nonprofit Professional (CNP) credential independently of partner institutions, and in 2017 NLA acquired Leaderosity, a digital platform, and now independently provides a fully online CNP certification.

The commentary above focuses on the US context. As noted earlier, in the US -- and also in other English-speaking Western countries -- educational programs in this field are either standalone, or embedded in programs such as public administration, business studies, or social work. Elsewhere in the world, the related studies are equally embedded, institutionally, and intellectually, in academic programs such as sociology, political science, economics, and public law, which put more emphasis on social dynamics, structural inequalities of power and economic relations, or legal authority and legitimacy. Some openly reject what they perceive as the neoliberal, managerialist approach of the US and English-speaking academy. Other critiques, from both outside and within the US, focus on the dynamics of what has been termed the “NGOization of social movements”, the processes through which the institutionalization and professionalization of nonprofit organizations, and a prioritization of service over expressive functions, can result in the domestication of more contestatory political dynamics.
Nonprofit Education and the Baruch MPA

Through the work of Fred Lane and other colleagues, the Baruch MPA has been an early adopter in the reconceptualization of the meaning of public affairs and administration. This has included both the introduction of nonprofit-specific courses and the addition of nonprofit content in existing courses. Alongside the teaching of nonprofit issues, Baruch faculty have made substantial contributions to scholarship and the field, and through the establishment of the Baruch Nonprofit Management Research Group and later the Nonprofit Group and the Center for Nonprofit Strategy and Management, Baruch has become an invaluable contributor to the nonprofit studies academy and to practitioners in New York City and around the country.

Table 1 documents some of the key markers of the adoption of nonprofit issues in Baruch graduate program content, as well as research and service to the community.
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<th>Decade</th>
<th>Graduate Course Content (including dates of first introduction of some courses)</th>
<th>Nonprofit Research and Service</th>
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<td>1970s</td>
<td>Fred Lane offers first nonprofit management courses as a Selected Topic in MPA. Fall 1978, PUB 9448 Administration of Not-For-Profit Agencies first appears in Baruch Bulletin.</td>
<td>1982 National Urban Fellows program begins. In 1988, the Nonprofit Management Research Group is established as an informal research team focused on public financial accountability and resource development in nonprofit organizations. Subsequently, the name is shortened to Nonprofit Management Group and its mission was expanded.</td>
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<td>1980s</td>
<td>Spring 1982, PUB 9432 Fundraising and Grant Administration. Baruch first introduces a specialization in nonprofit studies within the MPA around 1981. But when NASPAA came in 1982 to accredit the program (then called “peer review”), they said Baruch did not have enough students to have specializations, so the first iterations were discontinued. Other Selected Topics are offered such as Volunteer Management.</td>
<td>Since the 1990s, Baruch has also delivered a range of non-credit practitioner education and cohort leadership programs in partnership with industry associations, including United Way, Partnership for After-School Education, and Hispanic Federation, and Baruch faculty have had leadership/board roles in key nonprofit education and industry associations.</td>
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<td>1990s</td>
<td>Early 1990s new nonprofit courses: PUB 9651 Nonprofit and Voluntary Agencies (1990); PUB 9650 Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector (1993). The School of Public Affairs was created in 1994 and all courses rebranded as PAF, e.g., PUB 9432 became PAF 9152 Fundraising and Grants Administration in Not For Profit and Voluntary Organizations. New course PAF 9153 Budget and Finance in Nonprofits. School of Public Affairs MPA again includes a specialization (Concentration) in Nonprofit Administration (changed to Nonprofit Management in 2022). US News publishes first ranking of nonprofit programs. As pioneers Baruch was well within the Top 10. As nonprofit education became more widespread, Baruch fell in the rankings. (In the 2022 ranking, Baruch was #21).</td>
<td>The Nonprofit Group and the Survey Research Unit work with umbrella organizations and federations of human services agencies to produce a nonprofit executive outlook survey. In 2007, the Center for Nonprofit Strategy and Management is established to consolidate research and to strengthen outreach services to the nonprofit sector in NYC through its practitioner seminar program and Consulting Day.</td>
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<td>2000s</td>
<td>New Nonprofit courses, including PAF 9183 International Nonprofits; PAF 9157 Religion, Nonprofits, Politics, and Policy (discontinued); PAF 9158 Introduction to Philanthropy (discontinued). PAF 9150 Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector discontinued. In the Baruch Zicklin Business School, the entrepreneurship program embraces social enterprise, introduces MGT 9965 Boards, Governance, and Leadership within Entrepreneurial, Family, and Social Enterprises and MGT 9969 Social Entrepreneurship: Concepts and Cases. Zicklin program head Tom Lyons edits a two-volume collection Social Entrepreneurship, with chapters by various School of Public Affairs faculty.</td>
<td>National Urban Fellows partnership ends. The Great Leaders Program (continuing certificate program - one cohort only). New York Community Trust Leadership Fellows program is introduced.</td>
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| 2010s  | The school is renamed the Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, and new Master in International Affairs is first offered in 2017, which includes a concentration in International Nongovernment Organizations. New Baruch College MA in Arts Administration includes both for-profit and nonprofit content, with many students taking nonprofit courses in the Marxe School. | |

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1 Nonprofit content has also been added to the Baruch/Marxe undergraduate public affairs content.
2 Individual professors and collaborations among professors have produced a substantial body of literature on nonprofits, including research reports, journal articles and books. Currently there is no comprehensive listing of this literature.
3 For full list of past and present PUB and PAF courses, see: [https://bar-undergraduate-catalog.coursedog.com/departments/PAF-BAR/courses](https://bar-undergraduate-catalog.coursedog.com/departments/PAF-BAR/courses)
Conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that the embrace of nonprofit studies within the Baruch MPA program was necessary and desirable. At the same time, we can speculate about the consequences – some intended, others not – that have shaped the program, both in its content and in the demographics of the students. A program that was originally designed to educate mid-career public servants has morphed into a degree that now has a majority of students who come from, work in, or intend to work in the nonprofit sector.

As we move forward, we can also ponder the future directions of nonprofit studies. In the last few years we have witnessed a decreasing public trust in a nonprofit sector damaged by accusations of ineffectiveness and malfeasance, an increasing emphasis on critical approaches to understanding the impact of the sector, and a greater understanding of the imperative to promote diversity and equity in sector leadership and operations. Equally importantly, Baruch has recently established a campus-wide teaching cluster area focused on social innovation, so we have to address how we can more effectively move into the intellectual and practice spaces related to social enterprise, corporate social responsibility, ESG investing and other organizational iterations that combine a social purpose with more market-based approaches that incorporate both for-profit and nonprofit logics.
Sources and Readings


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* The original Fred Lane version of this paper had the following endnote:

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