

NONPROFIT MARKETING EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES: A DISCUSSION OF BACKGROUND, CURRICULA PATTERNS, AND FRESH THINKING

**Theresa M. Conley, Department of Marketing, Daniels College of Business, University of Denver
2101 South University Blvd., Office 491, Denver, CO 80208, tconley@du.edu**

ABSTRACT

This special session presentation is intended to be a forum for discussing the state of marketing education for the nonprofit sector – specifically focusing on charity and social marketing pedagogy, theory, and techniques. Additionally, this presentation will reveal, research findings, curriculum approaches, and new thinking to better prepare and educate undergraduate and graduate students given the dynamic nature and the growth in the nonprofit sector.

INTRODUCTION

Numerous data sources help give a framework for the nonprofit sector but it is a worthwhile venture to understand and assess the history, terminology, and educational needs of this important sector. According to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, the growth of the nonprofit sector in the United States is staggering. The number of nonprofits has doubled over the last 15 years. Nearly one in every ten working Americans is working for a non-profit. There is \$300 billion dollars donated internationally each year to nonprofit causes and there are over 70,000 foundations, the largest being the Gates foundation.

BACKGROUND

There are considerable academic journal, trade articles, and books on philanthropy, nonprofit organizations, and non-government organizations. Generally, nonprofits are typically organized by size and donor dollars into the following broad categories: healthcare, social services, education, arts and culture, public affairs and policy, and civil and human rights - healthcare being the largest category. There are text books, and journal articles and research done about nonprofit management and nonprofit marketing. What seems to be limited is a comprehensive review and analysis of the type of pedagogical approaches being used in university courses and how those approaches directly or indirectly guide and impact the nonprofit sector – specifically the charity and social marketing areas of the sector.

Nonprofit management education is a rich area for graduate education and a variety of courses and

programs offered. According to Kathleen M. Fletcher in her 2005 article in the *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* entitled “The Impact of Receiving a Master’s Degree in Nonprofit Management on Graduates’ Professional Lives”, specialized degrees in this area have a positive perception and are valued by organizations and the graduates. This article and others supports the need and value of specific education relating to the nonprofit sector. There is very little literature or discussion found on nonprofit marketing education.

In the pioneering article on this topic which appeared in the *Journal of Marketing* written by Philip Kotler and Gerald Zaltman in 1971, entitled “Strategies for Introducing Marketing into Nonprofit Organizations”, they develop the initial ideas for how nonprofit marketing strategies and practices are a distinct application area within general marketing theory. Later assessment from others questioned the ethics and accountability of marketing social causes and the background connected to social advertising but this continues to be an important area of discussion for marketing educators.

TERMINOLOGY

The topic of nonprofit marketing and nonprofit education is plagued by ongoing terminology confusion. Referring to the marketing of social causes, Kotler and others use the term social marketing but have and encourage different meanings for it. Alan R. Andreasen points out in 1994 in his article in the *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* entitled “Social Marketing: Its Definition and Domain”, the terminology used in academic journal articles is quite diverse and often incorrect – leading to confusion in the marketplace and the academy. Terms such as cause marketing, social marketing, nonprofit marketing, charity marketing, all need to be clarified and used correctly. New cultural shifts and the contemporary use of the word “social” are starting to confuse this topic further.

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CHANGE; FRESH THINKING

Discussion of this topic includes the need to understand the contemporary views and changes in the nonprofit sector which are both culturally and

socially relevant. This leads to a nonprofit marketing educational strategy to anticipate and guide the thinking and knowledge in this space to ensure higher education is pro-active rather than reactive, which is often the case. There seems to be room for improvement.

In one research study published by *Nonprofit World*, a picture emerges which questions whether marketing professionals are actually doing marketing in a broader, strategic context or simply executing marketing communication tasks – whether there is a narrow and limited definition of marketing due to a lack of education and proper recruitment and transition into this sector. Are the salaries so much lower that well-educated students would not consider a career in this sector? Are there nonprofit employees making strategic decisions that don't have the background or experience to be doing so? This again supports the need for a more detailed review of pedagogical approaches and their impact or lack of impact on the industry.

In a recent award-winning book entitled, *Uncharitable*, author Dan Pallotta addresses five restraints on nonprofits which undermine their potential and ability to succeed with their overarching goals. Two points tie to nonprofit marketing education. One is the ability for nonprofits to attract and retain well-educated talent. According

to Mr. Pallotta in his book, "It is obscene that our society would prohibit a charity from paying a fraction of a CEO's salary to the people who might be able to help us end world hunger or cure AIDS. How can we possibly get top talent with that kind of attitude?" Second, Mr. Pallotta speaks about the ability for marketing and advertising to be used without restraint to build awareness and funds for a social cause. He asks critical questions on why it is allowed that for-profit businesses can spend in order to reap the benefits of strategic marketing and advertising but nonprofits are chastised for it. There are numerous new ideas and fresh thinking on the topic of nonprofit management and marketing which are worthy of debate and discussion.

RESEARCH NECESSARY

The prevalence and consistency of nonprofit marketing education in the United States is not clear and needs to be examined. Understanding and analyzing the curricula variations, pedagogical methods, and overall aims of the courses and programs is necessary to further the development of world-class marketing education in this growing and dynamic segment.

References available on request