DRAFT

COURSE SYLLABUS

Leading in the Nonprofit Sector

Course Description

This course introduces students to a broad range of nonprofit leadership issues. The first part of the course focuses on some of the major challenges leaders face within nonprofit organizations, including setting direction and inspiring and aligning others. Part Two then looks at external leadership issues: How do nonprofit staff lead in communities? What are some of the major issues facing nonprofit leaders in the Washington region? The next segment of the course considers nonprofit subsectors (e.g., health, education, human services, arts). Most of the life of a nonprofit leader is spent within a subsector. What are the major challenges facing leaders in different subsectors? The final, most extensive part of the course then explores critical national nonprofit issues. Those who aspire to leadership in the nonprofit sector should be informed and have opinions about major sectoral issues, such as the argument that more philanthropy should be devoted to helping the poor or that there are now too many nonprofit organizations. This course will give students the opportunity to do just that – to deepen their understanding of and form opinions about the major sector issues of the day. Class format will vary, with presentations by the professor, instructor and student-led discussions, analyses of case studies, and guest speakers. Beginning in mid-semester, students will have significant responsibility for designing and leading class sessions. Overall, this class will feature high levels of student participation.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Deepen their understanding of good leadership practices within nonprofit organizations and within communities (through readings, class sessions, case studies, papers).
- Increase their knowledge about critical issues facing nonprofit subsectors and the nonprofit sector as a whole (readings, class sessions, papers).
- Improve their intra-organizational and community leadership skills (readings, class sessions, case studies, papers, presentations).
- Enhance their oral and written communications skills (memos, presentations).
Course Requirements

There are two major types of requirements for the course:

1. Active Engagement: Students are expected to engage actively in the course in the following and related ways:
   - **Regular Attendance:** Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to arrive in class on time. Attendance will be noted. If at all possible, students should email the instructor beforehand when they expect to miss class because of illness or another reason.
   - **Completion of Reading:** Students are expected to complete all assigned reading before class. It is especially important that case studies receive a close reading. In fact, if at all possible, cases should be re-read just before class.
   - **Active Participation:** Students are expected to participate actively in all class sessions. In addition to contributing to regular class discussions, students may be asked to make a presentation or lead a discussion on a relevant issue. The instructor will occasionally cold call on students. **To facilitate active engagement, cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices should be turned off during class.**

Student engagement will count for 15% of the course grade.

2. Written Assignments and Presentations: Students are expected to complete the following:

   - **Assignment #1: Short, Reaction Papers:** To enhance learning of important material and prepare for class discussions, students will complete a series of short (1-2 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) papers. Reaction paper assignments will generally be given one week before they are due. For example, in session #1, students will receive the assignment due at session #2. Strong papers will connect (multiple) course readings to the issue being addressed. If a reaction paper focuses on an analysis of a particular case study, a good paper will reference some of the readings for the week. Reaction papers must be submitted on BlackBoard and handed in at or before class, and will generally not be accepted late. Students who miss class for any reason have the option of handing in these papers before the class session for which they are assigned. Students are excused from writing a reaction paper on the day they complete assignment #4 described below. The two lowest grades will be dropped. The reaction papers will count for 25% of the course grade.

   - **Assignment #2: Leadership Challenge within a Nonprofit:** Students will analyze one leadership challenge facing a nonprofit organization of the student’s choosing. The paper should provide some background on the organization; describe the leadership challenge; identify several options for addressing the challenge; and discuss the preferred option, including both pro’s and con’s. The paper should anticipate possible
problems in implementing the preferred solution and address how these problems could be handled. Students are welcome – and even encouraged – to write about nonprofits with which they are personally familiar (e.g., nonprofits where they have worked or volunteered). The instructor will treat all papers as confidential. This paper (approximately 5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) is due on October 8 and will count 20% of the grade. Papers should be submitted on BlackBoard and handed in.

- **Assignment #3: Subsector Leadership**: Students will also write a paper on important issues facing one of the major nonprofit subsectors covered in the Salamon, *State of Nonprofit America* book. Students should imagine they have just been named to head an association representing nonprofits in a particular subfield (e.g., Association of Nonprofit Hospitals, Association of Nonprofit Theaters, Association of Nonprofit Universities). In their papers, students should discuss how they would address three major challenges currently facing the subfield. Papers should be approximately 5 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font. The analysis should draw on material in the *State of Nonprofit America* and any other sources students want to consult. Subsector papers are due on October 29 and will count 15% of the grade. Depending on class size, some students may give presentations on their subsector papers rather than in connection with assignment #4.

- **Assignment #4: Sector Issues: Design and Implementation of Class Session and Paper**: Students will sign up at the beginning of the semester, either individually or in pairs, to help the instructor design and implement one class session – or actually about half of a class session (i.e., approximately 75 minutes, either 7:20 - 8:35 pm or 8:45-10:00 pm) on an important local or national nonprofit sector issue (see sessions #6B, 7, 9-13, and 14A below). Students who want to develop a session on a topic other than the ones described in the syllabus are welcome to discuss this option with the instructor.

For the topics they choose, students will: 1) develop an initial proposal for the session, describing how the session will be conducted and specifying a reading assignment and a reaction paper question for the students to complete. In designing their sessions students may want to consider using case studies, outside speakers, field trips, debates, role plays, small group discussions, or other even more creative options – including food is often very popular; 2) receive feedback from the instructor on the proposal; 3) submit a revised design; 4) finalize the design through emails or in a phone call or in-person meeting with the instructor; 5) inform the class of the design for the session; 6) lead the actual class session; and 7) write a paper (approximately 5-7 pages, double-spaced, 12-point font) on the session topic.

Due dates are as follows: 1) the initial proposal is due four weeks before the class session; 2) feedback from the instructor will be given three weeks before the class; 3) the revised design should be submitted two weeks before the class; 4) the student and instructor will email or talk sometime between two weeks and one week before the class to finalize the design; 5) **the final design – including especially homework**
assignments for the rest of the class (e.g., reaction paper question, background reading) – will be presented to the class one week before the session; and 6) the 5-7 page paper is due on the day of the class, and should be submitted on BlackBoard and handed in. Students are responsible for emailing the instructor to schedule the phone call or in-person meeting if needed. A couple of qualifications/suggestions: 1) Please get approval from the professor before formally inviting speakers; 2) Only one outside speaker per week works best; 3) Please try to avoid material that might be covered in weeks other than your own; 4) Consider using a chapter from the State of Nonprofit America as background reading if there is a chapter that is related to your topic; 5) Please follow the timetable or your grade will be reduced. The class design and paper will count 25% of the grade.

All papers should be submitted both in hard copy and on-line on BlackBoard. Grades will be reduced for assignments handed in late without prior approval of instructor.

Grades:
All assignments will receive numerical grades from 0-100. For final grades, numerical grades will be converted to letter grades without rounding as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>97-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-96.99</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89.99</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-86.99</td>
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Contacting the Instructor
Please feel free to set up an appointment to talk with the instructor either in-person or on the phone. Dr. Abramson can be reached at the following:

- Office phone: 703-993-8189
- Office e-mail: aabramso@gmu.edu
- Office Address: George Mason University - Arlington Campus, Founders Hall, 3351 Fairfax Drive, Room 608, Mail Stop 3B1, Arlington, VA 22201
- Cell phone: 202-262-5204

Readings
Course readings are available through Blackboard, are on-line, or are in the following books that are available for purchase through the GMU bookstore:


Additional Background Information on the Nonprofit Sector
Students are encouraged to consult the background material on the nonprofit sector listed in Appendix A of this syllabus and to use information on nonprofit management available through the GMU Library at:  http://infoguides.gmu.edu/nonprofit

**Academic Integrity**
GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt of any kind, please ask for guidance and clarification.

**GMU Email Accounts**
Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive class-related information.

**Office of Disability Services**
If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see the instructor and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS: http://ods.gmu.edu

**Other Useful Campus Resources**
- Writing Center: http://writingcenter.gmu.edu
- University Libraries “Ask a Librarian” : http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

**University Policies**
The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

**Course Outline and Reading Assignments**
Please note that additional readings and case study material will be added during the course of the semester. **Please be sure to look for emails from the instructor and your classmates that contain course-relevant information.**

1. **JANUARY 25: Introduction to the Course and Overview of the U.S. Nonprofit Sector**

Suggested:
PART ONE: LEADERSHIP WITHIN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

2. FEBRUARY 1: Introduction to Organizational Leadership

SIGN UP TO LEAD CLASS SESSION


3. FEBRUARY 8: Setting Direction and Motivating: Drawing on Personal and Shared Values to Develop a Compelling Organizational Vision and Inspire Others


Suggested:

4. FEBRUARY 15: Aligning: Communicating to Keep Others on Track

--Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, chs. 8-12

5. FEBRUARY 22: New Models of Leadership

MEMO ON LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE DUE

--Brafman and Beckstrom, *Starfish and the Spider*.

PART TWO: NONPROFIT LEADERSHIP IN COMMUNITIES

6. MARCH 1: Leading Beyond the Walls

A. Introduction to nonprofit advocacy and lobbying (Instructor-led discussion)

B. Should nonprofit advocacy and lobbying be increased?: How involved are nonprofits currently in advocacy and lobbying activity? Should this kind of activity be increased? What are the potential costs and benefits to nonprofits and to society of increasing nonprofit – and foundation – engagement in policy? What are important organizational and legal barriers to increasing nonprofit policy work? How can these barriers be overcome? Should nonprofits be allowed to be more engaged in electoral politics? Should churches and other religious organizations, in particular, be permitted to expand their electoral activity?

7. MARCH 8: Leading Nonprofits in Communities

A. Collaboration among local nonprofits: Many observers feel that there is a lack of collaboration among nonprofits in many communities and that this significantly limits nonprofits' impact. What are some of the obstacles to nonprofits collaborating with one another? How can these obstacles be overcome? What are some examples or models of nonprofit collaboration?

B. Leading the nonprofit sector in the Washington, DC-area: What is the size and scope of the local nonprofit sector (see www.connectnorthernvirginia.org and other sources)? What roles do nonprofits play in the Washington region? How important are they in the local economy? What organizations “represent” the local nonprofit sector? Are nonprofits at the “table” with government and business when important regional economic and policy decisions are being made? How can the nonprofit sector get appropriate recognition for the roles it plays? What are the major, broad, “sector-wide” issues currently facing local nonprofits?

MARCH 15: Spring Break – No Class

PART THREE: LEADERSHIP ON NONPROFIT SUBSECTOR ISSUES

8. MARCH 22: Subsector Issues

MEMO ON NONPROFIT SUBSECTOR DUE

--Salamon, ed. *Nonprofit America*. Read three chapters out of chs. 2-10.

PART FOUR: LEADERSHIP ON NATIONAL “SECTOR” ISSUES

9. MARCH 29: National Sector Issues I
A. Strengthening the overall nonprofit sector: To what extent do individual nonprofit organizations think of themselves as part of a single, unified nonprofit sector, rather than as belonging to different subsectors, like health, education, human services, and the arts? How did “sector” consciousness develop? What are the “infrastructure” or support organizations that represent the nonprofit sector as a whole and seek to improve the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations? What are the most important steps that should be taken to strengthen the overall nonprofit sector?

B. Are there too many nonprofit organizations?: Should nonprofits be encouraged or somehow forced to merge or go out of business? Should there be tougher requirements to establish a nonprofit? Or, are there possibly too few nonprofits in our society? What is the “right” number of nonprofits for our society?

10. APRIL 5: National Sector Issues II

A. Sector workforce and talent, including generational issues: Are compensation and working conditions for nonprofit staff sufficient to attract and retain high-quality workers? How are different generations in the nonprofit workforce relating to one another? Is the nonprofit sector prepared for the increasing retirement of baby-boom era executives? How can nonprofits be better prepared for successful leadership transitions? Do we need new approaches to address nonprofit staff and leadership challenges?

B. Diversity and inclusion: Currently, how diverse on a variety of dimensions (e.g., race, ethnicity, income class, beliefs, etc.) are the senior and junior staffs and boards of nonprofits and foundations? How inclusive are nonprofit practices? Should nonprofits seek to become more diverse in the make-up of their staffs and boards and adopt more inclusive cultures? What benefits and costs are associated with increased diversity and a stronger culture of inclusion? If a nonprofit wanted to enhance the diversity of its staff and board and establish a more inclusive culture, what are some “best practices” it might adopt to accomplish these goals?

11. APRIL 12: National Sector Issues III

A. Power dynamics between funders and nonprofits: Many feel that the relationship between foundations and nonprofit grant seekers is characterized by a power dynamic that requires nonprofits to react to foundation demands rather than foundations responding to what grant seekers know and are seeking. Nonprofits report that the process of securing funds wastes capacity, often devalues the expertise of organizations, and requires grantees to acquiesce to foundation demands at the expense of being responsive to stakeholder experiences. In general, there is a perceived lack of trust and communication between the parties. What are the causes of poor relationships between foundations and nonprofits? Are there examples of foundations that are on
better terms with nonprofits? What can be done to improve foundation-nonprofit relations?

B. Philanthropy, nonprofits, the poor, and increasing inequality: Is an appropriate amount of philanthropic and nonprofit activity benefiting the poor, people of color, and other underserved populations? Should there be an additional subsidy for philanthropy and nonprofits that serve these populations, or a reduced subsidy for philanthropy and nonprofits that do not? Economic inequality seems to be increasing in the U.S. What role can nonprofits and philanthropy play in addressing problems related to increasing disparities in income and wealth?

12. APRIL 19: National Sector Issues IV

A. Performance management: How is nonprofit performance currently being tracked, both by nonprofits themselves and by funders and other agencies, including some “rating” agencies? Are nonprofits sufficiently efficient and effective? Do nonprofits actually use performance measures they develop to improve their performance? If not, how can nonprofit performance be improved? What is the role of nonprofit boards in improving nonprofit performance? Is there a downside to too much emphasis on performance measurement and evaluation?

B. Oversight of the nonprofit sector: What kind of trouble do nonprofits get themselves into? Are nonprofits that are acting inappropriately getting caught? What should be done about the “bad apples” within the nonprofit sector? What role is currently played by government (federal, state, and local), the media, and the nonprofit sector itself in ensuring nonprofits follow the law and act ethically? Should any of these institutions take on an expanded or reduced role in monitoring and enforcing appropriate nonprofit behavior?

13. APRIL 26: National Sector Issues V

A. Nonprofits and business: What are the advantages and disadvantages of nonprofits becoming more like for-profit entities by, for example, charging for their services and adopting other business-like practices? Should nonprofits be required to provide a minimum amount of “community benefit” in exchange for their tax-exempt status? Should nonprofits that receive significant fee income (e.g., hospitals and universities) be in a different legal category than nonprofits with philanthropic support? Should a new legal designation for a “Fourth Sector” be established to encompass hybrid, double-bottom-line organizations that seek both to “do good” and “make money”?

B. The nonprofit sector in twenty-five years: What will the nonprofit sector look like twenty-five years from now? How will current trends affecting the nonprofit sector play out? What new forces may affect the nonprofit sector in the years to come? What form should the nonprofit sector take going forward?
14. MAY 3: National Sector Issues VI

PAPER DUE ON “THE NONPROFIT SECTOR IN 25 YEARS”
STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

The nonprofit sector in twenty-five years: What will the nonprofit sector look like twenty-five years from now? How will current trends affecting the nonprofit sector play out? What new forces may affect the nonprofit sector in the years to come? What form should the nonprofit sector take going forward?

MAY 10: Hold for possible make-up session if needed
Appendix A: Resource Guide for the Nonprofit Sector (Selected Resources)

**Newspapers/Journals – Practitioner-Oriented**
- Chronicle of Philanthropy
- Nonprofit Quarterly
- Nonprofit Times
- Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)

**Journals – Research-Oriented**
- Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)
- Nonprofit Management and Leadership (NML)
- Nonprofit Policy Forum
- Voluntas

**E-Newsletters - National**
- Blue Avocado
- IS Daily Media Digest (Independent Sector)
- NPQ’s Nonprofit Newswire (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- Philanthropy News Digest (Foundation Center)
- Philanthropy Today – Daily Update from the Chronicle of Philanthropy

**E-Newsletters – Local**
- The Daily WRAG (Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers)

**National Organizations**
- Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
- Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)
- BoardSource
- Council on Foundations
- Foundation Center
- Independent Sector
- International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR)
- National Council of Nonprofits
- Nonprofit Finance Fund

**Local Organizations**
- Center for Nonprofit Advancement (CNA)
- Foundation Center Library – Washington, DC
- Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation
- Nonprofit NoVA (affiliate of the Nonprofit Roundtable) (in transition)
- Nonprofit Roundtable of Greater Washington (in transition)
- Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP)
• Washington Grantmakers
• Young Nonprofit Professionals Network – DC (YNPNdc)

Statistics on the Nonprofit Sector
• Foundation Center
• Giving USA
• GuideStar
• Listening Post Project at Johns Hopkins University, Center for Civil Society Studies
• National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute
• Nonprofit Almanac
• Connect Northern Virginia (www.connectnorthernvirginia.org)

Job Openings
• PND Job Alerts
• Chronicle of Philanthropy
• Idealist.org
• The Daily WRAG
• YNPNdc

Indexes to Nonprofit Research
• Catalog of Nonprofit Literature (Foundation Center):
• The Nonprofit Sector: A Research Handbook, second edition
• Philanthropic Studies Index (Indiana University Center on Philanthropy)

Blogs
• Beth’s Blog – Beth Kanter
• Cohen Report – Rick Cohen
• A Fine Blog – Allison Fine
• Huffington Post – contributions by on nonprofits and philanthropy
• Philanthropy 2173 – Lucy Bernholz
• White Courtesy Telephone – Albert Ruesga and others