

## ABSTRACT

*This article examines the potential for advancing the volunteer administration profession resulting from the partnership between the Association for Volunteer Administration and American Humanics, Inc., announced in 1999. As volunteer administration evolves from a field of study to a respected profession, it is posited that linkages to higher education will become even more important. Ideas for encouraging individual AVA members to engage in the array of curricular and co-curricular activities provided through the collegiate network of American Humanics affiliates is offered. It is suggested that legitimizing the volunteer administration profession is possible, in part, when active relationships with American Humanics college and university affiliates are fully explored.*

# Advancing the Volunteer Administration Field: Implications for the AVA and American Humanics Partnership in the New Millennium

Robert F. Ashcraft, Ph.D.

## INTRODUCTION

As the field of volunteer administration faces a new millennium, questions persist about the extent to which the vocation has emerged with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities inherent to an established profession (Brudney and Stringer, 1999). An agreement reached in 1999 between the Association for Volunteer Administration and American Humanics, Inc., holds promise for the advancement of the volunteer administration field into an identified profession beyond that which has been possible in prior years. The inherent strengths of two national organizations, both concerned about strengthening the capacity of volunteer managers and leaders, provides reasoning for why the respective board of directors of AVA and American Humanics agreed to become "collaborating professional organizations."

While the mission of AVA is "to promote professionalism and strengthen leadership in volunteerism," the purpose of American Humanics is "to prepare and certify future nonprofit professionals to

work with America's youth and families." AVA accomplishes its purpose through a membership organization of individuals and services that include a performance-based credentialing program and an educational endorsement program. American Humanics provides a competency-based, student development focused approach through co-curricular activities that complement formal classroom instruction. The delivery system for American Humanics is accomplished through a network of campus affiliates located across the United States. By unifying, AVA, the largest member organization in the volunteer administration field, with American Humanics, the largest network of higher education institutions that prepares undergraduate students for nonprofit careers, new opportunities exist to advance the volunteer administration profession. To realize this potential, however, it is important that stakeholders of both entities learn about the history, purpose, culture, programs and features of each organization.

The purpose of this paper is three-part

---

*Robert F. Ashcraft* is Director of the American Humanics Program at Arizona State University and is assistant professor in the Department of Recreation Management and Tourism. He led a W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant project resulting in the creation of a Center for Nonprofit Leadership and Management at ASU in 1999. In prior professional work, he was a director of volunteer services. He is an AVA member and currently serves as a volunteer on several local and national nonprofit boards, committees and task groups.

and is guided by the following questions: 1) What is known about volunteer administrators and higher education preparation leading to a rationale for encouraging stronger linkages?; 2) What is American Humanics, its philosophy and collegiate network that makes it relevant to the volunteer administration field? and 3) What practical ways can AVA members and American Humanics students and faculty engage in the AVA/American Humanics partnership to advance the volunteer administration field?

### VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Volunteer administration has been seen as multi-disciplinary in nature, and has been identified as, "truly eclectic, incorporating skills and techniques from many other professions and disciplines (Campbell, 1994). In a comprehensive survey of AVA members in 1992, data revealed that volunteer administrators appear to have high levels of education. The majority of respondents reported that they have attained a bachelor's or post-baccalaureate degree (Brudney, 1994). This finding was later confirmed in a 1996 study of leadership practices of AVA members (Ashcraft and Yoshioka, 1997). However, the earlier study also revealed that most members have received little training in the volunteer administration field or that what training they had received was primarily through non-university based courses. Further, a 1998 study revealed that "the topic of volunteer administration and management rarely commands a course of its own or substantial coverage in other courses in nonprofit programs ..." (Brudney and Stringer, 1999). One might conclude from these findings, and from personal experience or other anecdotal evidence, that there is a disconnect between what most volunteer administrators studied in college level courses and how what they learned has been directly applied to the day-to-day management of volunteer programs. It is not surprising, therefore, that many volunteer adminis-

trators have turned to non-university based training courses that satisfy the need for volunteer management skill building.

Despite this uncertain connection between the formal preparation of practitioners and the halls of academia, it is posited here that the best interests of the field can be served by considering the full range of possibilities made available through the new AVA/American Humanics partnership. This thesis is advanced given the historic role of higher education in helping fields of study become identified professions. A 1999 initiative announced by AVA to re-position the volunteer administration field provides incentive to act on this position. The initiative specifically calls upon practitioners to advance their profession by growing in their field, through forging strategic alliances and to otherwise develop professionally in order to help build viable career paths (AVA, 1999). It could be argued that formal, university-based, coursework in volunteer management is not essential to the success of the practitioner. However, it is unlikely that legitimizing the profession is possible without a concerted effort to collaborate fully with colleges and universities.

Lessons learned from other professions suggest that colleges and universities play a major role in both the creation and legitimacy of professions. What it means for any field of occupational endeavor to become a profession has been the subject of debate for many years. Attempting to give precise definition to volunteer administration "jobs" becomes problematic because roles vary significantly according to functions, titles, responsibilities, and organizational context for the work. However, a multiple criterion definition has emerged that generally centers on at least six variables that define a profession (Schein, 1972). These criteria, in brief, include: 1) a defined body of knowledge, 2) formal academic preparation prior to practice, 3) standards of practice that are restrictive and require continua-

tion of education, 4) professional organizations, 5) a code of ethics, and 6) public acceptance.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the extent to which the volunteer administration field has moved toward a profession, it is argued here that AVA's attempt "to re-position the volunteer administration field" in moving it toward professional status will necessitate strategic alliances with higher education partners. While AVA can promote standards of practice, a professional organization, and a code of ethics, it is unlikely that defining a body of knowledge, developing formal academic preparation prior to practice, and increasing public

acceptance, can be accomplished without college and university partners. Thus, the AVA/American Humanics partnership could become the first dynamic step toward the greater goal of advancing the status and recognition of the volunteer administration field.

#### AMERICAN HUMANICS AND ITS CAMPUS NETWORK

American Humanics, Inc. is "a strategic alliance of academic institutions, nonprofit organizations and collaborating professional organizations...all concerned about the need for better prepared entry-level employees in the nonprofit sector (American Humanics, 1995). The organization

**TABLE 1**

**American Humanics, Inc.  
Affiliated Colleges and Universities (n = 56)  
(January 2000)**

Arizona State University (Tempe, AZ)	Oklahoma State University (Stillwater, OK)
Benedict College (Columbia, SC)	Oxnard College (Oxnard, CA)
Bennett College (Greensboro, NC)	Pepperdine University (Malibu, CA)
California State University (Fresno, CA)	Rockhurst University (Kansas City, MO)
California State University (Fullerton, CA)	San Diego State University (San Diego, CA)
California State University (Long Beach, CA)	San Francisco State University (San Francisco, CA)
California State University (Los Angeles, CA)	Shaw University (Raleigh, NC)
California State University (Northridge, CA)	Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, TN)
California State University (Sacramento, CA)	Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (Edwardsville, IL)
Chicago State University (Chicago, IL)	SUNY College at Oneonta (Oneonta, NY)
Clayton College & State University (Morrow, GA)	Texas Wesleyan University (Fort Worth, TX)
Clemson University (Clemson, SC)	University of Arkansas at Little Rock (Little Rock, AR)
Coppin State College (Baltimore, MD)	University of the District of Columbia (Washington, DC)
Covenant College (Lookout Mountain, GA)	University of Houston (Houston, TX)
Crichton College (Memphis, TN)	University of Houston - Downtown (Houston, TX)
DePaul University (Chicago, IL)	University of Houston - Victoria (Victoria, TX)
Edinboro University of Pennsylvania (Edinboro, PA)	University of Memphis (Memphis, TN)
George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)	University of North Texas (Denton, TX)
Graceland College (Lamoni, IA)	University of Northern Iowa (Cedar Falls, IA)
High Point University (High Point, NC)	University of Puerto Rico, (Hunacao, PR)
Indiana University Bloomington (Bloomington, IN)	University of San Diego (San Diego, CA)
Indiana University Purdue University (Indianapolis, IN)	University of Southern Colorado (Pueblo, CO)
Jarvis Christian College (Hawkins, TX)	University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (Chattanooga, TN)
Kennesaw State University (Kennesaw, GA)	The University of Texas at San Antonio (San Antonio, TX)
LeMoyne-Owen College (Memphis, TN)	University of Washington at Tacoma (Tacoma, WA)
Lindenwood University (St. Charles, MO)	Western Michigan University (Kalamazoo, MI)
Louisiana State University in Shreveport (Shreveport, LA)	Xavier University of Louisiana (New Orleans, LA)
Missouri Valley College (Marshall, MO)	
Murray State University (Murray, KY)	
North Carolina Central University (Durham, NC)	

was founded in 1948 by the late H. Roe Bartle, who was a career professional with the Boy Scouts of America and who once served as Mayor of Kansas City, Missouri. The early days of American Humanics found the organization operating on a small number of private, largely religious-affiliated institutions that graduated students primarily into careers with the Boy Scouts of America.

The historic roots of the American Humanics organization have been grounded in the "spirit, mind and body for service to humanity" philosophy in preparing professionals for nonprofit youth development agency careers. Today's American Humanics, however, positions itself as the only U.S. organization that attempts to organize, through affiliated colleges and universities, a program to attract, prepare and place students into service careers with nonprofit youth and human service organizations (American Humanics, 1995). For over a decade, American Humanics, headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri, has intentionally broadened its strategy to include a comprehensive nonprofit management education approach. Within the focus of nonprofit management education is a commitment to preparing students for volunteer administration duties. Many alumni now serve as directors of volunteers or have a portion of their job responsibilities involving facets of volunteer administration.

As of January 1, the program operates through 56 affiliated campuses (Table 1). Remarkable growth has been achieved during the decade of the 1990s due largely to a strategic plan informed by data suggesting the emergence of thousands of entry-level jobs in the nonprofit sector (American Humanics, 1995). With funding support in the 1990s, largely from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, American Humanics has grown from a small network in its first 40 years (10 to 15 affiliated schools), to its current status of almost 60 schools. The organization's plan is to grow to 100 campus affiliates by the year

2001 (American Humanics, 1995).

American Humanics works in collaboration with 17 national nonprofit partner organizations such as Boys and Girls Clubs of America, Girl Scouts of the USA, Habitat for Humanity, United Way of America and YMCA of the USA (Table 2). These organizations, to differing degrees, provide materials for classroom use, guest speakers, training opportunities for students, scholarship funds, internship opportunities, and jobs for graduates.

---

**TABLE 2**

**American Humanics, Inc.  
National Nonprofit Partners (n = 17)  
(January 2000)**

- American Red Cross
  - Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
  - Boy Scouts of America
  - Boys & Girls Clubs of America
  - Camp Fire Boys and Girls
  - Catholic Charities USA
  - Girls Incorporated
  - Girl Scouts of the U.S.A.
  - Habitat for Humanity International
  - Junior Achievement Inc.
  - National Network for Youth
  - National Urban League
  - Special Olympics Inc.
  - Volunteers of America
  - YMCA of the USA
  - YWCA of the USA
  - United Way of America
- 

In addition, American Humanics maintains formal relationships with several collaborating professional organizations (CPOs) that have a stake in nonprofit leadership and management issues. In addition to AVA, these include the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, the National Society of Fund Raising Executives, and the Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management (Table 3). These CPOs provide curriculum materials, training opportunities and scholarships for students in the American Humanics network. While these nonprofit partners and

---

**TABLE 3**

**American Humanics, Inc.  
Collaborating Professional Organizations  
(n = 11)  
(January 2000)**

Association for Research on Nonprofit  
Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)  
Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA)  
The College Fund/UNCF  
The Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit  
Management  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
The Learning Institute  
National Center for Nonprofit Boards  
National Society of Fund Raising Executives  
Nonprofit Risk Management Center  
National Training Institute for Community Youth  
Work  
The Washington Center for Internships and  
Academic Seminars

---

collaborating professional organizations represent national organizations, American Humanics campus affiliates frequently develop local relationships with small, grassroots nonprofits or with other national organizations serving their communities.

American Humanics facilitates campus programs that provide students with "unique curricular and career placement linkages between universities and their youth and human service partner organizations" (Ashcraft & Virden, 1995). Campus programs prepare undergraduate students for entry-level management positions in nonprofit organizations, with a continued emphasis on local affiliates of national nonprofit youth serving agencies. The program provides an academic focus featuring topics in voluntary, nonprofit agency management and includes participation by agency professionals who offer workshops, seminars, field trips and cooperative educational experiences. American Humanics programs are represented in different disciplines including social work, recreation, sociology and public administration. American Humanics, therefore, promulgates a

multi-disciplinary approach to nonprofit management education.

### A COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH TO VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION EDUCATION

American Humanics offers a competency-based education model leading to national certification for students (American Humanics, 1999). Competencies are updated annually through input from human resources professionals representing national nonprofit partners. Students develop competencies through experiences led by a campus director, and others, who facilitate involvement in and outside the classroom. In-classroom offerings include formal course work in volunteerism and volunteer management, managing not-for-profit organizations, and philanthropy/fund raising. Depending upon the campus, these courses are developed as independent courses or as content topics inside existing courses. Service learning strategies are employed by many of the American Humanics campus programs. Again, depending upon the campus, courses are taught by resident faculty, adjunct faculty, or a combination of the two.

Out of classroom activities involve co-curricular experiences that are designed to complement the in-classroom instruction based on a student development philosophy. They include, in part, leadership development retreats, applied fund raising experiences, field trips and student leadership association experiences.

The American Humanics competencies offer a two-part framework divided into Foundation Competencies and Professional Development Competencies. Similarly, a competency framework is in place for those seeking professional credentialing in volunteer administration through AVA. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to compare and contrast the American Humanics and AVA competencies, an analysis by this author of both sets of criteria revealed striking similarities.

Foundation Competencies are those areas of knowledge and skill deemed appropriate to a prepared student, despite vocational choice. They include: career development exploration; communication skills and employability skills; personal attributes; historical and philosophical foundations; youth and adult development; and cultural differences and sensitivities.

Professional Development Competencies are those deemed essential to nonprofit management. They include: board/committee development; fund raising principles and practices; human resource development and supervision; general nonprofit management; nonprofit accounting and financial management; nonprofit marketing; program planning and risk management.

A series of competencies relate directly to volunteer administration and are grouped under a collection of skill and knowledge areas titled, Human Resource Development and Supervision. This grouping includes exploration of both volunteer and paid staff personnel systems. With regards to volunteer administration competencies, upon completion of an American Humanics program, a successful graduate should be able to:

- Identify factors that motivate individuals to volunteer their services to a nonprofit organization
- Identify sources for volunteer recruitment
- Explain strategies for the recruitment, selection, orientation, training, motivating, supervising, evaluating, recognition and termination (if needed) of volunteers
- Demonstrate ability to manage diversity
- Explain the importance of delegation as a technique for the effective utilization of volunteer talents.

Upon satisfying the defined competencies, students graduating from an affiliated institution may earn American Humanics certification. Students who

graduate from affiliated American Humanics programs are frequently employed by a local affiliate of one of the national nonprofit partners. However, students are free to pursue any position and are not bound, contractually or otherwise, to only those nonprofit partners formally affiliated with American Humanics. Today, many American Humanics alumni have titles such as directors of volunteers, or they have in their job responsibilities some aspects of volunteer administration.

While partnerships exist with nonprofit organizations, students are not required to intern in a specific agency, and they are free to choose their future place of employment. As a result, graduates are found in government and business organizations applying skills they have learned through the program. This, too, extends the reach of American Humanics alumni into positions that involve volunteer administration separate from the nonprofit sector. However, it is noted that most alumni pursue nonprofit career positions.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AVA/ AMERICAN HUMANICS PARTNERSHIP

This analysis suggests that the volunteer administration field can evolve toward a full profession when active partnerships with colleges and universities are established. It has further revealed that the American Humanics approach to teaching volunteer administration, within its nonprofit management education umbrella, considers the value of a student development framework. The framework used in the implementation of curricular and co-curricular experiences leads to the successful attraction, preparation and placement of students in nonprofit sector careers.

Whether the new AVA/American Humanics partnership becomes more than simply a philosophical covenant or one that helps transform the volunteer administration field into a respected profession remains to be seen. Likely, the success of the partnership will depend large-

ly upon the relationships developed between individual volunteer administrators and local students and faculty of affiliated American Humanics campuses. Several practical ways are suggested that can encourage these relationships to develop and grow so as to advance the volunteer administration profession. They include:

- American Humanics can provide AVA members with access to more than 60 locations through its network of campus locations. This provides members with a direct link to courses that contain "best practices" for volunteer administration.
- AVA members can serve in many roles such as mentors to students desiring volunteer administration careers, as guest presenters on campus, and as adjunct faculty members who teach volunteer management courses in American Humanics curricula.
- American Humanics students have field-work and internship requirements to fulfill and can become a ready human resource for organizations desiring such linkages.
- AVA members can provide students with "real-life" experiences that prepare them for their chosen career field in ways that complement formal classroom instruction.
- American Humanics programs frequently feature noted local and national speakers in topics of interest to volunteer administrators. AVA members can often participate in these gatherings to become re-energized in their work, to gain new ideas and to share practitioner perspectives. In addition, many American Humanics programs host local training activities provided by American Humanics national Collaborating Professional Organizations. AVA members can benefit from these training conferences by learning the latest about "best practices" in volunteer administration.
- AVA members can help "ground" all American Humanics curricular and co-curricular activities in practical ways to assure students are prepared for the realities of the volunteer administration field.
- American Humanics programs can provide an entrée on campus to those seeking linkages to academics who engage in research relevant to volunteer administrators. Frequently, American Humanics campus faculty and staff broker relationships between practitioners and academics. Some outcomes are program evaluation studies, master's and doctoral theses that blend theory and practice, and other "products" that assist the local volunteer administrator. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration* published by AVA can be promoted as a vehicle to disseminate findings.
- AVA members can invite graduating students, who enter volunteer administration positions, to become members of AVA and to pursue its certification program.

This list should only be a starting point for considering the variety of ways in which the AVA/American Humanics partnership can strengthen each organization's mutual interests. Together, AVA members and American Humanics (faculty, staff, students and alumni), can contribute to the further development of the volunteer administration field. Through their teaching, research and service missions, universities have served a role in society resulting in fields of practice emerging as identified professions. It could be argued, therefore, that the AVA/American Humanics partnership is essential to developing the volunteer administration field into a credible profession. With the beginning of the new millennium, it is an opportune time to consider the full range of opportunities inherent in the new AVA/American Humanics partnership.

---

## REFERENCES

- American Humanics. (1999). *Certification Competency Requirements Handbook*. Kansas City: American Humanics.
- American Humanics. (1995). *Strategic Plan*. Kansas City: American Humanics.
- Ashcraft, R. & Yoshioka, C. (1997). Leadership practices of Association for Volunteer Administration members. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Vol. 16, Number 1.
- Ashcraft, R. (1996). *American Humanics Co-Curricular Program Handbook*. Kansas City: American Humanics.
- Ashcraft, R. & Virden, R. (1995). Understanding our changing student product: Implications for diverse constituencies. *Humanics: The Journal of Leadership for Youth and Human Service*. Spring.
- Association for Volunteer Administration. (1999). *Positioning the Profession: Communicating the Power of Results for Volunteer Leadership Professionals*. Richmond, Virginia.
- Brudney, J. and G. Stringer (1999). Higher education in volunteer administration: Exploring — and critiquing — the state of the art. In M. O'Neill and K. Fletcher (eds.), *Nonprofit Management Education: U.S. and World Perspectives*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Brudney, J. and T. Love and C. Yu (1994). The Association for Volunteer Administration and professionalization for the field: Suggestions from a survey for the membership. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Vol. XII (1,2).
- Campbell, K. N. (1994). Welcome to the profession of volunteer administration. *The Journal of Volunteer Administration*. Vol. XII (1,2).
- Schein, E. H. (1972). *Professional Education*. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. McGraw-Hill. New York.