

# The Inception of a Volunteer Program Management Course: A First Step Toward Professionalism

Muriel M. Scarbrough

The inspiration for a professional training course for volunteer directors was born at the St. Louis Council of Directors of Volunteer Services (CVD) Annual Workshop in 1989. Susan J. Ellis, the featured speaker, posed two challenging questions. The first was: "What training have you had for your position as a Director of Volunteer Services (DVS)?" The majority of directors indicated they had none or on-the-job at best. Her next question was even more to the point: "How can you expect your position to be considered a professional one with no formal education in your field?"

As President of CVD, the question of upgrading your professional status was one of continuing concern to me and this challenge provided the necessary motivation. Steps had to be taken to begin this upgrading.

The most direct avenue appeared to be contacting local colleges that might consider including a course on *Volunteer Program Management* in their curriculum. My first step was to call two local institutions, Tarkio College and the St. Louis Community College (SLCC) Continuing Education Offices. After hearing this request, staff from both colleges expressed interest in adding the program to their curriculum, if there were enough prospective students. In later calls, we discussed curriculum content as well as possible class sites, fees, equipment needs and course content.

The main requisite was that the course be a fully accredited course. Another requirement was that the teacher have a background in volunteerism. Both colleges agreed to accept these conditions.

The next CVD general meeting addressed the issue and found a great deal of interest. The next step was a mailing (see Appendix) to the entire membership of 143 agencies. Thirty-seven percent responded, with roughly half of those indicating definite interest in taking such a course. The remainder asked for more information before making a decision.

After numerous telephone conferences, SLCC was finally selected over Tarkio for two reasons: first, the number of students required to assure a class was seventeen to eighteen compared to twenty to twenty-five at Tarkio. Second, the lower tuition at SLCC would accommodate those students with limited budgets.

The next challenge was finding a qualified teacher, one acceptable to the college as well as to prospective students. Only someone with a solid background in volunteerism would be acceptable to volunteer directors. The college required a master's degree. This latter prerequisite was necessary to assure full accreditation for the course.

A CVD member was preferred as a teacher by those expressing interest in the course so DVSs who appeared to have the necessary qualifications were

---

*Muriel M. Scarbrough* has been Director of Volunteers at St. Louis County Department of Community Health and Medical Care (DOCHMC) for nearly eight years. Her program has included volunteers in both hospital and primary care settings. Ms. Scarbrough has chaired committees for the Missouri Association of Directors of Volunteer Services and for the St. Louis Council of Directors of Volunteer Services where she recently completed her second consecutive term as President.

contacted. The first choice had an impressive background in volunteerism but she was unacceptable to the college if the course were to be fully accredited. After an exhaustive search by telephone, and through word of mouth (assisted by CVD members), a number of our peers were found who met all criteria and several were available and willing to teach. The final choice had eight years of experience as a DVS as well as a master's degree in teaching. She responded enthusiastically and so began a round of meetings with SLCC.

Because most of the students were expected to be employed DVSs, the first course was offered in the evening at an off-campus site, selected to allow better choices of time, parking and access to quality audio-visual equipment. The site chosen was a centrally located high school with excellent audio-visual equipment, ample parking and adequate classrooms.

The first class was held on January 16, 1990, with an enrollment of 18 students. An interesting side note here is that of those eighteen students, only six were CVD members. Since our advertising had been limited to CVD members, the curriculum brochure had apparently proved an effective means of attracting students. It therefore appeared that others in the community were seeing the value of such a course.

The choice of a Tuesday evening, from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m. was inconvenient for a number of CVD members who had indicated a strong desire to take the course. Several of these were greatly disappointed and were willing to pay the course fee if classes could be videotaped for them. The college felt this would not be feasible for this first course. Others in CVD gave no reasons for not following through and taking the course. While this was slightly discouraging, the fact that the course was being offered and that an adequate number of students had registered was compensation enough for the time and effort expended.

The instructor used a variety of teaching methods including lecturing, expert guest speakers, videos of nationally known experts in the field of volunteerism, satellite programs and a presentation by each student concerning one aspect of the DVS position, *i.e.*, producing a volunteer manual, an orientation slide presentation, special events such as fund raisers, and so forth.

The last twenty minutes of each class was given over to sharing "Triumphs and Terrors," as the instructor titled it. The class members were encouraged to share projects that worked really well for them and others that were disasters. Class members were unanimous in their expressed enthusiasm for this segment of the program. It was considered a great help, especially for less experienced DVSs.

The composite of students reflected quite a variety of experience. There were veteran DVSs with seven to ten years of service, those with only a couple of years of experience and one who was just beginning her job as a DVS. Three were not yet in the field. Of these last three, one was preparing to become a Volunteer Coordinator, one was a hospital employee in a Marketing/Public Relations Department and the third was a woman using the class as an elective toward her master's degree. The last was the only dropout.

Students were employees of two nursing homes, a children's home, four hospitals (one a mental health and one a Veteran's), a health department, a private girls' school, a humane society, a girls' club (for the underprivileged), an organization which made talking tapes for the blind, a cathedral mission society, a youth hostel agency, and a Salvation Army center for children.

Educational backgrounds varied from G.E.D. to master's degrees, and the age range was from the early twenties to the mid-sixties.

Personalities were incredibly diverse and yet there was tremendous cohesiveness and support. The instructor fostered

and encouraged this atmosphere. On-the-job problems and disappointments were discussed with complete openness and the entire class responded with suggestions and concern where there seemed to be no viable solution. Networking during breaks brought a number of benefits and new resources.

The textbook used was Marlene Wilson's *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs*, (Pub.: Boulder, CO: Voluntary Management Associates, 9th edition-1988). Grading was based on attendance, class participation, the personal presentation and a final examination.

Seventeen students completed the course with fifteen taking the exam, one choosing to audit the course and one who had moved out of state completing the course requirement by mail. Students evaluating the class indicated unanimous satisfaction with the course and a desire for expansion of the program.

While one reason for attending was to gain credibility, the class provided a great deal of new knowledge and insight. Questions asked by even inexperienced DVSs often brought out new ideas and ways of looking at situations that students were able to take back to their jobs and use effectively.

At the end of the course a report was made at our May CVD general meeting and of the forty-three members in attendance, fifteen indicated definite interest in taking the course when it is offered again.

On July 27, 1990, the instructor met with the department head of the Human Services program, SLCC, Meramec Campus, to discuss expansion of the program. The department head has now presented the proposal of expansion to a 24-28 hour certification program to college administration. The idea received a positive reception and she has expressed the belief that this program could be in place by the fall of 1991. It has been announced in Introduction to Human Services classes as an expected reality.

Some of the courses being considered for this certification program are Marketing/Public Relations, Oral Communications/Public Speaking, Psychology, Writing Skills and other related courses some of which are already part of the Human Services curriculum.

According to data from the Association of Volunteer Administration (AVA), there are only three other colleges in Missouri offering courses in volunteer management, one of which has both credit and non-credit courses, one has credit and the third offers only non-credit. All three colleges are located in Kansas City.

In 1989-1990 there were nineteen states reporting active programs for Volunteer Managers in thirty-seven colleges or universities. In some institutions both credit and non-credit courses are offered with total available credit courses of twenty-four, twenty-five non-credit, one for graduate credit, one is a certification program and one consists of a one-day conference.

When analyzing this information from AVA, it was interesting to note the multitude of departments within which the programs were found. The department having the largest number was "American Humanics" with seven, second was "Continuing Education" with six offerings (one of which was the one-day conference) and third was the "Office of Community Education" with two offerings. Others were under such unlikely places as "Recreation and Community Education," "Recreation and Leisure Studies," "Department of Urban and Environmental Policy," "Youth Educational Services," "Cookingham Institute of Public Affairs," and "Youth Agency Administration Interdisciplinary Studies." It would appear many colleges are struggling with the problem of placing such programs. Those of us interested in professionalizing the DVS position need to work with the colleges and universities in our areas to facilitate implementation of the necessary courses.

The position of Director of Volunteer Services is so new that most schools of higher education offer no curriculum in Volunteer Management. There is no planned route of entry to the job. Not one person in the class started out to be a

DVS: events in their employment simply led them into the position. With this initial class we have taken a major step toward professionalism and the journey will be continued.

**APPENDIX**



**ANNOUNCING**

CONTACT HAS BEEN MADE WITH THE ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND THE LOCAL TARKIO EXTENSION SERVICES REGARDING THE POSSIBILITY OF A FOR-CREDIT COURSE IN VOLUNTEER PROGRAM MANAGEMENT. BOTH COLLEGE SYSTEMS HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN OFFERING THIS COURSE SHOULD THERE BE ENOUGH INTEREST TO WARRANT THEIR DOING SO. IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, OR WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW WITH YOUR NAME, AGENCY, ADDRESS AND A CHECK IN THE APPROPRIATE BOX AND RETURN TO:

MURIEL M. SCARBROUGH, DVS  
ST. LOUIS COUNTY DOCHMC  
111 S. MERAMEC, ROOM LL111  
CLAYTON, MO 63105

- I WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THIS COURSE.
- I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN TAKING SUCH A COURSE.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

AGENCY: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

**St. Louis Council of Directors of Volunteer Services**