

Graduate Certificates as a Link Between Universities, Professionals, and Communities

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Abstract

Graduate certificates enable metropolitan universities to meet the unique needs of professionals in their communities. Through examination of two new graduate certificates at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock in Conflict Mediation and Nonprofit Organization Management, this paper illustrates how universities and their professional communities can build effective educational programming. Success is described in terms of the following characteristics: needs analysis, process/partnership, speed/flexibility, multidisciplinary linkages, and as a springboard to additional professional linkages.

At the heart of the metropolitan university movement is the growing emphasis on building a stronger interface with the communities in which our universities reside. Through a range of applied community activities, specialized linkages to the public schools and community colleges, community problem-solving, and involvement of faculty and students in community engagement and service learning, the metropolitan model is gaining great attention and credence in the broader community. We applaud those activities and emphasize that each is at the heart of the metropolitan university model, defined and supported by research in this arena (Lynton 1995).

This paper addresses another stakeholder arena in which metropolitan and urban universities have potent opportunities to build mutually beneficial relationships—the established and emerging professional communities. From the traditional advanced professional degrees to ongoing symposia and joint research agendas, metropolitan universities have already played significant roles. We draw attention to an additional opportunity, which is being used increasingly in graduate colleges, but not necessarily focused on professionals—the *graduate certificate*.

The emphasis on metropolitan issues has correctly identified the problems of the urban agenda: school reform, collapsing infrastructure, urban/suburban conflicts, and a variety of other specialized issues from poverty to race, from decaying roads to information highways (Lynton 1991). It is critical as well that metropolitan universities be in the forefront of new approaches, especially in meeting the cutting edge issues of professionals in the community.

What do the professions need from their metropolitan schools? Obviously, they need educated personnel to fill the professional ranks, as well as those who support those professions. In the transition to a new information or post-industrial age, professions are undergoing rapid change. Those educated in the modern models of the professions, even a few years back, often require major retooling of their skills and talents. Other professions are creating greater specializations beyond the traditional professional school curricula. And finally, there are new emerging professions that seek educational linkages.

But the challenge is that the particular specialization or emerging professional arena is in the midst of change. Thus, any point of definition within the university is likely to be fraught with difficulty about current theory, as well as being out of date by the time it is instituted. The university must decide whether to be reactive or to define its niche against other competitors (Immerwalr 2002).

The graduate certificate offers a timely and flexible approach for meeting the professional community needs. Its particular structure in most universities allows for shorter time periods for adoption, quicker abilities to change structures, and a capacity to be responsive to customer demands.

We suggest an approach to graduate certificates characterized by linkages between the academic and professional communities in the creation, implementation, and delivery of the certificates. A high degree of involvement by the professional audience enhances the success of such programs and strengthens the relationship of the metropolitan university with the area it serves.

Our recommended approach to graduate certificates is built around the following characteristics: needs analysis, process/partnership, speed/flexibility, multidisciplinary linkages, and a springboard for other professional linkages.

This paper will examine the expansion of graduate certificates generally and, using the above criteria, examine the creation of two graduate certificates at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR): Graduate Certificates in *Conflict Mediation* and in *Nonprofit Organization Management*. Both cases will demonstrate the utilization of professional communities in developing programs. Following that discussion, we will examine some future issues in the development of graduate certificates for professional audiences.

Before examining the two cases at UALR, a brief treatment of the development of graduate certificates is required.

Graduate Certificate Programs Nationally

Graduate certificate programs are a growing trend in American higher education. According to a survey by Wayne Patterson (1997), dean-in-residence at the Council of Graduate Schools, graduate certificate programs typically require 12–24 graduate

hours. About an equal number are interdisciplinary and discipline-focused. Graduate certificates meet a need for competency in a specific area without the full requirements for a graduate degree.

Faculty and administrators at metropolitan universities know that the contemporary graduate student is older, has family and career responsibilities, and attends graduate school on a part-time basis. Welch and Syverson (1997) note, "Certificate programs meet a growing demand in this new demographic where time is not always available for full-time graduate study, and where a full degree program is not always desired. Certificate programs have gained importance among working professionals who seek short-term, post-baccalaureate programs that will upgrade job skills or meet the requirements of a professional credentialing body. Certificates are also an important means of acknowledging specialization or advanced study beyond the requirements of a bachelor's degree, or as a credit-bearing entrée into a master's program."

Welch and Syverson (1997) report three types of certificates in their exploratory study. The most frequently offered certificate is a credentialing certificate for professionals in the fields of health sciences (mainly nursing), social sciences (such as mental health and gerontology), and business and education specializations. Some of the most popular professional certificates are in information technology fields. These professional certificates usually require at minimum a bachelor's degree, and occasionally a master's or doctorate. The second type of certificate program is a graduate certificate that augments a bachelor's degree in a specific area of study, often interdisciplinary in nature, such as a women's studies or international study program. Other popular graduate certificates include teaching English as a foreign language, library science, performance or arts, ethics, and environmental studies. This last type of certificate is intended to provide formal recognition of improved career-related skills such as writing or software languages. The most typical audience is non-traditional working students.

Beyond the obvious appeal to students because of the flexibility and focused nature, graduate certificates appeal to institutions. Patterson's (1998) survey showed that 90% of respondents reported that no state approval was required to adopt a certificate program, and 35% reported that the state did not even review the programs. The program may be administered in a number of ways, from administration by the graduate school (36.6%), continuing education (4.2%), disciplinary programs (12.7%), or some combination. Often the admission criteria are more liberal for certificate programs than for master's programs, and the educational format is often more creative as well. Some graduate certificates are more permanent curricular options, while some are developed intentionally to meet an emerging need with a planned phase-out.

To summarize, the graduate certificate program is an emerging educational product that is designed for the needs of professional part-time students who seek a credential that is flexible, focused, and relevant.

Multidisciplinary Graduate Certificates for Professionals: Two UALR Examples

The interface between the academy and professionals in the metropolitan area can be a fruitful source of growth and increased excellence for both the metropolitan university and professional communities. In particular, multidisciplinary graduate certificates for professionals can offer an opportunity for creative interaction leading to enrichment of academic offerings and enhancement of professional standards. UALR's Graduate Certificates in Conflict Mediation and in Nonprofit Organization Management are examples of such certificates.

The two certificates grew out of close ties with two communities of professionals, each experiencing changing conditions and requirements of practice. Many practitioners in these communities had master's degrees or juris doctorates and sought additional, more focused, graduate level education. Their needs could not be met through the common post-baccalaureate model of a certificate "designed to enhance competency in specific areas of professional development" (Welch and Syverson 1997). Because of rapid evolution in their professional disciplines, these communities needed education that would go beyond enhancing competency. The communities needed education that would develop greater awareness and understanding of their professions, impart a wide range of technical skills, and apply knowledge and research skills to changing environments.

Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation Background. In Fall 2002 the first students were admitted to UALR's Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation Program. The program's first graduate completed the required five three-hour courses in two semesters to receive the certificate in May 2003.

Interest in conflict mediation has grown steadily in Arkansas since the state legislature established the Arkansas Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Commission in 1995. A growing number of Arkansans practice mediation as a profession or as a specialty within a profession.

High quality education is particularly important to mediators because mediation is a relatively new professional discipline. However, mediation education and training have not been available in Arkansas on a regular basis. UALR's Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation was developed in response to the education needs of two groups—professional mediators and professionals in other fields whose responsibilities include managing conflict.

Before the certificate was inaugurated, UALR faculty in several disciplines had worked to address the need for conflict mediation education for professionals through their own schools and departments. The William H. Bowen School of Law offered juris doctorate students a mediation course and the opportunity to gain experience through mediation clinics. The Department of Speech Communication taught conflict resolution techniques as part of several courses. The Institute of Government obtained

grants from the ADR Commission to convene a conference on ADR for local government and to carry out local government conflict resolution demonstration projects.

Planning. In Fall 2001 UALR's College of Professional Studies convened a Planning Committee to explore the possibility of offering a Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation. Representatives of the college's School of Social Work, Institute of Government, and Department of Speech Communication were joined on the committee by representatives of UALR's School of Law, College of Business Administration, College of Education, and College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.

The School of Law and the School of Social Work were aware that growing numbers of attorneys and social workers wished to incorporate mediation into their practices and would welcome the opportunity of obtaining graduate education in conflict mediation. Other programs believed that education in conflict mediation would enhance the professional knowledge and skills of organizational psychologists, speech communication specialists, educators, and managers in public, private-sector, and non-profit organizations.

Planning for the certificate was informed by an analysis of knowledge, skills, and competencies needed by mediators which the College of Professional Studies conducted for the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS.) The FMCS study (Brenton, Craw, and Joiner 2002) was carried out concurrently with the work of the Planning Committee. The study included focus groups of national experts on mediation and mediator education, a review of the literature on mediator qualifications, and a summary of state requirements for the practice of mediation.

The committee designed the certificate to require five three-hour courses, or a total of 15 hours. Students would be admitted through the Graduate School and would be required to hold a bachelor's degree but not to take an entrance exam. At least initially the certificate would be administered and funded through the Off-Campus Programs Division of the Office of Continuing Education and Professional Development, which would receive the tuition from the program.

Members of the Planning Committee were active in the Arkansas Bar Association's Mediation Section and/or the Arkansas Conflict Resolution Association (ACRA), a professional association of mediators. They utilized personal contacts through these organizations to obtain input and feedback about the certificate's design. Throughout the planning and implementation process the committee kept the ADR Commission and the mediation community informed of the certificate's development and progress. The Planning Committee sought and received support for the certificate from ACRA and the ADR Commission.

With strong support from UALR's Graduate School, the committee worked quickly to gain approval from the departments, the Graduate School, and the Graduate Council for the certificate and new courses. The first courses were offered less than a year after the committee's first meeting.

Implementation. The program is designed to fit the schedules of busy practitioners, with flexible sequencing of courses and alternative course scheduling. Students can take the courses in any order; no course has prerequisites. A course for teachers on conflict management in the schools is offered in the summer full time for one week. Most courses are offered in a weekend format—Friday night, all day Saturday, and most of the day Sunday for two weekends. The scheduling format is attractive both to practicing professionals and to graduate students working with high demands on their time and availability. The schedule makes attendance possible for students not only from the immediate metropolitan area but also from other parts of the state.

The program is multi-disciplinary, with courses from various departments coordinated by the committee. In its first year the program offered the following courses:

<u>Course</u>	<u>Department</u>
Conflict Analysis and Intervention (Required)	Speech/Communication
Mediation (Required)	Law
Negotiation (Required)	Speech/Communication
Family Mediation (Elective)	Social Work
Crisis Communication (Elective)	Speech/Communication
Managing Public Disputes (Elective)	Public Administration
Conflict Management in the Schools (Elective)	Teacher Education

In the second year the program will add an elective course from the Psychology Department: Designing ADR Systems for Organizations.

Each course has a mix of students from the Conflict Mediation Certificate, the graduate program of the department offering the course, and, if space allows, other graduate programs. For example, approximately one-half of the students in the mediation course were from the Law School and one-half were from the Conflict Mediation Certificate. This mix challenges the instructors and enriches the classroom experience by bringing together students with diverse backgrounds.

Although most courses are taught within the regular loads of UALR faculty members, the two-weekend scheduling format makes it feasible to bring in specialists as adjunct faculty. In the first year the Conflict Mediation Certificate Program contracted with national experts to teach courses in family mediation, managing public disputes, and managing conflict in the schools. These notable instructors brought a national perspective to educating the emerging profession of mediators in Arkansas.

Marketing. The Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation program has required a minimum of marketing. At its inception the program was marketed to professional mediators through newsletters and announcements at meetings. The program was announced at an Alternative Dispute Resolution Summit sponsored by the ADR Commission and at ACRA's annual membership meeting. ACRA's newsletter published articles about the certificate.

This focused marketing approach resulted in classes at or near optimum size for the first year. As UALR began to mention the certificate program along with other programs in normal marketing efforts, applications were received from educators, church leaders, court officials, public administrators, and even from a former UALR chancellor.

Challenges. Any new program presents administrative challenges. The Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation was one of UALR's first graduate certificates, and that fact combined with alternative scheduling and the crossing of college boundaries meant that considerable time was required to implement and administer each course in the first year.

Administering the certificate was complicated by the fact that procedures and rates of tuition were not uniform for all courses in the certificate. One course was offered through the William H. Bowen School of Law, which has different registration schedules and procedures and different rates of tuition from the other colleges at UALR.

Benefits. UALR has become a credible leader in the professional mediation community—so much so that the ADR Commission changed eligibility standards for its roster of mediators to include our graduate certificate in lieu of a master's degree.

UALR demonstrated its leadership in efforts during the regular 2003 legislative session to change state law to recognize the authority of judges to order parties to mediation before adjudication. The success of this legislation heightened UALR's relationship and credibility with key legislators, which helps the university with other legislative priorities.

The certificate provides opportunities to cooperate with the professional community in education and training. For example, the certificate program shared, with the ADR Commission, the costs of bringing to Arkansas a family mediation expert, who taught a course for the certificate and also taught three days of training sponsored by the commission.

Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Organization Management Background. On January 13, 2003, a group of 25 students gathered to begin the pilot program of the Graduate Certificate in Nonprofit Organization Management. The first class is now progressing through the elective courses and is scheduled to complete the 16-hour graduate program in May of 2004.

According to a 2002 study, there are almost 6,000 nonprofit organizations in the state of Arkansas (Duran). UALR is located in one of five Arkansas counties having the highest number of nonprofits. As the state's capital city, Little Rock also hosts the headquarters of many of the major nonprofit organizations with statewide constituencies.

Although central Arkansas has the state's highest concentration of nonprofit organizations, education opportunities in the region have been limited. Short courses offered by private and governmental agencies have been inconsistent. Some managers have had access to management training only at conferences related to their organization's specific field.

Through ongoing conversations with students and the local professional community over a period of years, the UALR faculty had been aware of the need for advanced education specific to the nonprofit field. At the same time this need was identified locally, a trend in nonprofit management education was developing at the national level.

Unlike many established professions, the field of nonprofit education is relatively new. For many years, courses for nonprofit managers have been taught as part of public administration or business administration degree programs. This was true at UALR, where graduate courses in nonprofit management have been taught as electives in the public administration program.

Colleges and universities are now developing specific degree programs in a variety of forms to meet the needs of the nonprofit field, a significant sector that comprises more than 6 percent of the country's organizations and has revenues of 9 percent of the gross national product (Mirabella 2003; Salamon 1999). Major initiatives are underway to increase and improve nonprofit management education. One example is the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's "Building Bridges Between Practice and Knowledge in Nonprofit Management Education" ("Building Bridges") program (Center Point Institute 2003) that contributed over \$12 million to 28 programs for nonprofit education projects between 1998 and 2002.

The timing of UALR's support of graduate certificates has presented an opportunity to meet local professional needs while allowing the university to become a participant in the evolving national field of nonprofit management education.

Planning. In Fall 2001, the College of Professional Studies held several meetings to determine the possibility of multidisciplinary graduate certificates within its college and with other colleges. Discussions regarding the possibility of a graduate certificate in nonprofit management were led by the Institute of Government, the department housing the Master of Public Administration degree program and training programs in nonprofit management.

A group of nine faculty members was assembled as a faculty advisory committee for the development of the nonprofit management certificate. Departments represented were Public Administration, Social Work, Mass Communication, Speech Communication, Criminal Justice, History, and Sociology. Three of the faculty had taught nonprofit management classes for several years and several others had extensive experience with nonprofits as consultants, as an executive director, and as board members. All had great interest in creating a strong graduate program for professionals in nonprofit organizations, seeing this program as a natural extension of the

university's metropolitan mission. A draft curriculum was prepared by the faculty group and approved by the Graduate School and the Graduate Council in Spring 2002.

The next step was a critical one for the new program. Staff of the Institute of Government met with 48 leaders in the nonprofit community in central Arkansas. The individual interviews were conducted with executive directors of nonprofit organizations, executive directors of foundations, board members, staff, and consultants to nonprofit organizations. The organizations represented a variety of purposes, including the arts; community development; disaster relief; education; preservation of the environment; health; museums; social services for families, youth, the elderly, and the disabled; hunger relief (on both local and international levels); and religion. The sizes of the agencies varied from multi-million dollar international aid organizations to agencies with only one paid staff person.

The two university representatives utilized the interviews as an information-gathering tool to listen to what community leaders suggested, rather than a marketing tool by which to sell the program. Issues addressed varied from the needs of the nonprofit community in central Arkansas to the more specific educational needs, cost, accessibility, and other components of a product they could endorse. The interviews confirmed the desire of nonprofit professionals for greater interaction generally among the nonprofit community and more specific issues of support for the graduate certificate.

Following the interviews, a nonprofit professional advisory committee of 14 nonprofit executive directors was formed to work with the faculty committee. The two advisory groups reviewed the results of the interviews and the preliminary work of the faculty committee. Changes were made to the initial recommendations, such as the return to traditional evening classes. The planners had expected a weekend/intensive format to be the preferred delivery of classes, but this was not the recommendation of the advisory committee. The executives, who are heavily involved in activities such as weekend symphony performances and fundraising events, requested evening classes. The certificate faculty willingly adjusted their previous schedules to meet the needs of the professional community.

The members of the nonprofit professional advisory committee were invited to recommend students for the pilot class from their respective agencies. Applications were received from six of the 14 advisory committee agencies.

Marketing. In November 2002, a small marketing plan was implemented with a web page, a mass mailing to over 250 central Arkansas nonprofits, and advertising through UALR sources. Student applications were received throughout November and December. In January 2003, the first class began, less than nine months after the initial approval was received from the university's Graduate Council.

Implementation. Collaboration with the local professional community was an important feature of the implementation of this program. An additional connection to the local nonprofit community was an invitation to nine CEOs from leading nonprofit

organizations to be guest lecturers in the first course. Agencies represented by the speakers included the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, The Nature Conservancy, Heifer International, the National Conference for Community and Justice, the Arkansas Arts Center, Winrock International, Centers for Youth and Families, the American Red Cross, and the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Their presentations brought a real world perspective to the students and gave the nonprofit leaders a first-hand look at and a stronger partnership role in the new certificate program.

A decision was made to begin this certificate program with a cohort pilot class that would complete the entire 16-hour curriculum before new registrations would be accepted. Since the program is the first of its kind in Arkansas, the faculty wanted to be able to respond to the evaluations with any substantive changes needed before new students were added to the program.

The program is being piloted with regular evaluations conducted with four groups throughout its first year: the students, the faculty, the nonprofit organizations represented, and related departments and offices of the university.

The course list began with a draft developed from a review of similar programs in other universities. During the interviews, the community nonprofit leaders were asked to list the content areas they felt to be most needed in this program. Their recommendations were compiled and organized for review by the faculty and the community advisory groups. Other than the course in small group communication, the subject areas requested by the local professionals matched the course list of most of the nonprofit degree programs offered nationally, including the subject areas of the national American Humanics program for undergraduates, a program also offered at UALR.

Courses in the pilot program include Nonprofit Organization Management (required), Human Resources, Marketing, Financial Management, Fundraising, Small Group Communication, Program Planning and Evaluation (required for the pilot class), and a Capstone Course (required). Following the pilot program, the elective choice may be broadened to include additional courses in criminal justice, health administration, public history, and sociology.

The program was administratively located in the Off-Campus Programs Division of the Office of Continuing Education and Professional Development for its first year, but the start-up of the program was coordinated by the Institute of Government. Classes have been held in a traditional evening format and located off-campus for easier accessibility. Admission requirements for the pilot class were an undergraduate degree and compliance with Graduate School admission requirements. In the pilot program, preference was given to persons currently employed in the nonprofit sector.

Most courses have been offered within the regular load for UALR faculty. Two of the pilot courses are being taught by adjunct/practitioner faculty in the nonprofit field. The instructor of the Financial Management course is the CFO of a leading international nonprofit headquartered in Arkansas. She holds a masters degree in economics and is a

CPA. The instructor of the Fundraising course holds a Ph.D. in educational management and development and is the owner of a consulting firm for nonprofit organizations.

Challenges. As with the Graduate Certificate in Conflict Mediation, the implementation of this program required specific attention to the coordination of the certificate's needs with existing university systems. Student tuition will continue to be a challenge in this program. Many nonprofits do not have large continuing education budgets for their staff. It is important for the goal of diversity in size and purpose of nonprofit organizations that financial assistance be secured.

Benefits. This is the first graduate program of its kind in Arkansas to serve the evolving field of nonprofit organization management. The format of a graduate certificate provides the necessary flexibility for this program to meet the profession's needs.

Through participation in needs assessment interviews, as members of the advisory committee, as guest lecturers, as evaluators, and as partners in developing program resources, the professional community of nonprofit managers has developed stronger linkages with UALR. The collaboration between the academy and the professional community has served as a catalyst to future joint endeavors. Plans are now underway for the sharing of library resources, partnering for professional conferences, reciprocal advertising of programs relevant to the collaborators, job networks, and research projects.

Conclusion and Recommendations

UALR's development of the two Graduate Certificates highlights the critical linkage between profession and university and illustrates the potential effectiveness of this education tool in the metropolitan environment. The flexibility of the graduate certificate made it possible to create two structurally different programs to meet the needs of two different professional communities. UALR's approach is demonstrated through examining the following characteristics: needs analysis, process/partnership, speed/flexibility, multidisciplinary linkages, and serving as a springboard for other professional linkages.

Needs Analysis

UALR carried out an extensive needs analysis among local nonprofit professionals for the Nonprofit Management Certificate, interviewing 48 leaders of nonprofit organizations in the metropolitan area. For the Conflict Mediation Certificate, interviews with local professionals who desired to expand their use of conflict mediation were supplemented by information from a national study on mediator qualifications conducted at UALR as the certificate was being planned.

In the metropolitan university model, a quicker process of interview of knowledgeable informants and engaging existing professionals in the discussion becomes a more active version of a needs analysis with greater involvement of the professional community.

Partnership/Process

The Nonprofit Organization Management Certificate organized an advisory group of 14 nonprofit leaders to provide input into planning decisions, including curriculum and scheduling. The process of creation and implementation of the graduate certificate was done hand-in-glove with the professional community on every element of the process from course delineation to structure to faculty to projects of the students—all inclusive of the professional community's day-to-day involvement in that process. The Conflict Mediation Certificate's Planning Committee utilized a less formal method of obtaining feedback through personal contacts by members of the committee who were active in the state professional associations of mediators.

Differences between the professional communities led to differences in the implementation of the two certificates. Nonprofit professionals saw networking with other nonprofit managers as an important aspect of the program. This led to a cohort approach for the Nonprofit Organization Management Certificate. Mediation professionals, who practice in various settings with varied schedules, placed a high value on flexibility in proceeding through the program. This led the Conflict Mediation Certificate to allow students to enter the program through any course, take courses in any order, and proceed at their own pace.

Scheduling classes is another example of differences in implementation. Mediation professionals preferred an intensive weekend schedule, where all class hours could be completed in two weekends. Nonprofit professionals, in contrast, often had professional obligations on weekends for fundraisers and other events. They preferred a more traditional schedule of evening classes one day a week for a semester.

In the metropolitan version of graduate certificates aimed at professions, we define process and partnership as one and the same.

Speed/Flexibility

Utilizing the graduate certificate enabled UALR to act quickly to offer the graduate education needed by the professional communities. The planning process for both certificates began in Fall 2001 and both offered courses in the following academic year.

Graduate certificates can readily be modified or even discontinued. Both certificates plan to monitor the evolving needs of the professional communities and change, add, or drop courses to meet these needs. Because the programs have no departments, no employees, and no infrastructure, they could easily be discontinued if no longer needed.

The metropolitan university model needs to be able to utilize the speed and flexibility inherent in the graduate certificate's core function in order to modify the certificate program to respond to changing professional standards. Both of UALR's new programs are too early in the process to define exactly how that will evolve. However, it is clear that maximum interaction between the university and its professional clientele must be maintained.

Multidisciplinary Approaches

The education needs of mediators and nonprofit professionals reach across traditional disciplines. Nonprofit professionals need knowledge and skills in areas such as financial management, human resources, program evaluation, marketing, grantwriting, and fundraising—all oriented toward nonprofit organizations. Such courses may be offered in various disciplines, such as public administration, business administration, social work, technical writing, speech/communication, or mass communication. The Nonprofit Organization Management Certificate in its first semester offered courses through the public administration, social work, and mass communication programs.

Mediation and conflict resolution are by nature cross-disciplinary. Courses are most commonly offered in the disciplines of law, social work, speech/communication, education, religion, business, psychology, health care administration, and public administration. The Conflict Mediation Certificate in its first year offered courses through the speech/communication, law, social work, public administration, and teacher education programs.

The goal of each certificate is not only to bring together courses from several disciplines but also to cultivate integrative understanding. Nonprofit management and mediation are professions which are actively changing and defining themselves. The certificate programs endeavor to increase the practitioners' awareness of the research and best practices in their fields and to give them skills to maintain and enhance professional standards in a rapidly changing environment.

The metropolitan model as applied to professional graduate certificates will be multidisciplinary when designed for professions that are multidisciplinary. The delivery of the courses will not be defined by existing coursework packaged differently, but will be evolved from disciplinary traditions to meet the needs of the particular professional audience.

Springboard

Metropolitan approaches to graduate certificates for professional audiences are part of an interactive and ongoing pattern of engaging with the broader community. UALR's two new multidisciplinary graduate certificates have already served as a springboard for greater engagement.

The ongoing process of developing and advising the Nonprofit Organization Management Certificate has cemented linkages between UALR and the nonprofit community. In these days of increasing public/private/nonprofit partnerships, connections with the nonprofit sector are a valuable part of UALR's interaction with the metropolitan area, in addition to its strong existing relationships with the private and public sectors. The Nonprofit Management Certificate adds graduate education to UALR's previous nonprofit offerings of training and an undergraduate certificate and 18-hour minor in American Humanics.

The Conflict Mediation Graduate Certificate placed UALR as a leader in the mediation community. UALR exercised leadership in efforts to change state law regarding mediation in the state courts. New legislation was successfully passed in the 2003 regular session of the Arkansas legislature, which heightened UALR's relationship and credibility with key legislators.

Thus, metropolitan approaches to graduate certificates aimed at professional audiences act as a springboard to a broader pattern of knowledge creation, applied research, symposia in critical questions to the professional field, and future training and education needs. They are interactive and ongoing—and require meaningful collaborative relationships between the academy and the professions.

Ongoing Considerations

Two general themes can be noted about successfully developing professional graduate certificates. First, the interaction with the professional community in an ongoing way is critical and may take various forms based on the different stages of professional development, different professional needs, and existing ties between the university and the profession. Second, metropolitan universities must develop methods of adapting quickly if they are to utilize these more flexible models effectively.

The Graduate Certificate is a particularly appropriate tool for metropolitan universities. It can enable the university to develop stronger relationships with the professional communities and to serve their metropolitan and urban audiences more effectively.

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