Alumni Perspectives:
Evaluation of the Nonprofit Leadership and Management Masters Program

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Executive Summary

In Spring 2008 the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit Research, along with the SOLES Director of Assessment, completed an alumni survey. The survey focused on how well the Nonprofit Leadership and Management program learning outcomes prepared the alumni for their professional roles, how those roles may have changed as a result of their preparation, their level of satisfaction with the various components of the program, and their perspectives on their current involvement with the program. All 65 alumni of the program were invited to participate in the survey.

The alumni survey produced positive results overall. Alumni satisfaction is high, as evidenced by the following indicators:

- The response rate was high for an alumni survey, 71%. This indicates a desire and willingness to continue to engage with the program.
- In terms of the program's effect on students' careers, 89.1% (41) of the alumni experienced some type of career change since attending the program, with 58.7% (27) receiving an increase in income since graduation.
- For each of the learning outcomes in required courses, 89% to 100% of the respondents indicate that their knowledge and skills were enhanced moderately to extremely well.
- Across all cohorts, 75% (33) of the respondents indicated that they apply the knowledge they learned in the program on a daily basis.
- Satisfaction on interpersonal elements of the program is high, especially in the areas of relationships with other students and use of nonprofit professionals in the program.
- The rate of Overall Satisfaction is 95.2%.
- All but two respondents engage with the program on an ongoing basis, one reporting that he/she would like to but there are few opportunities outside California.
- Respondents felt free to give both positive feedback and suggestions for additions to the program.

Three recommendations were made based on the study findings: incorporating the learning outcome Promoting Organizational Diversity throughout the program, reviewing the learning outcomes with high percentages of moderately well enhanced responses for potential improvements in coverage, and creating a matrix to document in which courses the student learning outcomes are covered.

Introduction

The number of leadership and management programs focusing specifically on the nonprofit sector have been growing over the last two decades. The Nonprofit Leadership and Management Masters (NLM) Program at the University of San Diego is one such program. The NLM Program is an integrated course of study melding state-of the-art leadership theory with cutting-edge management models, strategies, and tools designed to produce thoughtful, effective nonprofit leaders. It is designed for professionals who have an interest in developing their skills in an academically rigorous setting.

USD's Nonprofit Leadership & Management Program was designed in direct response to the stated needs of nonprofit professionals in San Diego. These needs were identified through 65 key informant interviews with nonprofit academics and community leaders, and focus groups with approximately 175 individuals representing different specialties within the sector; it was followed by a market survey of nonprofits throughout the County. The result was a program launched in fall 2002 containing these key elements:

- An outstanding faculty of top practitioners and academics from USD's School of Leadership and Education Sciences
- Classes offered during early evening hours and on weekends to accommodate working professionals.
- A curriculum focused on best practices and community benefit. Core courses require students to directly apply classroom knowledge through the completion of assigned projects with local organizations.[1]
- Discounted tuition and scholarships. The availability of reduced tuition combined with a generous scholarship enables NLM to attract practitioners from diverse backgrounds and organizations.

The first cohort started in fall 2002, with most of these students graduating in 2004. Since the program's inception, 83 students have graduated from the program (65 at the time this study was conducted).

Since 2002, several reports have been written by an outside evaluator based on the results of entrance and exit surveys. The present study follows up on these previous surveys. This report contains results of a March 2008 alumni survey and compares those results to the previous entrance and exit surveys. This study was developed in a partnership between the School of Leadership and Education Sciences (SOLES) Office of Assessment and the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit Research staff. The role of the Office of Assessment is to assist

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[1] For example, students create or re-write governance documents such as by-laws or personnel policy manuals, design financial management systems, create board and volunteer recruitment plans, marketing plans, fundraising plans, related business plans, and the like. Often working in teams or pairs, students interact regularly with nonprofit "clients" to produce a product that is tailored to the particular needs of each organization. As a graduation requirement students submit a list of the applied projects each undertook and present three to evidence proficiency in those skill areas.

programs in the evaluation process, ensuring that program evaluations are designed, implemented, and the results are analyzed in a manner that follows the highest standards in assessment and evaluation practice, and that those results are useful for curricular and program improvement. Program review and evaluation is a key element to success for all nonprofit organizations, and institutions of higher education are developing a very strong culture in this area. This culture includes the use of both outside evaluation and objective institution-based evaluation. Today's accreditation process requires strong evidence that the goals and learning outcomes of all programs are being measured for success, and that the results of such analyses are being used by programs for continual improvement. It is in this spirit that we provide this report of findings.

Background

Nonprofit management education is a relatively new field. In the last twenty years, there have been several academic conferences organized specifically to discuss nonprofit management education (Ashcraft, 2007). Scholars have written about the number of Nonprofit Masters degree programs (Mirabella, 2008), where these programs are housed and what types of courses are offered in these programs (Wish & Mirabella, 1998, & Mirabella, 2007). As a natural progression of the educational process, educators have begun to evaluate their programs (Fletcher, 2005; Herman & Renz, 2007). Many researchers have found that collecting data from alumni on their satisfaction with their program of study and how their learning and degree affected their career plays a vital role in the evaluation of graduate programs. Information of this type is generally collected through phone interviews, focus groups, or written surveys. Written surveys provide a standardized means of collecting data.

As previously mentioned, the Nonprofit Leadership and Management Program has evaluated its program design and delivery since its inception through entrance and exit surveys created by R. Sam Larson (The Ohio State University) and the program director Pat Libby, using the research of Mirabella and Wish (1998a, 1998b) and the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration (2000). Elements from these entrance and exit surveys were utilized as a foundation for this study and to help create an alumni survey instrument to continue the evaluation process, adding the perspectives of time and use of knowledge and skills. This study also addresses additional areas of interest, such as the level and type of alumni involvement with the program.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to discover alumni perspectives on the following:

- How well the program learning outcomes prepared them for their professional roles;
- How those professional roles may have changed as a result of this preparation;
- The level of satisfaction with the various components of the program and with the program as a whole; and
- Alumni perspectives on their current level of involvement with the program.

Survey Instrument and Administration

It was determined that a written survey would be the best option for providing an anonymous, in-depth means for collecting this information from alumni. The survey contained multiple choice questions, yes/no questions, rating scale questions, and open ended questions. The questions covered the areas of career path, nonprofit management learning outcomes, experiences with advising, personal expectations of program, alumni involvement, and demographic information.

The alumni survey was distributed in two stages. First, a pilot survey was distributed to eleven alumni. The results of the pilot were very good, and led to the rewording of two phrases in the knowledge and skills section. Second, the survey was distributed to the remaining alumni who were not included in the pilot. Requests for participation in the survey were sent through email messages containing links to the online survey. Two reminder messages were sent to those who had not yet responded.

Methods of Analysis

Analysis of quantitative data included descriptive statistics, including frequencies, cross tabulations, and means, as well as inferential statistics such as tests for significant differences in means and proportions across demographic variables, and regression analysis.

Results

Response Rate and Respondent Demographics

Seven alumni completed the pilot and thirty-nine alumni completed the survey. This represents a 70.8% (46/65) total response rate. Tables 1 and 2 provide demographic information about the respondents by cohort, gender and race/ethnicity.

Table 1
Respondents by Cohort and Gender

	Male	Female	Did Not Respond	Total
2002 Cohort	36.3% (4)	63.6% (7)	-	11
2003 Cohort	18.8% (3)	68.7% (11)	12.5% (2)	16
2004 Cohort	-	100% (8)	-	8
2005 Cohort	18.1% (2)	54.5% (6)	27.2% (3)	11
Total	19.6% (9)	69.6% (32)	10.9% (5)	46

Table 2
Respondents by Cohort and Race/Ethnicity

	White	Black/African American non Hispanic	Hispanic, including Chicano	Asian/Pacific Islander	Did Not Respond	Total
2002 Cohort	54.5% (6)	-	36.3% (4)	9.1% (1)		11
2003 Cohort	43.8% (7)	12.5% (2)	12.5% (2)	12.5% (2)	18.8% (3)	16
2004 Cohort	75% (6)	-	25% (2)	-	-	8
2005 Cohort	54.5% (6)	-	27.3% (3)	-	18.1% (2)	11
Total	54.3% (25)	4.3% (2)	23.9% (11)	6.5% (3)	10.9% (5)	46
San Diego Demographics	52.4%	5.1%	29.4%	10.7%	-	-
Graduate Students Nationally	65.3%	10.7%	6.0%	5.4%	-	-

The demographic break down of respondents compares fairly well with the demographics of the population of students they were drawn from. Regarding gender, 19.6% of the respondents were males, compared to 22.6% of the graduates. Regarding race/ethnicity, 54.3% of the respondents were white, compared to 51.2% of the graduates. When disaggregated by cohort, a few areas had slightly higher differences than the aggregated figures. Males were over represented in the 2003 cohort (18.8% of the respondents compared to 11.1% of the graduates) and underrepresented in the 2004 cohort (0.0% of the respondents compared to 14.3% of the graduates) and the 2005 cohort (18.1% of the respondents compared to 38.1% of the graduates). Whites were slightly under represented in the 2002 cohort (54.5% of the respondents compared to 60.0% of the graduates), and were most significantly over represented in the 2004 cohort (75.0% of the respondents compared to 60.0% of the graduates).

The demographics of the program alumni closely align with San Diego County demographics with regard to race/ethnicity, and the program has greater diversity with regard to this demographic than graduate programs nationally.

These two tables also show comparison data in order to provide context for the program as a whole. The demographics of the program alumni closely align with San Diego County demographics with regard to race/ethnicity, and the program has greater diversity with regard to this demographic than graduate programs nationally. As an additional point of comparison not shown in the charts, 67% (Leete, 2006) of nonprofit employees nationally are female, which corresponds closely to the percentage for this program and for the survey respondents.

Information about Respondents' Organizations

Alumni were asked to provide information about the nonprofit organizations they work for. Tables 3 – 5 present the NTEE codes, number of employees, and organizational budget sizes. NTEE codes are used by the IRS to classify nonprofit organizations.

Table 3
NTEE Code Information
Of Respondents' Organizations

MAJOR NTEE CODE	Survey % (N)	San Diego County %
Arts, Culture and Humanities	10.5% (4)	9.3%
Education	23.7% (9)	15.9%
Health	2.6% (1)	5.7%
Human Services	34.2% (13)	20.9%
Public, Societal Benefit	10.5% (4)	5.1%
Religion Related	7.9% (3)	19.6%
Unknown	10.5% (4)	5.2%
Did not answer	17.4% (8)	-
Total	46	-

Table 4
Number of Employees
Of Respondents' Organizations

Number of Employees	% (N)
1-10	19.6% (9)
11-50	6.5% (3)
51-100	13.0% (6)
101-500	17.4% (8)
501-1000	0.0% (0)
1001-3500	10.5% (4)
Did not answer	34.8% (16)
Total	46

Table 5
Budget Size
of Respondents' Organizations

Budget Size	% (N)
$250,000 or less	6.5% (3)
$251,000-500,000	4.3% (2)
$501,000-$1 Million	4.3% (2)
$1.01 Million-$2.5 Million	13.0% (6)
$2.51 Million-$5 Million	6.5% (3)
$5.01 Million-$10 Million	2.2% (1)
$10.01 Million-$25 Million	13.0% (6)
$25.01 Million-$50 Million	4.3% (2)
Greater than $50 Million	4.3% (2)
Did not answer	41.3% (19)
Total	46

Career Path

It is clear from the survey results that the NLM program had a positive impact on the alumni's careers. Overall, 89.1% (41) of the alumni experienced some type of career change since attending the program, 58.7% (27) received an increase in income since graduation, 32.6% (15) applied for a position at a different type of nonprofit organization, and 15.2% (7) assumed a leadership role within the sector (i.e., a leadership role with a professional or trade association). One respondent reported moving to the national level, one chose to move to a career as a funder, and one reported that the program gave him/her the credibility to pursue new clients.

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Of the 23 respondents who held support positions (examples listed on the survey included Program Associates or Assistants, and Assistant Directors) prior to enrolling in the NLM program, 47.8% (11) now hold senior level positions (which include both Senior and Executive Staff). And out of those 11 alumni, 54.5% (6) applied for a position in a different nonprofit. Of the alumni who held support positions prior to enrolling,

39.1% (9) stayed in support staff positions. Out of those 9 alumni, 44.4% (4) received an increase in their income, and 44.4% (4) applied for a position in a different nonprofit.

The survey also asked questions about how their careers were affected by networking. Results show that the relationships made through the program had a positive affect, with 27.5% (11) reporting that they found out about their most recent job from someone affiliated with the program, 12.2% (5) reporting that they were hired by an alumni of the program, and 20.0% (8) reporting that they hired a student or an alumni of the program.

Of those responding to the question, 80% (36) are currently working in the nonprofit sector, and 88.9% (40) have not relocated.

Knowledge and Skills Enhancement

The alumni were asked to what degree the required coursework and electives enhanced their abilities. The question posed in the survey was "*How well did required courses enhance your abilities in the following areas?*" The scale was a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = Not at All, 3 = Moderately Well, and 5 = Extremely Well. Points 2 and 4 were not labeled. However, for this analysis, there will be times when level 2 will be referred to as Somewhat Well, and level 4 will be referred to as Well.

It is important to note that for Likert scale variables, the mean score should be viewed cautiously. This is because Likert scales are not interval-level scales (that is, the "distance" from Not at All to Moderately Well is not necessarily equal to the distance from Moderately Well to Extremely Well), and the concept of a mean requires intervals to be uniform. However, means for each of the learning outcomes are presented here as a visual shorthand, a way to rank how well the program is doing in enhancing student abilities on the various learning outcomes. Keep in mind that the proportion of students answering Well or Extremely Well (i.e. choosing level 4 or 5) provides the best indicator of program success for each outcome.

Aggregate Results for Required Courses

Table 6 reports alumni perceptions on the skills covered by required courses. It is important to note that learning outcomes may be covered in more than on course, and courses often cover more than one learning outcome. The learning outcomes are presented in order from highest mean score to lowest.

Table 6
Enhancement of Knowledge and Abilities on Learning Outcomes in Required Courses

Learning Outcome	Not at all 1	Somewhat Well 2	Moderately Well 3	Well 4	Extremely Well 5	Mean	N
Exercising Leadership	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	2.3% (1)	14.0% (6)	83.7% (36)	4.81	43
Addressing Organizational Challenges	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4.7% (2)	30.2% (13)	65.1% (28)	4.60	43
Evaluation and Accountability	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	14.0% (6)	32.6% (14)	53.5% (23)	4.40	43
Systems Thinking, Organization Theory	2.3% (1)	2.3% (1)	9.3% (4)	25.6% (11)	60.5% (26)	4.40	43
Governance (board responsibility, etc.)	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	11.6% (5)	32.6% (14)	53.5% (23)	4.35	43
Program Design	2.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	11.6% (5)	32.6% (14)	53.5% (23)	4.35	43
Strategic Planning	0.0% (0)	4.8% (2)	19.0% (8)	23.8% (10)	52.4% (22)	4.24	42
Community engagement and organizing	2.3% (1)	4.7% (2)	11.6% (5)	30.2% (13)	51.2% (22)	4.23	43
Ethics	0.0% (0)	7.3% (3)	17.1% (7)	31.7% (13)	43.9% (18)	4.12	41
Fundraising and Development, proposal writing	2.4% (1)	4.9% (2)	17.1% (7)	46.3% (19)	29.3% (12)	3.95	41
Legal Issues (incorporation, personnel law)	2.5% (1)	2.5% (1)	27.5% (11)	40.0% (16)	27.5% (11)	3.88	40
Marketing	2.4% (1)	9.8% (4)	26.8% (11)	29.3% (12)	31.7% (13)	3.78	41
Financial Management	4.8% (2)	7.1% (3)	26.2% (11)	33.3% (14)	28.6% (12)	3.74	42
Staffing and supervising volunteers	2.4% (1)	14.6% (6)	22.0% (9)	39.0% (16)	22.0% (9)	3.63	41
History of the Nonprofit Sector	7.0% (3)	11.6% (5)	25.6% (11)	25.6% (11)	30.2% (13)	3.60	43
Staffing and supervising employees	2.3% (1)	16.3% (7)	25.6% (11)	34.9% (15)	20.9% (9)	3.56	43
Promoting Organizational Diversity	2.4% (1)	11.9% (5)	38.1% (16)	23.8% (10)	23.8% (10)	3.55	42

Exercising Leadership ranked highest by far, with 97.7% (42) of the respondents indicating that their ability to exercise leadership was well or extremely well enhanced. Addressing Organizational Challenges also ranks high, with 95.3% (41) of the alumni responding well or extremely well. Other outcomes for which more than 80% of the alumni responded well or extremely well were: Evaluation and Accountability, 86.1% (37); Systems Thinking, Organization Theory, 86.1% (37); Governance, 86.1% (37); Program Design, 86.1% (37); and Community engagement and organizing, 81.4% (35).

The level of satisfaction with program learning outcomes is extremely high.

Promoting Organizational Diversity ranked lowest of the outcomes of the required courses, with 47.6% (20) of the alumni responding that their knowledge and skills were well or extremely well enhanced. This learning outcome also received the most responses of Moderately Well, 38.1% (16), indicating that there seems to be a structure in place which can be improved upon. Other outcomes for which less than two-thirds of the alumni responded well or extremely well were Financial Management, 61.9% (26), Marketing, 61.0% (25), Staffing and Supervising Volunteers, 61.0% (25), History of the Nonprofit Sector, 55.8% (24), and Staffing and Supervising Employees, 55.8% (24). It must be noted that the Financial Management course was changed in 2003, the Legal issues course did not become a requirement until 2005, and Supervising and Staffing Volunteers was added to the Fundamentals course in 2007.

Comparing the learning outcomes to the courses which list these outcomes in their syllabi, a number of interesting facts emerge. EDLD 505 Organizational Theory and Change covers two outcomes which alumni feel were enhanced, Addressing Organizational Challenges, and Systems Thinking. The course also covers an outcome which alumni feel was not enhanced, Promoting Organization Diversity. It may be that this diversity outcome should be addressed in multiple courses across the program. EDLD 501 Nonprofit Fundamentals also covers multiple learning outcomes, History of the Nonprofit Sector, Staffing and Supervising Employees, and Staffing and Supervising Volunteers. These outcomes were all rated at the lower end of the spectrum. Of the courses which list only one of the learning outcomes, some seem to be covering these outcomes well, for example EDLD 550 Leadership Practice, which supports the learning outcome Exercising Leadership, while others have lower marks and may need review their curriculum, for example EDLD 503 Financial Management, EDLD 508 Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations, and EDLD 509 Legal Issues for Nonprofits.

Aggregate Results for Elective Courses

Table 7 reports alumni perceptions about how well the learning outcomes for the elective courses were met. Students self select their elective courses, and the response rates on these outcomes is higher than the number of students who attend the specific courses that cover the outcomes. Therefore, it is conjectured that some respondents' rating of these outcomes is based on not attending a course that covered the concept, rather than on attending the course and not receiving adequate preparation. Public Speaking was ranked the highest, with 82.4% (27) of the alumni responding that the program enhanced their abilities in this area well or extremely well. However, four of the six elective learning outcomes received ratings that were below all of the required learning outcomes. These results indicate areas for investigation.

Table 7
Enhancement of Knowledge and Abilities on Learning Outcomes in Elective Courses

Learning Outcome	Not at all 1	Somewhat Well 2	Moderately Well 3	Well 4	Extremely Well 5	Mean	N
Public Speaking	0.0% (0)	6.1% (2)	12.1% (4)	30.3% (10)	51.5% (17)	4.27	33
Collaboration	5.3% (2)	5.3% (2)	21.1% (8)	31.6% (12)	36.8% (14)	3.89	38
Capital & Campaign Planning	15.4% (4)	11.5% (3)	19.2% (5)	30.8% (8)	23.1% (6)	3.35	26
Policy Making	10.3% (3)	10.3% (3)	37.9% (11)	27.6% (8)	13.8% (4)	3.24	29
Advocacy and Lobbying	16.7% (4)	8.3% (2)	37.5% (9)	16.7% (4)	20.8% (5)	3.17	24
Risk Assessment and Management	11.1% (3)	22.2% (6)	25.9% (7)	29.6% (8)	11.1% (3)	3.07	27

Differences between Groups

Responses to how well their knowledge and skills were enhanced for learning outcomes from both the required and elective courses were compared across cohorts. In comparing the responses by cohort, tests of differences in the ratings were significant for only two learning outcomes—Financial Management (p=.02) and System Organization Theory (p=.05). For Financial Management, further analysis showed that the ratings were lower for the Fall 2002 and Fall 2004 cohorts. For the outcome Systems Organization Theory, analysis showed that ratings were very high for the 2002, 2003, and 2004 cohorts, but much lower for the Fall 2005 cohort. These results indicate consistency issues in the offerings, although it should be noted that the Financial Management course was changed in 2003.

Responses were also compared for gender differences. Tests of differences were statistically significant between males and females for the outcomes Governance (p=.04) and Exercising Leadership (p=.01). For Governance, 64.5% of the females rated their abilities as extremely well enhanced, compared to 22.2% of males. However, combining the top two ratings, the percentages were not very different, 90.3% of females and 88.9% of males. For Exercising Leadership, 100% of the males rated their abilities as extremely well enhanced. For females, the distribution was Moderately Well 3.2%, Well 19.4%, and Extremely Well 77.4%. The practical significance of this might be that the males hold a stronger conviction about the benefits received in this area.

Finally, responses were compared for differences between race and ethnicities. Due to sample size, all non-Caucasians were combined into one group. Tests of differences were statistically significant between Caucasian and minority respondents (as a group) for the outcomes Supervising Volunteers (p=.04) and Supervising Employees (p=.001). For both of these variables, there were no unfavorable responses (below moderately well) by minority graduate respondents (n = 15 and 16, respectively). However, 29.2% (7) of Caucasian graduates rated Supervising Volunteers unfavorably. For Supervising Employees, the percentage was 33.4% (8).

75% (33) of the respondents reported applying the knowledge daily.

Applying Knowledge and Skills

When asked how often they apply the knowledge and skills gained during the program, 75% (33) of the respondents reported applying this knowledge daily, 20.5% (9) reported applying it weekly, and 4.6% (2) reported applying it less frequently (monthly or yearly). These responses point clearly to the program content being matched well to the skills used in the nonprofit workplace.

Alumni Suggestions on Additional Content

We also asked alumni if there are any subject areas that they would like to see added. Fourteen of the 46 participants responded to this open-ended question. The following suggestions were made (the numbers in parenthesis indicate the number of similar suggestions):

- More finance and budgeting (6)
- Website planning (4)
- Media (2)
- Human resource management (2)
- More on risk management
- Project management
- Nonprofits and government – how they work or don't work together
- Online fundraising
- More on grants and contracts management and preparation
- More on supervising
- Where to go for resources
- Event planning
- More development strategies
- Board management

Applied Projects

The survey looked at the applied projects that students do in groups in most of their courses to see the affects they may have had on their career and their leadership abilities. Of those responding, 93.0% (40) of the alumni reported that engaging in the applied projects during their degree program enhanced their leadership abilities, and 84.1% (37) of the alumni said that engaging in the applied projects had an impact on their career. For example, one alumnus said,

> They [the applied projects] allowed me the opportunity to take on a new challenge that went beyond academics while addressing real needs of actual nonprofits.

Also, another student explained the tangible benefits of engaging in applied projects during their degree program by saying,

> **The projects acted as a template for work-related projects. I often modified projects and used them as templates for work-related projects/assignments. For example, the program design project was a good template for when I applied for a grant for my organization.**

Respondents were also asked how difficult it was to select projects to present in the final portfolios[1]. Of those that responded to this question, 55.8% (24) indicated that it was not difficult, 39.5% (17) indicated that it was somewhat difficult, and 4.7% (2) indicated that it was extremely difficult to select which projects to include.

Advising

Alumni were asked about their satisfaction with both academic and career advising. With regard to academic advising, 91.9% (34) of alumni said that it met their needs either moderately well or extremely well.

With regard to career advising, 63.0% (29) of the participants reported receiving career advising while in the program. Of those receiving some form of career advising, 93.1% (27) received career advising from nonprofit program faculty, 48.3% (14) received career advising from nonprofit program staff, 14.0% (4) received career advising from other faculty, and 10.3% (3) received career advising from university career services. These numbers add up to more than 100% because many alumni received career advising from multiple sources; of those who received career advising, 31.0% (9) received advising from two sources, 6.9% (2) received advising from three sources, and 6.9% (2) received advising from all four sources.

Alumni were asked to what degree career advising met their needs. Three respondents who did not use career advising reported that it did not meet their needs at all. Of the 29 alumni who reported receiving career advising, only 27 responded to this question. Of those that did respond, 40.7% (11) responded that the career advising met their needs extremely well, 55.6% (15) responded that the career advising met their needs moderately well, and 3.7% (1) responded that the career advising did not meet his/her needs at all.

Satisfaction with Program Elements

Tables 8 and 9 show alumni satisfaction with various elements of the program. Table 8 displays levels of satisfaction with interpersonal elements, such as collaboration and faculty mentoring, while Table 9 displays levels of satisfaction with academic elements. Further investigation is needed in the area of faculty mentoring. Most of the courses in the program are taught by adjunct faculty with full time positions in the nonprofit sector. The lower level of satisfaction with faculty mentoring might be due to the limits to their time with the students.

Table 8
Satisfaction with Interpersonal Elements

Interpersonal Elements	Satisfied or Very Satisfied
Relationships with other students	92.7% (38)
Involvement of nonprofit professionals in the program	92.7% (38)
Collaboration opportunities for nonprofit leaders and students	85.4% (35)
Relationships with faculty	85.3% (35)
Networking opportunities for students and alumni	80.5% (33)
Faculty mentoring of students	70% (28)

Table 9
Satisfaction with Academic Elements

Academic Elements	Satisfied or Very Satisfied
Connection of coursework to practice	97.6% (40)
Currency of course content (i.e., up-to-date)	95.2% (39)
Links between the academic program and nonprofit organizations	90.3% (37)
Instructional quality	90.2% (37)
Scheduling of class times	87.8% (36)
Quality of research experiences (e.g., studies, colloquia)	82.9% (34)
The academic rigor of the program	80.5% (33)
Connection of research to practice	78% (32)
Overall Academics	90.2% (37)

In addition, 95.2% (39) of respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the location (San Diego) and 92.7% (38) were satisfied or very satisfied with the cost of the program.

Respondents were asked which factors of the NLM program have been most important for their professional growth. Many expressed various aspects of the course work were the most important elements. More than any other content, 21.7% (10) of the respondents specifically mentioned leadership development and the corresponding course as the most important element of the program for their professional growth. Strategic Planning was reported by two respondents. Other content areas reported by one respondent each were Fiscal Management, Marketing, Organizational Theory, Public Speaking, Program Design, and Research.

On the other hand, a number of alumni took a global perspective in answering this question. One alumnus said, "All of the academic work added to my personal growth and self-confidence which in turn have directly benefited my nonprofit and professional growth." Another listed "learning such a broad range of themes related to nonprofits…from leadership to program evaluation" as important.

Many alumni expressed the benefits of networking and connections with other students in the program (8 responses), and the connections with the larger nonprofit community (7) as important to their professional development. One alumnus said,

> **I think the network of nonprofit professionals in this program creates and promotes is one of its greatest strengths. I know that if I have a question or issue that needs resolving that I can send out an e-mail and get advice from experienced leaders.**

Also important are the connections of coursework to practice (reported by three respondents), self confidence that was built (2), academic rigor (1), the reputation of the university and the program (1), critical thinking, (1), and report writing (1). One alumnus summed up the benefits of the program as "Connections with other nonprofit professionals, confidence in true and effective leadership strategies, ongoing resources for advice and/or best practices/approaches, etc."

Overall Satisfaction

Various indicators were used to measure overall satisfaction with the program and with the University of San Diego. Table 10 reports the responses to questions that directly measure satisfaction.

I would be inclined to recommend the USD Nonprofit Leadership and Management program to a friend. [100% (41)]

Table 10
Indicators of Overall Satisfaction

	Disagree or Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Agree or Strongly Agree
I would be inclined to recommend the USD Nonprofit Leadership and Management program to a friend.	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	100% (41)
The availability of discounted tuition and scholarships influenced my decision to attend the program.	2.2% (1)	2.2% (1)	95.2% (39)
If I were making the decision today, I would be inclined to study the same topic (nonprofits).	2.2% (1)	9.8% (4)	87.9% (36)
If I were making the decision today, I would be inclined to enroll in the USD Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program.	2.2% (1)	9.8% (4)	87.8% (36)
If I were making the decision today, I would be inclined to attend the University of San Diego.	9.8% (4)	7.3% (3)	83% (34)

N=41

Table 11 reports the responses to the direct question of satisfaction with the program. It's clear from this data that alumni are satisfied with the program and the university

Table 11
Overall Satisfaction with the Program

	Very Dissatisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
Overall satisfaction with program	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	4.9% (2)	22.0% (9)	73.2% (30)

N=41

Both alumni reporting neutral satisfaction are from the first cohort (2002). One of these alumni was also neutral about the cost of the program, while the other was very dissatisfied with the cost. One was also dissatisfied with program advising. In the other program areas, these alumni each reported that they were satisfied or very satisfied. Therefore it seems that the elements of cost and advising were important factors for these alumni in determining overall satisfaction.

Factors Which Contributed Most to Overall Satisfaction

One of the original goals of the study was to determine which elements of the program contributed most to changes in overall satisfaction. This turned out to be difficult. The reason for this is because there was little dispersion of the answers to many of the questions regarding satisfaction and learning outcomes. That is, in order to determine how changes in one variable correlate to changes in another, each variable must *change* across the data set. For example, Exercising Leadership was rated highest of the learning outcomes. However, for that outcome, 84.7% of the alumni responded that their abilities in this area were extremely well enhanced, and no alumni rated it negatively. Since the range of answers (or dispersion) was very low, the level of satisfaction with leadership practice did not correlate with the level of overall satisfaction. Like Exercising Leadership, many other variables did not have enough dispersion in the responses to stand out in this type of analysis. Therefore, although regressions were run on the data, the results were inconclusive.

Alumni Recommendations

The alumni survey produced very positive results and participants provided a number of important recommendations. Alumni said that career and academic advising were important elements of the program; however Career Services at the University of San Diego still needs to make a greater effort to connect with graduate students in the NLM program. One student suggested the need for a dedicated person to provide career advising for the students in the NLM program.

In addition, although many alumni expressed one of the best elements of the NLM program was networking; alumni still expressed a need for more networking opportunities in the alumni program. One alumni said, "…[I would like] more opportunities to stay connected with other alumni, new [and] current students and the program in general."

Alumni also suggested that specific courses be changed. For example, the Resource Development course should be more in depth. This could be achieved by partnering "with professionals at the Association of Fundraising Professionals who are behind successful fundraising in San Diego nonprofits." It was also recommended that the Ethics class be offered earlier in the NLM program. Another participant stated that the leadership and organizational theory portions of the program were excellent and thought-provoking; however other portions of the program could be improved by providing more opportunities for free exchange of ideas (less one way lecturing style). Another student desired, "continued opportunities to authentically interact."

Moreover, four of the alumni specifically expressed the need for more diversity within the NLM program. However, when comparing demographic data of the NLM program to other programs in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences, the NLM program is more diverse, and it is very representative of San Diego demographics. Therefore, this may be an issue of perception. Other alumni recommendations included recruiting more high level nonprofit executives into the program, including community volunteers as guest speakers in the courses, providing more nonprofit resources during the program, and providing specific skill training for dealing with difficult people. Finally, it was suggested by more than one alumnus that Pat Libby, the director of the program, is an important part of the program and should be "cloned."

Level of Engagement of Alumni

Most alumni are engaged with the program in one or more ways. Table 12 reports the ways in which they reported engaging with the program.

Table 12
Types of Alumni Engagement

Method of Engagement	Percent (number)
Keep in contact with other alumni	84.8% (39)
Give to the alumni fund	45.7% (21)
Participate in NLM activities on campus	34.8% (16)
Participate in alumni meetings	28.3% (13)
Participate in NLM Advisory Board	4.3% (2)
Other: Read emails	2.2% (1)
Volunteer when asked	2.2% (1)

N=46

Two alumni reported that they did not participate. One of them stated "I would like to be more actively involved but there are few opportunities to participate when you live outside CA."

Comparison to Entering and Exit Surveys by R. S. Larson

This section of the report will focus on comparing the results of this study to those found by R. Sam Larson in her July 2005 report, "Accomplishments and Perspectives of the 2002 and 2003 Cohort Alumni," which reported results from entrance and exit surveys of the first two cohorts in the NLM program.

Comparing Knowledge and Skills Responses

A difficulty needed to be overcome in order to compare 2004 and 2005 exit surveys with the present 2008 alumni survey. The scale used in the exit surveys contained three choices, while the scale used in this alumni survey contained five choices.

Exit Survey Scale	No Change 3		Improved 2		Greatly Improved 1

Alumni Survey Scale	Not at All 1	Somewhat Well 2	Moderately Well 3	Well 4	Extremely Well 5

The difficulty is in making a value judgment about whether or not it should be assumed that the three middle scores in the alumni survey represent the same thing as the one middle score in the exit survey. It can be easily argued that Improved means the same thing as enhancing abilities Moderately Well (3) or Well (4) but less than Extremely Well. However, the exit scale did not allow for graduates to air their perspectives that their skills were somewhat improved, but less than they would have liked. This possibility is reflected in the choice of level 2 in the alumni survey question. As mentioned earlier in this report, the label for this category was not given on the survey, but is given here for ease of writing this report. It was therefore concluded that, for purposes of comparing the results between the exit and alumni surveys, the category 2 (Improved) on the exit survey scale would be comparable to categories 3 and 4 on the alumni survey scale.

Tables 13 and 14 compare the data gathered from the 2005 report of the 2002 and 2003 cohorts to the 2008 alumni survey regarding how much the required and elective coursework enhanced the alumni's knowledge and abilities. There are four columns of data in these tables. The first column contains results from the 2004 and 2005 exit surveys, and it lists the percent of respondents who reported that the skill was improved or greatly improved. The second column contains results from the 2008 alumni survey, and reports the responses from the 2002 and 2003 cohorts, which are from the same group of students as reported in the first column. This column lists the percent of respondents who reported that the skill was enhanced moderately well to extremely well. The third column also contains results from the present alumni survey, and reports the responses from the 2005 cohort, which is the most recent cohort to complete the program. It lists the percent of respondents who reported that the skill was enhanced moderately to extremely well. This column is provided to illustrate any differences over time between the first two

cohorts and the last cohort to finish (at the time the survey was conducted). Finally, the last column contains results from all respondents to the 2008 alumni survey, and again lists the percent of respondents who reported that the skill was enhanced moderately to extremely well.

Table 13
Comparison of Improvement in Knowledge and Skills - Required Coursework

	04 & 05 Exit Surveys of 2002 and 2003 Cohorts[a]	08 Alumni Survey 2002 and 2003 Cohorts[b]	08 Alumni Survey 2005 Cohort[b]	08 Alumni Survey All Cohorts[b]
History of the Nonprofit Sector	94%	80%	100%	81%
Staffing and supervising employees	87%	84%	80%	81%
Staffing and supervising volunteers	74%	85%	89%	83%
Evaluation and Accountability	97%	100%	100%	100%
Ethics	n/a	96%	90%	93%
Financial Management (Budgeting and Accounting)	82%	79%	100%	88%
Marketing	92%	88%	89%	88%
Systems thinking, organization theory	100%	100%	80%	95%
Fundraising and Development, proposal writing	100%	96%	100%	93%
Community engagement and organizing	92%	92%	100%	93%
Governance (board responsibilities, etc.)	95%	96%	100%	98%
Legal Issues (incorporation, personnel law)	74%	91%	100%	95%
Promoting Organizational Diversity	79%	96%	80%	86%
Strategic Planning	97%	100%	90%	95%
Exercising Leadership	n/a	100%	100%	100%
Addressing Organizational Challenges	n/a	100%	100%	100%
Program Design	95%	96%	100%	98%

[a] Percent of respondents selecting Improved or Greatly Improved
[b] Percent of respondents selecting Moderately Well through Extremely Well

Table 14
Comparison of Improvement in Knowledge and Skills - Elective Courses

	04 & 05 Exit Surveys of 2002 and 2003 Cohorts[a]	08 Alumni Survey 2002 and 2003 Cohorts[b]	08 Alumni Survey 2005 Cohort[b]	08 Alumni Survey All Cohorts[b]
Advocacy and Lobbying	53%	87%	80%	75%
Policy Making	87%	88%	86%	79%
Collaboration	n/a	95%	88%	89%
Capital & Campaign Planning	n/a	80%	80%	73%
Public Speaking	87%	95%	100%	94%
Risk Assessment and Management	n/a	60%	100%	67%

[a] Percent of respondents selecting Improved or Greatly Improved
[b] Percent of respondents selecting Moderately Well through Extremely Well

In comparing the responses of the 2002 and 2003 cohorts at time of exit (column 1) to the present follow up (column 2), there are very consistent results, except on four learning outcomes. The learning outcome History of the Nonprofit Sector received higher scores on the exit survey than on the alumni follow up survey. History was only added to the curriculum in 2005, so it is not surprising that only 80% of the alumni rated their knowledge as being moderately to extremely well enhanced. What is surprising is that it was scored highly upon exit. For the other three learning outcomes, Legal Issues, Promoting Organizational Diversity and Advocacy and Lobbying, we see the opposite, that the alumni survey results are higher than the exit survey. This might be explained by the difficulty discussed above in comparing the data due to the different rating scales used. By including the category moderately well enhanced, this significantly raised the percentages on these two learning outcomes. However, the explanation must go beyond this, as other learning outcomes with larger percentages in the moderately well enhanced category do not have this discrepancy. This would be an area for further examination.

In comparing the responses of the first two cohorts (column 1) to the responses of the most recent cohort to graduate (column 3), we see a number of differences. In the areas of History of the Nonprofit Sector, Financial Management, Legal Issues and Risk Assessment, the percent of alumni who indicated that their knowledge and skills were moderately to extremely well enhanced was higher in the most recent cohort to graduate. It has already been mentioned that History of the nonprofit sector was added in 2005 and Financial Management was changed in 2005; this data suggests that these changes have been improvements. In the areas of Systems thinking, Promoting Organizational Diversity, and Strategic Planning, the percent of alumni who indicated that their knowledge and skills were moderately to extreme well enhances was lower in the most recent cohort to graduate. These would be areas for further investigation into course content.

Comparing Applying Skills Responses

On the 2004 and 2005 exit surveys, 68% (26) respondents said they applied the knowledge they received from the program on a daily basis, and 24% (9) said they did so on a weekly basis. On the 2008 alumni survey, 69.2% (18) of members of the 2002 and

2003 cohorts said they apply the knowledge they received from the program on a daily basis, 26.9% said they do on a weekly basis, and 3.8% (1) said they do so on a monthly basis. These results indicate students in the program apply what they are learning about as often as they continue to apply these skills after they have graduated. Across all cohorts, 75% (33) of the respondents to the 2008 alumni survey indicated that they apply the knowledge they learned in the program on a daily basis. This may demonstrate that the more recent cohorts are finding their program knowledge and skills even more useful, which is to be expected as the program matures and curriculum changes are made.

Comparing Impact of NLM Program on Alumni Careers

On their exit survey, the 2002 and 2003 cohort reported the changes to their careers that had taken place since enrolling in the program, and predicted future changes after graduation. In Table 15, these reports and predictions are compared with what this group of alumni reported on the alumni survey, three years after graduation.

Table 15
Impact of Program on Alumni Careers – 2002 and 2003 Cohorts

Type of Change	Actual Changes during Program (Reported on Exit Survey)	Anticipated Changes after Graduation (Reported on Exit Survey)	Actual Changes after Graduation (Reported on Alumni Survey)
Assume a leadership role	13%	79%	41%
Receive an increase in income	53%	68%	59%
Apply for a position at a different type of nonprofit	18%	55%	50%
Be promoted within my organization	26%	47%	19%
Assume a leadership role within my sector	n/a	47%	26%

From the chart above it appears that the impact of the program on students' careers starts well before graduation.

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Conclusions and Recommendations

The alumni survey produced positive results overall. Alumni satisfaction is high, as evidenced by the following indicators:

♦ **The response rate was high for an alumni survey, 71%. This indicates a desire and willingness to continue to engage with the program.**

♦ **In terms of the program's effect on students' careers, 89.1% (41) of the alumni experienced some type of career change since attending the program, with 58.7% (27) receiving an increase in income since graduation.**

♦ **For each of the learning outcomes in required courses, 89% to 100% of the respondents indicate that their knowledge and skills were enhanced moderately to extremely well.**

♦ **Across all cohorts, 75% (33) of the respondents indicated that they apply the knowledge they learned in the program on a daily basis.**

♦ **Satisfaction on interpersonal elements of the program is high, especially in the areas of relationships with other students and use of nonprofit professionals in the program.**

♦ **The rate of Overall Satisfaction is 95.2%.**

♦ **All, but two respondents engage with the program on an ongoing basis, one reporting that he/she would like to but there are few opportunities outside California.**

♦ **Respondents felt free to give both positive feedback and suggestions for additions to the program.**

To sum it up, one student said,

> **I am often called up to be the expert in nonprofit issues for my organization during everyday issues, board meetings, and outreach opportunities. The knowledge I bring to the table has helped grow my importance with my organization.**

The results of the alumni survey also indicate a few areas for program faculty and administrators to review.

♦ Promoting Organizational Diversity is a vital subject to be discussed in any management program. According to the course syllabi, only one course lists this as a learning outcome (Organizational Theory and Change). This learning outcome was rated lowest by alumni survey respondents in how well their skills and knowledge were enhanced. Such a vital learning outcome could be incorporated across the program, and its link to other program content such as staffing and supervising, ethics, community engagement, legal issues, advocacy and lobbying, among others, could be incorporated into the courses covering those topics. Given that this outcome was rated as moderately well enhanced by 38% of the respondents, there is a structural base on which to move forward.

♦ Reviewing all learning outcomes that have high proportions of "moderately well" responses would be a way to find other areas that could be easily enhanced. For required courses, these outcomes include Staffing and Supervising Employees, Staffing and Supervising Volunteers, History of the Nonprofit Sector, Financial Management, Marketing, and Legal Issues.

♦ Creating a matrix of the key learning outcomes and which courses address them could enhance ownership of the responsibility for adequately covering them. This would be the next step in a program Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan.

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