

CERTIFICATE PROGRAMS PROVIDE A COMPETITIVE EDGE IN A WEAK ECONOMY

In good economic times, the certificate programs offered by the School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS) can make the difference between a dead-end job and a rewarding one. These hard-hitting programs give individuals the knowledge they need to change careers, to qualify for a promotion, to prepare for professional accreditation, or earn credits for graduate school.

Students like them because they are affordable, they take less time to complete than a full-fledged degree, and they are practical. Knowledge gained in the classroom can be put to use the very next day.

When times are bad, SCPS certificate programs take on added value. For individuals they can provide the crucial margin between a secure job and unemployment. And for organizations navigating rough economic waters, they are a cost-effective way to increase the skills, the flexibility, and the productivity of their work force.

The number and variety of SCPS certificate programs are steadily growing, but each one is carefully vetted before being introduced. "We have established a network of connections in the communities we serve that provides valuable suggestions about potential topics," says Barbara Kessler, director of career and professional development programs at University Center in Charlottesville. "But before we develop a new program, we identify expert instructors who know the subject and check with other local colleges and universities to make sure we are not duplicating their efforts."

Over the last 18 months, three new certificate programs have gone through this process. Nonprofit Management is being offered in Charlottesville, Association Management in Richmond, and Public Administration, developed by the Hampton Roads Center, will be available online.



SCPS introduces nonprofit management, association management, and public administration programs

Certificate in Nonprofit Management

In May 2008, the 16 students who were the first to complete the Certificate in Nonprofit Management were honored at a ceremony in Charlottesville. They are employed at a variety of organizations, from ARC of the Piedmont to the Thomas Jefferson Foundation. "I was a classical musician thinking about getting more involved in arts administration," says Adrienne Wager, an arts development officer at U.Va. "The exposure I gained through the certificate program led me to fundraising."

To earn the certificate, participants must complete 35 contact hours from a menu of noncredit courses. "We surveyed local nonprofit leaders to find out what issues would be valuable to them, and we consulted with our counterparts at Piedmont Virginia Community College and the Charlottesville-based Center for Nonprofit Excellence to find out how our three organizations could work together," notes Kessler. The result of these deliberations is a slate of day-long and half-day courses that include such topics as successful grant writing strategies, organizing a capital campaign, managing volunteers, and strategic planning. SCPS also offers a number of courses designed specifically to reinforce the skills of nonprofit board members, an area identified from the surveys.

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Certificate in Association Management

In 2007, three leaders of Richmond-based associations made their case for a new certificate program to U.Va. Richmond Center Director Kathy Cullen. There are hundreds of associations with headquarters in Richmond, they pointed out, but very little in the way of affordable professional development opportunities for association executives. They had a vision of a small, select group of executives, meeting once a month for 10 sessions, that would cover such hands-on issues as leadership and succession planning, lobbying and the law, strategic planning, and project management. A special feature of the program would be the caliber of the guest speakers featured at each session.

In September 2008, the center offered the first session in its Certificate in Association Management. Among the highlights of the year will be modules featuring Tom Silvestri, president and publisher of *The Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Wally Stettinius, former chairman and chief executive of Cadmus Communications, and Delegate David E. Poisson, who represents the 32nd District in the Virginia House of Delegates. Participants can sign up for the individual noncredit modules or attend a minimum of nine modules to receive the certificate. Both the certificate program and the individual sessions have been approved by the American Society of Association Executives for continuing education credit.

“The program meets an unfilled need,” says David Reel, executive vice president of the Home Building Association of Richmond and one of the three proponents of the program. “While there are numerous programs on how to be more effective in the private sector, there is a continuing shortage of cost-effective local programs for those who want to master the unique set of skills required for success in the association world.”

Certificate in Public Administration

While the Certificates in Nonprofit Management and Association Management are delivered live to local audiences in Charlottesville and Richmond, the online Certificate in Public Administration offered by the Hampton Roads Center will reach a national and global audience. Among the participants in this year’s pilot class are the spouse of a foreign service officer in Hong Kong, the counsel for a Florida county health department, and a member of a parks and recreation department in North Carolina.

“With a wave of senior government officials set to retire in the next decade, there will be a premium on people with the knowledge base needed for decision-making, planning, administrative effectiveness, and budgeting,” says Celeste Greene, who proposed and developed the program. “This certificate is designed to provide a foundation for the next generation of leaders.” Each of the program’s four graduate-level courses, on such topics as public policy analysis, and public organization management, will last 16 weeks. Although the program is still under review, the Hampton Roads Center is considering offering the courses in four, 10-week quarters.

Assignments, tests, discussion panels, and student progress are posted using the Blackboard Learning System™. Several times during the semester, all the students get together virtually thanks to another program, Elluminate Live!, which combines voice communication with web-based content that Greene presents. “I have had great exchanges with the other students,” reports Nicholas Romanello, legal counsel with the Health Care District of Palm Beach County. “As someone looking for a solid introduction to public administration rather than a degree program, this certificate fills the bill.”