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Continuing Education 2007 Higher Education

Schools are preparing students to make a difference in the world.

In case you haven't noticed, the world is kind of a mess. People are homeless, starving and dying of incurable diseases. They're killing each other, not to mention the planet and its atmosphere. But what can you do about it? A lot, actually.

In the age of *An Inconvenient Truth*, and with celebrities like Bono and Angelina Jolie making activism a very public priority, social consciousness is more than just cool. It can be the foundation of your career—a very satisfying one, no less.

In recent years, New York's institutions of higher learning have taken notice of a strong desire among students to do work that helps make a difference in the world. Young people who are new to the workforce want jobs they can feel good about; people who have already made their marks in one field seek career switches to areas in which they can give back to society. In response, schools have developed programs designed to prepare students for work in all manner of greater-good arenas, including fund-raising for nonprofits, human service organizations, global non-governmental organizations (NGOs), health care and various environmental arenas. It's a win-win situation, in which important issues get more professional attention, and those doing the work feel better about their place in the world at the end of the day.

Fund-raising, Nonprofits and NGOs

At one time, you didn't need any special credentials to go into fund-raising or other kinds of work for non-profits, nor the education that now comes with those credentials. But things have changed.

"There's a professionalization of the industry taking place," says Lucas Rubin, director of Columbia's master's of science program in fund-raising management. "It's been happening gradually over the past 20 years. It's centered on the idea that there's a core body of theories and practices you need to learn. There's a growing professional quality to this field that references the business world—marketing, communications and law. People want to know that their organizations are run efficiently, that their money is going to a good place."

Fund-raising is a growing area of interest for people who want to feel good about the work they do. "Many of our students are career-changers who are leaving the for-profit world midcareer after they've grown disillusioned," says Lewis Brindle, director of NYU's George H. Heyman Jr. Center for Philanthropy. At the center, both certificates and master's degrees can be pursued not only in fund-raising but in grant writing and foundations, so students can be active in philanthropic efforts as well.

"To a certain extent, I had a lack of satisfaction in my job with a hotel chain," says Asabe Poloma, a student in the fund-raising management program at Columbia. "The endless hours, the constant connection to the Blackberry—and what are you getting out of it in the end?" She now has a job—which she juggles with her studies—as a program assistant with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

"This is very much a growing area for career transitioners," concurs Rubin. "They might be in their mid-thirties or early forties, have worked for years in something like marketing, and there's a logjam of people ahead of them in terms of promotability. Plus, they don't feel satisfied any longer working for a corporation."

Columbia's program provided the opportunity for a career change—and a chance to help others make a switch—for William Dale, a former classical cellist, who is now director of development for Career Transition for Dancers (CTFD). When the Florida Philharmonic with which he played went belly-up, Dale became sympathetic to the cause of artists, whose careers are difficult to sustain. That turn of events led him to the university's program, which led him to CTFD. "The program helped me to do good," Dale says. "I now work for an organization where we help dancers find new careers when they can't perform professionally anymore. I feel lucky that I can help others. Having made my own transition, I wish there had been an organization like this for me, but I found Columbia instead."

Job satisfaction seems to be high in nonprofits. "This is a good area for satisfying the need to do something important," Rubin says. "Plus, it's exciting for a lot of people. There's an emerging group of students who enjoy asking other people for money for good causes. To me, that's a great possibility; enjoy what you do and make decent money at it."

According to Rubin, fund-raising developers with master's degrees from Columbia can earn between \$75,000 and \$150,000 annually. More good news for anyone who is interested in fund-raising for nonprofits or NGOs as a profession: it's a fast-growing field.

"It's been recognized by *US News & World Report* and *Business Week* as an area that is going to be hot for the next 20 years," says Ken Brown, director of public relations for NYU, which offers both a certificate program and a master's degree in fund-raising.

"There are many nonprofit organizations being created every day," says NYU's Brindle. "They all need good development officers and those people need to have training, because with all those organizations out there, there's great competition for funds."

What's more, a generational shift in the field will be making way for the next group. "Baby boomers are retiring," says Dr. Beverly Lyons, director of the master's of public administration program at Long Island University. "There's a lot of opportunity here. Also, there will be jobs in the federal government. About 50 percent of upper level management there will be retiring in about three years."

But nonprofits aren't the only way to go. After all, if everyone worked only in nonprofit, well, there'd be no profits to donate. To that end, Pace University's Social Entrepreneurship certificate program is designed to train people not only for the business side of nonprofits, but also for socially responsible work within for-profit corporations.

"In the area of social entrepreneurship, the impetus for starting a company is to further or advance a cause or purpose," says Bruce Bachenheimer, clinical professor and program director at Pace's Lubin School of Business. "It's about a mission to address any number of ills, from AIDS to world hunger or environmental issues. And it's about having a sustainable type of business. It's something larger than just making money," he continues. "It's using entrepreneurship—the same skills and concepts you would apply to a commercial business—to solve important problems."

Sherri Muth, who earned a social entrepreneurship certificate at Pace, said she picked up important business skills through the program, which she applies to her work as the director for a nonprofit rehabilitation center that develops and finds jobs for people with disabilities. "One of the assignments was to write a business plan," she recalls. "It made me realize that we need to run nonprofits just like any other kind of business. I took courses in law, strategic planning, business planning, budgeting, IT."

Vera Jelinek, divisional dean and director of NYU's Global Affairs department, says she started the program in 1984, "but now it's hotter than ever. The interest has grown in response to what is happening in the world—globalization, ethnic conflicts, and a realization that whatever happens in a small hamlet in Africa has an impact on us. There's a lot of interest in classes about NGOs, humanitarian assistance and refugee protection." She notes that students go on to work at NGOs, human rights organizations, the U.N., the foreign service. Some find jobs in journalism and research.

Touro College is finding increasing interest in its master's in social work program (MSW), especially from students who are bilingual in English and Spanish. "In human services, in New York, this is a much needed profession," says Steven Huberman, dean of the Graduate School of Social Work at Touro. "There's a tremendous need in the hospitals, schools and nonprofits for social workers who speak Spanish," he says. "I can place every bilingual student

in this program in a good, competitively compensated job. There are more than 20,000 nonprofit organizations in New York, and they need people.”

Of course, you don't have to pursue a degree to further educate yourself in these areas. The New School's School of General Studies offers a course in grassroots work. “There's a real interest in anything that deals with community development and activism,” says teaching fellow Linda Silva Thompson. “A lot of people are disenchanted with the current political structures, and they want to affect change. One of the goals of this course is to look at community organizing in terms of developing power, leadership and action, from a grassroots perspective. Until you understand that, it's hard to counteract what you don't like in the world.”

The New School also offers socially minded courses such as Marketing as an Economic, Social and Cultural Process, Non-Governmental Organizations and Urban Development, Human Nature, Violence and Social Inequality, and Advocacy, Public Policy and Social Change. Plus, the school offers a documentary studies certificate. Many of the students in this program are social activists who plan to make films about the causes they care about, says Deborah Kirschner, associate director of Arts Communications.

Health care

Anyone who's read a newspaper lately can tell you our country is sick. Literally. And all this ill-health means a huge need for health care workers. “Health careers are high-demand occupations,” says Don Bostic, dean of Long Island University's School of Continuing Studies. “If you were looking for employable skills with a long-term future and a strong sense of purpose, this is the way to go.”

Those who steered clear of the industry because they didn't think they had the time or money for medical school, an internship and residency, will be happy to know that there are many growing areas of health care that require much less of an investment but are significant and have an increasing need for skilled professionals.

Two in-demand certificates offered at LIU are vascular and surgical technology. They are both one-year full-time programs that prepare students for a national certification exam that leads to licensure. You can go for these even if you don't have a bachelor's or an associate's degree. “For the vascular tech certificate, you need to take four college courses,” Bostic reports. “For the surgical tech certificate, you only need a high-school diploma or GED.”

Vascular technicians are trained to perform sonography and other types of tests on veins and arteries. Surgical technicians act as support in the operating room. “They assist the surgical team, make sure the right tools are there, help with sterility,” Bostic explains. “It can be an intense job, but you're a big part of an important team. I've heard of surgeons refusing to work unless their surgical tech is there with them, shoulder to shoulder.”

Michelle Soto, a graduate of the program who now works as a surgical tech and teaches at LIU, finds a high level of job satisfaction. “It feels so good knowing that I have helped someone have more time on the planet,” says Soto, who did stints in the military and in retail before studying at LIU. “It's rewarding seeing someone who is sick gain a better quality of life because of how I assist in surgery. I like going to work and every day I feel like I've done something.”

Tuoro College has responded to the growing demand for medical professionals with two new health science programs, one in bariatric science and another in neuropsychological rehabilitation.

The bariatric science certificate program focuses on the causes, consequences and treatment of obesity, which has become epidemic in this country. “It takes into account the biological, psychological and social aspects of obesity,” says Stephen Phillips, an associate professor. “We are training students to become bariatric counselors, to consider the whole person from a mind-body perspective. This is a new and very needed health profession.”

The neuropsychological rehabilitation master's program aims to help people with physical and neurological disabilities become able to work. “In the past, many people with disabilities didn't live very long,” explains Dr. Joseph Weisberg, dean of Tuoro's School of Health Sciences. “Now, with the advances of modern medicine, they survive. We want to take it to the next step and help them become self-sufficient.”

“Health care is perhaps the largest single area of continuing education for CUNY, and it continues to grow,” says Rita Rodin, director of public information at the City University of New York. “Almost every CUNY college has something in

this area. The programs are a combination of training for positions focused on technical jobs, and those that are administrative and office positions.” Among CUNY’s many offerings is a nursing certificate designed to help those interested in getting into one of the city’s highly competitive nursing programs. “We even have a program at Lehman College that trains nurses and doctors from other countries to become registered nurses in the U.S.,” says Rodin.

Environmentalism

It’s an understatement to say that the environment has become a topic of interest. So it’s gratifying to know there’s a lot more you can do than recycle and use low-impact lightbulbs. Columbia University has been a leader in climate-change issues, in both research and education. “Our program is focused on sustainable development, from the engineering side of it,” explains Klaus Lackner, chair of the Department of Earth and Environmental Engineering.

Columbia’s certificate program in this area includes courses such as A Better Planet by Design, Alternative Energy Resources, Industrial Ecology of Earth Resources, Air Pollution Prevention and Control, and Alternative Energy Resources. “Although we take a multidisciplinary approach, we are very much interested in large-scale and global issues,” Lackner says.

Students who complete the program find it helps them get jobs in a variety of areas. “Quite a few end up working for organizations that look into these issues from a policy point of view,” Lackner says. “Or they might wind up with the EPA or energy companies. Some go to NGOs or on to graduate school to study this at a higher level. One student went on to work at a Chinese NGO, trying to improve the environment in China.”

“I think this is a very hot area,” says David Greenstein, director of continuing education at Cooper Union. “People throw around terms like ‘carbon footprint’ and ‘carbon budget,’ without really knowing what they mean. These things need to be better understood.”

Cooper Union is launching a certificate program in green building design in the fall. “It’s directed toward architects, engineers and developers,” Greenstein says, “but anyone can take the first overview course.”

The program will look at eco-friendly design from many angles. “It will consist of a number of courses on passive design, strategies for low-tech design, indoor-outdoor lighting controls, thermal comfort, high performance engineering, demand reduction and more,” Greenstein notes. “We’ll also have a course on the economics of green building design.” In addition, there will be a prep course for the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) test.

Polytechnic University offers master’s programs in environmental science, environmental engineering and civil engineering with a concentration in environmental and water resource engineering. “These all deal with preserving, protecting and remedying air, water and soil environments,” says Suzanne Matulay, a university spokesperson. “The emphasis is on preparing graduates to meet the challenges of the next century.”

NYU is addressing green demand, too. In its Real Estate Institute, NYU’s School of Continuing Education offers weekend workshops called Energy Management and Energy Conversion and Environmentally Sustainable Design. “It’s important, as it affects real estate development now,” says Brown.

It’s clear that our social, economic, political and environmental problems are legion. But it seems that soon our educational programs and students in these areas will be as well.