

# *A Master's Degree Emphasizing Volunteer Administration*

by Lyla Brewer

Following retirement as a Volunteer Bureau executive director, I planned to pursue a Master of Arts Degree which would concentrate on volunteer administration. Two purposes were the basis for this plan: 1) to acquire further education and better preparation to serve as an advisor or consultant to volunteer programs, and 2) to promote the interest of higher education in courses in volunteer administration. Established degrees such as a Master's in Business Administration or a Master's in Social Work would not have provided the special education necessary nor would they have called attention to the particular needs of the developing career field of volunteer administration; thus it was necessary to apply for a degree in a "Special Major," available to students whose needs cannot be accommodated by existing majors at California State University, Fresno.

For the Special Major, the student must assemble a committee of professors from various disciplines, identify with them the course of study in two or more fields, and gain the endorsement of the Graduate School before embarking on the master's degree program. In this case, one year elapsed between the proposal and its approval by the Graduate School, during which clarifications, revisions, meetings, explanatory interviews, and other obstacles were encountered. The proposed title of "Volunteer Program Management" was unacceptable to the Graduate School for the stated reason that

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*Lyla Brewer is a Board member and Notebook Editor for the Association of Volunteer Bureaus. Before and since her retirement as a Volunteer Bureau Executive Director she has been an involved participant in the field of volunteerism. She presently makes her home in Fresno, California.*

none of the classes pertained to volunteers. The revised title of "Human Resources Development" eventually met with Graduate School approval.

In the interim, I took fifteen units of upper division undergraduate work under the mistaken supposition that they would be applied to the master's degree. They were not, but perhaps the fact that I was on campus and producing acceptable work was a factor in the final approval of the proposed program.

The approved program consisted of thirty-four units in the following courses:

Business	Seminar in Organizational Behavior
Business	Seminar in Personnel Management
Business	Executive Leadership
Health Science	Seminar in Administration of Health Science Programs
Journalism	Public Relations Practice
Recreation	Administration of Recreation for Special Populations
Social Work	Seminar in Small Group Behavior
Social Work	Social Planning and Administration
Social Work	Evaluative Research
Social Work	Thesis

The thesis subject was "Perceptions of Competencies for Volunteer Administration" and was a study to validate the nineteen competencies for volunteer administration approved by the members of the Association for Volunteer Administration as the basis for the performance-based assessment program for certification. The following is a summary of my methodology and findings.

### Thesis Study: Perceptions of Competencies for Volunteer Administration

In 1979, the Association for Volunteer Administration approved a proposal for a performance-based assessment program for certification, which was founded on a set of nineteen competencies for performing in volunteer administration. When the certification program is implemented, it will influence the entire field of volunteer administration by establishing the nineteen competencies as standards against which performance will be measured and as guidelines for hiring and supervising volunteer administrators.

A question arises concerning the degree to which volunteer administrators outside the Association membership agree on the designation of the competencies, and the related question concerns the degree to which the executive directors in corresponding agencies agree on the competencies. According to estimates, some 70,000 to 80,000 individuals currently perform the functions of volunteer administration in agencies and organizations. The membership in the Association amounts to approximately eight hundred individuals, or about one percent of the total estimated population of the field of volunteer administration. While the eight hundred concur upon the designated nineteen competencies, there was no research on whether the competencies were also recognized as necessary by practicing volunteer administrators who do not have an affiliation with the Association. Research was also needed on the opinions of the persons responsible for hiring and supervising volunteer administrators in agencies.

A survey was made of the two populations: volunteer administrators and executive directors (or other persons responsible for employing and supervising volunteer administrators in human service organizations). The study was limited to volunteer administrators who spend the greater portion of their working hours performing the functions of volunteer administration, arbitrarily designated for the study as a minimum of twenty hours each week. The study also was limited to those volunteer administrators who perform their functions in the immediate geographic environs of Fresno County, California. Efforts were undertaken to insure that

the entire population of volunteer administrators meeting the qualifications were identified, as well as the executive directors in the corresponding agencies.

The staff and records of the Volunteer Bureau of Fresno County, Inc., identified approximately 150 contact persons in community service agencies which have registered descriptions of requests for volunteers with the Bureau. Returned questionnaires eventually established that twenty-one persons actually performed as volunteer administrators for twenty or more hours each week. This procedure also elicited the names of sixteen executive directors in these respective agencies, the discrepancy as a result of some agencies employing more than one volunteer administrator and others having the volunteer administrator hired by a board or committee.

Each of the persons returned a completed questionnaire, so that the study was comprehensive and included literally all the professional, full-time volunteer administrators in the area. The name of each participant in the survey was cross-checked with the membership directory of the Association for Volunteer Administration, and none of the volunteer administrators or the executive directors was found to be affiliated with the organization.

Questionnaires were mailed to individuals meeting the criteria, requesting them to indicate if they found each competency to be "essential," "desirable," or "unimportant," and to add further competencies not included on the list. The information on the returned questionnaires was computed into mean ratings, frequencies, and percentages, and the figures were then examined to determine the relationships between: 1) the opinions of responding volunteer administrators and executive directors; 2) the comparison of responses of volunteer administrators and executive directors by size of program; 3) the rank order of the mean rating responses; and 4) additions to the list of competencies.

The following figure illustrates how volunteer administrators and executive directors rated each of the nineteen competencies:

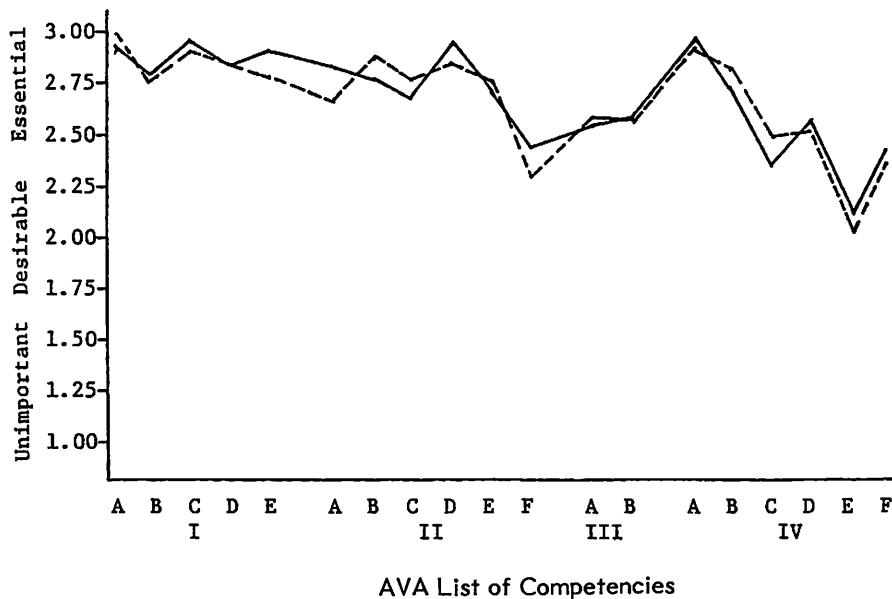


Figure 1. Comparison of Mean Ratings of Volunteer Administrators and Executive Directors

Key:

- Volunteer Administrators
- - - Executive Directors

AVA List of Competencies:

- I - Planning/organizing  
 A knowledge of agency  
 B planning capabilities  
 C decision making  
 D structures/procedures  
 E delegating/coordinating

- II - Staffing/directing  
 A recruiting  
 B selecting  
 C developing  
 D motivating/communicating  
 E recognizing  
 F transitioning away

- III - Controlling  
 A evaluating  
 B documenting

- IV - Relationships  
 A people  
 B groups  
 C organizations/change  
 D regulations  
 E history/trends  
 F knowledge of profession

The general conclusion drawn from the findings is that volunteer administrators who are not members of the Association for Volunteer Administration agree that the proposed competencies are necessary for performing as a volunteer administrator, and that executive directors in the corresponding agencies also agree on the necessity for the competencies. Sixteen of the nineteen competencies received ratings of "essential" by both volunteer administrators and executive directors, a positive endorsement and validation of eighty-four percent of the listed competencies. Furthermore, the list of nineteen competencies can be considered complete, as respondents to the survey did not suggest additions that were dissimilar to the list proposed by the Association. Finally, the unanimous return rate of responses demonstrated practitioner and employer interest and concern in the establishment of specific competencies for the professional practice of volunteer administration.

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Editor's Note: The list of competencies under discussion in this article forms the basis of the Certification Project presently being piloted by the Association for Volunteer Administration. Further information about these competency areas and about the procedure for obtaining certification may be requested directly from AVA, P. O. Box 4584, Boulder, CO 80306.

## INDEX TO VOLUNTEER ADMINISTRATION, VOLUME XIV (1981-2)

- Brewer, Lyla. "A Master's Degree Emphasizing Volunteer Administration." No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 24-26.
- Briggs, Dorothy L. "On Satisfying the Volunteer and the Paid Employee: Any Differences?" No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 1-8.
- Cianfrocco, Michael, with Norma A. Grecco, Ph.D. "The Value of an Internship in Volunteer Administration." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 7-8.
- Corbett, Kathryn L. "Academic Credit for Volunteer Work." No. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 1-2.
- Fair, Beth. "The Development of a Multi-Department Municipal Social Services Volunteer Program." No. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 3-7.
- Goldstein, Marc B., Ph.D. and Carolyn Wysocki. "Using Process Consultation Techniques to Improve Board Training." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 13-15.
- Grimshaw, William F. and Claren Schweitzer. "The Kalamazoo Voluntary Action Center Community Leadership Development Project." No. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 8-13.
- Honer, Anne S. "Manage Your Measurements, Don't Let Them Measure You!" No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 19-23.
- Miller, Rick. "The Developing Organization." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 20-23.
- Patton, Joanne H., CAVS. "Building Volunteer/Paid Staff Teamwork From the Top." No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 9-13.
- Richards, L., Ph.D. "Education for Volunteer Program Management: One Model in Canada." No. 4, Winter 1982, pp. 14-18.
- Scheier, Ivan, Ph.D. "The Imitation of Volunteers: Towards an Appropriate Technology of Voluntary Action." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 1-6.
- Sigler, Robert T., Ph.D. and John McNutt. "The Role of Needs Assessment Research in the Planning and Development of Volunteer Programs." No. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 14-18.
- Skillingsstad, Connie, C.A.V.S. "Volunteer Administration as a Career." No. 2, Summer 1981, pp. 5-10.

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- Taylor, Marilyn. "The Management of Community Resources." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 9-12.
- Warner, Sharon. "It Can Work: A Volunteer Services Advisory Committee." No. 3, Fall 1981, pp. 19-20.
- Whitham, Michele A. "When Partnership Fails: The Student as Victim." No. 1, Spring 1981, pp. 16-19.
- Wokutch, Richard E. and Alex F. DeNoble. "Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Vounteerism." No. 2, Summer 1981, pp. 11-16.

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## The Final Word on Volunteer Administration: Looking Ahead

This issue marks both an ending and a beginning: Volunteer Administration, in its present form, ceases publication with this final number 4 of Volume XIV. As the Cumulative Index (Summer 1981) and the Index in this issue show, the past fourteen volumes have offered readers a vast array of articles by an impressive list of authors. Everyone connected with Volunteer Administration during these past years hopes that the journal has provided our field of volunteerism with thought-provoking and useful information. Volunteer Administration will remain on our reference shelves for many more years, since its articles contain knowledge and concepts that define the state-of-the-art for our field.

It would violate all the principles of volunteer management to end this journal without giving recognition to the many volunteers who originated, shaped, developed, led, and managed it through these years. To all the Editors, Reviewers and contributing authors--a most sincere thank you for your efforts to create a meaningful publication. A resounding note of appreciation also goes to some of the "behind-the-scenes" people who shepherded the business and production side of this journal. All the detail work of subscription files, mailing lists, etc. required the attention of competent, caring individuals. A special bravo must go to Hilda Palm, who has served us so well for so long as Managing Editor.

But like the phoenix, a new publication is about to be born--a journal that will build upon all of the good things from the past, yet will move forward with the dynamic changes affecting the field of volunteerism. Later this year, the Association for Volunteer Administration will begin publishing The Journal of Volunteer Administration. Though this will mean a short break in the publishing calendar, it is anticipated that The Journal of Volunteer Administration will maintain continuity for its subscribers. It, too, will be produced quarterly. Readers will immediately notice changes in physical design and format. It is also planned to include more pages of articles as well as new, regular features. More importantly, The Journal of Volunteer Administration will be committed to printing a wide variety of innovative articles representing the full spectrum of our field. The Journal will be dedicated to stimulating the growth of volunteer administration as a profession and to becoming the major resource for anyone seeking to research volunteer administration.

As current subscribers to Volunteer Administration, you will automatically be entitled to as many issues of The Journal of Volunteer Administration as remain on your subscription record. When you have received as many issues of the new Journal as necessary to fulfill your right to four publications, you will be sent renewal information describing revised subscription costs. As before, all members of the Association for Volunteer Administration will continue to receive The Journal as a benefit of membership.

Should you have any questions regarding the transition from the old to the new publication, please write to us. Also, should you have any suggestions for us as we plunge into the preparation of The Journal of Volunteer Administration, please share your thoughts. This is an excellent time to consider the possibility of writing an article to submit for review. Guidelines for manuscript preparation are available upon request.



On behalf of those of us who are preparing this exciting new publication, I want to emphasize our enthusiasm and anticipation for the project. I hope that when The Journal of Volunteer Administration is in your hands in a few months, our efforts will meet with your approval. So here's to the past...and here's to the future...we're going there together!

Susan J. Ellis  
Editor-in-Chief



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