

Nonprofit Studies Program

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Abstract:

This paper reports the result of an e-mail survey of directors of 31 academic centers of nonprofit study. The purpose of the paper is to describe the existing ecology of these organizations in terms of their substantive foci; the academic disciplines they stress; their combinations of research, teaching and service; the structures within which they operate in their universities; the geographic scope of the audiences they serve; their levels and sources of economic support; and the particular ways in which they make themselves distinctive.

We find that the “typical” nonprofit academic center, most likely located in the East or Midwest section of the U.S., emphasizes the study of management of nonprofit organizations; depends largely on faculty with backgrounds in management and public policy and administration; pursues a healthy mix of teaching, research and service and considers itself “comprehensive in that regard; emphasizes degree-related over non-degree related teaching; focuses primarily on a local audience; employs four full time staff and 10 faculty affiliates; and operates on a budget of less than \$700,000 and minimal endowment, with a mix of revenue from internal university support, foundation and corporate grants, and fees and tuitions.

However, there is hardly a “typical” nonprofit academic center. Centers vary widely on each of these dimensions and fill many different substantive and market niches. Some niches, such as the application of certain disciplines to nonprofit study (e.g., economics or humanities), or substantive concerns such as public policy as it affects nonprofits, are more sparsely attended than others. The patterns described here may assist new nonprofit academic centers to find productive niches in the expanding world of nonprofit academic study.

Introduction

Since the establishment of the first academic center devoted to study of the nonprofit sector at Yale University in 1978, many universities in the U.S. and elsewhere have nurtured such units. For purposes here, a nonprofit academic center is a formal university-based entity with dedicated staff and leadership, devoted to study of some aspect of the nonprofit sector, and which includes research as part of its agenda. This definition reflects the criteria employed by the Nonprofit Academic Centers Council (NACC) an association established in 1991 which supports the work and development of these centers.

The number of nonprofit academic centers in the U.S. and Canada now approaches 50, with 41 members of NACC as of January, 2006. Most of these centers are located in the East, Midwest and West Coast regions of the U.S., with a small handful in the South (see map in Appendix 3). These centers are quite diverse, reflecting various areas of academic interest in the nonprofit sector, alternative university contexts, and different local circumstances. Indeed, there now exists an “ecology” of nonprofit academic centers which fill different disciplinary, substantive and geographic “niches” in relation to the field of nonprofit study. For emerging centers, such as the one at Georgia State University in Atlanta, the selection of an appropriate niche is an important strategic question.

Our objective in this study was to gain an overall picture of the character and focus of existing academic centers. We wanted to know what academic disciplines they stress; their relative emphases on, and combinations of, research, teaching and service; the structures within which they operate at their particular universities; their foci in terms of local versus national or international audiences; their levels and sources of economic support; and the particular ways in which they make themselves distinctive.

The survey reported here is motivated by strategic planning for Georgia State University’s nonprofit academic center. We appreciate the cooperation given to us by NACC and by the center directors who responded to our survey. We hope this information will be of general interest and use to the field and to universities contemplating new academic centers for nonprofit study in the future.

Methodology

Given the busy schedules of academic center directors, we made it a point to design a brief electronic survey that was easy to answer. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix 1.

The surveyed population consisted of the members of NACC, plus two additional centers at LaSalle University and Yale University which appeared to meet the definition (see www.centerpointforleaders.org/virtual_resources.html.) In total, 43 center directors were sent surveys, initially on Jan 19, 2006, with a follow-up survey on January 26th. By March 15th, 31 of the 43 centers had responded, for a response rate of 72%. A list of responding schools is provided in Appendix 2. Not all responding centers answered every question, as reported below. Basic (univariate) statistical analysis of the response data is presented in tabular and graphical forms.

Substantive Focus in Nonprofit Sector

We asked center directors what particular aspects of the nonprofit sector their centers were focused on (Question 1). Respondents were asked to distribute 10 points among six different possible foci and/or to specify their own focus. Twenty-eight respondents (N) answered this question. As shown in Table 1, Management emerged as the most common focus in terms of the mean number of points it was allocated, the number of instances where it was most highly ranked, and the number of times it received a non-zero weight. Philanthropy is the second most common emphasis, receiving half the weight of Management. Civil Society, Public Policy and International emphases clustered well below Philanthropy. Emphasis on Nonprofit Law was well below the latter group. Other cited foci included: Spirituality, Leadership, Fundraising, Finance, Volunteerism, Governance and Accountability. (In this and subsequent tables, SD is standard deviation around the mean and CV or Coefficient of Variation is SD divided by the mean, a measure of variation around the mean value.)

Table 1

Focus	N=28	Mean	SD	Coefficient of Variation	# of times discipline was highest ranked	# of time discipline received a non-zero weight
Management		3.5	2.2	.62	14	23
Philanthropy		1.8	1.7	.94	3	20
Civil Society		1.1	1.1	.94	2	18
Public Policy		1.1	1.2	1.03	0	16
International		.8	1.1	1.29	0	13
Law		.5	1.3	2.54	1	6
Other		1.2	2.4	2	2	8

Table 2 provides an alternative look at this data by examining each area of emphasis just for those centers where that emphasis is relevant. Here, N* equals the number of instances in which center directors allocated any points to the particular focus. In this analysis, Management again has the highest mean, but the means of the other disciplines are higher, suggesting that where certain alternative foci are engaged, they are given

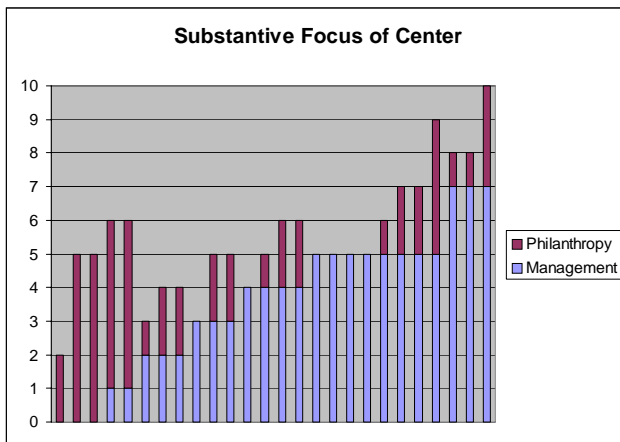
considerable weight. This seems particularly true for Philanthropy and Law, and certain “Others” that were cited.

Table 2

Focus	N*	Mean*	SD*	Coefficient of Variation*
Management	23	4.1	1.8	.43
Philanthropy	20	2.5	1.5	.59
Civil Society	18	1.6	.7	.53
Public Policy	16	1.8	.9	.49
International	13	1.8	.8	.47
Law	6	2.2	1.9	.90
Other	8	4	2.9	.73

Since Management and Philanthropy were the two most emphasized foci, they are compared in Figure 1, in terms of the proportions with which these two foci are given weight by individual academic centers. The area above the combined bars for these two foci represents the weights of all the other foci combined. Figure 1 shows that in over half of the centers where Management was given weight as a focus, it was the dominant thrust. Alternatively, Philanthropy was dominant in only a few (4) centers where it was given weight.

Figure 1



We also inquired about the disciplinary orientation of faculty who participate in the centers (Question 5). Respondents were again given 10 points to distribute among alternative disciplines. Management, Economics, Sociology, Humanities, Public Policy

or Administration, Social Work, Political Science and Law were listed as choices. Other disciplines cited by respondents were Psychology, History, Recreation, Higher Education Administration, Business, Medicine, Finance and Accounting, Urban Planning and Systems Engineering, Natural Resources, Art and Architecture, and Museum Studies. Not surprisingly, as indicated in Table 3, Management again is first in terms of the highest mean weight and the number of instances where it is “dominant”, i.e., given the highest weight. Public Policy and Administration was listed most often as one of the emphases however. There appears to be a rough clustering of disciplines in terms of their levels of emphasis, with Management and Public Policy/Administration at one level, Sociology and Political Science at the next, and other disciplines scattered below that. This picture is clarified somewhat when responses that gave no weight to particular disciplines are eliminated, as in Table 4. Here Sociology, Political Science, Humanities and Law form a second level cluster, followed by Economics and Social Work below that.

Table 3

Focus	N=28	Mean	SD	CV	# of centers where emphasis was dominant
Management		2.2	2.7	1.21	8
Economics		.6	1.0	1.54	0
Sociology		1.3	2.2	1.79	2
Humanities		.6	1.2	1.98	1
Public Policy/Administration		2.3	2.3	1.02	5
Social Work		.4	.7	1.74	0
Political Science		.8	1.5	1.88	1
Law		.6	1.9	3	1
Other		.9	1.8	2.10	1

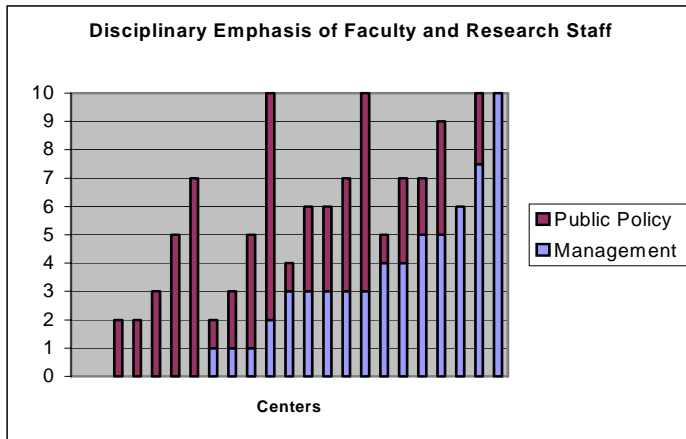
Table 4

Focus	N*	Mean*	SD*	CV*
Management	16	3.8	2.4	.64
Economics	11	1.6	.9	.56
Sociology	13	2.7	2.5	.93
Humanities	7	2.2	1.5	.64
Public Policy/Administration	19	3.4	2.1	.62
Social Work	8	1.4	.5	.38
Political Science	10	2.3	1.8	.80
Law	7	2.6	3.3	1.29
Other	8	2.9	2.3	.79

Management and Public Policy/Administration, the predominant disciplines, are compared in Figure 2. Again the area above the bars for these two foci represents all

other disciplines combined. Two respondents gave no weight to Management or Public Policy/Administration, hence are not included in this graph. Figure 2 suggests a fairly even balance between Management and Policy among faculty in those schools that combine these disciplines. Interestingly, it is less common for Management alone to be represented than it is for Public Policy/Administration. One might be tempted to interpret this as suggesting that one can study policy without management but not vice versa.

Figure 2



Balance of Teaching, Research and Service

Nonprofit academic centers can differ substantially from one another in the degree to which they emphasize teaching, research or community service in their programming. In an effort to understand how this balance varies among centers, we asked respondents to distribute 10 points among these three components or to an unspecified “Other” category (Question 2). Other responses included Conferences, Publications, Improving Practice, Supervised Action Learning, Professional Development, Administration, Fundraising, Leadership Development, Consulting, and Technical Assistance. As illustrated in Table 5, thirty centers responded to this question, all but one indicating having a Research component. Teaching, however, is the dominant mode, with a mean allocation of 3.8 points and as the strongest emphasis in eleven centers. The mean weights for Research and Teaching are comparable, but Research was the primary emphasis only half as often as teaching. Service received half the emphasis of Research and its coefficient of variation (CV) is relatively high, indicating wider variation in this response.

Table 5

N=30	Mean	SD	CV	Dominant Focus	# discipline given non-zero weight
Teaching	3.8	1.7	.45	11	27
Research	3.2	1.8	.56	6	29

Service	2.0	1.7	.86	3	21
Other	1.1	1.8	1.70	3	8

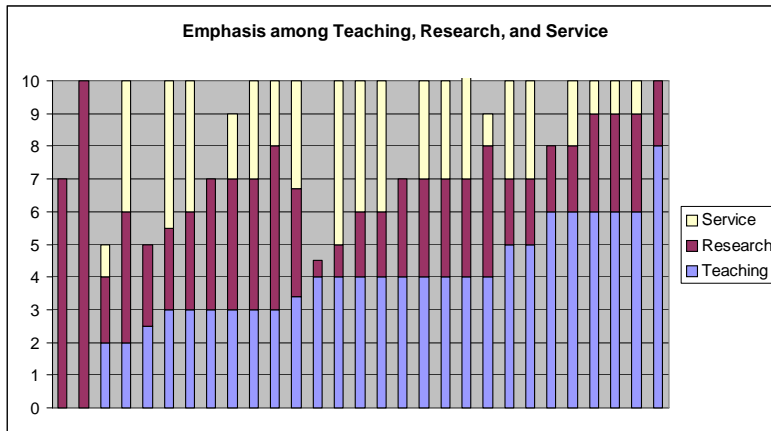
Table 6, which removes components receiving zero weights from the calculations, shows the “Other” category to be a mixed bag of alternative orientations, although commensurate in size to the three principal dimensions for those centers with an alternative emphasis. Still, this analysis maintains the basic priority ordering of Teaching, Research and Service of nonprofit academic centers overall.

Table 6

	N*	Mean*	SD*	CV*
Teaching	27	4.1	1.4	.35
Research	29	3.2	1.8	.56
Service	21	2.8	1.3	.46
Other	8	3.4	1.6	.47

Figure 3 displays the mixes of emphasis of Teaching, Research and Service for each of the respondents’ centers. All but two centers include Teaching in their repertoires and all but one include Research. Community Service is less well represented. A majority of centers display a mix of all three.

Figure 3

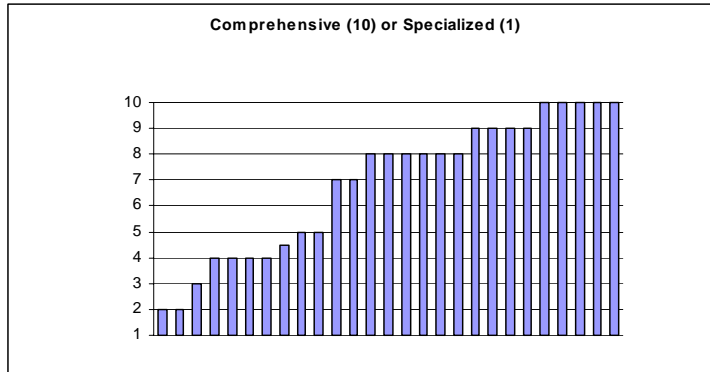


This general balance of Teaching, Research and Service was also reflected in respondents’ views of whether their centers were Comprehensive or Specialized with respect to these functions (Question 4). Respondents were asked to distribute 10 points among these two options. As Table 7 and Figure 5 illustrate, most respondents placed their centers towards the Comprehensive end of the scale. In particular, the median respondents gave a weight of 8 to the Comprehensive option.

Table 7

N=27	Mean	SD	CV
Comprehensive or Specialized	6.9	2.7	.39

Figure 5



For those centers with a Teaching component, we asked about the emphasis between degree and non-degree programs (Question 3). Again, respondents were asked to distribute 10 points between these two options. As Tables 8 and 9 indicate, degree programs are substantially more heavily emphasized than non-degree programs by the responding centers, though there is more variability in the emphasis given to non-degree programs. As indicated in Figure 6, however, there are four centers that focus exclusively on degree-related teaching and another four that focus exclusively on non-degree related teaching. Moreover, a full range of combinations of emphasis between degree and non-degree related Teaching is found among responding centers.

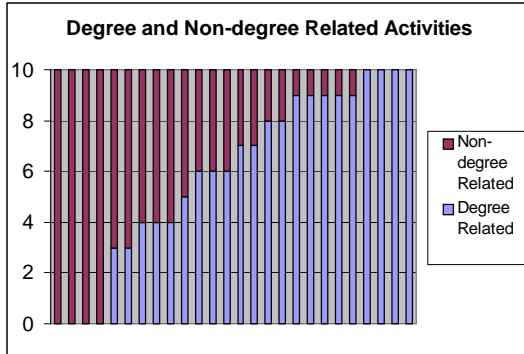
Table 8

N=27	Mean	SD	CV	# of time Dominant	# of times receiving non-zero weight
Degree Related	6.1	3.4	.56	16	22
Non-degree Related	3.9	3.4	.86	9	22

Table 9

	N*	Mean*	SD*	CV*
Degree Related	22	7.1	2.4	.33
Non-degree Related	22	4.7	3.2	.69

Figure 6



Target Markets

Nonprofit academic centers potentially serve several different geographic markets, ranging from their local communities to the international arena. Again, we asked respondents to distribute 10 points among five options, as listed in Table 10 (Question 7). Not surprisingly, the Local market received the most emphasis, with the highest mean number of points, and the most number of centers giving it the highest weight. However, the National and Regional markets were close behind the Local in terms of mean weighting. Statewide and International markets clustered together in a third tier. Interestingly, the National market was most frequently given some non-zero weight, and both National and International markets were given some weight by more respondents than other categories. As illustrated in Table 11, this overall pattern persists when we remove zero-weighted responses, although here the Regional emphasis emerges more strongly than the National one.

Table 10

N=28	Mean	SD	CV	Dominant	# of time receiving non-zero weight
Local	2.5	2.3	.95	10	19
Regional	2.4	2.5	1.08	4	19
Statewide	1.3	1.4	1.09	2	16
National	2.4	1.9	.79	5	24
International	1.6	1.4	.90	2	20

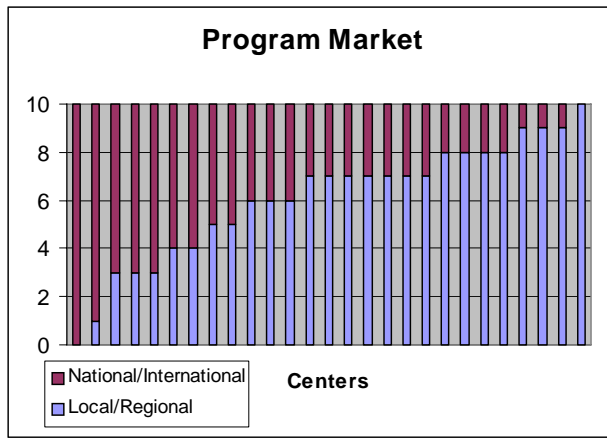
Table 11

	N*	Mean*	SD*	CV*
Local	19	3.6	1.9	.53
Regional	19	3.3	2.5	.74

Statewide	16	2.1	1.2	.57
National	24	2.7	1.8	.67
International	20	2	1.3	.63

In Figure 7, we examine the bifurcation of Local, Regional and Statewide on the one hand, and National and International on the other. Here, Local/(State)/Regional receives more emphasis than National/International, but two centers focus exclusively on one or the other, and a full range of emphases exist among centers between these two polarities.

Figure 7



Support Structure

A number of factors affect how well nonprofit academic centers are supported within their host universities. Hence, we asked respondents about their affiliations with various schools within their universities, as well as the human and financial resources to which they have access. As Figure 8 indicates, centers vary widely in their connections with schools. Some are unaffiliated with any particular school while others are connected to two or more schools. However, the modal and majority arrangement is for a center to be based in a single school.

Figure 8

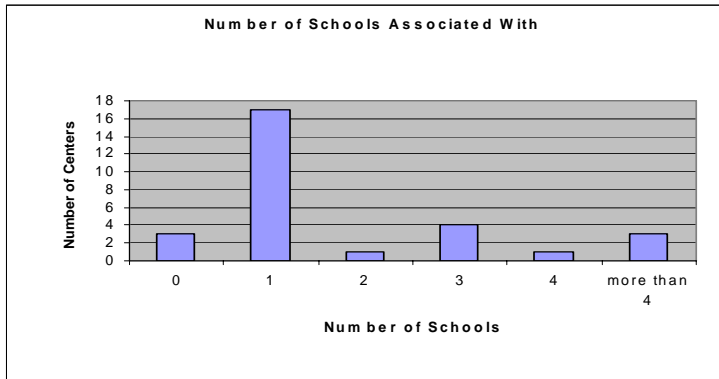


Table 12 displays various indicators of the size of responding nonprofit academic centers in terms of their human and financial resources. Staff size varies widely and there is a substantial difference between the mean and the median staff size because of the presence of a few centers with large staffs (see Figure 9). The same pattern occurs in somewhat more muted form for the number of faculty affiliates associated with centers (Figure 10). In this case, one large center is an outlier, with more than twice the number of affiliated faculty as the second largest, but the difference between the median and the mean is relatively small.

Table 12

	N	Mean	Median	SD
FTE Staff	25	7.9	4.5	9.9
Annual Budget	24	\$ 1,356,458	\$ 675,000	\$ 2,698,634
Endowment	15	\$ 7,845,333	\$ 1,500,000	\$ 18,898,631
Faculty Affiliates	22	11.8	10.5	9.7

Figure 9

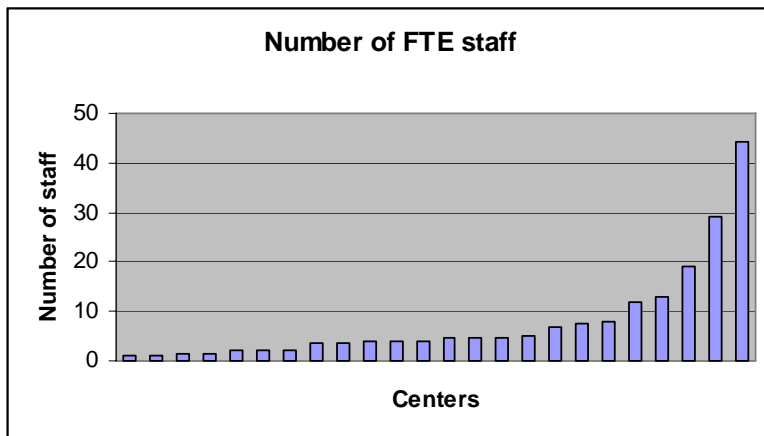
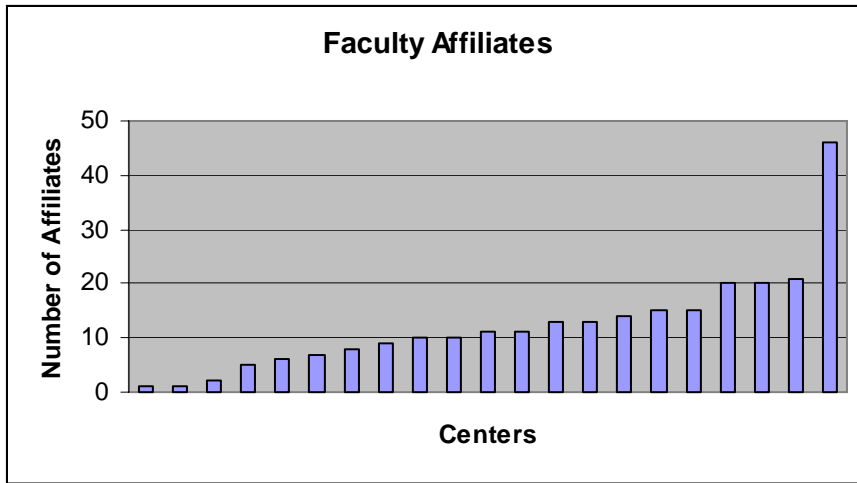
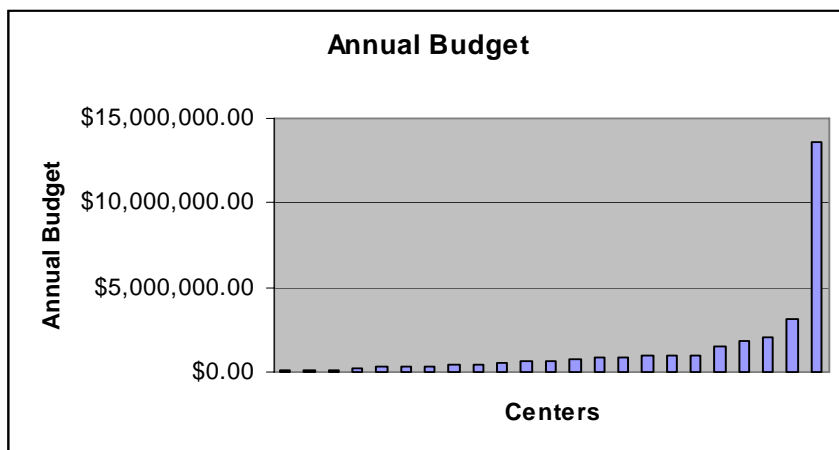


Figure 10



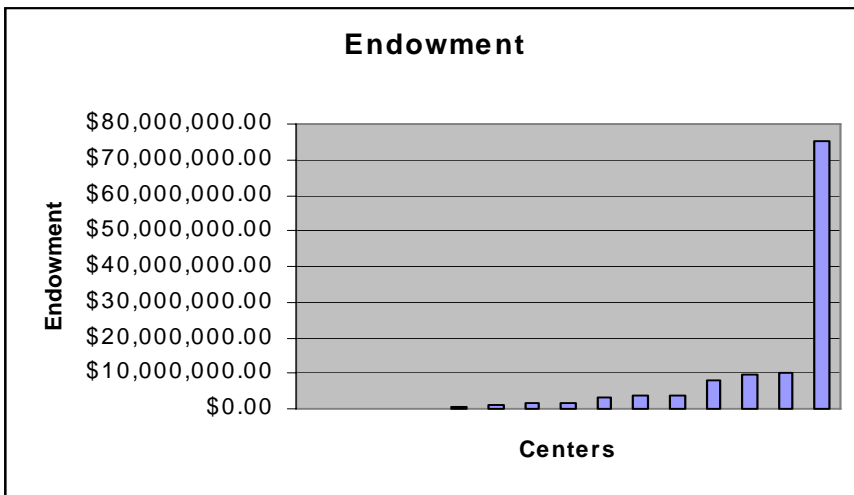
Given these variations in staff and faculty resources, it is no surprise that the distribution of annual budgets of the responding academic centers is also substantially skewed. The presence of one very large responding center (see Figure 11) is responsible for a large difference between the mean and the median. All but one of the centers have an annual budget less than \$5 million, while the outlier is almost three times that amount. It is difficult to determine, however, how consistently the staff, faculty and budget figures are estimated from one center to another. In particular, some centers may receive substantial support in the form of in-kind services from other parts of the university which are not reported explicitly in their budgets.

Figure 11



Finally, some fifteen respondents reported that their centers had endowments, although it is puzzling that only ten of these centers reported having investment income (see below). Again, there is a large difference between the mean and median endowments because, as seen in Figure 12, one center with a large endowment skews the distribution. The median endowment is quite modest, \$1.5 million, with several centers having endowments in the range of \$10 million.

Figure 12



The sources of revenue support for the responding centers also exhibit considerable variation, as seen in Tables 13 and 14. Overall, internal university support, foundation and corporate grants, and fees and tuitions appear to be the three principal mainstays of nonprofit academic centers, with research and service contracts as significant components for many centers as well. Government grants and contracts and investment income are relative rarities, with the median responding center having none of either.

Table 13

N=27	Mean	Median	SD	CV
Internal University Support	25.6	20	24.6	.96
Foundation/Corporate Grants	25.2	20	26.3	1.04
Research and Service Contracts	15.1	10	18.2	1.20

Fee and Tuition Revenues	24.9	5	33.0	1.33
Government Grants and Contracts	1.2	0	3.4	2.88
Investment Income	7.3	0	15.3	2.10

Table 14

	N*	Mean*	Median*	SD*	CV*
Internal University Support	23	30	25	23.9	.80
Foundation/Corporate Grants	18	37.8	34.5	23.6	.62
Research and Service Contracts	19	21.5	15	18.3	.85
Fee and Tuition Revenues	15	44.8	40	32.6	.73
Government Grants and Contracts	4	7.8	5	5.5	.71
Investment Income	10	19.7	15	20.2	1.03

One indicator of the financial health of nonprofit academic centers is the degree to which their revenues are diversified. To gauge this matter, we computed a Herfindahl index for each responding center that varies between 0 (completely diversified) and 1 (completely concentrated from one source). As shown in Table 15 and Figure 13, most centers are fairly diversified in their income, with only a few very highly dependent on a single source. Interestingly, as illustrated by Table 16 and 17 and Figures 14 and 15, there appears to be no strong pattern of diversification by the size of responding centers, measured in terms of either staff or annual budget. However, the largest centers do seem to be more diversified than most of the smaller ones.

Table 15

N=26	Mean	SD	CV	Median	Range
Revenue Concentration	.51	.2	.42	.46	.2052-1

Figure 13

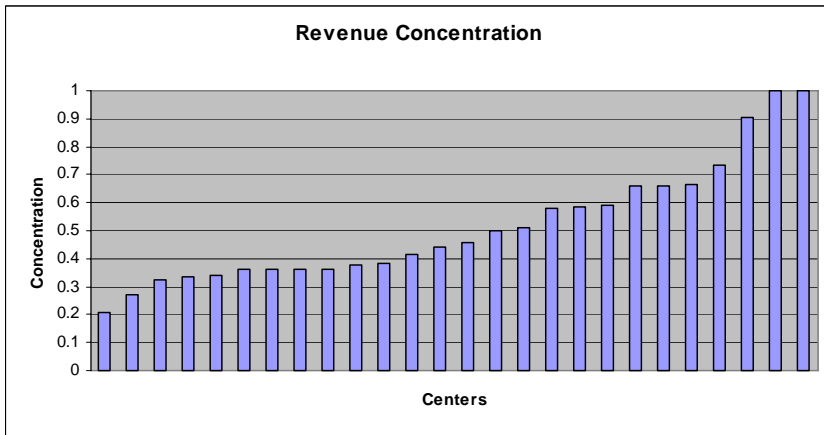


Table 16

# of Staff/ Rev.Conc.	0-.33	.33-.67	.67-1
Smallest quartile	1 center	3 centers	2 centers
Second quartile	0	4 centers	0
Third quartile	0	7 centers	0
Largest quartile	1 center	4 centers	0

Table 17

Annual Budget/Rev.Conc.	0-.33	.33-.67	.67-1
Smallest	0	5 centers	2 centers
Second	0	6 centers	0
Third	0	3 centers	1 center
Largest	2 centers	2 centers	0

Figure 14

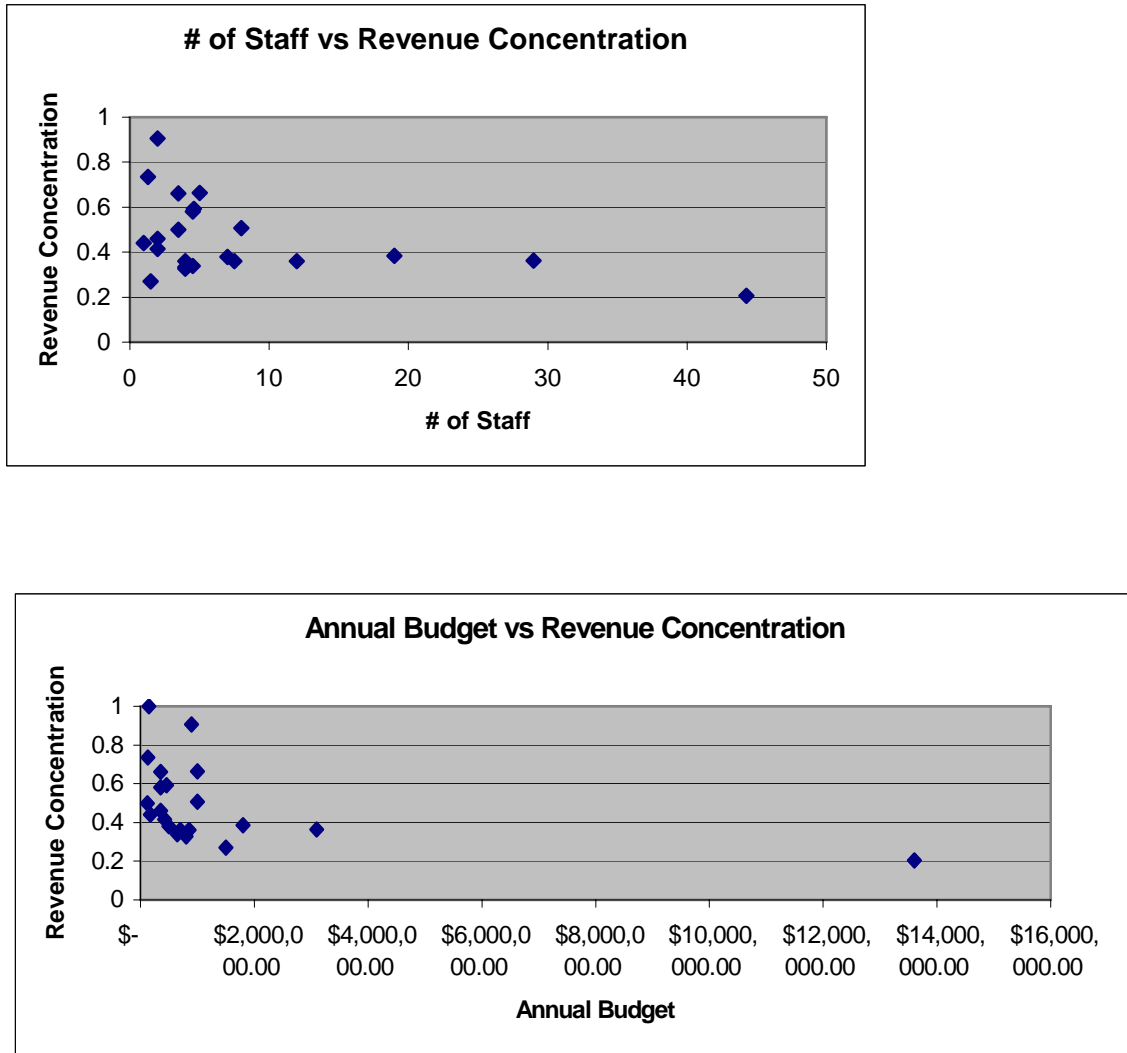


Figure 15

Distinguishing Features

Finally, respondents were asked, in qualitative terms, to identify what features made their centers particularly distinctive. Responses fell into five broad categories: the connections between teaching, research, and service; disciplinary or substantive focus; structural characteristics; special modes of program delivery; and target audiences.

Connections between teaching, research and service: Some centers focus on merging teaching and research while others are almost exclusively research-oriented. For example: “Our curriculum is multidisciplinary and both teaching and research focus on

linking theory to practice.” Another respondent indicates that: “We are engaged in considerable technical assistance work that is directly connected to our research.”

Disciplinary or substantive focus: some respondents mentioned how their centers focus on management, philanthropy, or another discipline. For example: “We focus on philanthropy and we’re international.” One center focuses on research in archival collections and another in developing people of color to lead nonprofits.

Structural characteristics: Some respondents highlighted their relationships with the business schools, or noted that they were programs not centers, or were associated with multiple schools. For example: “Effective collaboration of three schools and exposure of students representing each of three sectors coming together.”

Special modes of program delivery: One center offers all degree courses online. For example, “We offer 8 study abroad courses per year. This year we have or will have students in China, Mexico, Italy, Ireland and Brazil.”

Target audience: – One respondent reported focusing on the Pacific Northwest while another focused on an international audience. Example, “International focus combined with local/regional interest.”

Summary

Our brief survey reveals a snapshot picture of nonprofit academic centers as a diverse set of organizations that vary widely in their size, scope and organizational arrangements, the financial and human resources with which they operate, the substantive and disciplinary character of their work, their particular mixes in the academic trinity of teaching, research and service, and the geographic scope of their target audiences.

Management and philanthropy are the two main substantive foci of academic centers, and management and public policy/administration are the primary academic disciplines on which they depend. Other important niches are less intensively occupied, including public policy and international perspectives on the nonprofit sector. In addition, certain relevant academic disciplines, including economics, law, political science, and the humanities, are less prominent than one might expect in a field that is so concerned with resource issues, social change, and ethical values.

It is important, of course, to emphasize the limitations of this brief survey. The responses of knowledgeable center directors are nonetheless dependent on their subjective assessments, limits on their time and access to information, and the very limited survey instrument and statistical measures employed here. Moreover, the surveyed and responding populations may not be completely representative of all academic units that fit the definition of a nonprofit academic center. Given these caveats,

however, we believe that the current report offers useful information and a benchmark that could be use to track the development of nonprofit academic centers in the future. For Georgia State University, the data appear to support our proclivity to develop an academic center in the Southeast that is strong in economics and policy analysis, with a healthy mix of teaching, research and service, well grounded by a solid foundation of financial and human resources, and focused on service to regional, national and international constituencies.

Appendix 1

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the substantive focus of your center as it relates to the nonprofit sector?
Please distribute a total of 10 points among the following responses

Management _____ Philanthropy _____ Civil Society _____
Public Policy _____ International _____ Law _____
Other _____ (please specify)

2. What is the balance in your emphasis among teaching, research and service activity?
Please distribute a total of 10 points among the following responses

Teaching _____ Research _____ Community Service _____ Other _____
If you gave points to Other, please explain:

3. If your center is engaged in Teaching Activity, what is the balance between degree-based and non-degree related teaching?
Please distribute a total of 10 points among the following responses

Degree-related _____ Non-degree related _____

4. On a scale from 1 to 10, to what degree do you consider your center to be “comprehensive” (embracing teaching, research and service equally) or “specialized” (emphasizing primarily one of the dimensions)?

Specialized 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Comprehensive

5. What is the disciplinary emphasis of the faculty and research staff who participate in your center?
Please distribute a total of 10 points among the following responses

Management _____ Economics _____ Sociology _____ Humanities _____
Public Policy/Administration _____ Social Work _____ Political Science _____
Law _____ Other (specify) _____

6. With how many schools on your campus is your center formally attached or affiliated?

0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ more than 4 _____

7. To what extent is the market for your programs local, regional, national or international?
Please distribute a total of 10 points among the following responses

Title of Paper

Local ____ Regional ____ Statewide ____ National ____ International ____

8. What is the size of your center? Please respond with estimates of the following:

FTE staff ____ Annual Budget ____ Endowment ____
Number of Active Faculty Affiliates ____ Other indicator (specify) ____

9. What are the sources of revenue support for your center. Please provide approximate percentages for the following:

Internal University support ____ Foundation/Corporate Grants ____
Research and Service Contracts ____
Fee and Tuition revenues ____ Government grants and contracts ____
Investment Income ____ Other? (specify) ____

10. In a sentence or two, what features distinguish your center from other nonprofit academic centers in the U.S.?

Appendix 2

Centers that responded:

Arizona State University
Boston College
Case Western Reserve University
City University of New York
DePaul University
Georgetown University
Grand Valley State University
Harvard University
Indiana University - Purdue University at Indianapolis
Louisiana State University – Shreveport
New School University
New York University – Wagner School
New York University School of Law
North Park University
Northwestern University
Portland State University
Rockefeller Archive Center
Seattle University
University of California-Los Angeles
University of Maryland University College
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Missouri-Kansas City
University of San Francisco
University of Southern California
University of Texas at Austin
University of Washington
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
York University
La Salle University
Yale University

