Contact information

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Class schedule

Tuesdays, 8:30-11.30 AM
Location: Weill Hall 1230

Course overview

Private philanthropic foundations in the U.S. have long played central roles in advancing social change and shaping policy priorities, while simultaneously being relatively unconstrained by democratic accountability mechanisms. While this autonomy allows foundations to innovate, experiment and take risks that may lead to effective policy outcomes, it has also historically led to normative concerns about the power of private wealth within the public realm.

The core framework of the course will engage with these questions by utilizing an experiential approach, wherein students will participate in a hands-on process of making actual grants to nonprofit organizations. The Once Upon A Time Foundation has provided a grant of $50,000 that the class will allocate as a course-long project, directly applying the concepts discussed during class through a practical lens. Students will determine the mission and objective of the funding based on students’ values; the organization(s) to which funding will be allocated; the number of and size of the gift(s) that will be made; how the gift(s) will be awarded; and how the impact of the gift(s) will be evaluated and assessed.

The course is open to undergraduates from all departments at the University of Michigan.

Because this is a new course on a timely topical matter, the syllabus is likely to undergo some iteration based on responsiveness to student interests, direction of discussion, and current events, and the instructor reserves the right to make reasonable changes to the syllabus throughout the course of the semester, with appropriate notice to students.

Grading and assignments

Students will be evaluated based on their performance in five areas of the course.

- Beginning reflection memo: 10%
- Concluding reflection memo: 10%
- Blog posts: 15%
- Class participation (discussion contributions and preparation): 30%
- Class project: 35%
  - Two presentations in teams of four people: 10% each (20% total)
  - Final group presentation: 15%
**Reflection memos.** At the outset of the course, students will compose 5 page memos that reflect upon their past experience with charity and philanthropy, the major issues that interest them, and the charitable and philanthropic organizations that they admire and why. At the end of the course, students will compose 10 page memos that reflect on their learning in the class, how the process of engaging in grantmaking contributed to their development, and their ideas regarding charitable and philanthropic engagement going forward after the class.

**Blog posts.** Each week, students will briefly respond to a blog prompt that will extend discussion outside of class, prime questions for a future session, or raise questions about relevant current events or news stories.

**Class participation.** The course is highly interactive and discussion-based, and as such, participation is a substantive component of students’ experiences. Contributions in class should reveal a substantial familiarity with the assigned readings, a capacity to analyze the issues and problems under discussions, and an ability to incorporate, synthesize, and constructively criticize the comments of classmates.

**Class project.** Students will form teams of four people, each of which will meet outside of class to determine several nonprofit organizations to present as candidates for possible funding allocation. Teams will then formally present the following components to the class: A) the process by which they arrived at their decisions and B) a case for the organizations they chose. These mini-presentations, which should be approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length, will be made on February 11 and March 11. The teams will then make a final presentation on April 15, detailing their final recommendations regarding funding candidates and reporting on their experience with the funding exercise.

**Course policies**

- Students are expected to attend class regularly and on time, and to notify the instructor of all planned absences and late arrivals in advance.
- Paper extensions require prior arrangements with the instructor. There will be no exceptions to this policy, barring emergencies. Late papers will receive a deduction of one course grade per day.
- Students may use laptops and e-readers in class to take notes and access the course textbook, but no internet use is permitted in class.
- Students are expected to conduct themselves with academic honesty and integrity as established at [http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/](http://www.rackham.umich.edu/policies/academic_and_professional_integrity/), particularly with regard to plagiarism.

**Class schedule**

All readings will either be posted on the course CTools website or are available online as indicated in the syllabus.

**Tuesday, January 14. Introductions; overview of course structure; discussion of class values and priorities**


**Tuesday, January 21. Charity vs. philanthropy**


**Reflection memo due**

**Tuesday, January 28. Philanthropy and issues of democracy**

**Tuesday, February 4. Locus of control: Case studies of philanthropy for the education of Black children and Give Directly**
- Listen to NPR’s This American Life 503, “I was just trying to help,” August 16, 2013, at http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/503/i-was-just-trying-to-help

**Tuesday, February 11. Philanthropy workshop: first round of team presentations; Midterm Student Feedback session**

**Tuesday, February 18. Philanthropic influence in policy: Case study of the Gates Foundation**

**Tuesday, February 25. Strategic and venture philanthropy: Case study of U.S. charter schools**

**Tuesday, March 4. Spring break; no class**

**Tuesday, March 11. Philanthropy workshop: Second round of team presentations**

**Tuesday, March 18. Theories of change and strategic management: Case study of the Hewlett Foundation**

Tuesday, March 25. Measuring impact: Case study of the Robin Hood Foundation

Tuesday, April 1. Accountability, collaboration and community responsiveness: Case study of the Meyer Foundation and Southern Partners Fund

Tuesday, April 8. Philanthropy and inequality

Tuesday, April 15. Final presentations, deliberation on funding decisions, voting on funding candidates

Tuesday, April 22. Concluding comments, presentation to grantee organizations and class celebration

Final reflection memos due