**SOC 1131: PHILANTHROPY AND THE NONPROFIT SECTOR**  
Fall 2021  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00pm - 4:15pm, Emerson 108

**Course head:**  
Shai M. Dromi  
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Office hours: schedule an appointment [here](#)

**Head TF:**  
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**Course schedule:**  
Lecture  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 3:00pm - 4:15pm

Section  
Tuesdays 3:00pm - 4:15pm  
Wednesday 1:30pm - 2:45pm  
Wednesday 4:30pm - 5:45pm

**Campus philanthropy and nonprofit events (attend at least 2 of your choice)**  
Students are asked to attend two events of their choice out of a list of available enrichment workshops and talks that will take place on campus throughout the semester.

**Course website:** [https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/89247](https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/89247)

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Most moral and religious frameworks uphold some form of benevolence and charity. However, societies have different ways of thinking about the roles of philanthropy and nonprofit organizations. This course investigates the nature of philanthropy and nonprofit organizations, as well as their influence on civil society. We will consider different sociological approaches to charitable giving and apply them to substantive topics, such as competing philosophies of giving and the relationship between philanthropic and state-sponsored programs. We will also address issues of social responsibility that arise when billionaire and corporate actors engage in philanthropic work.

The course offers students two unique activity-based learning opportunities in order to gain skills and experience in the world of nonprofit organizations:
• Students will work in groups to identify and evaluate nonprofits as potential donation recipients, and will assess the impact a donation would make for those organizations. Student groups will decide how to disburse a grant provided by the Philanthropy Lab to nonprofits, and to experience first-hand the dilemmas donors face as they evaluate nonprofits for donation.
• Through a partnership with the Lemann Program on Creativity and Entrepreneurship (LPCE), student groups will develop their own nonprofit ventures to address the social impact of COVID-19. Student ventures will receive startup seed funding and, upon successful completion of the course, will compete over additional seed money. The course will include a series of guest lectures and workshops on entrepreneurship to support student venture development.

**Course Aims and Objectives**

At the end of this course, students will be able to
(a) recognize key sociological approaches to the study of nonprofits and philanthropy as a social activity;
(b) employ sociological concepts and theories to analyze the key issues nonprofits and donors face;
(c) identify community needs and evaluate demands for nonprofit intervention;
(d) define clear nonprofit intervention strategies;
(e) design minimum viable product for nonprofit venture;
(f) pitch nonprofit venture for funding support;
(g) evaluate existing nonprofit organizations in terms of their financial stability and their transparency and accountability.

**Enrollment**

• Undergraduate students from all concentrations and years are welcome to take this course.
• Students who wish to enroll should
  (a) fill out the online questionnaire at this link by 8pm on August 25th, and
  (b) request permission to enroll through their Crimson Carts.
  Students will be informed of enrollment decisions on August 25th.
• Graduate / professional students are welcome to audit the course with course head permission but cannot enroll for credit.

**Course Policies and Expectations**

*COVID-19 safety*: Face masks are required for all course activities, unless Harvard policy changes throughout the semester. Students are expected to abide by Harvard’s [Environmental Health & Safety](#) procedures at all times. Students who require accommodations with respect to these policies should contact Accessible Education Office (AEO) as soon as possible.
Attendance policy: Attendance in lectures and sections is mandatory. Please email your TF or myself in advance if you are unable to come to class for any reason.

Reading and participation: Please join class prepared to discuss the assigned reading material for each week. This means reading any required material by Tuesday each week and having it readily available on your computer so you can refer back to it during our discussion. Your active participation is crucial for the quality of our course.

Group work: It is crucial that all group members contribute equally to group work and remain engaged throughout the semester. We will conduct some group-building exercises early in the semester and will offer support and periodic check-ins throughout the course. However, we expect all students to do their parts in the group projects.

Technology: Please do not use laptops or cellphones during class. Laptop and cellphone use during classes distracts not only yourselves, but also the students sitting around and behind you.

Assignment submission: Please submit your assignments on Canvas, under ‘assignments’.

Late assignments: Assignments should be submitted by their due dates. In case of extenuating circumstances that prevent you from handing in your work on time, please email your TF or course head in advance. Otherwise, we will deduct a third of a letter grade per day that your homework is late (A becomes A-, A- becomes B+, etc.).

Communication: You are welcome to join us for office hours to discuss any aspect of the course (e.g., brainstorming policy memo ideas, clarifying concepts discussed in class, etc.). If you are not able to join our posted office hours, please feel free to reach out to any one of us and we will schedule another time for a meeting. You can expect a response to your emails within 24 hours on weekdays and within 48 hours over weekends.

Expectations for online learning

We may hold several of our course meetings on Zoom, to accommodate guest speakers. Online learning is still a new experience for many of us, and it is therefore crucial for everyone to follow these guidelines:

• While on Zoom, please close any apps that are not directly related to the course – email, Facebook, Messenger, and the likes – and put away your phone.
• Please turn on your video and keep it on throughout section and lecture times.
• On most sessions, students’ Zoom apps will be initially muted. Please use the “raise hand” function on Zoom to ask a question. Questions can also be typed into the chat box.
• On occasion, students will be unmuted for collaborative work. In these situations:
  o Please take care not to speak over other students. Keeping in mind that there may be a lag on some students’ computers, please wait one second after another student has finished talking before starting to talk.
  o In addition, please be mindful of any background noises in your surroundings that may be audible to other students (it may be necessary for you to mute yourself while not speaking).
**Lecture and section recordings**

- In order to respect all course participants’ privacy and to maintain a safe learning environment, we are asking you:
  - Not to make your own recordings of online course session.
  - Not to circulate existing course recordings.

Such actions would violate the mutual trust that our shared learning experience requires.

On our end, we will delete the recordings as soon as they are no longer needed by students who were not able to make the live sessions, and no later than the end of the semester.

**ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

Click on each assignment for the full handout.

**Individual assignments** 70%

**Research paper proposal** – due November 7, 2021. 10%


*Final due date may be adjusted once FAS posts final assignment due dates, around mid-term.*

**Analytic question** – due on 5 weeks of your choice on Monday by 2pm. 10%

*Over the course of the term, each student will formulate five questions about reading assignments:*
  - Each student will choose 5 weeks out of the course schedule to submit questions.
  - At least one question needs to be submitted for each of the first three units of the course.
  - Questions should be about one-paragraph long (5-6 sentences).
  - Analytic questions cannot be based on reading items marked with an asterisk.
  - Students should not submit more than one question a week.
  - Questions should be uploaded to Canvas by Monday at 2pm.

**Participation and attendance** 10%

**Group assignments** 30%

**Group contract** (ungraded requirement) – due date September 12, 2021. ---

Groups will set their own rules for appropriate member conduct and for ensuring equal work distribution, and will task each group member with specific parts of the work.

**Memo 1: Problem statement** – due date September 26, 2021 10%

A 3-4 page double-spaced memo. Groups will receive initial funding upon satisfactory completion of this assignment.

**Draft: Lean Canvas** (ungraded requirement) – due in class October 20, 2021 ---

A 1-page business plan is due in class for peer feedback.
**Memo 2: Nonprofit Selection – due November 21, 2021**

A 5-page double-spaced memo presenting the nonprofit you would like to support, describing the criteria on which your selected nonprofit excels and a summary of your research into its activities.

**Memo 3: Grant application – due date December 1, 2021**

A 5-6 page double spaced memo, along with lean canvas.

**Donation Proposal Pitch— November 29, 2021**

Student groups will pitch their selected nonprofit organization to the class for donation.

**Nonprofit Venture Pitch—December 1, 2021**

Student groups will present their venture in class and will award seed funding by class vote.

The final grades will follow the College’s grading system:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100% to 94.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of the grade of A, is of extraordinary distinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>&lt; 94.0% to 90.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>&lt; 90.0% to 87.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that indicates an adequate and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>&lt; 87.0% to 84.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>&lt; 84.0% to 80.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>&lt; 80.0% to 77.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of the grade of A, is of extraordinary distinction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>&lt; 77.0% to 74.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that indicates a good comprehension of the course material, a good command of the skills needed to work with the course material, and the student’s full engagement with the course requirements and activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>&lt; 74.0% to 70.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that indicates an adequate and satisfactory comprehension of the course material and the skills needed to work with the course material and that indicates the student has met the basic requirements for completing assigned work and participating in class activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>&lt; 70.0% to 67.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work that is unsatisfactory but that indicates some minimal command of the course materials and some minimal participation in class activities that is worthy of course credit toward the degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>&lt; 67.0% to 64.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>&lt; 64.0% to 61.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>&lt; 61.0% to 0.0%</td>
<td>Earned by work which is unsatisfactory and unworthy of course credit towards the degree.</td>
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**Academic Integrity**

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For research paper assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate.

However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. This policy applies to you individually, when you work on individual assignments, but also to your group for group
assignments. Any assignment submitted by your group should be the product of the its own collective labor.

If you or your group received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), this assistance should also be acknowledged.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students needing academic adjustments or accommodations because of a documented disability must present their Faculty Letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) and speak to me by the end of the second week of the term, September 10, 2021. Failure to do so may result in my inability to respond in a timely manner. All discussions will remain confidential, although I may contact AEO to discuss appropriate implementation.

READING MATERIAL

- All reading items are available electronically - links are provided on the PDF version of the syllabus.
- There is no need to buy any of the course books.

WRITING AND RESEARCH HELP

Writing Help: The Departmental Writing Fellow (DWF) assists anyone taking a sociology course with individual consultations and with workshops. You can find out more about the DWF’s work and schedule a meeting here. In addition, there is a video of a writing workshop in sociology online, which may be useful to course students. The Harvard College Writing Center is also available for consultations.

The Sociology Department also offers advising in quantitative and qualitative methods – please see the Department’s website for details.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 – September 1, 2021 – Introductions.
The first session will be devoted to introducing ourselves, setting course expectations, and providing key definitions that will be used throughout the course. We will also begin examining the broad social and economic effects of COVID-19, and the ways nonprofit organizations have begun addressing them.

Recommended reading:
Unit 1: The social meanings of giving.
In the first unit, we will consider how charitable giving connects to broader social dynamics by relating several contemporary examples to readings in cultural and economic sociology.

Week 2 – September 8, 2021 – Giving and inequality.
Charitable giving is intrinsically connected to inequality. This connection may be explicit (for example, when the rich give to the poor) or subtle (for example, when donors give generously to a museum, and gain social status in the process). This week, we will examine some key mechanics underlying giving relationships.

Readings

Recommended

Group work
Students form groups, receive topic assignments, and begin working on group contracts (the recommended reading item from week 1 can help group members get a sense of potential challenges…).

Week 3 – September 13 and 15, 2021 – Strings attached.
Receiving a charitable gift often imposes considerable constraints on the recipient. This week we will evaluate several contemporary and historical examples for such constraints (as well as attempts to alleviate them). We will put them into social context using concepts from economic sociology.

Readings

Listen
Act one (“Money for nothing and your cows for free”) in This American Life 503: I Was Just Trying to Help.

Recommended

Group work
Groups develop problem statement and conduct initial research into their nonprofit area.
**Week 4**  
**September 20, 2021 – Who gives, and why?**  
Giving is inextricably tied to inequality from the donor side as well. While common sense dictates that those who have more give more, there is also ample evidence to the contrary. This week we will take a critical look at who in society is compelled to give and volunteer more, and examine several explanations for this disparity.

**Readings**  


**September 22, 2021 - Workshop 1: First steps toward your nonprofit venture**  
Main topics: Problem statements, unseating tricky problems, creating a user persona  
Facilitated by **Rebekah Emanuel**, Head of Social Entrepreneurship, Harvard Innovation Lab

**Unit 2 – Making a good intervention.**  
*Given the various social constraints on charitable giving covered in unit 1, how can we make a successful intervention? In unit 2 we will explore several ways to evaluate nonprofits and to examine their potential impact.*

**Week 5**  
**September 27, 2021 – Values and philosophies of giving.**  
This week we will consider how long-standing traditions and philosophies affect the ways donors and policy makers think about charitable giving. These include ideas about the proper relationship between civil society and the state, about the causes of poverty and social suffering, and the extent to which individuals can intervene.

**Readings**  


**Watch**  
“The why and how of effective altruism” – a TED talk by Peter Singer.

**Recommended readings**  

*Singer, Peter. "What should a billionaire give – and what should you?" *The New York Times*
Group work
Groups submit their first memo and begin working on interviewing 3 potential beneficiaries/users. The group develops a list of at least 8 nonprofits that meet the goals of the group and gather basic information about them. A group representative emails the full list to head TF.

**September 29, 2021 - Workshop 2: Understanding community needs and active listening**
Facilitated by Fahima Begum, fellow at the Mindic Program in Engaged Scholarship

**Week 6**
October 4 and 6, 2021 – Is philanthropy always the best option?
*Despite the good intentions that are usually associated with philanthropy, there are also many arguments against attempting to solve public problems through charity. This week, we will review such arguments and examine several examples of unsuccessful attempts at charitable intervention.*

Readings


Recommended readings


Group work
Groups interview 3 potential beneficiaries / users, and prepare initial material for their lean canvas.
Each group meets to narrow the organizations to be considered to a list of three.
• Should be based on criteria established by the group.
• Each organization is assigned to one member of the group for further study.
-A representative of each group should email head TF the list of organization assignments.

**Week 7**
October 13, 2021 - Workshop 3: Developing an elevator pitch and thinking through the lean canvas
Facilitated by Rebekah Emanuel, Head of Social Entrepreneurship, Harvard Innovation Lab
**Group work**

In preparation for this week:
- Watch Elevator Pitch: [https://vimeo.com/481276132/1082c0144d](https://vimeo.com/481276132/1082c0144d) (minutes 0-9:20)
- Attempt to make a 1 liner that fits the form: “For [user] who has [x problem] we [what you do]”
- Attempt to fill in Lean Canvas boxes in this order:
  - First fill this out for the Beneficiaries. Fill out first the 1) problem 2) customer segment 3) Unique value proposition 4) solution
  - Then model for the funder/donor. Fill out first the 1) problem 2) customer segment 3) Unique value proposition 4) solution

**Week 8**

**October 18 and 20, 2021 – Nonprofits and public disclosure.**

*Tax codes and government forms provide donors with invaluable information about nonprofits, and they also tell us a great deal about how the state conceives of the nonprofit sector. This week we will examine the types of information nonprofits are required to make public in order to maintain a tax-exempt status.*

**Readings**

Bromley, Patricia and John W. Meyer. “‘They are all organizations’: The cultural roots of blurring between the nonprofit, business, and government sectors.” *Administration and Society* 49, no 7 (2014): 939-966.


**Group work**

Groups prepare draft lean canvas for class on October 20 and receive feedback from other students and course staff. Groups decide on a finalist and let head TF know. Over the next weeks, groups will conduct in-depth research on their finalist. Group members will receive tasks such as data collection, interviewing a charity representative, etc. Task division must be approved by TFs or myself. An interview with a charity staff member (over Zoom or face-to-face) and/or a site visit is required.

**Week 9 – October 25 and 27, 2021 - Evaluating nonprofits.**

*There are many ways to evaluate what constitutes a good intervention. A charity could provide immediate assistance to the needy, develop public education programs, or work with policy makers for long-term solutions. In these two meetings, we will review several ways of evaluating nonprofit interventions and consider the assumptions on which they rely.*


**Group work**

Groups continue to evaluate finalist nonprofit for donation

**Week 10 –**

**November 1, 2021 - Workshop 4: Developing hypotheses and testing demands**

Facilitated by Rebekah Emanuel, Head of Social Entrepreneurship, Harvard Innovation Lab

**Group work**

In preparation for our November 1 workshop…

- Update the elevator pitch and lean canvas based on feedback
- Make a list of the top 5 “throw in the towel” risks—e.g., “People don’t want to use this”, “I can’t get money for this”, etc.
- Listen to the “Easiest Ways to Test User Demand”
  - Recorded video is available [here](#)
  - The session slides are available [here](#)
- Come up with 2 ways to test one of your top risks

**After workshop:** Students develop scheme to test demands for their venture and execute it. Plan must be approved by course staff member.

**November 3, 2021 -- Visit to the Widener Library**

Meeting with Kathleen Sheehan, Research Librarian, Ross Mulcare, Associate University Archivist for Community Engagement, and Kate Donovan, Associate Librarian for Public Services and Curator of the Harry Elkins Widener Collection, to tour the building and examine how the Widener family gift to Harvard University continues to affect campus life.

We will meet in the Widener Library lobby at 2:55pm sharp – please be on time!

Reading items for the visit


*Talk given by Harvard administrator William Bentinck-Smith on the occasion of Widener Library’s 65th anniversary (from the Harvard University Archives).*

**Unit 3 – Making an impact.**

Having reviewed the workings of nonprofit organizations, as well as ways to evaluate them, we will now take a step back and look at some ways in which philanthropic work may or may not make a broader social impact in select sites.

**Week 11**

**November 8, 2021 – Corporate philanthropy**
Even though this course focuses on nonprofits, corporations have become major actors in the philanthropic world—both by engaging in truly nonprofit activities and by creating for-profit programs that address social problems. This week we will review key ways in which corporate actors engage with social problems, and compare them to nonprofit actors.

Readings

Recommended

Group work
Students continue to test demand for their venture and to evaluate their finalist nonprofit.

November 10, 2021 - Nonprofits, advocacy, and activism.
A key way in which nonprofits work is through advocacy, and in this week we will take a critical look at how nonprofits interact with the political sphere and how philanthropists further their political agendas through donation. We will also look at emerging ways by which nonprofits try to engage activists and donors.

Readings

Recommended:


Group work
Students continue to test demand for their venture and to evaluate their finalist nonprofit.

Week 12 – November 15 and 17, 2021 - Race, ethnicity, and philanthropy.
One of the key issues philanthropists have focused on is racial disparity. But has philanthropy helped overcome race-based inequality? Or has it only made a superficial impact while leaving structural inequalities intact? We will consider this topic using both historical and contemporary examples.

Listen

**Group work**
Students continue to test demand for their venture, evaluate their nonprofit, and work on their grant applications and pitches.

**Week 13 – November 22, 2021 – Hearing from course alumni**
We will hear from past course alumni about the results of their donations, where their ventures currently stand, and what additional professionalization activities they have completed since taking the course.

**Group work**
Students continue to test demand for their venture, evaluate their nonprofit, and work on their grant applications and pitches.

**Unit 4: Decision-making.**
**Week 14 – November 29 and December 1, 2021 - Group presentations.**
We will hear from students on November 29 about the nonprofits they have evaluated and on December 1 about their own nonprofit ventures. After each session, students will allocate funding to nonprofits and to student ventures by vote.

Due December 15, 2021 – Research paper. (This date may be adjusted once the registrar’s office posts final assignment due dates, around mid-term.)

**Online Resources**

- Charity Navigator. A website that rates charitable organizations and provides information on finances and transparency. [www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)
- GiveWell. Provides in-depth information and recommendations about charities. [www.givewell.org](http://www.givewell.org)
- Giving What We Can. Charity reviews and recommendations. [www.givingwhatwecan.org](http://www.givingwhatwecan.org)
- Guidestar. Provides basic data about nonprofits and their financial information. [www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)
- Foundation Center. Includes a database on grantmakers and grants and does research, education, and training. [www.fdncenter.org](http://www.fdncenter.org)
- Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Academic center focused on philanthropy. [www.philanthropy.iupui.edu](http://www.philanthropy.iupui.edu)
- Non-Profit Quarterly [www.nonprofitquarterly.org](http://www.nonprofitquarterly.org)