

- Learn some of the basic philosophy of altruism and philanthropy, from both classic and contemporary sources.
- Learn about contemporary schools of charitable giving.
- Learn to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of existing charities and philanthropic organizations.
- Work in teams to find charitable causes worthy of funding and help facilitate the distribution of money to selected organizations.
- Continue working to improve as writers and public speakers.

HUB Areas

HU 450 meets the learning outcomes for the following HUB areas:

Philosophical Inquiry and Life's Meanings

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of notable works in philosophical thought, make meaningful connections among them, and be able to relate those works to their own lives and those of others. Students in HU 450 will become acquainted with some of the classic philosophical theories of charity and will read deeply in one of the most influential contemporary schools of philosophical thought, effective altruism.
2. Students will demonstrate the reasoning skills and possess the vocabulary to reflect upon significant philosophical questions and topics such as what constitutes a good life, right action, meaningful activity, knowledge, truth, or a just society. Students in HU XXX will be asked to consider the role charity has in the good life and to reflect on the place philanthropic organizations have in a just society.

Ethical Reasoning

1. Students will be able to identify, grapple with, and make a judgment about the ethical questions at stake in at least one major contemporary public debate, and engage in a civil discussion about it with those who hold views different from their own. Students will engage contemporary public debates on the role of charity in a liberal, pluralist society.
2. Students will demonstrate the skills and vocabulary needed to reflect on the ethical responsibilities that face individuals (or organizations, or societies, or governments) as they grapple with issues affecting both the communities to which they belong and those identified as "other." They should consider their responsibilities to future generations of humankind, and to stewardship of the Earth. Students in HU 450 will be challenged with the possibility that individual charity is a crucial responsibility that they have both to society at large and to the domestic and international "other."

The Individual in Community

1. As they prepare to give, students will be asked to reflect on the work of Edgar Villanueva, author of *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*. In that book, Villanueva offers a postcolonial critique of philanthropy and urges charitable givers to avoid replicating harmful colonial patterns. Following Villanueva, students will be asked to reflect on how their participation in a philanthropic enterprise either conforms with or diverges from the patterns Villanueva identifies—and how their racial, ethnic, or national identity shapes their thoughts about giving.

2. As they evaluate charities, students will effectively join the philanthropic community as active participants in the distribution of funds to worthy causes. As a part of that process, they will interview representatives from local and international organizations as they seek to evaluate the effectiveness of individual charities. They will also hear from workers in the world of professional philanthropy, as guest speakers from foundations in the Boston area join the class to share their wisdom.

Course Materials

Required course materials are available for purchase at the BU Bookstore. You may search out used copies of the textbook on the web, but it is your responsibility to assure they will be delivered promptly. Search by ISBN to ensure that you get the correct edition.

Required for purchase:

Banerjee, Abhijit and Esther Duflo. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012). ISBN: 9781610390934.

Singer, Peter. *The Most Good You Can Do*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. ISBN: 9780300219869

Some shorter course readings will be made available on the course web site or via the BU Libraries web site. You are welcome to access these texts electronically, but you should have a reliable way to annotate them if you do.

Course Readings

The readings for this course are complex, but they are all eminently manageable. Read slowly and carefully; re-read if time permits. Pay close attention to the way that our authors choose their words. *Always read with a pencil in hand*. Take notes in the margins or in a separate notebook. In your notes, point out tensions that exist within the text, emphasize what seem to be key ideas or phrases, and ask questions about difficult passages.

Assignments and Grading

There are three tent-pole assignments for CGS 450. The first is an individual giving statement. Early in the semester, each student will compose a brief personal essay explaining their philosophy of charity and establishing their own giving priorities. The second is a charity evaluation due shortly after spring break. In it, students will put the principles of charity evaluation described in the first half of the course into practice in trying to determine the effectiveness of a cause or organization of their choosing. As part of the essay, they will also analyze charities' publicly available financial records and conduct interviews with representatives from relevant organizations to get a first-hand look at their inner workings. Students will then break into groups of three; each group will pick one of the evaluated charities as a target for more focused evaluation and analysis. Then, in a culminating presentation that is also the third major assignment, each group will advocate for one charity, explaining to their classmates why Philanthropy Lab funds should be directed toward it. Course grants will be determined by a full-class vote conducted in the penultimate class meeting. Comprehensive descriptions of all these assignments will be made available later in the semester.

The six components of a student's course grade, then, are as follows: the personal giving philosophy, the charity evaluation, the group presentation, a midterm exam, a final, and attendance and participation. Papers and exams meet the HUB requirements for requirements for Ethical Reasoning and Philosophical Inquiry and Life's Meanings. Work within the charity evaluation groups will fulfill the HUB requirement for Teamwork/Collaboration.

The grading breakdown for assigned work is as follows:

Personal Giving Philosophy: 10%
Charity Evaluation Paper: 20%
Group Presentation: 20%
Midterm Exam: 15%
Final Exam: 20%
Attendance and Participation: 15%

Funding Incentives

Some of the funds provided by the Philanthropy Lab are financial incentives tied to student participation in two extra course activities. The first is a Giving Goal, a statement provided to the Philanthropy Lab (anonymously or not) outlining the student's plans regarding the role of charity in their lives beyond the course. The second is a pair of surveys, one issued at the beginning of the course and a second at the end, that track students' changing attitudes about philanthropy. Completion of both activities is highly encouraged as the Philanthropy Lab's willingness to continue partnering with Boston University is in part dependent on student participation in them.

Class policies

Regular attendance is expected. Each student will be allowed two absences; further absences will result in a lower grade for the class. Students who come to class without the necessary materials will risk being marked absent. Students who accrue more than four absences will fail the course. If you anticipate a long absence from the course due to illness, please contact the professors as soon as possible.

In HU 450, a high value is placed on in-class participation, and earnest effort is prized over the perfect comprehension of texts and ideas. I aim to create an inclusive classroom where students with a variety of backgrounds and opinions feel comfortable sharing their perspectives. If you are a student who doesn't always feel comfortable talking in class, I encourage you to challenge yourself to do so here; your ideas are valuable! And if you are a student for whom in-class participation is easy, I remind you that it is possible to talk too much. Be aware that high-quality discussions require some students to be bold in stating their positions and other students to be reflective in making space for other voices.

The final paper will be accepted electronically and must be submitted in a Microsoft Word-compatible format (e.g. .doc or .docx) to our course Blackboard page (learn.bu.edu). Assignments must be submitted by 11:59 p.m. on the due date and will be marked down 1/3 of a grade for each day late.

Plagiarism

According to Boston University's Academic Conduct Code, to which every incoming freshman promises to adhere, plagiarism is "representing the work of another as one's own. Plagiarism includes but is not

limited to the following: copying the answers of another student on an examination, copying or restating the work or ideas of another person or persons in any oral or written work (printed or electronic) without citing the appropriate source, and collaborating with someone else in an academic endeavor without acknowledging his or her contribution. Plagiarism can consist of acts of commission – appropriating the words or ideas of another – or omission – failing to acknowledge/document/credit the source or creator of words or ideas.” Plagiarism is forbidden in Humanities 450. Confirmed instances of plagiarism in student work will be part of the student’s permanent record and can result in a variety of punishments, ranging from lowered grades to suspension to, in egregious cases, expulsion. Students who have any questions about plagiarism should consult the professor.

Students are expected to produce original writing in HU 450 and may not use AI writing programs like ChatGPT or AI writing assistants like Quillbot.

Class Schedule

The following schedule may be revised as the semester unfolds and supplementary readings are added; all changes will be announced in class. Make sure you consult your syllabus if you are absent.

Week 1 (January 22) – INTRO AND SYLLABUS

Readings: syllabus (available online).

Week 2 (January 29) – Philosophical Background

Readings: Bentham on Utilitarianism (on Blackboard); Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality” (on Blackboard); Noddings, “Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education.”

Week 3 (February 5) – Effective Altruism 1

Readings: Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do*, 1-81.

Assignment Due: Individual Giving Philosophy

Week 4 (February 12) – Effective Altruism 2

Readings: Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do*, 90 – 180.

Week 5 (February 21) – Is international giving better than domestic giving? Is direct aid better than advocacy? Critiques of Effective Giving.

February 19 is Presidents’ Day; Monday classes are running on Wednesday, February 21.

Readings: Gabriel and McElwee, “Effective Altruism, Global Poverty, and Systemic Change,” in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues* (available through the BU Libraries web site); selections from William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden* (available on Blackboard).

Week 6 (February 26) – Choosing Causes 1

Readings: Banerjee and Duflo, *Poor Economics*, 1-70.

Week 7 (March 4) – Banerjee and Duflo, 71-182.

Midterm Examination

Week 8 (March 11) – SPRING BREAK; CLASSES SUSPENDED

Week 9 (March 18) – Individual Charity Presentations

Assignment Due: Charity Effectiveness Evaluation and Individual Presentations.

Week 10 (March 25) – Does charity replicate colonialism?

Readings: excerpts from Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth*; de Waal, “Ethics in Translation: Principles and Power in the Philanthropic Encounter” (in *Giving Well*); Saunders-Hastings “Benevolent Giving and the Problem of Paternalism,” in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues*; Irfan, “Neo-colonial Philanthropy in the UK” (on Blackboard).

Week 11 (April 1) – Is big philanthropy a threat to democracy?

Readings: excerpts from Reich, *Just Giving*; LaMarche, “Democracy and the Donor Class” (on Blackboard); excerpts from Callahan, *The Givers* (on Blackboard).

Week 12 (April 8) – Group Presentations

Assignment Due: Group Presentations

Week 13 – April 15 – PATRIOTS’ DAY HOLIDAY; CLASSES SUSPENDED

Week 14 – April 22 – Charity Vote Day

Week 15 – April 29 – Donation Presentation Ceremony

Final Exam: Date and Time TBD