

*[This syllabus is subject to change; do not print. Refer to the electronic version on Blackboard.]*

## **CGS HU 450: Giving Well**

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**Office Hours: Mondays, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.;**  
**Wednesdays, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m., 12:05 – 1:05 p.m.**  
**Fridays, 10:00 – 11:00 a.m.; or by appointment.**

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### **Course Description**

From the course bulletin: **Giving Well is a class that explores the theory and practice of impactful charity. Students will read influential texts on philanthropy and apply ideas from these texts as they evaluate the effectiveness of existing charities. The course is supported by a grant from the Philanthropy Lab, and it culminates with the disbursement of potentially upwards of \$50,000 to causes selected by students.**

The United States is one of the most charitable nations in the world. According to the Giving Institute, Americans of all income levels donated nearly a half trillion dollars in 2021. And Americans with lower incomes give as much as five times as much (measured by percentage of income) as their wealthy counterparts. But while Americans are generous, they are not particularly thoughtful about their giving. As Peter Singer notes, roughly two-thirds of Americans do no research at all before giving their money away. Simply put, we donate a lot, but we don't think much about why or how we do so.

This course is intended to help remedy that problem, asking students to think seriously about the purpose, structure, and philosophy of charitable giving. In the process, we will reflect on a number of basic questions: How do we define charity? What counts as charity—and what doesn't? Are people ethically obliged to donate their money? What motivates people to do so? How might we encourage people to give more? How should we pick our charities? Which charities do the most good? As we seek answers, we will be guided by a group of philosophers now commonly known as effective altruists. Effective altruism is a movement committed to encouraging givers to do the most good they can with their donations, and students will read a number of that movement's central texts.

But our discussion of these themes will not be merely theoretical. Throughout the semester, course participants will do research on a variety of charitable causes and philanthropic organizations in an effort to select three or four that are most worthy of funding. And the course will culminate in the distribution of upwards of \$50,000 to these groups. The money is generously provided by the Fort Worth-based Philanthropy Lab, whose mission it is to support courses like CGS HU 450 at colleges and universities all over the United States.

### **Course Objectives**

In CGS HU 450, students will be expected to make progress in attaining the following goals:

--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. Hard copies of all texts are required.

*Required for purchase:*

Banerjee, Abhijit and Esther Duflo. *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2012). ISBN: 978-1541706187.

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

CGS HU 450 Coursepack

*Students must acquire hard copies of all course texts*, and all materials are available for purchase at the BU Bookstore. If you would rather order the books online, feel free, but search by ISBN to ensure that you get the correct edition. Also, if you would rather print out pdfs of the readings included in the coursepack, you are welcome to do so; they will be made available on Blackboard.

## 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 third-to-last 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: 15%

Group Presentation: 20%

Midterm Exam: 15%

Final Exam: 20%

Attendance and Participation: 20%

## **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.

HU 450 is a screen-free course, so laptops, e-readers, and iPads are not permitted in class. (An exception is made for students with relevant accommodations.) Make sure you come to class every day with hard copies of all the necessary assigned materials and a pencil or pen and paper. Students may not consult electronic devices of any kind during quizzes or exams, and those who are seen doing so will receive an automatic zero and be subject to an academic misconduct investigation.

Papers 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](http://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 and AI**

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 26) – INTRO AND SYLLABUS**

Readings: syllabus (available online); Reich, excerpts from *Just Giving* (in coursepack).

### **Week 2 (February 2) – Philosophical Background**

Readings: Bentham on Utilitarianism; Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality"; Noddings, "Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education"; excerpts from Butler, *Frames of War* (all in coursepack).

### **Week 3 (February 9) – Effective Altruism 1**

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

*Assignment Due: Individual Giving Philosophy*

#### **Week 4 (February 17) – Effective Altruism 2**

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

*February 16 is Presidents' Day; Monday classes are running on Tuesday, February 17.*

#### **Week 5 (February 23) – Choosing Causes 1**

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

#### **Week 6 (March 2) – Choosing Causes 2**

Readings: Banerjee and Duflo, 71-182.

*Midterm Examination*

#### **Week 7 (March 9) – SPRING BREAK; CLASSES SUSPENDED**

#### **Week 8 (March 16) – Critiques of Effective Giving**

Readings: Ashford, “Severe Poverty as an Unjust Emergency” (available on Blackboard); Shaefer et al., “Can poverty in America be compared to conditions in the world's poorest countries?” (on Blackboard)..

#### **Week 9 (March 23) – Individual Charity Presentations**

*Assignment Due: Initial Charity Evaluation (due March 22 at 11:59 p.m.) and Lightning Talks.*

#### **Week 10 (March 30) – Does international charity replicate colonialism?**

Readings: excerpts from Cesaire, “Discourse on Colonialism (on Blackboard); Saunders-Hastings “Benevolent Giving and the Problem of Paternalism,” in *Effective Altruism: Philosophical Issues* (on Blackboard); Irfan, “Neo-colonial Philanthropy in the UK” (on Blackboard).

#### **Week 11 (April 6) – Group Presentations**

*Assignment Due: Group Presentations*

**Week 12 (April 13) – Vote Day**

**Week 13 (April 22) – Donation Presentation Ceremony, President Gilliam visit.**

*April 20 is Patriot's Day; Monday classes are running on Wednesday, April 22.*

**Week 14 – April 27 – Final Exam**