



Philanthropy & the Common Good

Spring 2026

Mondays 6:00-8:30pm / Jenkins and Nanovic Hall B079

HESB 30348 / POLS 30142 / CNST 30423

Jonathan T. Hannah, M.Sc., J.D., LL.M.

Office Hours: Fridays from 10:00-11:00am 5th floor of Flanner Hall

Phone: (313) 365-0229

Email: jhannah@nd.edu

“Very little good can be accomplished, or evil avoided, without the aid of money.” – Catherine McAuley

“This college cannot fail to succeed. Before long, it will develop on a large scale. It will be one of the most powerful means for good in this country.” – Edward Sorin

Course Description:

The primary objectives of this course are (1) to learn about the role philanthropy plays in society, and (2) to make real philanthropic grants to local Michiana nonprofit organizations. The funding comes from our partner organization, The Philanthropy Lab, generous individual benefactors, Notre Dame’s Office of Public Affairs and Communications, the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture, The Sheedy Family Program in Economy, Enterprise and Society, and the Center for Citizenship and Constitutional Government. The total sum of our awarded grants will depend on a few factors discussed on the first day of class, and will likely fall somewhere between \$45,000 and \$50,000. This is a serious responsibility and students are expected to conduct thoughtful analysis in the decision making process.

The grant funding decisions will ultimately be made by the students. Each student will be a member of the Board of Directors, and each student will have equal weight when voting. I, as instructor, serve as Advisor to the Board and have no voting authority or privilege concerning the board.¹

¹ I reserve the right to veto any nomination or award to a nonprofit organization that disrespects the mission of Notre Dame and our Catholic character. The class may not award grants to the University of Notre Dame itself. Awards to nonprofit organizations where there is a conflict of interest, such as familial employment, are allowed only when such conflicts are disclosed and taken into consideration by the board. Additionally, the class may not award grants to the five nonprofits selected by the 2024 class. All recipients must be 501(c)3 organizations with a 990 report from the past year and have current tax exempt status from the IRS.

In order to execute this grant-making process, each student will have two main responsibilities. First, each student will be placed on a site visit group team that consists of two to three members. Second, each student will sign up to execute a programmatic assignment that has unique opportunities. Instructions regarding the responsibilities for site visit teams and programmatic teams will be outlined in a separate document and distributed on the first day of class.

Site visit teams are expected to conduct one site visit with a local nonprofit. All nonprofits visited by site visit teams will then be invited to submit a proposal for funding. All nonprofits must be in the Michiana area, defined as Elkhart, La Porte, Marshall, St. Joseph, and Stark counties in Indiana, plus Berrien and Cass counties in Michigan. Teams are highly encouraged to conduct site visits in person. Virtual site visits may be permitted under special circumstances, including distance from campus.

All nonprofits engaged must have certified nonprofit status and accessible 990 forms submitted to the IRS. As a class we will use the semester to explore local nonprofits and then carefully and systematically award between three and five grants. The minimum grant award will be \$5,000, and the maximum will be \$25,000. Some classes in this syllabus are labeled as Board Meetings and will serve as the venue for these decisions.

At some point during the semester, students are also expected to volunteer at a local nonprofit organization for a few hours. Students will write a brief reflection paper about this experience and how volunteering their time compares to giving monetarily.

During other class days we will gather and discuss how philanthropy shapes society. We will look at philanthropy and charity first through the lens of the founders and early Americans, and then from different religious and philosophical traditions. We will then examine how philanthropy evolved throughout American history and how it works today. This will allow us to discuss serious questions as a class. What is the role of philanthropy in 21st century America? Why are nonprofits needed today? How do nonprofits function in relation to each other and the layers of government?

Reading Assignments:

Most reading assignments will be timely articles related to philanthropy or the Common Good. The readings in this syllabus are the required primary readings. Most weeks, the instructor will email the class with a few hypothetical questions to think about while completing the readings, as well as some additional short and timely readings on the subject. Students are expected to read the following book and submit a review paper.

David Callahan, *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (Knopf, 2017)

Grading:

Students will be graded as follows:

Class participation and site visits	20%	200 possible points
Programmatic assignment	15%	150 possible points
Book Review (5 pages, 3/6)	15%	150 possible points
Common Good essay (4 pages, 3/20)	15%	150 possible points
Philanthropic personal finance prompt (4/20)	10%	100 possible points
Volunteering reflection (2 pages, 5/4)	5%	50 possible points
Research Paper (8 pages, 5/4)	20%	<u>200 possible points</u>
		1,000 possible points

Grading Scale

A 1000-930	A- 929-900	B+ 899-885	B 884-830
B- 829-800	C+ 799-785	C 784-730	C- 729-700
D+ 699-685	D 684-630	D- 629-600	F 599-000

No extra credit will be given.

Laptop computers and tablets may be used in the classroom for the purposes of research and notetaking. Please keep phones turned off during class.

Academic Integrity: Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. I shall follow and enforce the university's policies regarding academic integrity.

Honor Code: Class members are expected to understand the principles and procedures set forth in the University of Notre Dame Academic Code of Honor (<http://www.nd.edu/~hnr/code/>) and abide by its pledge: "As a member of the Notre Dame community, I will not participate in or tolerate academic dishonesty."

Students with disabilities will be accommodated as extensively as possible. Please talk directly with the instructor regarding any necessary arrangements.

Tentative Class Readings and Schedule

Note: This Schedule is subject to change. Because this course incorporates guest speakers, site visits, and entails an organized grant making component, the schedule will most likely have some adjustments throughout the semester.

Class 1 (January 12)

Introduction & Overview

We will review the syllabus, talk about expectations for the course, and discuss the partnership with the Philanthropy Lab. We will also have a brief conversation about the role of philanthropy in society. Students should come to class prepared to have a conversation about ways philanthropy might help solve societal problems they have encountered and witnessed throughout their lives.

Students should acquire a copy of *The Givers* and finish reading the book by late September.

Origins of Philanthropy

Assigned Content

Alexis de Tocqueville, "[Political Associations in the United States](#)"

George Washington, "[Thanksgiving Proclamation of 1789](#)"

Browse [A History of Modern Philanthropy](#) timeline from the National Philanthropic Trust

Recommended Content

Edward T. Devine, "[The New View of Charity](#)," The Atlantic, December, 1908

Note: We will also review the grant agreement from the Philanthropy Lab. Site visit teams of 2-3 students will be assigned later next week. Students must send the instructor their preferred programmatic team assignments by 9am on 1/19.

There is no class on January 19th, Martin Luther King Day

Class 2 (January 26)

Individuals & Philanthropy

Assigned Content

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "[Two Kinds of People](#)"

Peter Singer, "[What Should a Billionaire Give – And What Should You?](#)," The New York Times Magazine, December 17, 2006

Emma Goldberg, "[What if Charity Shouldn't Be Optimized?](#)," The New York Times, December 9, 2024

USCCB, [Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching](#)

Arthur C. Brooks, "[Why Giving Matters](#)," Speech delivered at Brigham Young University, February 24, 2009

Note: Students will receive programmatic team assignments during this class.

Site Visit Discussions

We will discuss the various nonprofits that students are interested in visiting and have a conversation about what we hope to achieve with our philanthropy.

Class 3 (February 2)

Rise of the Foundations

Assigned Content

Andrew Carnegie, "[The Gospel of Wealth](#)," The Century Co. (Digitized by Cornell University)
[Audio version](#)

Anupreeta Das, "[Has the Long Friendship of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett Reached Its Final Act?](#),"
The New York Times, August 4, 2024

By this date, students should be nearly halfway done reading *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (Knopf, 2017). Expect to have a discussion about what you have read so far.

Recommended Content

David Wallace-Wells, "[The \\$200 Billion Gamble: Bill Gates's Plan to Wind Down His Foundation](#),"
The New York Times Magazine, May 8, 2025

Is Philanthropy Fair?

Assigned Content

Alana Semuels, "[The Problem with Modern Philanthropy](#)," The Atlantic, March 28, 2017

Annika Neklason, "[Philanthropy Serves the Status Quo](#)," The Atlantic, July 1, 2019

Malcolm Gladwell, "[My Little Hundred Million](#)," Revisionist History Podcast Season 1 Episode 6,
July 21, 2016

Recommended Content

Jane Addams, "[The Subtle Problems of Charity](#)," The Atlantic, February, 1899

Site Visit Discussions

We will discuss the various nonprofits that students are interested in visiting and have a conversation about what we hope to achieve with our philanthropy.

Class 4 (February 9)

Government & Philanthropy

Assigned Content

James Madison, "[The Federalist Papers No. 10](#)"

Alana Semuels, "[Two Rich Men Decided to Fund a Failing City. Some People Say They Made It Worse](#)," Time Magazine, November 4, 2021

Recommended Content

Cade Metz, "[OpenAI Backtracks on Plans to Drop Nonprofit Control](#)," The New York Times, May 5, 2025

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "[The Social Contract and Discourses, Book IV, Chapter 1](#)"

What is the Common Good?

The term *The Common Good* has origins in Christian and Catholic thought. It is now used, often interchangeably, with terms such as *The Public Good* or *The Greater Good*. During this class, we will explore the roots of *The Common Good*, and see how it has evolved over time. Questions to think about for our discussion: Is there a universal definition of the Common Good? Does it matter if people disagree about how to define the Common Good? How do we promote the Common Good? Is Philanthropy an efficient vehicle to promote the Common Good?

Assigned Content

Michael Novak, "[Three Precisions: Common Good](#)," First Things, December 2, 2009

Robert Reich, "[Why the common good disappeared \(and how we get it back\)](#)," Salon, February 26, 2018

V. Bradley Lewis, "[Is the Common Good an Ensemble of Conditions?](#)" Archives of Philosophy, 2016

Michael Sandel, "[What's Become of the Common Good?](#)" IWMVienna, September 30, 2023

Class 5 (February 16)

Philanthropy & Taxes

Assigned Content

Jonathan Hannah, "[A tax policy for the common good: renew the CARES Act's charitable tax deduction permanently](#)," Public Discourse, December 13, 2020

Daniel Hungerman, "[Trump's 'big' bill gives millions of taxpayers a new charitable tax break, but whether it will help nonprofits is unclear](#)," The Conversation, July 10, 2025

Binyamin Appelbaum, "[The Really Unfair Thing About the Met Gala](#)," The New York Times, May 2, 2025

Recommended Content

David A. Fahrenthold and Billy Witz, "[The Best Teams That Money Could Buy](#)," The New York Times, January 6, 2024

Theodore Lechterman, *The Tyranny of Generosity: Why Philanthropy Corrupts Our Politics and How We Can Fix It* (Oxford University Press, 2021). Chapter 3, A Farewell to Alms (accessible online via Hesburgh Libraries)

Board of Directors Meeting

In this first board meeting, students will discuss site visits, scheduled site visits, and how the various nonprofits compare to one another.

Class 6 (February 23)

Commerce & Philanthropy

Assigned Content

Milton Friedman, John Mackey and T.J. Rodgers, "[Rethinking the Social Responsibility of Business](#)," Reason, October 2005

Amy Schiller, "[Is For-Profit the Future of Non-Profit?](#)," The Atlantic, May 21, 2014

Jonathan Hannah, "[Can philanthropy save our national parks?](#)," Philanthropy Daily, January 19, 2022

Theodore Schleifer and Nicholas Kulish, "[Larry Ellison Wants to Do Good, Do Research and Make a Profit](#)," The New York Times, August 12, 2025

Recommended Content

Coral Murphy Marcos, "[6 Remote Places for a Volunteer Vacation](#)," The New York Times, May 2, 2025

Annie Lowrey, "[Effective Altruism Committed the Sin It Was Supposed to Correct](#)," The Atlantic, November 17, 2022

F. Emerson Andrews, "[This Business of Giving](#)," The Atlantic, February, 1953

Common Good Roundtable Discussion

Essays on the common good are due October 6th. Come to class prepared to discuss the central idea of your essay.

Class 7 (March 2)

Philanthropy and the Constitution

Assigned Content

[*Americans for Prosperity Foundation v. Bonta*](#)

Recommended Content

[*Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc. v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission*](#)

Philanthropy Gone Wrong

Assigned Content

Emily Steel, "[A Pattern of Lavish Spending at a Leading L.G.B.T.Q. Nonprofit](#)," The New York Times, August 1, 2024

Ingrid Jacques, "[Hillsdale College receives \\$4.6M after it sues Mizzou for ignoring donor's wishes](#)," The Detroit News, December 18, 2019

Kathryn Palmer, "['Cancel Culture' or Fundraising Gone Awry?](#)," Inside Higher Ed, October 2, 2023

Bob Fernandez and Charlotte Keith, "[America's Richest School Serves Low-Income Kids. But Much of Its Hershey-Funded Fortune Isn't Being Spent.](#)," ProPublica, March 28, 2021

Mid-term break, March 7-15

Recommended Content

PBS Frontline, [Two American Families: 1992-2024](#), July 23, 2024

Class 8 (March 16)

Site Visit Presentations and Discussion

Each site visit team should be prepared to deliver a twenty minute presentation (including Q&A) between 3/16 and 3/23.

Assigned Content

Scott White, "[Is The College Board Truly A Nonprofit Or A \\$1.6 Billion Testing Monopoly?](#)," Forbes, May 29, 2025

Class 9 (March 23)

Site Visit Presentations and Discussion

Each site visit team should be prepared to deliver a twenty minute presentation (including Q&A) between 3/16 and 3/23.

Class 10 (March 30) **Proposal Review Week**

Full proposals from nonprofits seeking funding will be due by March 27th at the very latest. Students are expected to thoroughly read all the proposals the week of March 30th. Please report to class with general questions, commentary, and ideas to ensure that we carefully and thoughtfully can conduct the final two board meetings that take place the following two weeks. The Board of Directors Leadership team should plan to open the first round of voting at the conclusion of this class.

Class 11 (April 6) **Board of Directors Meeting**

Class 12 (April 13) **Board of Directors Meeting**

The class will confirm the grant awards and ensure that award letters are sent to recipients. We will also make sure that other outstanding programmatic tasks are completed before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Class 13 (April 20) **Reflection Class & Final Preparation for Awards Ceremony**

We will discuss what we learned during the semester and how we might participate in philanthropy moving forward. We must also make sure that all awards ceremony plans are completed.

Class 14 (April 27) **Awards Ceremony**

We will aim to host our awards ceremony on campus the evening of April 27th at 6pm. Please note that this time and date may change due to availability of university leadership. I kindly ask that you do your best to keep your calendar open this week in the event that we need to hold our ceremony on a different date.

Note: Research papers are due on May 4th th at 11:59pm.