



Philanthropy and Nonprofit Organizations

LAH 351F

Spring 2026

Professor: Pamela Paxton
Class Meetings: Mondays and Wednesdays 2:00-3:30
Classroom: RLP 1.102
Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 1:00-2:00 or by appointment
Office: RLP 3.738
Office Phone: (512) 232-6323
Email: ppaxton@prc.utexas.edu

To give away money is an easy matter in any man's power. But to decide to whom to give it, and how large and when, and for what purpose and how, is neither in every man's power nor an easy matter. Hence it is that such excellence is rare, praiseworthy and noble.

--Aristotle, *Ethics*, 360 BC

Course Description:

Charitable giving in the United States was almost 500 billion dollars in 2022 and over 70% of those dollars came from individual giving. Is this money well spent? Unfortunately, only some charities are effective. This course will introduce students to nonprofits, philanthropy, and how to give money away. It will cover theories of giving, the nonprofit sector, and criticisms of both. A significant portion of the course will focus on providing students with the tools and skills to evaluate charitable programs for effectiveness using social scientific techniques. We will also address the relationship between philanthropic and state-sponsored programs and discuss issues of social responsibility that arise when billionaires, foundations, and corporate actors engage in philanthropic work.

The experiential learning portion of the class will introduce students first-hand to the dilemmas donors face as they evaluate nonprofits. Based on their own evaluations, students will have the opportunity to distribute significant funds (provided through The Philanthropy Lab and individual donors), to charitable organizations. Students will be placed into groups that will do extensive research on a category of nonprofits, ultimately deciding which charities will receive funds through discussion and debate.

Course Materials:

Peter Singer. 2019. *The Life You Can Save: 10th Anniversary Edition*. New York: Random House. Available at University Co-op and online at <https://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/>

Eric Friedman. 2013. *Reinventing Philanthropy*. Potomac Books. Available at University Co-op.

Other course readings available through Canvas.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Class Participation (10%) As in all college courses, students should come to class having read and thought about the assigned readings. Regular and thoughtful contributions to classroom discussions are essential to the success of the seminar. Also, attendance matters. Make sure you sign in on the attendance sheet every day. Your attendance will be considered in your overall participation grade. Only students who have attended regularly will vote on the final distribution of the funds. Finally, you will also be evaluated on your participation in group work.

Philanthropy Lab Portal (6%) The major donor for the course – The Philanthropy Lab – requires students to complete several simple tasks for the class to receive course funds.

Paper 1 (15%) 250 words, one page. In class writing January 28; First draft due February 4, 9:00 am; Revision due on February 18, 9:00 am. Details provided in handout.

Paper 2 (10%) 500 words, two pages. Due February 27, 9:00 am. Details provided in handout.

Paper 3 (15%) 1250 words, five pages. Due April 10, 9:00 am. Details provided in handout.

Oral Presentations (20%) individual and within debates.

Self and group evaluations (4%) 250 words, one page. Due April 27. Details provided in handout.

Final exam (20%) May 4, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm

Grades will include + and – distinctions.

Your grade will be docked one grade per day late, for any assignment.

Outline of Course:

January 12: Introduction to the course

Readings:

No readings for today

January 14: What are the Obligations of Wealth?

Readings:

Peter Singer. 2019. *The Life You Can Save*. New York: Random House. Chapters 1 and 2.
Emma Goldberg. “What if Charity shouldn’t be Optimized?” *New York Times* December 9, 2024

Dylan Matthews. “The Problem with US Charity is that it’s Not Effective Enough” *Vox* December 11, 2024

Leif Wenar. 2012. "Poverty is No Pond: Challenges for the Affluent." Chapter 6 in *Giving Well: The Ethics of Philanthropy*, edited by Patricia Illingworth, Thomas Pogge, and Leif Wenar.

Optional:

Read the text of the giving pledge and current signatories. givingpledge.org

Kamala Thiagaragan. "A Coconut Seller and a Day laborer Reflect on Life in Astoundingly Unequal India. *NPR* December 23, 2021.

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2021/12/23/1065267029/a-coconut-seller-and-a-day-laborer-reflect-on-life-in-astoundingly-unequal-india>

Paul Woodruff. 2013. "Philosophy of Giving: Alternatives to Singer."

January 21: Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector

Readings:

Paxton, Pamela. 2019. "Charitable Giving" in *The Nonprofit Sector: A Handbook*, third edition. Edited by Walter Powell and Patricia Bromley.

Phil Buchanan. 2019. *Giving Done Right*. Chapter 1: Nonprofits and Their Unsung American Heroes.

Groups:

Group assignments and first meeting / begin initial preferences

January 26: More on the Nonprofit Sector

Readings:

Rob Reich. 2012. "Toward a Political Theory of Philanthropy." Chapter 9 in *Giving Well: The Ethics of Philanthropy*, edited by Patricia Illingworth, Thomas Pogge, and Leif Wenar.

January 28: Giving in the U.S. / in-class writing for Paper 1

Readings:

Oliver Zunz. 2021. *Philanthropy in America: A History*. Introduction.

Gara Lamarche. 2014. "Is Philanthropy Bad for Democracy?" *The Atlantic*.

Jennifer Ludden and Mary Louise Kelly. 2025. "2025 Was a Year of Chaos for Groups that Help Poor People." *National Public Radio*. <https://www.npr.org/2025/12/30/nx-s1-5658285/2025-was-a-year-of-chaos-for-groups-that-help-poor-people>

Groups:

Continue preferences

February 2: Choosing Where to Donate

Readings:

Charles Bronfman and Jeffrey Solomon. 2010. "The Soul of the New Philanthropist." chapter 5 in *The Art of Giving: Where the Soul Meets a Business Plan*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Eric Friedman. *Reinventing Philanthropy*. Chapters 1-3, 10.

La Piana Consulting. 2010. *Due Diligence Done Well: A Guide for Grantmakers*.

Groups:

Mission / Vision

February 4: Giving Coach Exercise / paper 1 draft due, 9:00 am

Groups:

Group meeting: bring three charities, begin discussion and rubric

February 9: Understanding the IRS Form 990

Readings: Guide Star 2016. *Highlights of the Form 990*

GuideStar. 2018. *What You Need to Know about Executive Compensation*. Candid

Groups:

Group meeting

February 11: Understanding the IRS Form 990 II

Readings:

Reich, Rob, Lacey Dorn, and Stefanie Sutton. Anything goes: Approval of nonprofit status by the IRS Stanford, CA: Stanford University Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society, 2009, pp. 1-26. Link: <https://www.openminds.com/wp-content/uploads/indres/101509ssreichnonprofit.pdf>

Suozzo, Andrea. 2022. Right-Wing Think Tank Family Research Council is Now a Church in the Eyes of the IRS. <https://www.propublica.org/article/family-research-council-irs-church-status>

Watch Dan Pallotta's Ted Talk:

https://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta_the_way_we_think_about_charity_is_dead_wrong?subtitle=en

Groups:

Group meeting / begin to rank charities, possibly eliminate some

February 16: Understanding the IRS Form 990 III

Readings:

Institute for Local Governance. 2010. *Pondering Public/Nonprofit Collaborations: What a Form 990 Says about a Nonprofit*

Ellis Simani and Lexi Churchill. 2025. "This Charter School Superintendent Makes \$870,000. He Leads a District with 1,000 Students." *ProPublica*.

<https://www.propublica.org/article/valere-public-schools-superintendent-salary-texas>

Groups:

Group meeting

February 18: Evaluation, Logic Models, and SRI / Paper 1 Revision due, 9:00 am

Readings:

Phil Buchanan. 2019. *Giving Done Right*. Chapter 6: No Easy Answers: Assessing Performance.

Eric Friedman. *Reinventing Philanthropy*. Chapter 8.

Peter Rossi, Mark Lipsey and Howard Freeman. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*. Seventh edition. Pp. 93-96, 146-164

Communities Foundation of Texas. *Common Grant Application*

Groups:

Groups narrow to one charity per person

February 23: Evaluation, Logic Models, and Social Return on Investment II

Readings:

Paul Brest and Hal Harvey. 2018. *Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy*. 2nd edition. New York: Bloomberg Press. Chapter 6.

Michael Weinstein and Ralph Bradburd. *The Robin Hood Rules for Smart Giving*. 2013. New York: Columbia Business School. Chapters 1-2.

Alana Conner Snibbe. 2006, Fall. "Drowning in Data" *Stanford Social Innovation Review* 39-45

February 25: The Scientific Method and Experimental Design

Readings:

Peter Rossi, Mark Lipsey and Howard Freeman. *Evaluation: A Systematic Approach*. Seventh edition. Chapter 8.

Alnoor Ebrahim. 2014. "What Impact? A Framework for Measuring the Scale and Scope of Social Performance." *California Management Review*. Appendix only

Groups:

Practice presentations within group

March 2: presentations

March 4: Groups decide on a single nonprofit / groups email nonprofit

March 9: Guest Speaker: Sarah Rintamaki, Founder of *Connecting for Kids*

March 11: The Scientific Method and Experimental Design II

Readings:

Trochim, William M. The Research Methods Knowledge Base. Read these pages:

<https://conjointly.com/kb/experimental-design/>

<https://conjointly.com/kb/two-group-experimental-designs/>

<https://conjointly.com/kb/random-selection-and-assignment/>

<https://conjointly.com/kb/probabilistic-equivalence/>

optional:

GiveWell. 2019. Common Problems with Formal Evaluations: Selection Bias and Publication Bias

Spring Break

March 23: Against Experiments in the Nonprofit Sector

Readings:

Nicole Marwell and Jennifer Mosley. 2025. *Mismeasuring Impact: How Randomized Controlled Trials Threaten the Nonprofit Sector* Stanford University Press (selections)

Groups:

Plan research

March 25: Class Cancelled Today / groups meet for group research

March 30: Volunteering

Readings:

Peter Singer. 2019. *The Life You Can Save*. Chapter 4.

April 1: New Research on Giving by Individuals and Governments

Readings:

Duhigg, Charles. 2017. Why Don't You Donate for Syrian Refugees? *New York Times* Economist. Oct 26th, 2013. "Pennies from Heaven: Giving Money Directly to Poor People Works Surprisingly Well. But It Cannot Deal with the Deeper Causes of Poverty.

Listen to Act one ("Money for Nothing and Your Cows for Free") in This American Life

503: I Was Just Trying to Help, available here:

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/503/i-was-just-trying-to-help>

Nurith Aizenman. "It's One of the Biggest Experiments in Fighting Global Poverty. Now the Results are In." *NPR* December 7, 2023

<https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2023/12/07/1217478771/its-one-of-the-biggest-experiments-in-fighting-global-poverty-now-the-results-ar>

Sarah Holder and Shirin Ghaffary. "Sam Altman-Backed Group Completes Largest US Study on Basic Income." *Bloomberg* July 22, 2024.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-07-22/ubi-study-backed-by-openai-s-sam-altman-bolsters-support-for-basic-income>

Groups:

Group research on opposition

April 6: Arguments Against Nonprofits

Readings:

Robert Lupton. 2011. *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help, and How to Reverse it*. Chapter 2

Paul Kivel. "Social Service or Social Change?" chapter 11 in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*. Cambridge: South End Press.

April 8: Arguments Against Nonprofits II

Readings:

Gridharadas, Anand. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. Chapter 1 and Chapter 6.

Groups:

Practice Debates and Rebuttals

April 13: Final Presentation and Debates

April 15: Voting

April 20: Final Decisions

April 22: Giving Goals / Plan Evaluation of Grants

Readings:

William MacAskill. 2015. *Doing Good Better*. Chapter 9

Giridharadas, Anand. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. pp. 255-263

April 27: Course Wrap-Up / self and group evaluations due

May 4, 10:30-11:45pm Final Exam

May 4, 12:00pm Presentation of Checks to Recipients and Celebration

Overview of Process for the Distribution of the Funds

Mid-January: students fill in choices for groups

- 6 groups of ~3 students each

End of January: students receive group assignments and begin discussion of overall goals for giving.

Early February: groups meet for more discussion of overall goals.

- Each student charged with finding three charitable organizations that meet the goals of the group.
- That means ~9 organizations per group.

Mid-February: groups review their organizations

Mid-February: group meetings to narrow the organizations to be considered to 1 per member of the group.

- Should be based on criteria established by the group.
- At this point, each group will cut down to considering only ~3 organizations.
- Each organization is assigned to one member of the group for further study.

End of February: individuals work on paper #2, which is a report on their charity, and prepare a presentation on their charity for the upcoming presentations.

Beginning of March: Each member of each group will present information on their charity. Then groups will debate within themselves on the merits of their individually-assigned charities. The rest of the class will provide input.

- Within your assigned group you will be presenting information, arguing, and attempting to persuade other members of your group as well as the rest of the class.
- The end result is that each group will select down to one charity for further research.
- At this time we will have 6 finalist charities, one per group.

March 4: groups choose their finalist charity.

March - April: Groups organize due diligence research, further data collection, and tasks for group members. Each group will undertake serious study of their selected charity.

- All aspects of the organization – mission, program effectiveness, capacity of management and board to lead the organization, fiscal strength, etc. must be considered.
- Students will evaluate the charities using the tools learned in class
- Students will need to interview a representative from the charity or do a site visit
- Students will check with university lawyers about potential grantees to make sure there are no legal problems
- Each student will use the results of their own research, as well as the group's research, to write paper #3.

Mid-April: presentations and debates will provide detailed information for each group's top choice. Each member of the group has to play some role. The class will be voting on the amounts of money to give to each of the charities.

- presentations must include:
 - The case for this type of charity
 - Why this organization makes an impact
 - Any specific recommendations you are making on the size of the gift, unrestricted or restricted use, the percentage of the agency's budget the gift would be, possible uses of money (how much they need to make an impact)
- each group will be assigned an opposing group, who will prepare a rebuttal. Groups will have a chance to respond to the rebuttal, as well as to questions from the floor.

April 15: voting.

April 20: final decisions. Final decisions will involve the number of charities to give to and the amount to give to each charity. Only students who have attended regularly will vote on the final distribution of the funds. No more than 3 charities will receive donations.

May 4: checks will be presented to representatives of the selected charities.

Helpful Resources:

The Philanthropy Lab. Website for the Philanthropy Lab project. Includes grants awarded to date and syllabi from the courses at all participating universities. www.thephilanthropylab.org/

GiveWell. In depth charity research, reviews, and recommendations. www.givewell.org

The Life You Can Save. In depth charity research, reviews, and recommendations based on the principles outlined in the book. www.thelifeyoucansave.org/

Giving What We Can. Charity reviews and recommendations and a giving pledge. www.givingwhatwecan.org

AmplifyATX. Local nonprofit search. www.amplifyatx.org/search?query=

Charity Navigator. Charity ratings with emphasis on financial health and accountability/transparency. www.charitynavigator.org

ProPublica's Nonprofit Explorer. Easiest way to access Forms 990. <https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/>

Guidestar. Basic data about nonprofits, including tax Forms 990. www.guidestar.org

The Chronicle of Philanthropy. National weekly devoted to philanthropy. www.philanthropy.com

Independent Sector. Nonprofit advocacy and policy. www.independentsector.org

Ashoka. Supporting social entrepreneurs. www.ashoka.org

Foundation Center. Maintains a database on grantmakers and grants and does research, education, and training. www.fdncenter.org

Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. Academic center focused on philanthropy. www.philanthropy.iupui.edu

Scope of Organizations and Topics

The nonprofit sector encompasses organizations working across virtually all areas of social, economic, cultural, and political life. Some nonprofits focus on direct service delivery, others on research or education, and some engage in advocacy or policy-related activities within the bounds of U.S. law.

Because students will bring nonprofit organizations into the course for evaluation and discussion, the range of organizations examined may involve a wide variety of social topics. Engagement with these materials is part of learning how to analyze nonprofit missions, organizational structures, funding models, and outcomes. Course discussions will emphasize descriptive analysis, critical evaluation of evidence, and organizational context, and students are expected to engage with course materials analytically and professionally.

University of Texas Honor Code:

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the University of Texas Honor Code:

I pledge, as a member of the University of Texas community, to do my work honestly, respectfully, and through the intentional pursuit of learning and scholarship.

I pledge to be honest about what I create and to acknowledge what I use that belongs to others.

I pledge to value the process of learning in addition to the outcome, while celebrating and learning from mistakes.

This code encompasses all of the academic and scholarly endeavors of the university community.

Your work must be your own work. Plagiarism means “to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one’s own. To use another’s production without crediting the source” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2012). Do not present someone else’s writing or ideas as your own. This includes unacknowledged word-for-word use of someone else’s work, unacknowledged paraphrasing of someone else’s work, and/or unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas. If you use words or ideas from someone else, you must cite your sources. Unclear on what constitutes plagiarism?

Want to know how to avoid it? See

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/>

Title IX Reporting Requirements:

Senate Bill 212 and Title IX Reporting Requirements. Under Senate Bill 212 (SB 212), the professor and TAs for this course are required to report for further investigation any information concerning incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking committed by or against a UT student or employee. Federal law and university policy also requires reporting incidents of sex- and gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct (collectively known as Title IX incidents). This means we cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with us. If you need to talk with someone who can maintain confidentiality, please contact University Health Services (512-471-4955 or 512-475-6877) or the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (512-471-3515 or 512-471-2255). We strongly urge you make use of these services for any needed support and that you report any Title IX incidents to the Title IX Office.

Documented Disability Statement:

Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

- Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).

- Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD's website for more disability-related information:
http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php

This syllabus is subject to change. Changes, if any, will be announced in class. Students will be held responsible for all changes.