



Civil Society & Community Studies

School of Human Ecology
Nancy Nicholas Hall
1300 Linden Drive
Madison, WI 53706

Philanthropy & Civic Engagement

CSCS 400

Philanthropy Lab

Tuesday & Thursday, 1:00-2:15pm - 3 Credits

Room 1125 Nancy Nicholas Hall

Spring 2026

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Acknowledgements

This course is made possible by the generous funding of the Philanthropy Lab (Fort Worth, TX) and the Endres Manufacturing Company Foundation (Waunakee, WI). I wish to extend sincere thanks to the Philanthropy Lab and the Endres Manufacturing Company Foundation for their support of this course, and in expanding philanthropic education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison occupies ancestral Ho-Chunk land, a place their nation has called Teejop (day-JOPE) since time immemorial. In an 1832 treaty, the Ho-Chunk were forced to cede this territory. Decades of ethnic cleansing followed when both the federal and state government repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, sought to forcibly remove the Ho-Chunk from Wisconsin. This history of colonization informs our shared future of collaboration and innovation. Today, UW-Madison respects the inherent sovereignty of the Ho-Chunk Nation, along with the eleven other First Nations of Wisconsin.

Course Description

This class explores philanthropy and civic engagement through giving time, money and effort to a public purpose. Students will learn the philanthropic process including creating a giving plan, as well as exploring strategic and creative ways to give that promote civil society and engagement. Students will develop plans for assessment and evaluation of philanthropic giving.

Course Overview

This course explores philanthropy and civic engagement and in addition to classroom learning, included is a unique experiential learning component. Over the course of a semester, students will decide on the distribution of actual funds (\$50,000) to support philanthropic goals through a philanthropy project. Students will learn the philanthropic process including creating a giving plan, as well as exploring strategic and creative ways to give that promote civil society and engagement.

Philanthropy has a long history of making a difference within our communities by taking private resources and developing them with a public purpose. More recently, philanthropic giving has become one of the largest trends in our society with *Giving USA* reporting in 2025, Americans gave over \$592 billion in 2024 to the philanthropic sector. Although philanthropic endeavors tend to be defined through gifts of money and time, the sector extends far beyond in more creative ways including social entrepreneurship to achieve the goal of making the world a better place. With approximately 1.4 million nonprofit organizations that aid in advocacy, human and social services, research, education, as well as many others, our communities are stronger due to the support of these philanthropic works (*Giving USA Foundation*, 2025).

This course provides an in-depth understanding of philanthropy, including its historical development, and normative and structural elements as a driver of social change. Contemporary topics will include ethics, future trends, women and youth philanthropy, as well as corporate, international philanthropy. It also includes information about careers that focus on philanthropy. By the end of the course, students will have knowledge of the tradition of competing value commitments in civil society, the modern nonprofit sector and its relationship to government and for-profit arenas, and key challenges facing nonprofit organizations related to philanthropic giving today nationally and globally.

Philanthropy Lab Project

A special feature of this course is an opportunity for students to apply theoretical knowledge to a real-world decision-making process by determining how to allocate \$50,000 in actual grant funds to nonprofit organizations. Students will learn how to formulate goals to give effectively and learn to assess and evaluate whether the goals have been achieved.

Students will evaluate the role of values in philanthropy and develop funding priorities within broad social topic areas. In the process of choosing recipients, students will address several key questions:

- How should funds be distributed in a way that optimizes the benefits, meets goals and objectives, and are consistent with one's values?
- What is the basis of private philanthropic giving for the public good?
- To what extent do non-governmental organizations depend on philanthropic giving to operate and achieve goals domestically and globally?
- How should charitable dollars be distributed and what role do nonprofit organizations and philanthropic dollars play in a modern democracy?
- What are the appropriate criteria to be used to select grant recipients?
- How do you assess the success of your giving in accomplishing objectives and goals?

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Critically analyze philanthropic issues from a human ecological perspective.
2. Recognize the social responsibility of individuals within a community and reflect on the role of giving within civil society.
3. Identify multiple stakeholders and describe the possibilities, values, and limitations of philanthropic decisions.
4. Explore philanthropic trends: women and giving, corporate philanthropy, and youth philanthropy.

5. Share fund allocation decisions using written, oral, and visual communication.
6. Explore careers that focus on philanthropy in the nonprofit and corporate settings.

Required Textbook and Course Materials

1. Required book: Tracy Gary, *Inspired Philanthropy* (Jossey-Bass Books, 3rd edition, 2008).
2. Books for Flash Talk (you will be assigned one of these during class):
 - Ann Mei Chang, *Lean Impact: How to Innovate for Radically Greater Social Good* (Wiley, 2019)
 - Edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-profit Industrial Complex* (Duke University Press, 2017)
 - Goldseker, S., & Moody, M. P. *Generation Impact: How Next Gen Donors are Revolutionizing Giving*. (Wiley, 2017)
 - Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy during Jim Crow* (University of Illinois Press, 2020)
 - L. Joyce Zapanta Mariano, *Giving Back: Filipino America and the Politics of Diaspora Giving* (Temple University Press, 2021)
 - Paul Woodruff, Ed. *The Ethics of Giving: Philosophers' Perspectives on Philanthropy* (Oxford, 2018).
 - Villanueva, E., *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*. (Berrett-Koehler Publishers: Oakland, 2018).
3. All other readings and course materials will be available electronically on Canvas.

Suggested Additional Readings

First Nations Development Institute, *Telling our Giving Stories: Native American Philanthropy and Community Development* (First Nations Development Institute, 2015)

Ilchman, W. F., Katz, S., & Queen, E., *Philanthropy in the World's Traditions*. (Indiana Uni. Press, 1998)

Shaw-Hardy, S., Taylor, M., & Beaudoin-Schwartz, B., *Women and Philanthropy: Boldly Shaping a Better World*. (Jossey-Bass, 2010)

Zunz, O. *Philanthropy in America: A History*. (Princeton University Press, 2012)

Communication and Technology Policies

Communication: Please check our Canvas site throughout the semester, reviewing the “Home” section, and other pertinent sections (e.g., “Assignments”, “Discussion”, etc.”). You are responsible for monitoring Canvas Inbox for relevant course materials throughout the semester.

Technology Policies: Please limit your laptop use to taking notes and relevant course work, and refrain from cell phone use.

Grading

Timely completion of assignments is expected, and points will be deducted for each day that an assignment is late unless you have obtained prior approval from the instructor or in case of an unforeseen emergency. All assignments and course requirements will be evaluated using UW-Madison’s grading scale (below).

| Letter Grade | GPA Value | Final Points Grade | Final Percentage Grade |
|--------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------|
|--------------|-----------|--------------------|------------------------|

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-----|----------------|----------|
| A (Excellent) | 4.0 | 93-100 points | 93-100% |
| AB (Intermediate Grade) | 3.5 | 88-92.5 points | 88-92.5% |
| B (Good) | 3.0 | 83-87.5 points | 83-87.5% |
| BC (Intermediate Grade) | 2.5 | 78-82.5 points | 78-82.5% |
| C (Fair) | 2.0 | 70-77.5 points | 70-77.5% |
| D (Poor) | 1.0 | 60-69.5 points | 60-69% |
| F (Failure) | 0.0 | 0-59.5 points | <59.5% |

Assignment Points

Class Participation and Attendance: 20 points

-Including class prep and posts to Canvas

-Including completion of the pre-course and the post-course surveys

-Including instructor assessment of group work and discussion participation

Reflections on the Textbook and other Readings: 15 points

\$10 Exercise: 5 points

Book Club: Flash Talks & Book Discussion: 10 points

Giving Goal: 5 points

Review of Proposals: 10 points

Site Visit & Reports: 10 points

Inspiring Philanthropist paper: 10 points

Attendance at Award Ceremony: 5 points

Final Reflective Essay: 10 points

Total Points Possible: 100 points

Course Requirements & Assignments

Attendance and Participation:

Participation assignments are due periodically in the course as indicated in the Course Schedule. Attendance and participation assessments will also be monitored. Your grade will be calculated at the end of the semester.

As one student previously said, "This class is not a 'class', it is real life. It is teaching students how to grow up, gain responsibility, and make an impact in our communities." Through this course you are given the power to impact real communities. To accomplish this, and to facilitate effective discussions and a team-based learning experience, attendance is mandatory, and all absences will be accounted for in your final participation grade.

This course also requires that you prepare and be actively engaged in class activities, and you will be evaluated on the frequency and quality of your participation in group discussions and teamwork.

Each student is allowed one unexcused absence. For any additional absences, your attendance grade will be lowered 1 point unless you provide written documentation of an acceptable reason such as:

- Religious observations
- University sponsored requirements (with appropriate documentation)

- A doctor's note verifying that you are unable or advised not to attend class
- Family death or an emergency

\$10 Exercise:

If you were given \$10 to “do something good” how would you choose to use it? In this activity, you will be given \$10 to use as a philanthropist in any way you choose. More detailed instructions will be presented in class.

Book Club: Flash Talks & Book Discussion:

The purpose of this assignment is to broaden our understanding of philanthropy and explore specific topics in its philosophy, application and social impacts. Several books have been selected that do an excellent job of exploring these ideas. However, since we do not have enough time in a semester to read everything individually, you will work collectively to read and teach the material to your peers.

Inspiring Philanthropist Paper:

The purpose of this assignment is to learn more about a philanthropist who is inspiring to you and to explore their life and work. The idea is to find someone who you can learn from and have as an inspirational figure and potential model for philanthropic giving.

Giving Goals:

Your giving goal is designed to allow you to apply your learning about philanthropy to your own personal life. The giving goal serves to guide your giving in the future and should reflect your values and areas of interests. Sample giving goals can be found on the Philanthropy Lab website. You should post your goal both to Canvas and on the Philanthropy Lab website.

Review of Proposals:

One of the most important activities in this class is reviewing the grant applications that are submitted. You will each be assigned grants to review and will use the process and rubrics developed by the Grant Evaluation team to accomplish this. Completing your reviews and submitting them on time is important for the decision-making process within the course.

Site Visits and Report:

An important part of the grant review process involves site visits to the top organization applicants. You will conduct these visits in small groups. You will also need to take notes and report back on your findings to the rest of the class. The Site Visit group will give you more details later in the semester about the process and focus of these visits.

Final Reflective Essay:

For the last assignment, you will complete a Final Reflective Essay which will center on your experience and learning in this course.

Course Policies

UW-Madison Credit Hour Policy

This class meets for two 75-minute class periods each week over the semester and carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities (reading, writing, committee work, etc.) for about 3 hours out of the classroom for every class period.

Rules, Rights and Responsibilities

See the Undergraduate Guide to [Rules, Rights and Responsibilities](#), outlining Student Privacy Rights, Availability of Academic Record Information to Parents or Guardians or Others, Academic Integrity, Student Rights and Responsibilities, Student Grievance Procedures, Seeking Assistance and AlcoholEdu.

Academic Integrity

By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison's community of scholars in which everyone's academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review.

Special Accommodations

I support the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Statement on Accommodation for Students' Religious Observances

According to campus-wide policy on religious observance, please notify me within the first three weeks of class of the specific dates for which you request relief for religious observance, since these may affect your ability to meet course deadlines.

Learning Activities

These key learning activities will supplement readings, discussions and lectures in ways that allow students to enrich their understanding of the possibilities of philanthropy.

- **Guest Speakers:** The experiences of guest speakers will broaden students’ understandings of philanthropy, professional opportunities, and the realities of both giving and receiving.
- **Site Visits:** Students will conduct site visits with selected organizations and meet with nonprofit professionals to better evaluate proposals and build relationships.
- **Cohort Presentation:** Students from prior classes will share the results of their evaluation process.
- **Awards Celebration:** Students will host an awards ceremony for grant awardees.

Supplemental Learning Activities

Philanthropy Exhibit: Students will visit virtual exhibits to learn more about the connections between philanthropy, the arts and social issues.

- *The Memory Project - Face of Joy:* <https://memoryproject.org>

Grant Making Timeline

| Week | Activity | Deadline | Primary Leads |
|------|---|--|---|
| 1 | Introduction | N/A | N/A |
| 2 | Assign Committees | Submit Requests, Assignments Distributed on Canvas | All students submit preferences, Instructors assign |
| 3 | Release RFP | Online & Email | RFP & Awards Research & Site Visits Communications |
| 4 | Committee Work | N/A | ALL |
| 5 | Committee Work | N/A | ALL |
| 6 | Proposals Due | Via Email | Communication Grant Review |
| 7 | Application Review Starts | Student Reviews | Grant Review |
| 8 | Committee Work | N/A | ALL |
| 9 | Plan for Site Visits | N/A | Research & Site Visits |
| 10 | Research and Site Visits | Report on Site Visits/Phone Calls | Research & Site Visits All students participate in at least 1 visit |
| 11 | Site Visit Report | N/A | Research & Site Visits |
| 12 | Funding Decisions | N/A | Grant Review |
| 13 | Final Funding Decision Plans for long-term Evaluation | Decisions Completed Awardees Notified | Grant Review Evaluation |
| 14 | Awards Ceremony | Start of Class or Earlier | RFP & Awards |
| 15 | Course Evaluation | In Class | ALL |

I expect to follow this course schedule and timeline. However, due to the nature of this work, the timeline and schedule may be altered at the instructors' discretion. Please exercise flexibility as this is subject to change based on decisions made by the class, organizational availability and other factors outside of our control.

Class Schedule & Readings

Unit 1: The Social Meanings & Realities of Giving

In this unit, we will explore the social dynamics and impacts of philanthropic giving by analyzing the roots of philanthropy and its role and landscape in American society.

Week 1: Course Overview

Tuesday January 20 & Thursday 22: Course Overview

- Class Activity:
 - Pre-Surveys
 - Review Syllabus and Course Expectations
 - Review Grant Cycle for Course

Week 2: Philanthropy & Inequality

By its very nature, philanthropy is intricately connected to issues of inequality and power in society, whether through the issues it addresses or the nature of those who give. This week, we explore these connections and the various mechanisms and impacts they have on philanthropic giving and society. We will also interrogate how power, privilege and positionality are implicated in the philanthropic process. We will ask the question, "What role can philanthropy play in supporting social change and justice?"

Tuesday, January 27: Philanthropy and Inequality

- Class Activity:
 - Review Committees and Instructions for submitting preferences
 - Introduction to Global Inequality
 - Terminology and Definitions
 - Committee Assignments will be made via Canvas.
- Recommended Reading: Students should read the following to inform discussions:
 - "Global Philanthropy and Inequality" [LINK](#)

Thursday, January 29: Funding, Power & Social Change

- Class Activity:
 - Conversations and analysis of readings, be prepared to discuss
 - Committee Work
- Recommended Readings:
 - Preface, Forward, and Introduction in edited by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. (2007). *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*.
 - Forward and Introduction in Villanueva, E. (2018). *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*.

- Discussion with Anand Giridharadas and Edgar Villanueva: [LINK](#)

Week 3: Philanthropy in Action

This week we will focus on how philanthropy is put into action and how it can be done successfully in light of the topics covered in class to this point.

Tuesday, February 3: Philanthropy Insights and donors

- Class Activity: Work to complete the RFP
- Assign Flash Talks

Thursday, February 5: Committee Work

- Assignments Due:
 - Work with your committee to prepare in order to finalize RFP today
- Readings: Submit a reflection essay on the textbook chapter readings on Canvas,
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 1: Giving and the Nonprofit World
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 2: You, the Philanthropist

Week 4: The Who, Where and Why of Philanthropy

Who gives in the U.S. and why they give are not always intuitive. This week we explore the types of people who give, where they direct their giving, and the role our values play in philanthropy.

Tuesday, February 10: Philanthropy Motivations & Landscape

- Class Activity:
 - Values in Philanthropy
 - Landscape of Philanthropic Giving
 - Q & A with past students, be prepared with questions
- Readings:
 - Giving USA Report: [LINK](#)

Thursday, February 12: Impact, Implications, and Consequences of Giving

- Class Activity:
 - Discussion of Readings
- Readings:
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 3: Developing Your System of Giving
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 4: Creating a Mission Statement
 - Recommended Readings
 - Listen to: Act one “Money for nothing and your cows for free” in *This American Life* 503: I Was Just Trying to Help. [LINK](#)

Week 5 Unit 2: Key Moments & History of Philanthropy in the U.S.

Understanding the history of philanthropy allows us to more fully understand its function and role in society today. In this unit we will explore this history broadly as well as key moments in philanthropy.

February 17 and 19: Personal Giving

- Readings:

- Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 5: Deciding How Much to Give
- Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 6: Where to Give

Week 6: History & Examples of Success in Giving

Tuesday, February 24 and Thursday, February 26: Historical Context & Major Players

- Class Activity:
 - Historyofgiving.org: Each student will be assigned one time period from History of Giving. They should read and take notes in detail on their section using the History Notes template on Canvas. This can be found in the assignment titled “Week 5 History Notes” and should be uploaded before class. Students will work with peers assigned to the same section. As a small group, they will consolidate the information they learned and teach the material to their peers.

Excellence and Successes in Philanthropy

- Readings:
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 7: Creating a Personal Giving Plan
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 8: The Many Ways to Give

Unit 3: Contemporary Approaches to Philanthropy

There are a variety of different approaches and philosophies towards philanthropic giving. In this unit we will explore these approaches and their impacts on decision making and funding. We will also actively be applying what we learn to our own grant making process.

Week 7: Evaluating Proposals and Forms of Philanthropy

This week we will explore key ideas and techniques used to evaluate grant proposals.

Tuesday, March 3: Methods in Evaluating Grant Proposals

- Class Activity:
 - Discuss Readings as it applies to our review process
 - Committee Work
- Recommended Readings:
 - Kania & Kramer (2011). “Collective Impact” [LINK](#)
 - Meiksins, (2013). “Strategic Philanthropy: The Good, the Bad, the Ugly” [LINK](#)
 - Scan: LCC Toolkit, “Evaluating Grants” [LINK](#)
 - Scan: National Archives. “Grant Evaluation Checklist” [LINK](#)

Thursday, March 5: Entrepreneurship, International, Corporate & Community Philanthropy

- Class Activity:
 - Community Based Philanthropy Case-Study
- Readings:
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 9 Organizational Giving: Family Foundations and Corporate Giving
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 10 Engagement with Groups You Support

Week 8: Evaluating Grants & Conducting Site Visits

This week we begin the work of applying everything we have learned this semester to evaluate the grant proposals we have received and move towards making a funding decision.

Tuesday, March 10: Philanthropy Lab Workshop

- Class Activity:
 - Committee Work and review of grant proposals and preparation for site visits

Thursday, March 12: Presentation on Personal Philanthropy

- Class Activity:
 - Continue Review of Applications and prepare for site visits—process and plans
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 11 Creating Greater Plans for Your Family, Heirs, and Humanity
 - Gary, Inspired Philanthropy, Chapter 12 Growing and Partnering with the Next Generation
- Recommended Reading
 - Alarie-Leca (2015), “Smarter Site Visits” [LINK](#)

Unit 4: Grant Making, Evaluation & Engaging with Organizations

In this unit we will be focusing on processes of grant making once applications have been received. We will be making important funding decisions and considering the mechanisms and approaches that can be applied to evaluating proposals and engaging with organizations.

Week 9: Setting Priorities and Making Decisions

Tuesday, March 17: Philanthropy Lab Workshop

- Class Activity:
 - Continue to Review Applications

Thursday March 19: Personal Giving

- Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch. 13 For Donors Who Have Much More to Give
- Gary, Inspired Philanthropy Ch 14: The Power of Partnership, Transformative Philanthropy
- Continue Review of Applications Browse the Philanthropy Job Boards: <https://www.philanthropy.com/jobs>
- “Is there such a thing as a career in philanthropy? Absolutely!” [LINK](#)
- “So you want a job in Philanthropy?” [LINK](#)

Week 10: Week of March 23rd Spring Break

Week 11: Evaluating Grants & Completing Site Visits

Tuesday March 31: Philanthropy Lab Workshop

- Class Activity:
 - Evaluation of grants and review of site visits

Thursday, April 2: Philanthropy Lab Workshop

- Class Activity:
 - Evaluation of grants and review of site visits and make final decisions

Weeks 12: Awarding Funds and Prepare for Award Celebration

Tuesday April 7 and Thursday April 9 Prepare for Award Celebration and Committee Work

Week 13: Award Celebration Preparation

Tuesday April 14 and Thursday April 16 Prepare for Award Celebration

Week 14: Award Preparation and Celebration

Tuesday April 21 Award Celebration Preparation

Thursday April 23: Award Celebration

- Class Activity:
 - Reflection on process, Final Thoughts
 - Finalize post-grant evaluation process
 - Course Evaluation

Week 15: Final Class Evaluation

Tuesday April 28 and Thursday April 30: Class evaluation and reflection

- Class Activity:
 - Reflection on process, Final Thoughts
 - Finalize post-grant evaluation process
 - Course Evaluation and focus group exercise

Final Examination Period—May 3, 10:05am-12:05am, Final Reflection Essay, Due on Canvas by the end of the exam period.

Final—Spring 2026—January 31, 2026