

Philanthropy and Social Difference
Prof. Victoria Rosner
IDSEM-UG 2206
Fall 2025
Mondays & Wednesdays: 9:30 to 10:45am
Room 801, NYU Gallatin

Victoria.rosner@nyu.edu

Gallatin 802

Office Hours: Monday 4:30-5:30 pm

Booking: <https://calendar.app.google/ctPXqyR8XqsxkfRG7>

and all other dates by appointment through Tess Derby, tsd265@nyu.edu

Course Assistant: Srihas (Haas) Borra, sb9844@nyu.edu

Course Description

Philanthropy is a practice deeply rooted in human society and culture, and practiced today by individuals and institutions alike. Philanthropy can bind communities together, but it can also hold people in positions of disadvantage. This course will allow students to learn about the history of philanthropy, debate its best practices, understand the role of social difference in sustaining inequality, and consider what it means to give and receive aid at different scales. We will approach the study of philanthropy through the humanities, reading texts by writers including Tsetse Dangarembga, Teju Cole, Virginia Woolf, and Andrew Carnegie, and drawing from these texts both an experiential perspective and a richer understanding of how ethics, values, identity, and imagination drive and define giving practices.

Through grants from The Philanthropy Lab and others, students will also have the opportunity to participate in philanthropy themselves, and one of our chief objectives for the term will be deciding as a group how to distribute our course funds of at least \$50,000 as productively as possible. Students will work in groups to research potential grantees, recommend to their fellow students how and where class funds should be invested, and make final decisions about class giving.

Course Objectives/Learning Goals

- Students will come to understand the history and culture of US philanthropy
- Students will reflect on their own relationship to giving practices, past, present and future
- Students will learn how to make thoughtful philanthropic gifts by developing a focused group mission and evaluating and selecting nonprofit organizations that can contribute to that mission.

Required Texts

* Posted on Brightspace

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull House* (1935)

ISBN: 978-1540343697

Carnegie, Andrew. *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (1889)

ISBN : 978-1980484714

Dangarembga, Tsetse. *Nervous Conditions* (1988)
ISBN: 978-1878067777

Freeman, Tyrone. *Madame C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (2020)
ISBN: 978-1523091416

Orwell, George. *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933)
ISBN: 978-0156262248

Poppendieck, Janet. *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (1999)
ISBN: 978-0-140-24556-1

Schiller, Amy. *The Price of Humanity: How Philanthropy Went Wrong and How to Fix It* (2023)
ISBN: 978-1-68589-022-3

Singer, Peter. *The Most Good You Can Do* (2016)
ISBN: 978-0300219869

Villeneuve, Edgar. *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance* (2018)
ISBN: 978-1-5230-9141-6

Walker, Darren. *From Generosity to Justice: A New Gospel of Wealth* (2021)
ISBN: 978-1633310773

Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas* (1938)
ISBN: 978-0156901772

Assignments

All assignments should be submitted electronically through Brightspace.

Assignment 1 (individual): Identification of needs. In about 2-3 pages, what do you think are the most important needs that philanthropy should address and why? What is your criteria for identifying those needs? How can and should philanthropy address them? You must draw on at least three sources, which can include course readings, news stories, academic essays and books, or interviews with professors or other experts. **Due September 22.**

Assignment 2 (group): After discussion of each group member's version of Assignment 1, produce a collaborative document of 3-5 pages outlining your group's goals and philosophy. This document will be your roadmap as you select and research organizations to receive class funds. Recognizing the many different kinds of organizations and approaches to addressing needs, you will need to make specific priorities that are practical and attainable. Not all goals are compatible with each other. If you do not find yourself making difficult choices, you are missing something. In evaluating this assignment, know that I will look for logical consistency! Include at least three examples of organizations that would align with your group's goals and philosophy. **Due October 8.**

Assignment 3 (individual): Philanthropic autobiography. In 3-5 pages, write the story of your life as a giver and a recipient of philanthropic gifts. What kinds of giving/receiving experiences have you had? How have these shaped your goals as a giver? What kinds of organizations are most important to you and why? Are there philanthropists who serve as models for you? Your essay should also look to the future. How do you understand your relationship to your community? Do you see philanthropy as playing a role in your adult life? Note: this statement

does not require you to make any specific commitment about giving; it is an exercise in reflection. Your paper should make reference to at least three course readings. **Due November 3.**

Deadline to post Giving Pledge to unlock course funds: November 5.

Site visits (group): Site visits are a required element of this course. Working in groups of at least two students, each student will visit at least two organizations, each of which needs to have been selected by you or another member of your group. No later than **November 17** please email me and Srihas Borra with the subject line “site visit report” stating the name of the organizations you visited and the dates of the visits. Graded P/F as part of your participation/group work grade.

In-class midterm (individual): In this 30-minute, closed book midterm, you will be asked questions about the class readings to date. A blue book will be provided. **In-class November 17.**

Assignment 4 (group): Final memo. In a collaboratively written memo of at least 5 pages, each group should identify the leading organization your group has selected to move to the final round of decision-making for funding. You should describe the criteria you used to arrive at your decision, including a discussion of the organizations that were not selected as finalists, the specific merits of the finalist, and how it aligns with the giving goals and philosophy described in the first group memo. The memo should reflect serious study of your selected organization, identifying mission, program effectiveness, capacity of management and board to lead the organization, fiscal strength, etc. Students will need to interview a representative from the charity (face-to-face or over skype). The memo should identify the amount needed to make an impact at the organization, and make a convincing case for why it deserves that portion of our class’s giving dollars. At least two of the course readings should be included substantially in the discussion. **Due December 1.**

Assignment 5 (group): To accompany your memo, your group should design a 10–minute presentation to share with the rest of the class. This will be your final opportunity to pitch your organization and the gift amount you think they need. **Due December 1.**

Assignment 6 (group): Prepare for Giving Day ceremony. As part of this work, prepare a letter to the recipient of the gift that justifies the gift to the foundation, and letters of declination to non-funded organizations that members of your group visited. Letters should be sent to the course assistant no later than (note the tight turnaround on this) **December 8.**

Grading

Assignment 1: 15%

Assignment 2: 15%

In-class midterm: 15%

Assignment 3: 15%

Assignment 4: 15%

Assignment 5: 10%

Assignment 6: 5%

Class participation and group work (incl. site visits): 10%

Note: there is no assignment in this class after December 9. Students will be invited to speak at our giving day ceremony about the class and the organization(s) selected to receive funding. Details to follow.

Attendance Policy

You are expected to attend each seminar meeting and to arrive promptly. Excessive absence or lateness will result in a lowered or even a failing grade. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for turning in any assignment due that day, and for notifying me about the absence.

You are expected to complete the assigned reading for the day prior to the start of class, and to have questions, ideas, and provocations to share with the rest of the class in discussion. You are also expected to bring a copy of the reading to the class where it will be discussed.

Electronic Devices

There is strong evidence that the use of laptops impedes learning in many students. Please do not use electronic devices in class except by special permission of the instructor, arranged in advance.

Writing Fundamentals

At Gallatin, all students are asked to become familiar with and use one of three established citation styles: Chicago, MLA, or APA. In this class, I ask that you use MLA. For guidance on how to use Chicago, MLA, and APA as well as other useful tips on writing, please refer to purdueowl.com.

AI

AI is quickly reshaping the way that many of us solve problems and complete tasks. The question of AI's impact on education is an open one, and I invite you to join me in figuring it out. We'll talk about this in class.

Students with Disabilities

Academic accommodations are available for students with disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Academic Integrity

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website (www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html)

Class schedule

Wednesday, September 3

Introductions and a challenge

Monday, September 8: The Roots of Modern Philanthropy

Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (1889)

Wednesday, September 10: Roots of Modern Philanthropy

Carnegie continued

Bill Gates, “Harvard Commencement Address” (2007)*

Register for Philanthropy Lab Student Portal and complete pre-course survey

Monday, September 15: Roots of Philanthropy

Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull House*, chps. IV, V, VI, VII, VIII, XIV.

Fall ‘24 Add/Drop Deadline

Wednesday, September 17: Roots of Philanthropy

Addams continued

Freeman, Tyrone. *Madame C.J. Walker’s Gospel of Giving: Black Women’s Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (Introduction and Conclusion)

Monday, September 22:

Discussion and signing of Philanthropy Lab grant letter

Group work begins: Group assignments; groups discuss roles and responsibilities, and overall goals for giving. Optional: choose a name for your group.

Assignment #1 Due (Be prepared to talk about your paper in class.)

Wednesday, September 24: Poverty and hunger

Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (second half)

Monday, September 29: Poverty and hunger continued

Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London* (second half)

Wednesday, October 1: Poverty and hunger cont.

Groups to schedule meetings with Srihas

Janet Poppendieck, *Sweet Charity*, Introduction and chs. 1, 2, 7, 8, Conclusion

Monday, October 6: Poverty and hunger 2

Jeanette Walls, *The Glass Castle* (selections) (2006)*

A Place at the Table (dir. Lori Silverbush and Kristi Jacobson) (2013)*

Wednesday, October 8:

tbd

Assignment #2 Due

Monday, October 13: **No Class**

NYU Fall Break / Indigenous People's Day

Tuesday, October 14: Monday Classes meet. Effective altruism

Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do*

Singer, "What Should a Billionaire Give – and What Should You?" (2006)

Wednesday, October 15: Effective altruism continued

Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do*, cont.

Monday, October 20: Bread or roses?

Schiller, *The Price of Humanity*

Wednesday, October 22: Bread or roses continued

Schiller, *The Price of Humanity*

Monday, October 27: Towards social equality

Woolf, *Three Guineas*

Philanthropy Lab Visit

Wednesday, October 29:

Woolf continued.

Review <http://givingpledge.org>

Monday, November 3: White Saviors

Teju Cole, “The White-Savior Industrial Complex” *The Atlantic* (2012)*

Rudyard Kipling, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899)*

Assignment #3 Due

Wednesday, November 5: Colonization/Decolonization

Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth*, 2nd ed. (2021) (selections)

Tsetse Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (selections)

Post Giving Pledge in the Philanthropy Lab portal (be prepared to discuss in class)

Monday, November 10: Colonization/Decolonization cont.

Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth*, 2nd ed. (2021) (selections)

Tsetse Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (selections)

Wednesday, November 12:

Workshop: How to Evaluate Nonprofit Organizations

Monday, November 17: A New Gospel of Wealth?

Site visit reports from groups in class

In-class midterm

Wednesday, November 19: A New Gospel of Wealth?

Darren Walker, *From Generosity to Justice: A New Gospel of Wealth*. (2021)

Monday, November 24: Extreme altruism and the future of kinship

Larissa MacFarquhar, “For Do-Gooders, It Is Always Wartime,”* tba (2015)

Richard Powers, “A Little More Than Kin” (2021)*

<https://emergencemagazine.org/essay/a-little-more-than-kin/>

Wednesday, November 27: NO CLASS

(Legislative Friday)

November 27-28: NYU Thanksgiving Recess

Monday, December 1: Final presentations

- Distribute group memos to the class
- Groups present to the class
- **Complete end of course survey by Monday, December 1** (Final deadline to complete end of course survey to unlock funding)

Assignment #4 and #5 due

Wednesday, December 3: Final presentations

Group presentations conclude

Friday, December 5: from 10:00 am to ?

Class Debate in room 801

- Read other groups’ final memos
- Vote on amounts to be given to each organization
- Groups notify selected organizations and invite them to the giving ceremony

Monday, December 8: Assignment #6 Due by 5:00 PM

Wednesday, December 10: **HOLD Giving Day Ceremony**

Friday, December 12 at 10am: **HOLD Giving Day Ceremony**

You made it! Congratulations!!