



Philanthropy & the Common Good

Fall 2026

Mondays 6:00-8:30pm / Flanner Hall 114
HESB 30348 / POLS 30142 / CNST 30423

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“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, 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.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. Awards to nonprofit organizations where there is a conflict of interest, such as the nonprofit having a paid staff member related to a student in the

In order to execute this grant-making process, each student will be placed on a site visit group team that consists of two to three members. 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 be 501(c)3 organizations and have current tax exempt status from 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 \$20,000. Students will deliver a presentation to their classmates explaining what they learned on their site visit. The grantmaking process will take place after all presentations have been completed and proposals have been submitted near the end of the semester during our Board of Directors meetings. Three students will be named as the board leadership team midway through the semester and tasked with running the board meetings.

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 our grantmaking.

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 multiple layers of government? How do they work with for profit companies?

Assignments:

Most assignments will be articles and select book chapters. Most weeks, the instructor will email the class with a few hypothetical questions to think about while completing the assignments, and occasionally some additional timely readings on the subject.

Grading:

Pre-course survey (first week of class)	1%	10 possible points
Class participation	20%	200 possible points
Documentary review (2 pages, 11/2)	10%	100 possible points
Site visit memorandum (2 pages, 10/31)	10%	100 possible points
Site visit presentation	10%	100 possible points
Common Good essay (4 pages, 10/6)	15%	150 possible points

class, are also not allowed. Additionally, the class may not award grants to the nonprofits selected by the classes within the previous two semesters. All recipients must be 501(c)3 organizations and have current tax exempt status from the IRS.

Philanthropic personal finance prompt (11/24)	10%	100 possible points
Post-course survey (last week of class)	1%	10 possible points
Volunteering reflection (2 pages, 12/13)	3%	30 possible points
Research Paper (8 pages, 12/11)	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

Extra credit opportunities may become available at select times throughout the semester.

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 (<https://honorcode.nd.edu/>) 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 (August 24)

Introduction & Overview

We will review the syllabus, talk about expectations for the course, and discuss our 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.

Origins of Philanthropy

Assigned Content

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

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

Lowell Jaeger, “[Okay](#),” Mobius: The Journal of Social Change, Fall 2012

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 this week.

Class 2 (August 31) **Philanthropy and Individuals**

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

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

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 (September 7) **Rise of the Foundations**

Assigned Content

Rob Reich, *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better* (Princeton University Press, 2018). Introduction and chapter 1, Philanthropy as an Artifact of the State: INSTITUTIONAL FORMS OF PHILANTHROPY (accessible online via Hesburgh Libraries)

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

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 (September 14)

Philanthropy and Government

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](#)”

Philanthropy and 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 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

Pope Leo XIV, “[Magnifica humanitas](#),” Introduction and chapters 1 and 2, May 25, 2026

Michael Sandel, “[The tyranny of merit](#),” TED, May, 2020

Class 5 (September 21) **Philanthropy and Taxes**

Assigned Content

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

Ron Lieber, “[Fidelity and Vanguard Won’t Allow Donations to Southern Poverty Law Center](#),” The New York Times, April 29, 2026

Association of Nonprofit Accountants and Finance Professionals, “[IRS Public Support Test: What Is It and How Is It Calculated](#),” ANAFP website.

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)

Class 6 (September 28) **Philanthropy and Commerce**

Special Event: Living a Good Life Through Service

Class will be held in Jenkins Nanovic Room 1030 this evening. Our event with Tieal Bishop will run from 6-7pm and is open to the public. Consider inviting friends.

Join Jonathan Hannah, professor of [Philanthropy and the Common Good](#), as he interviews [Tieal Bishop](#), founder and Executive Director of A Rosie Place for Children. A Rosie Place offers respite care for medically fragile children and provides a place for laughter, play, and friendship.

Jonathan and Tieal will talk about the role nonprofits play in society and how you can consider doing good while here at Notre Dame and after.

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

Jeff Bezos, [Interview on CNBC](#), May 20, 2026

David Gelles, “[Sell the Company for \\$400 Million? He’s Giving It Away Instead](#),” The New York Times, July 25, 2026

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

David Gelles, “[Billionaire No More: Patagonia Founder Gives Away the Company](#),” The New York Times, September 14, 2022

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

Class 7 (October 5)

Philanthropy and the Constitution

Assigned Content

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

Recommended Content

First Choice Women's Resource Centers, Inc. v. Davenport

Catholic Charities Bureau, Inc. v. Wisconsin Labor and Industry Review Commission

Site Visit Presentations

Should site visit teams choose, we may have time for some teams to deliver their presentations on this date.

Class 8 (October 12)

Site Visit Presentations

Each site visit team should be prepared to deliver a twenty minute presentation (including Q&A) between 10/12 and 11/2.

Mid-term break, October 17-25

Recommended Content

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

Class 9 (October 26)

Philanthropy and Ethics

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

Nicole Ault, "[Colleges Go to Court Over a Donor's Intent](#)," The Wall Street Journal, September 26, 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

Alexandra E. Petri, "[Kars4Kids Can Continue Broadcasting Ads in California, Appeals Court Says](#)," The New York Times, June 7, 2026

Site Visit Presentations

Each site visit team should be prepared to deliver a twenty minute presentation (including Q&A) between 10/12 and 11/2.

Class 10 (November 2)

Site Visit Presentations

Each site visit team should be prepared to deliver a twenty minute presentation (including Q&A) between 10/12 and 11/2.

Assigned Content

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

Class 11 (November 9)

Proposal Review Week

Full proposals from nonprofits seeking funding will be due by November 2nd at the very latest. Students are expected to thoroughly read all the proposals the week of November 9th. 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 12 (November 16)

Board of Directors Meeting

This will be our first of two days of time to meet as a board and discuss our grantmaking.

Class 13 (November 23)

Board of Directors Meeting

The class will confirm the grant awards and ensure that award letters are sent to recipients before the Thanksgiving holiday.

Class 14 (November 30)

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 15 (December 7)

Awards Ceremony

We will aim to host our awards ceremony on campus the evening of December 7th 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.

Recommended Content

Frank Capra, [It's a Wonderful Life](#), (1946)

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