

ENGL UN3738: Philanthropy and Social Difference  
Tuesday 2:10-4 PM  
752 Schermerhorn Extension

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Philanthropy is a practice deeply rooted in American society and culture, dating back to the founding of the United States and practiced today by individuals and institutions alike. The study of philanthropy is the study of what binds us together as a community and a nation, but requires an understanding of structures that hold some people in positions of disadvantage. Informed and effective philanthropy rests on an understanding of global and local structures of inequality and social difference – that is, on an understanding of the systemic forces that perpetuate poverty, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. To practice philanthropy that allows people access to the opportunities they need to achieve their potential, it is crucial to understand how and why those opportunities have not been made available on an equal basis to all. *Philanthropy and Social Difference* will allow Columbia undergraduate students to learn about the history of philanthropy, to become exposed to its best practices, to understand the role of social difference in perpetuating inequality, and to become informed actors in the practice of philanthropy themselves.

*Philanthropy and Social Difference* will introduce students to the history of American philanthropy, as described in both historical and literary texts by writers including Jane Addams, James Agee, and Andrew Carnegie. Through reading these texts, students will receive an experiential perspective on the social problems that philanthropy seeks to ameliorate. The course will also focus on best practices in contemporary philanthropy, including an introduction to social science evaluative practices that will teach students how to make informed decisions in making grants to nonprofit organizations.

Thanks to a grant from The Philanthropy Lab, students will also be able to have the experience of participating in philanthropy themselves. The class will have at least \$50,000 to give away by the end of the term to nonprofit organizations, and one of our chief objectives will be deciding as a group how to distribute these funds as productively as possible. We will focus the course, and our class giving, on three areas of special interest to Columbia undergraduates: homelessness, food insecurity, and people with disabilities. Students will work in groups to research potential grantees, recommend to their fellow students how and where class funds should be invested, and construct a reporting system for assessing the efficacy of grants awarded.

**Course texts:**

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

Agee, James and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) (excerpts)  
Carnegie, Andrew. *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays* (1889)  
Ehrenreich, Barbara. *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (2001)  
Orwell, George. *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933)  
Poppendieck, Janet. *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement* (1999)  
Rapp, Emily. *Poster Child: A Memoir* (2006)  
Singer, Peter. *The Most Good You Can Do* (2016)  
Winne, Mark. *Closing the Food Gap* (2009)  
Woolf, Virginia. *Three Guineas*. (1938)

### **Grading rubric:**

Assignment 1: 10%  
Assignment 2: 10%  
Assignment 3: 10%  
Assignment 4: 15%  
Assignment 5: 10%  
Assignment 6: 20%  
Assignment 7: 15%  
Class participation: 10%

### **Assignments:**

Assignment 1: In 2-3 pages, write up your proposed giving goals and philosophy to discuss with your group, as a contribution to your group's collaborative document. What kinds of organizations are most important to you? What are your giving goals and how do you hope to maximize the impact of your giving? What is your current investment in philanthropy and what role do you imagine philanthropy will occupy over the course of your lifetime? Due January 31 in class.

Assignment 2: After discussion of each group member's version of Assignment 1, produce a collaborative document of 2-3 pages outlining your group's goals and philosophy. Due February 7 in class.

Assignment 3: In a memo of at least two pages, discuss 3 organizations that meet your group's goals and philosophy and compile basic information about each group. Basic information includes the agency's mission and goals, key activities and programs, and contact information for its leadership. Be sure to explain each agency's history, mission and goals, as well as the community it serves; you should also highlight some of each agency's key activities and programs. Due February 14 in class.

Assignment 4: Do further study on 1 of your 3 organizations. In a memo of at least two pages, identify the agency's history, information about the community it serves, and more detailed information about its key activities and goals. It should also include information about where and when site visits (see below) might be conducted. Due February 21 in class.

Assignment 5: personal giving goal. Using the letters on the Giving Pledge website ([www.givingpledge.org](http://www.givingpledge.org)) as a guide, draft a “giving goal” statement about how you think about the role of giving in your future life, as you conceive it 1-5 years following your graduation from college. 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 personal reflection. Due March 21.

Assignment 6: Final memo. In a collaborative memo of at least 5 double-spaced pages, each group should describe the criteria used to finalize the decision on your organization, including a discussion of the agencies 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. must be considered. 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 3 of the reading items should be included substantially in the discussion. Due April 1 electronically, to be posted on Courseworks.

Assignment 7: prepare a letter to recipient of the gift, a letter to justify the gift to the foundation, and a letter of declination to non-funded organizations. Due April 11.

Site visits. Site visits are a required, though ungraded, element of this course. Working in groups of at least two students, students will visit each of the organizations selected by the groups. Each student should visit at least two organizations. Site visits will be conducted between February 21 and March 12. Be sure to arrange your visits in advance with the organizations.

### **Class schedule:**

#### January 17

Introductions

#### January 24

Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Timely Essays*

Ahn, C. E. “Democratizing American philanthropy”

Gates, Bill. Harvard Commencement Address 2007

King, T. L., & Osayande, E. “The filth on philanthropy: Progressive philanthropy's agenda to misdirect social justice movements”

B. Soskis, “The importance of criticizing philanthropy”

Students receive group assignments and meet to discuss overall goals for giving

#### January 31

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

Addams, “The Subtle Problems of Charity”

Assignment 1 due

February 7

Agee, James and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, pp. 1-118, 197-252, 318-380

Oliver Zunz, *Philanthropy in America* (selections)

Assignment 2 due

February 14

Woolf, *Three Guineas*.

Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) (selections)

Assignment 3 due

February 21

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

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

Distribution in class of Philanthropy Lab grant letter

Assignment 4 due

Site visits in groups of 2-3 students

February 28: Disability

Johnson, Harriet McBryde. "Honk if you hate telethons"

Shapiro, J. P. "Tiny Tims, supercrips, and the end of pity"

Shire, E. "Autism Speaks - but should everyone listen?"

Rapp, Emily, *Poster Child*

Site visits continue

March 7: Disability

Foote, C. J., & Collins, B. "You know, Eunice, the world will never be the same after this"

Storey, K. "The case against the Special Olympics"

Hall, E., & Wilton, R. "Alternative spaces of 'work' and inclusion for disabled people"

Gill, M. "The myth of transition: Contractualizing disability in the sheltered workshop"

Site visits continue

March 14

No class – spring break

March 21:

<http://givingpledge.org>

Tracy Gary, *Inspired Philanthropy*, Chapter 7 (Creating a Personal Giving Plan)

Assignment 5 due

March 28: Food Insecurity

Poppendieck, Janet. *Sweet Charity*, Introduction and chs. 1, 2, 7, 8, Conclusion  
Walls, Jeanette, *The Glass Castle* (selections)

(April 1: Assignment 6 is due electronically to be posted on Courseworks)

April 4: Food Insecurity

Winne, Mark. *Closing the Food Gap: Resetting the Table in the Land of Plenty*  
*Watch A Place at the Table*

Read other groups' final memos

Vote on amounts to be given to each organization

April 11: Homelessness

Orwell, *Down and Out in Paris and London*

Assignment 7 due.

April 18: Homelessness

Sherman Alexie, "What You Pawn I Will Redeem"  
Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed* (selections)

April 25

Giving ceremony

## **POLICIES**

### **Academic integrity**

The intellectual venture in which we are all engaged requires of faculty and students alike the highest level of personal and academic integrity. As members of an academic community, each one of us bears the responsibility to participate in scholarly discourse and research in a manner characterized by intellectual honesty and scholarly integrity.

Scholarship, by its very nature, is an iterative process, with ideas and insights building one upon the other. Collaborative scholarship requires the study of other scholars' work, the free discussion of such work, and the explicit acknowledgement of those ideas in any work that inform our own. This exchange of ideas relies upon a mutual trust that sources, opinions, facts, and insights will be properly noted and carefully credited.

In practical terms, this means that, as students, you must be responsible for the full citations of others' ideas in all of your research papers and projects; you must be scrupulously honest when

taking your examinations; you must always submit your own work and not that of another student, scholar, or internet agent.

Any breach of this intellectual responsibility is a breach of faith with the rest of our academic community. It undermines our shared intellectual culture, and it cannot be tolerated. Students failing to meet these responsibilities should anticipate being asked to leave Columbia.

### **Attendance and participation.**

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

### **Disability policy**

Columbia University is dedicated to facilitating equal access for students with disabilities and to cultivating a campus culture that is sensitive and responsive to the needs of students. Please let me know, either through the Office of Disability Services, or by contacting me individually, if you need special accommodations because of a disability.

### **Electronic devices in class**

We do not ban the use of laptops and other electronic devices because some students need them as a disability accommodation. However, there is strong evidence that the use of laptops impedes learning in many typical students. The use of email, texting, and social media during class is strictly prohibited.

### **Preferred gender pronoun**

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and gender identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than what is on the class roster, please let us know. Feel free to correct us on your preferred gender pronoun. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.