Course Objectives

This course aims to introduce students to the critical role played by U.S. foundations on public policy issues and in American society generally.

The manner in which the U.S. tax laws encourage charitable giving has had a significant impact on civil society and social welfare. A number of initiatives, including not only leading scholarly and medical advances but public television, urban renewal, school vouchers and the modern human rights and women’s rights movements, owe much to the support provided by foundations.

The course will review this history of charitable giving in the U.S., with particular emphasis on the foundations emerging in the first half of the 20th century from the great American fortunes (Carnegie, Rockefeller, Ford) and those coming to prominence around the turn of the last century (Gates, Soros). The role of conservative foundations in laying an intellectual and policy framework for the Reagan and Bush presidencies and the Giuliani mayoralty in New York will also be examined.

Classes will be devoted to a number of key topics, including government regulation and media scrutiny of foundations, corporate philanthropy and family foundations, and criticism of philanthropic practice from the left and the right. Philanthropic practice in other democracies will also be examined, along with in-depth looks at several foundations and philanthropic initiatives.

Readings will include The Foundation (Joel Fleishman), A Gift of Freedom: How the John M. Olin Foundation Changed America (John J. Miller), Philanthrocapitalism (Matthew Bishop and Michael Green) and a variety of articles and handouts.

Several classes will feature guest lecturers from leading foundations and non-profit organizations.
Purchased readings


Miller, John J., A Gift of Freedom, How the John M. Olin Foundation Changed America

Course requirements and grading

All students are required to:

1. Complete readings in advance of class sessions.
2. Attend class regularly and participate in discussions.
3. Write one ten-fifteen page paper, focusing on the work of a particular foundation, to be chosen in consultation with the instructor, with an analysis of the impact the foundation made on a policy issue
4. Present and discuss the findings from your paper in a full-class or small-group setting.
5. Assist in the preparation of a public forum based on class subject.

Grades will be based about fifty percent on the course paper, and the balance on class participation, paper presentation and familiarity with readings.

Course Schedule

January 21, Introduction and Overview

January 28, Evolution of charity and philanthropy in the U.S.; the historic, legal and regulatory framework (guest resource: Eileen Hershenov, Vice President and General Counsel, Consumers Union)

February 4, The great fortunes and the foundations they spawned: Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford

February 11, The 21st century billionaires: Gates, Soros and others

February 18, The conservative foundations and the war of ideas: Olin, Bradley, Scaife and others. (guest resource: James Piereson, former president, The John M. Olin Foundation)
February 25, Case study #1: The Atlantic Philanthropies and Health Care for America Now (guest resources, Stuart Schear, Vice-President, Planned Parenthood Federation of America)

March 4, Entrepreneurial philanthropy and its challenge to more traditional foundations (guest resource: Matthew Bishop, The Economist)

March 11 Topic to be determined

March 25, Class roundtable #1 on foundation profiles (first assignment)

April 1, Class roundtable #2 on foundation profiles

April 8, Foundation Change and Transformation (panel discussion open to a larger audience; participants to be determined)

April 15, Case study #2 America The Open Society Institute and the creation of the American Constitution Society and the Civil Marriage Collaborative (guest resource: John Kowal, Director, Democracy Program, The Ford Foundation)

April 25, Issues in contemporary philanthropy: a talk with Joel Fleishman, Duke University

April 29, Review, critique, loose ends

Other readings (partial list):

http://cpn1.georgetown.edu/doc_pool/1F03CostofCaution.pdf
http://www.thenation.com/doc/20010507/lamarche
http://fdncenter.org/pnd/newsmakers/nwsmkr.jhtml?id=8000103
http://www.soros.org/resources/articles_publications/articles/wisconsin_20040408

My speeches on philanthropic topics can be found at:

My bi-weekly column on philanthropy can be found at:
http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/about/atlantic_currents