Course Objectives

This course is a concentrated, selective version of my standard Spring course (not offered in 2014) which 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. Philanthropy has not only been critical to the establishment of leading educational and cultural institutions and medical research and discovery, but also to numerous public policy advances such as public television, urban renewal, school vouchers and the modern human rights and women's rights movements.

The course will touch on some of that history by way of a short introduction to institutionalized philanthropy, with particular emphasis on the foundations emerging in the first half of the 20th century from great American fortunes like Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford. But the principal focus will be the public policy activities of contemporary foundations.

Proceeding from the legal and historical environment, classes will examine selected key public policy approaches and strategies, including research, organizing and communications. One class will be devoted to a more intensive case studies of a particular philanthropy-supported policy initiative, the 2009-10 campaign for U.S. health care reform.

Purchased readings

Olivier Zunz, Philanthropy in America, Princeton University Press, 2012
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 page essay, focusing on one of four topics to be distributed by the instructor at the first session and due two weeks after the final session.

Course Schedule and Readings

Note: Assigned readings follow session description in this small font. URLs provided for most; for the balance, handouts will be given out at the first class. Optional readings are marked with an asterisk.

I. January 6: *Introduction and Overview. Legal and regulatory framework. Historical Antecedents, from the Progressive Era to the 1960’s. Why some foundations support public policy initiatives – and why they don’t.* Come prepared to talk about yourself and your expectations of the class, and I will do the same. I’ll provide an overview of what the class will cover, and we’ll explore why support of public policy advocacy is viewed by many foundations as a critical tool for advancing their mission, as well as why many foundations are skittish about it. We’ll also discuss the great fortunes, including Carnegie and Rockefeller, and the template set by the foundations they spawned one hundred years ago; the Russell Sage, New York, Rosenwald and Ford Foundations; the support provided by foundations such as Field and Taconic for the social movements of the 1950s and ‘60s.

- *Philanthropy in America,* Zunz, Chapters 1, 3 and 6.
II. January 9: **Strategies for public policy change: research, policy, communications campaigns, litigation, organizing, movement-building**

How foundation support for research and policy analysis builds a case for action; how investments in communications campaigns (including public opinion research and framing) builds on that. Likely to cover federal budget battles of the last thirty years and criminal justice campaign on drug policy, incarceration and the death penalty. How litigation can dovetail with community organizing and other strategies to advance policy change in certain fields. Why some funders are investing more in organizing and movement-building. Likely to focus on several younger organizations, like The Advancement Project and Make the Road New York, that combine litigation and organizing strategies.

- Zunz, Chapters 7 and 8
III. January 14: **Case study: The Atlantic Philanthropies and health care reform**

The Affordable Care Act of 2010 was by most accounts the most significant piece of social welfare legislation since Lyndon Johnson’s great society programs like Medicare and Medicaid. We will examine the role that foundations played in the lead-up to the legislation, the battle over it, and the aftermath, with particular attention to the Atlantic Philanthropies, which made a grant to $26.5 million to Health Care for America Now, at the time the largest advocacy grant ever made by a foundation.


IV. January 15: **Emerging critiques of foundation policy initiatives**

With greater foundation engagement in policy comes greater scrutiny and criticism: of the Gates Foundation as so big and opinionated that it dominates the fields of education reform and public health and drowns out other voices and approaches; of many “mainstream” funders for being too timid; of “venture philanthropists” for adopting business practices ill-suited to the non-profit world and insisting on crude metrics that don’t capture
the nuances of how change takes place. We'll survey these critiques and examine a few of them in detail.


Note: Most of my speeches and writings on philanthropic topics, including the ones recommended in the syllabus, can be found at:
http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/news/news?filter=speeches or on my personal blog,
http://www.garala.typepad.com/
http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLEkPQai2-5psKL72JpK14bqEAR7t00A96&feature=plcp