Seminar Description

Foundations are uniquely American institutions. They enjoy privileged status under the law in exchange for the expectation that they will support worthy causes that benefit society. Many foundations indeed provide valued financial assistance to educational, cultural, social service, civil rights, health-related and other non-governmental organizations that serve as the indispensable infrastructure of communities across the country.

Yet some foundations, especially large ones, have grander and more aggressive ambitions. They aspire to function as proactive change agents that are instrumental in incubating and creating new institutions, fostering and deploying new knowledge, cultivating and spreading innovative ideas, spawning and sustaining social movements, informing and shaping public opinion, reforming major institutions and service delivery systems, and impacting public policy.

This seminar will focus on the foundation as change agent. Among other topics, we will examine: (1) the original and continuing rationale for the existence of foundations; (2) significant examples of this catalytic role achieving its intended purpose; (3) high profile instances where best intentions backfired; and (4) the controversies that can arise when foundations choose sides in ideologically charged debates. The seminar will also concentrate on the spirited criticism that occasionally erupts over whether foundations are sufficiently transparent and accountable for their expenditures and impact; whether they should exist in perpetuity or be required to spend their way out of existence; whether and how they should be held responsible for the dubious actions of grantees; and whether they should be subjected to more rigorous legislative and regulatory strictures and oversight.

The course will meet once a week in seminar format. Since it is a discussion course, active student participation is expected. There will be advance reading assignments that are keyed to each week’s topic. Every student is required to write and present a short memorandum and a final research paper on subjects to be determined in discussion with me. There is no final examination in this course.
Class #1 – September 15, 2008

The first session will introduce the professor and participants in the seminar. We will review the purpose, expectations, requirements and organization of the course. The bulk of the session will be devoted an examination of the nature and purpose of foundations as well as their privileged and protected existence in the spectrum of American institutions.

Required reading:


Class #2 – September 22, 2008

Private foundations fall under the purview of Congress, the Internal Revenue Service, state legislatures and state attorneys general, among other legislative and regulatory overseers. In addition to routine oversight, they occasionally attract intense scrutiny, even threats, when their grants cause acute politicians, betray severe lapses in ethical judgment, or generate the perception that they are unaccountable, or insufficiently transparent. This session will focus on legislative and regulatory supervision of the philanthropic sector.

Required reading:


- Ford Foundation Cairo, [www.fordfound.org/pdfs/impact/regional_cairo.pdf](http://www.fordfound.org/pdfs/impact/regional_cairo.pdf)


Class #3 – September 29, 2008

We will visit the Verizon Foundation in Basking Ridge, NJ. In the interests of full disclosure, I serve on the board of directors of the parent company. Major corporations are significant players in philanthropy. As with their private counterparts, corporate foundations occasionally set out to make signature contributions to a given field. Patrick Gaston, the President of the Verizon Foundation, will describe and provide a demonstration of Thinkfinity, the initiative launched by the Foundation to deploy communications technology to enrich teaching and learning in schools. The presentation will be followed by a Q & A with Mr. Gaston.

Required reading:

• Please visit www.Thinkfinity.org to brief yourself on this initiative.


Class #4 – October 6, 2008

Public television as we know it today owes its very existence to the philanthropic sector, most notably the Carnegie Corporation. A half century ago, a blue ribbon commission created by Carnegie issued a landmark report that was instrumental in transforming a marginalized segment of the maturing television industry into a prominent and enduring player in modern telecommunications. We will examine the origins of public television and the recurring debates over its relevance and significance.

Required reading:

Class #5 – October 13, 2008

The philanthropic sector played a defining role in shaping medical education in the U.S. in the 20th century. The famed Flexner report, which was backed by the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, articulated rigorous new standards for medical education, helped fortify many medical schools, but also precipitated the demise of those that could not measure up. In this session, we will examine one of the most fabled examples of foundations as change agents.

Required reading:


**Class #6 – October 20, 2008**

In this session and the next we will examine several forays by major foundations into urban school reform. There have been many such ventures over the years. We will focus principally on three of them: (1) school decentralization in New York City; so-called comprehensive school reform; and (3) the small schools movement. The key questions for the class are what was sought and what was wrought by these ambitious reform efforts. Note that the readings for this session and the next are rather voluminous. The reading material will be divvied up so that teams of students take lead responsibility as presenters and discussants for each topic.

**Required reading:**

**Topic 1 -- School Decentralization**


**Topic 2 – Comprehensive School Reform**


**Class #7 – November 3, 2008**

This week we will continue our examination of major philanthropic forays into urban school reform. The guest presenter will be Marla Ucelli, who is Director of District Redesign for the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. As Associate Director in the Equal
Opportunity Division at the Rockefeller Foundation, she was instrumental in conceiving and launching the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future.

Required reading:

**Topic 3 – The Small Schools Movement**


**Topic 4 – Taking Stock**


• Chester E. Finn, Jr., Commentary: “Lessons Learned: A Self-Styled ‘Troublemaker’ Shares Wisdom Gleaned from 57 Years in Education,” *Education Week*, February 27, 2008.

**Class #8 – November 10, 2008**

The topic this time is non-traditional modes of philanthropy. Our guest presenter for this session will be Dennis Whittle, an MPA alumus of WWS and the Founder/CEO of Global Giving. It is a unique development donor that utilizes the internet to match givers and grantees. In addition to understanding these innovative modes of grant-making, we will probe whether they have the potential to be scalable and to serve as instruments of significant social change.

Required reading:

• Please visit the website of Global Giving at [www.globalgiving.com](http://www.globalgiving.com) to brief yourself on the organization’s strategy and initiatives.


Class #9 – November 17, 2008

Foundations have played decisive roles in seeding and sustaining institutions that seek to reshape the ideological and public policy landscape of this country. Liberal and conservative causes have benefited from, indeed owe their very existence to, foundation largesse. Ironically, both sides have studied, mimicked and, in poker terms, “called and raised” the strategies of the other in their quest for ascendancy and influence in American life.

Required reading:


• David Callahan, “$1 Billion for Ideas: Conservative Think Tanks in the 1990s,” National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, pp. 7-38.


**Class #10 – November 24, 2008**

We will visit the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in Princeton this week to meet with Dr. Risa Lavizzo-Mourey, the President and CEO, from 3:00-4:00 P.M. RWJF is the preeminent foundation addressing the crisis of childhood obesity. Dr. Lavizzo-Mourey will discuss her perspective on foundations as agents of social change and brief us on RWJF’s primary objectives and overarching strategy as the leading philanthropic change agent in this arena. Her presentation will be followed by a Q & A.

Required reading:


• Please also visit the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation website at www.rwjf.org to brief yourself in advance on its childhood obesity strategy, investments and position papers.

**Class #11 – December 1, 2008**

Foundation boards and executives as well as supporters, critics and overseers of the philanthropic sector wrestle endlessly with the questions of how foundations should evaluate their work, whether they are genuinely effective and sufficiently accountable, and, in the final analysis, whether their impact justifies their privileged legal status. We will delve into the knotty questions this week.

Required reading:


• Paul Brest and James Canales, “Let’s Stop Reinventing Potholes,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.


**Class #12 – December 8, 2008**

The seminar will conclude with an examination of some of principal of the institutional and political challenges facing major foundations that will shape their existence and effectiveness going forward.

**Required reading:**


• William A. Schambra, “Philanthropy’s Misguided Focus on ‘Root Causes’,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.


• Ian Wilhelm and Brad Wolverton, “Pushing Grant Makers,” *Chronicle of Philanthropy*.


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Organization and Requirements of the Seminar

There will not be an examination in this course. Students are required to write two papers:

• A short memorandum of 4-5 double-spaced pages which will be due mid-way through the semester. The topics must be discussed with and approved by Mr. Price.

• A research paper of approximately 20 double-spaced pages. The proposed paper topics must also be discussed with and approved by Mr. Price by the mid-term break.

In addition, small teams of students will be expected to make a presentation and then orchestrate a discussion of one or more of the weekly topics. The responsibility for doing so will be equitably distributed.

Final grades in the seminar will be based on the following factors:

• 25 percent – preparation and presentation of short memorandum

• 25 percent – active/informed participation in class

• 50 percent -- final research paper

Pertinent deadlines:

• Monday, November 10, 2008 – due date for short memorandum

• Monday, January 12, 2009 – due date for final research paper