COURSE SYLLABUS

Nonprofit Sector in Society

Course Description

This course introduces students to the thousands of soup kitchens, shelters, health clinics, educational institutions, arts agencies, and other organizations that make up the U.S. nonprofit sector. Class sessions will divide into three major parts. The first part of the course provides an overview of the nonprofit sector and how nonprofit organizations operate. The next set of sessions considers the contributions that nonprofit organizations make to American society, including their roles in delivering services, advocating for particular points of view, and providing vehicles for caring and self-expression. The final set of sessions then examines how nonprofits partner with philanthropists, government, and business to address social problems. The goal of the course is to give students a working knowledge of nonprofits, their contributions to society, and the ways they collaborate with other institutions to attend to social problems. No prior knowledge of the nonprofit sector is required or assumed.

Learning Objectives

Through this course, students will:

- Deepen their understanding of the basic features of the U.S. nonprofit sector; some of the essential governance and management functions in nonprofits; the role of nonprofits in society; and the partnerships that nonprofits form with donors, government, and business to address social problems (readings, class sessions, case studies, papers, term project).
- Improve their knowledge about a range of social issues and the Northern Virginia region in which they live (term project).
- Enhance their written and oral communications skills (papers, class discussions, term project, presentations).

Class Format

Class format will vary and include presentations by the professor, instructor and student-led discussions, student reports, guest speakers, and work on group projects. Overall, the class will feature high levels of student participation.
Course Requirements

There are three major types of requirements for the course:

1. **Active Engagement**: Students are expected to engage actively in the course in the following and related ways:
   
   - **Regular Attendance**: Students are expected to attend all class sessions and to arrive in class on time. *Attendance will be noted.* If at all possible, students should email the instructor beforehand when they expect to miss class because of illness or another reason.
   
   - **Completion of Reading**: Students are expected to complete all assigned reading before class. It is especially important that case study material receive a close reading. In fact, if at all possible, cases should be re-read just before class.
   
   - **Active Participation**: Students are expected to participate actively in all class sessions. In addition to contributing to regular class discussions, students may be asked to make a presentation or lead a discussion on a relevant issue. The instructor will occasionally cold call on students. *To facilitate active engagement, cell phones, computers, and other electronic devices should be turned off during class.*
   
   - **Keeping Current: The News**: Students will sign up at the beginning of the semester to lead a 5-10-minute discussion about one relevant news article that focuses on the topic of the class session in which they are presenting. On the day that students present, they should hand in a copy of their article with a brief analysis (1-2 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) of the article. *The short paper may contain some summary material from the news article, but should bring in other information and analysis as well.*

   Student engagement will count for 20% of the course grade.

2. **Written Assignments and Presentations**: Students are expected to complete the following:

   - **Short, Reaction Papers**: To enhance learning of important material and prepare for class discussions, students will complete a series of short (1-2 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) papers that typically respond to questions posed by the professor. *Strong papers will connect course readings to the issue being addressed.* For example, if a reaction paper focuses on an analysis of a particular case study, a good paper will reference some of the other assigned readings. Reaction paper assignments will generally be given the session before they are due. For example, in session #1, students will receive the assignment due at session #2. *These papers must be handed in at or before class, and will not be accepted late.* Students who miss class for any reason have the option of handing in these papers before the class session for which they are assigned. The lowest two reaction paper grades will be dropped. These papers will count for 20% of the course grade.
• **Term Project: Nonprofits in Northern Virginia.** For the term project, which is described in detail in Appendix A of this syllabus, students will complete a series of short papers – or briefs – that discuss the role of nonprofits in Northern Virginia. Different briefs are due on September 16, October 7, October 23, and November 13. Final reports are due on December 4. The term project will count for 25% of the grade, with briefs #1, #2, and #4 counting 5% each, brief #3 counting 3%, and the final submission counting 7%.

3. **Exams**

• **Mid-term:** The mid-term will be given on October 16 and will count for 15% of the grade.

• **Final:** The final is scheduled by the university for December 11, 1:30 – 4:15 pm and will count for 20% of the grade.

All written work should be submitted both in hard-copy and through BlackBoard. Please note that unexcused late submissions on any assignment will be marked down.

**Grades**

All assignments will receive numerical grades from 0-100. For final grades, numerical grades will be converted to letter grades without rounding as follows:

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<thead>
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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Numerical Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>87-89.99</td>
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**Contacting the Instructor:**

Dr. Abramson can be reached at the following:

- Office phone: 703-993-8189
- Office e-mail: aabramso@gmu.edu
- Office address: George Mason University – Arlington Campus, 608 Van Metre Hall, 3351 Fairfax Drive, Mail Stop 3B1, Arlington, VA 22201
- Cell phone: 202-262-5204
- Office hours:
  - Monday, Noon – 1:00 pm, Fairfax campus, room TBD
  - By appointment
  - Short conversations can also occur either just before or after class

**Readings and Other Resources**

Course readings are available through Blackboard, are on-line, or are in the following book that is available for purchase through the GMU bookstore:

Please also see Appendix B of this syllabus for additional resources on the nonprofit sector.

**Academic Integrity**

GMU is an Honor Code university; please see the University Catalog for a full description of the code and the honor committee process. The principle of academic integrity is taken very seriously and violations are treated gravely. What does academic integrity mean in this course? Essentially this: when you are responsible for a task, you will perform that task. When you rely on someone else’s work in an aspect of the performance of that task, you will give full credit in the proper, accepted form. Another aspect of academic integrity is the free play of ideas. Vigorous discussion and debate are encouraged in this course, with the firm expectation that all aspects of the class will be conducted with civility and respect for differing ideas, perspectives, and traditions. When in doubt of any kind, please ask for guidance and clarification.

**GMU Email Accounts**

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class.

**Office of Disability Services**

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see the instructor and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the ODS: [http://ods.gmu.edu](http://ods.gmu.edu)

**Other Useful Campus Resources**

- Writing Center: [http://writingcenter.gmu.edu](http://writingcenter.gmu.edu)
- University Libraries “Ask a Librarian”: [http://library.gmu.edu/ask](http://library.gmu.edu/ask)
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): (703) 993-2380; [http://caps.gmu.edu](http://caps.gmu.edu)

**University Policies**

The University Catalog, [http://catalog.gmu.edu](http://catalog.gmu.edu), is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university affairs.

**Course Outline and Reading Assignments**

Please note that “case study” selections will be added to the readings listed below. The instructor may also make other changes to reading assignments during the course of the semester. Additions and other changes to reading assignments will generally be announced in class and in emails through BlackBoard.

**AUGUST 26: Overview of Course, Introduction to Key Concepts**
AUGUST 28: Overview of Term Project and Important Course Resources
Required:

SEPTEMBER 2: No Class – Labor Day

PART ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE U.S. NONPROFIT SECTOR

SEPTEMBER 4: Introduction to the Nonprofit Sector
--SIGN UP FOR CURRENT EVENTS
--SELECT JURISDICTION AND ISSUE AREA FOR TERM PROJECT (see Appendix A)

Required:

SEPTEMBER 9: Why Nonprofits Exist
Required:

SEPTEMBER 11: History of the Nonprofit Sector I
Required:
--LeRoux and Feeney, *Nonprofit Organizations and Civil Society*, ch. 2, except section on “legal frameworks,” pp. 63-73, which was previously read for August 28 class.

SEPTEMBER 16: History of the Nonprofit Sector II
--BRIEF #1 OF TERM PROJECT DUE
PART TWO: “INSIDE” NONPROFITS: HOW NONPROFITS OPERATE

SEPTEMBER 18: Establishing a Nonprofit and Defining Its Mission
Required:
--Please listen to the Foundation Center’s 45-minute webinar, “Before You Seek a Grant: A Checklist for New Nonprofits,” accessible at https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=DTnGnXYoguo
(Note that in 2019 the Foundation Center merged with GuideStar to form the organization Candid.)

SEPTEMBER 23: Nonprofit Boards and Governance
Required:

SEPTEMBER 25: Nonprofit Fundraising and Resource Development I
Required:
--Tschirhart and Bielefeld, Managing Nonprofit Organizations, ch. 6, “Resource Acquisition.”

SEPTEMBER 30: Nonprofit Fundraising and Resource Development II
Required:
--Case study and other material to be assigned

OCTOBER 2: Performance Management and Maximizing Impact
Required:

PART THREE: ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

OCTOBER 7: Service Providers
--BRIEF #2 OF TERM PROJECT DUE
Required:
**OCTOBER 9: Community Builders**
Required:

**OCTOBER 15 (TUESDAY): Advocates**
Required:

**OCTOBER 16: Mid-Term Exam – Please bring a blue book**

**OCTOBER 21: Activists**
Required:

**OCTOBER 23: Vehicles for Expression: Arts and Religion**
--BRIEF #3 OF TERM PROJECT DUE
Required:
--Salamon, *America’s Nonprofit Sector*, chs. 9 and 11.

**OCTOBER 28: Employers and Catalysts for Economic Development**
Required:

**PART FOUR: “OUTSIDE” NONPROFITS: NONPROFIT RESOURCES AND PARTNERSHIPS**

**OCTOBER 30: Third-Party Government, Networks, and the Tools of Government I**
Required:
--Salamon, *America’s Nonprofit Sector*, chs. 4-5.

**NOVEMBER 4: Third-Party Government, Networks, and the Tools of Government II**
Required:
--Case study and other material to be assigned

**NOVEMBER 6: Philanthropy I**
Required:

**NOVEMBER 11: Philanthropy II**
Required:
--Case study and other material to be assigned
NOVEMBER 13: Volunteerism
--BRIEF #4 OF TERM PROJECT DUE
Required:
--LeRoux and Feeney, *Nonprofit Organizations and Civil Society*, ch. 5.

NOVEMBER 18: Nonprofits and Government I
Required:

NOVEMBER 20: Nonprofits and Government II
Required:
--Case study and other material to be assigned

NOVEMBER 25: On-Line Class - Nonprofits and Business I
Required:

NOVEMBER 27: No Class – Thanksgiving Break

DECEMBER 2: Nonprofits and Business II
--Case study and other material to be assigned

DECEMBER 4: Major Nonprofit Issues and the Sector’s Future
--FULL REPORT FOR TERM PROJECT DUE
Required:

DECEMBER 11 (1:30 – 4:15 pm): Final Exam
Appendix A:

Term Project: Nonprofits in Northern Virginia

For their term project, students will write a series of short papers – or briefs – that explore nonprofit activity in Northern Virginia. Each student will select one issue area (e.g., housing, arts and culture, education) and one jurisdiction (e.g., Fairfax County, Arlington County, Loudoun County) on which to focus, and develop a total of four briefs that describe the selected jurisdiction; the issue area; the range of nonprofits in the selected jurisdiction that work in the selected issue area; and the operation of a single nonprofit.

The major goals of the term project are to:
- Deepen students’ understanding of nonprofit organizations;
- Add to students’ familiarity with the Northern Virginia region in which they currently live; and
- Increase students’ knowledge of a selected issue area.

To accomplish these goals, students will work both independently and in groups to accomplish the four tasks described below. Some class time will be devoted to work on the term project. Completing the project will involve drawing on a variety of sources, including a useful database of nonprofits, interviews with community leaders, reports and studies, news and scholarly articles, etc. In completing their projects, all students should interview at least three individuals. Interviews may be in-person, by phone, or by email. (Students should not count interviews conducted by other students as part of group work toward their required three interviews.) All sources, including interviews, should be noted in a bibliography.

Especially to complete briefs #3 and #4, students should register (for free) with and use information provided in the GuideStar website: https://www.guidestar.org. For brief #3, you will mainly use the “search” tab at the top of the home page and then, after clicking “search,” you will use the “geography” and “organization” tabs that appear on the left hand side of the next page.

In the third course session (September 4), each student will choose the focus of his/her term project, which is one issue in one jurisdiction (e.g., education in Fairfax County; arts and culture in Arlington County; health in Loudoun County).

The possible issues are:
- Arts, Culture, and Humanities (NTEE code A)
- Education (B)
- Environment (C)
- Health (E)
- Food, Agriculture, and Nutrition (K)
(continued)
• Housing and Shelter (L)
• Recreation and Sports (N)
• Youth Development (O)
• Human Services (P)
• Civil Rights, Social Action, and Advocacy (R)

The possible jurisdictions are:
• Alexandria City
• Arlington County
• Fairfax County
• Loudoun County
• Prince William County

In subsequent weeks, students will complete work on the project components described below. Students should develop coherent papers that provide relevant information in an interesting way. Moreover, students are encouraged to provide additional material besides the basic information asked for below.

**Brief #1: Background on Selected Jurisdiction: Due September 16**

Students may work with their classmates focusing on the same jurisdiction to write a short (2-3 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) profile of their jurisdiction. Students working on the same jurisdiction may all turn in the same brief if they want, but this is not required. Profiles should include at least the following information about the jurisdiction, with particular attention to any controversies, challenges, and trends in the jurisdiction:

- Basic demographic information (e.g., overall population, percentage population belonging to different racial/ethnic groups)
- Basic socioeconomic information (e.g., median household income, poverty rate, unemployment rate, major industries)
- Structure of government (e.g., elected board of supervisors with appointed county executive) and party affiliation of major elected officials
- Highlights of the jurisdiction’s history
- Discussion of major current issues in the jurisdiction based on news articles and interviews with key leaders

When providing statistical information about a particular jurisdiction, it is often helpful to give context by including comparative information about the region as a whole or the nation. So, for example, rather than just stating that median household income in Fairfax County was $117,989 in 2017, you might note that Fairfax County’s median household income was almost double the national figure of $60,336 (see U.S. Census data available at: https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/saipe/#/?map_geoSelector=mhi_c&s_year=2017&s_measures=mhi_snc&s_state=51&s_county=51059.)
Brief #2: Background on Issue Area Nationally and in Overall Northern Virginia Region and Selected Jurisdiction: Due October 7
Students will work with other students focusing on the same issue and on their own to write a short (2-3 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) profile of their issue nationally and in the overall Northern Virginia region and their specific jurisdiction. Briefs from students working on the same issue may contain some identical material, but this is not required. Profiles should include relevant national information and should also include at least the following information about the issue in the Northern Virginia region and the particular jurisdiction, with particular attention to any debates, successes, problems, and trends:

- Basic data on the issue (e.g., percentage unemployed; percentage high school graduates; number of homeless)
- Information from relevant articles and reports
- Information from interviews with community leaders

Especially relevant is information specifically about nonprofits – and not just government and businesses – working in the issue area. So, for example, in the arts, attention should be paid particularly to information about what is happening specifically to nonprofit theaters and not just for-profit theaters.

Brief #3: List of Major Nonprofits Working on Selected Issue in Selected Jurisdiction: Due October 23
Students will use GuideStar and work on their own to develop a list of ten nonprofits (if possible) working on their selected issue in their selected jurisdiction. The final listing should include:

- Name of nonprofit
- Address
- Amount of total revenues for the most recent year available

Brief #4: Profile of Individual Nonprofit: Due November 13
Students will work on their own to develop a short profile (3-4 pages, 12-point font, double-spaced) of one of the nonprofits on the list in #3 above. In completing their profile, students should draw on the organization’s 990 tax form as well as information gained from interviews, news stories, and other relevant sources. Profiles of individual nonprofits should include:

- Name of nonprofit, physical address, website address
- First page of the organization’s most recent 990 form, which can be accessed through GuideStar
- Amount of revenues and major sources (e.g., percentage from each of earned revenue, government, individual philanthropy, foundation philanthropy, corporate philanthropy)
- Mission, major programs, and history
- Service area and number and types of clients served
- Name of board chair and description of board members (e.g., lawyers, bankers, general community members, organization’s clients)

Continued
• Name of executive director and description of organizational staff
• Discussion of any important partnerships with government, business, or other nonprofits
• Major issues/challenges facing the nonprofit

Final Report: Due December 4
Students should revise their prior submissions and resubmit them together as their final reports. To repeat, students should clearly identify the three interviews they conducted in their bibliographies.
Appendix B: Resource Guide for the Nonprofit Sector (Selected Resources)

Newspapers/Journals – Practitioner-Oriented
- *Chronicle of Philanthropy*
- *Nonprofit Quarterly*
- *Nonprofit Times*
- *Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR)*

Journals – Research-Oriented
- *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly (NVSQ)*
- *Nonprofit Management and Leadership (NML)*
- *Nonprofit Policy Forum*
- *Voluntas*

E-Newsletters - National
- *Blue Avocado*
- *The Digest: Today’s News About the Charitable Sector* (Independent Sector)
- *Voices for Good: The Latest Policy and Advocacy News* (Independent Sector)
- *NPQ* (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- *PND (Philanthropy News Digest)* (Candid/Foundation Center)
  - *Philanthropy Today – Daily Update from the Chronicle of Philanthropy*

E-Newsletters – Local
- *The (Almost) Daily WRAG* (Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers) – now on “vacation”

National Organizations
- Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA)
- Association of Fundraising Professionals (AFP)
- BoardSource
- Council on Foundations
  - *Candid – formed through a recent merger of Foundation Center and GuideStar*
  - *Independent Sector*
- International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR)
- National Council of Nonprofits
- Nonprofit Finance Fund

Local Organizations
- Center for Nonprofit Advancement (CNA)
  - *Foundation Center Library – Washington, DC*
- Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation
- Venture Philanthropy Partners (VPP)
• Washington Grantmakers
• Young Nonprofit Professionals Network – DC (YNPNdc)

Statistics on the Nonprofit Sector
• **Candid (Foundation Center and GuideStar)**
• **Giving USA**
• Nonprofit Works and Listening Post Project at Johns Hopkins University, Center for Civil Society Studies
• **Nonprofit Sector in Brief and Nonprofit Almanac** – National Center for Charitable Statistics at the Urban Institute

Job Openings
• **PND Job Alerts**
• *Chronicle of Philanthropy*
• Idealist.org
• *The Daily WRAG* – now on vacation
• YNPNdC

Indexes to Nonprofit Research
• **Catalog of Nonprofit Literature**  (Foundation Center):  
• **Philanthropic Studies Index** (Indiana University Center on Philanthropy)

Blogs
• **Beth’s Blog** – Beth Kanter
• **Nonprofit AF** – Vu Le
• **#501Social Blog** – Julia Campbell
• **Huffington Post** – contributions on nonprofits and philanthropy
• **Philanthropy 2173** – Lucy Bernholz
• **Nonprofit Law Blog** – NEO Law Group (Gene Takagi)