



Draft Syllabus

PUAD 659-DL1

NONPROFIT LAW, GOVERNANCE, AND ETHICS

Summer 2020 online/asynchronous

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Office hours: online by appointment

I. Course Description

Nonprofit organizations operate in an ever more complex environment that requires those governing and leading the organization to fully appreciate and act on the legal responsibilities, moral and ethical obligations and governance principles that nonprofits are subject to. This course is designed to familiarize students with key features of the American legal system, as they apply to nonprofit organizations, as well as ethical and accountability standards and good governance practices that nonprofit directors and executives should be aware of.

II. Course Format and Requirements

Format and Participation: The course will be a virtual seminar and thus requires active student participation in online discussions and projects and familiarity with the assigned readings for each week. Demonstrated familiarity with the readings as well as active participation in the discussion fora/blogs will be reflected in student evaluations.

Students will be randomly assigned to smaller working groups, which will carry the bulk of the course discussions over the course of the semester. I will periodically monitor the group discussions, but not generally intervene. Each week, each group will report out on its discussion of the week's readings and topic in a shared forum so that all students have the opportunity to review, learn from, and add to the findings of the other groups.

For the purposes of this course, each week will start on Mondays and last until the subsequent Sunday. There is no specific time where everyone needs to be logged in, but students are expected to visit the Blackboard course site *several* times a week.

Group Discussions starting Mondays: On Mondays, I will usually start off the week's topic with questions, comments or assignments. Within their groups, students are expected to address (where appropriate) my posting, but, *importantly*, contribute their own questions about reading materials, notes and comments; students are also expected to react to (and try to answer) the

comments and queries of other students in the group. Given the nature of the subject, chances are that in most weeks even the briefest web search would generate recent news items or examples of what organizations do that have some bearing on the topics we will discuss. Please bear the following in mind:

- The frequency of individual contributions to group discussions contributes significantly to your overall individual participation grades. Please use the discussion board in your group for the group discussion and do not take your discussions off Blackboard (eg by emailing each other). What I cannot see on Blackboard, I cannot count towards your participation!
- Weekly readings typically cover a fair number of issues. Groups should raise and discuss issues that seem important, but are hard to understand; in addition, it is also ok to select a particular issue or concept each week for more in-depth group discussion.

General Group Reports on Sundays: The individual group discussions will not be accessible to students from other groups. Each group will therefore prepare a weekly report on its own discussions and post it on the general discussion board (in response to my own posting). The weekly deadline for posting these is Sunday evenings, 9pm to allow everyone to review and comment on the group reports on Monday. The report/post should cover the following four areas:

1. The group's answers to questions or assignments from my initial posting (if any);
2. The group's main takeaways from the readings for the week;
3. Questions that came up during group discussions regarding issues from the readings and/or regarding news items/external materials in relation to the readings; and
4. The group's attempt to answer those questions itself.

Case Discussions: Cases from Miriam Wood's book—as assigned in the readings list—are required readings for all students. In weeks where cases are assigned, groups will also discuss the managerial and governance issues raised in these cases. I will typically post a few questions about each case (which can differ from the discussion questions given at the end of the cases). Include your group's thoughts on the cases in your group reports.

Roles within the groups: In each week, each student is expected to actively contribute to the group discussions. In addition, group members will rotate specific tasks from week to week. These are:

- Wrapping task (summarize group discussions and prepare the group report); and
- Starter task (develop initial postings for the week to break the ice and get the group discussions going)

All groups are required to work out a fair schedule for these tasks for the semester. There is a task assignment table in the appendix, which you can use to organize this. Blackboard is not great for jointly editing documents; usually, a group member volunteers to put a task schedule up in Google docs for everyone to sign up for specific weeks. This should happen right away in the first week!

A few pointers concerning **participation grading**:

- Participation will be evaluated both in terms of quantity and quality of your general contributions to all types of discussions (readings, cases).
- In determining your participation grade, I will look at your postings across the whole semester as compared to your fellow students.
- Quality counts more than (mere) quantity. Higher quality contributions are typically those that go beyond personal opinion to reflect readings and other relevant literature and material in a meaningful way.

Case Discussion Papers: As the main writing assignment in this course, each student will individually prepare a written case discussion paper for each of two pre-assigned cases from Miriam Wood's *Nonprofit Boards and Leadership: Cases on Governance, Change and Board-Staff Dynamics*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996). The cases are:

- Chapter 10: "Using Community Networks to Diversify the Board." (Due July 6)
- Chapter 8: "Confronting Crisis: When Should the Board Step In?" (Due August 17)

The papers will comprise a brief, one-paragraph case synopsis and then answer the discussion questions noted in the individual cases. Specific references to readings and the literature are required. The papers will be between 8 and 10 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 pt. font) . The paper must be uploaded on the course website in the assignments section. Late submissions will result in point deductions.

Mid-term: There is a mid-term scheduled for Session 7 that will cover the readings and discussions of the first part of the course.

All assignments and papers must be submitted through Blackboard. Please check assignment deadlines in Blackboard.

III. Evaluation and Grading

Grading Scale: A+ = 98-100; A = 94-97; A- = 90-93
 B+ = 87-89; B = 83-86; B- = 80-82
 C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = 0-59

Evaluation:	Case Discussion Paper (25% each)	50%
	Class Participation	25%
	Mid-term	25%

IV. Course Schedule Outline

WEEK	STARTING ...	TOPIC	
1	Jun 1	Introduction	
2	Jun 8	Legal Structure/Board Duties	
3	Jun 15	Tax Exemption	
4	Jun 22	Business Ventures and UBIT	
5	Jun 29	Independence Day week/work on paper	
6	Jul 6	Fundraising regulation and board responsibilities	<i>(paper due)</i>
7	Jul 13	<i>Mid-term</i>	
8	Jul 20	Governance and Government	
9	Jul 27	Policy and Planning	
10	Aug 3	Board and Staff Relationships	
11	Aug 10	Work Structure	
12	Aug 17	Monitoring	<i>(paper due)</i>

Note: The schedule of weekly topics (and associated reading assignments) remains subject to change at the discretion of the instructor. Adequate notice of any changes will be given in class.

V. Readings

Required Books:

Hopkins, Bruce (2017). *Starting and Managing a Nonprofit Organization: A Legal Guide*. 7th ed. New York: Johns Wiley & Sons.

Zimmerman, Doris (1997/2005). *Robert's Rules in Plain English*. 2nd ed. New York: HarperPerennial.

Light, Mark (2001). *The Strategic Board*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Wood, Miriam, ed. (2001). *Nonprofit Boards and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Books for online courses are available from the GMU bookstore in Fairfax and the Bookstore Fairfax website, not Arlington!

Weekly Readings:

All listed materials are required readings, unless otherwise noted. Additional material may be assigned.

Introduction

- Bruce Hopkins: Debunking some Myths and Misconceptions
Go to Wiley Online Library database from the GMU library page, log in and search for the doi: 10.1002/9781118534199.ch3

Structure and Board Duties

- Hopkins, Chapter 1, 3
- Zimmerman, Chapter 14-15; skim 4-11
- Wood, Chapter 11

Tax Exemption

- Hopkins, Chapter 4, 5 & 7
- Wood, Chapter 1
- Recommended: Hopkins, Chapter 6

Business Ventures, UBIT

- Hopkins, Chapter 13 & 23
- Toepler, S. (2012). "Conceptualizing Nonprofit Commercialism: A Case Study." *Public Administration and Management: An Interactive Journal* 9(4).
- Recommended: Hopkins, Chapter 17

Fundraising Regulation and Board Responsibilities

- Hopkins, Chapter 11 & 19
- Wood, Chapter 10
- Recommended: Hopkins, Chapter 12

Governance and Government

- Hopkins, Chapter 14-15
- Wood, Chapter 9

Policy and Planning

- Light, Chapter 2-6
- Wood, Chapter 13

Board and Staff Relations

- Light, Chapter 7-9
- Wood, Chapter 5

Work Structure

- Light, Chapter 10-11
- Wood, Chapter 6, 7

Monitoring

- Light, Chapter 12
- Wood, Chapter 8

VI. George Mason Academic Policies

- a. Students must adhere to the guidelines of the George Mason University Honor Code [See <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>].
- b. Students must follow the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing [See <http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/responsible-use-of-computing/>].
- c. Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account.
- d. The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops and outreach programs) to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance [See <http://caps.gmu.edu/>].
- e. Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See <http://ods.gmu.edu/>].
- f. Students must follow the university policy stating that all sound emitting devices shall be turned off during class unless otherwise authorized by the instructor.
- g. The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing [See <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu/>].

Appendix: Weekly task assignments

Week	Starting	Starters (2-3)	Wrapper (1-2)
1	Jun 1	No report this week	XXX
2	Jun 8		
3	Jun 15		
4	Jun 22		
5	Jun 29	No report this week	XXX
6	Jul 6		
7	Jul 13	No report this week	XXX
8	Jul 20		
9	Jul 27		
10	Aug 3		
11	Aug 10		
12	Aug 17	No report this week	XXX