

Engaging Young Adults in Philanthropy

by

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Background

Initiatives designed to engage youth in philanthropy have increased over the last 20 years in the United States (Rosen and Sedonaen, 2001). Many of these efforts have been led by community foundations and have focused on youths in high school. These initiatives typically seek to engage youth in organized philanthropy, increase their community involvement, promote giving and community service, and steer youth toward being productive adults.

Little research or evaluations have been conducted on the initiatives. A major exception was the 10-year longitudinal study of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (Tice, 2004). This study examined the impacts on young (ages 13-17) people's volunteering, giving, and leadership as a result of their experiences in grantmaking. Comparisons to non-participating youth showed that these young people volunteered at a greater rate. The study also found that participants gave at a greater rate than their peers.

Similar efforts at engaging youth in philanthropy have also recently been initiated in the United Kingdom. The Citizenship Foundation has developed curriculum for charitable giving at both the primary (Go-givers, n.d.) and secondary school level (Giving Nation Challenge, n.d.) as part of the *Giving Nation Challenge*. There is also a new effort aimed at increasing youth volunteering. The v charity (Youth volunteering, n.d.) was created in 2006 to increase opportunities for youth volunteering with a goal of involving one million youths within a five-year period.

A more recent trend has been the offering of philanthropy courses at colleges and universities. For example, there are courses being offered in at least four North Carolina post-secondary institutions. It is unclear if the teachers of these courses expect to impact their students beyond the typical expectations they have of other university courses. Nonetheless, there does appear to be at least some interest in impacting students beyond the classroom experience. This evidence is most clearly seen in the *Campus Compact* (About Campus Compact, n.d.), a national group that wants to create active citizens of college-aged youth to solve societal issues. This organization has recently begun a national effort, Students4GivingSM (Overview and Objectives, n.d.), to engage university-aged students in grantmaking so that they will be inspired to continue giving to charitable organizations.

Research on these university-based efforts on the potential impacts on students appears to be scant. This exploratory study seeks to begin filling the gap in determining the potential impacts these types of experiences might have on participating young adults. Principally, this study addresses the following research questions:

- Do students respond favorably to experiential-based approaches to teaching philanthropy?
- Do students believe that they develop an understanding of the field of philanthropy through these experiential-based approaches?
- Do students believe that their attitudes toward philanthropy changed as a result of their experience with philanthropy?

The Course

The initial offering of the “Philanthropy and Social Change” course that the author developed for Elon University (North Carolina) was taught during the spring semester of 2008. Students were expected to understand American philanthropy and its role in supporting nonprofit organizations, encouraging policy changes, and affecting social change as a result of taking the course. Students were also expected to understand the legal bases of private and community foundations, how grantmakers operate and are structured, understand the history of American philanthropy, and understand how values, vision, and mission impact philanthropic decisions.

Figure 1 demonstrates the level of importance the author placed on the major course design elements – acting as a grantmaking board of directors, hearing speakers from the field, being exposed to current trends in philanthropy, and understanding the legalities and history of philanthropy. The center represents the most important design element and each successive outer circle represents the next most important component.

The core design component was having the students operate as a grantmaking board of directors. Students, acting as board members, reached consensus on the board’s values, vision, and mission (see Appendix A) that served as a basis for giving a grant equal to half of the author’s adjunct salary (\$2,100 USD) for teaching the course. The class held board meetings, conducted virtual site visits, and performed due diligence before making decisions regarding their grant.

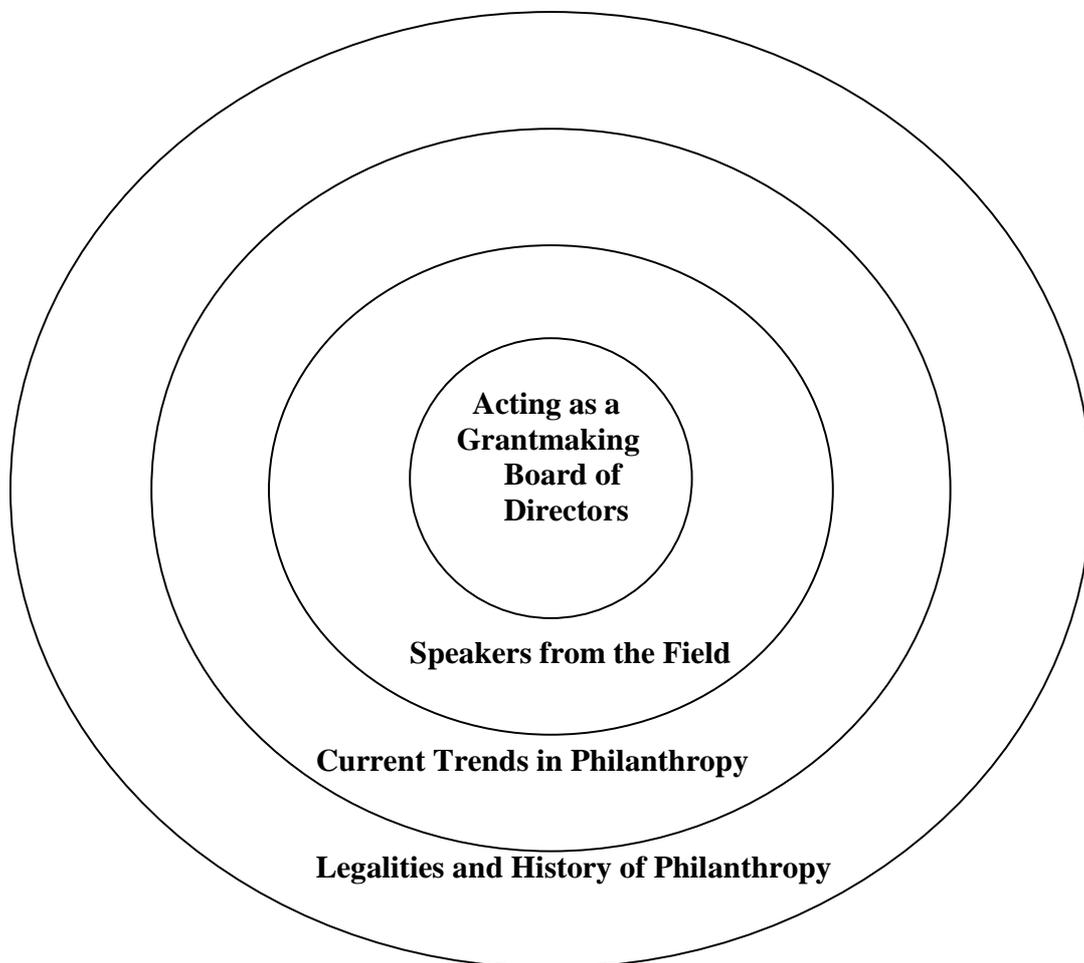
The second most critical component was having speakers from the field of philanthropy. Speakers represented management, program staff, and board members. Many different types of grantmakers were represented including independent, family, corporate, and community foundations. These institutions’ endowments ranged from \$6 million USD to \$2 billion USD. Persons associated with newer philanthropy vehicles such as donor advised funds and giving circles also spoke to the class.

The third component was exposure to current trends in philanthropy. These topics include proposed changes in non-profit law, social entrepreneurship, newer giving vehicles, and trends in

European philanthropy. Current events affecting philanthropy were also discussed and explored as a class.

The fourth component involved examining modern American philanthropy and a brief exploration of the history of philanthropy. Students were exposed to the legal bases of private and community foundations as well as how these institutions are structured and operated. The historical exploration covered the Anglo-Saxon origins of much of the legal bases of American philanthropy as well as the development of structured philanthropy in America over the last 100 years.

Figure 1:



The Students

Fourteen undergraduate students completed the course - 10 seniors and four juniors. The most common majors were political science (five students), corporate communications (three students), and international studies (two students).

The Survey

The study utilized a five-page student survey that included course evaluation items and perception items. The course evaluation components included the standard Elon University form (not included in this study) as well as items adapted from the Student Assessment of Learning Gains website (About SALG, n.d.). This project is managed by the University of Wisconsin and has been designed for college-level instructors to assess how course components helped facilitate perceived knowledge acquisition. Additional survey items were crafted to explore the students' experiences in the class as well as their perceptions of their attitudes and understanding of philanthropy as a result of completing the course.

Analytical approaches

Thematic analyses and descriptive statistical analyses of survey items employed to answer the three exploratory research questions. These included examinations of the classroom experience as well as perceived impacts on how the course affected students' understanding of and thinking about philanthropy. Additionally, thematic analyses assessed if students' future personal giving might be impacted as a result of their participation.

Results

The survey results are reported across three dimensions in the following sections. The first dimension analyzed relates to the students' perceptions of their classroom experience. The second explored their perceived understanding of philanthropy. The final dimension analyzed the potential impact of the course on their attitudes about philanthropy.

Perceptions of the Class Experience

A number of questions asked students to reflect about their experiences in the course. Survey items were both closed-ended and open-ended. Their perceptions of their classroom experiences are summarized in Tables 1 through 3.

Students first rated a series of items concerning the various pedagogical approaches utilized during the course. These results are provided in Table 1. The response categories were "no help" (coded as a 1), "a little help" (coded as a 2), "moderate help" (coded as a 3), "much help" (coded as a 4), and "great help" (coded as a 5).

Students rated having guest speakers as the most helpful aspect of the class with a mean of 3.93 ("much help") followed closing by doing hands-on/minds-on activities with a mean of 3.86. The

expectation of courteous behavior was considered the third most important aspect of the class. The least helpful aspect was working with peers outside of class with a mean of 2.46 (less than a “moderate help”).

Table 1: Student ratings of pedagogical aspects of the course

HOW MUCH did the following aspects of the class HELP YOUR LEARNING?	Average
<i>Hearing guest speakers.</i>	3.93
<i>Doing hands-on/minds-on class activities.</i>	3.86
<i>The expectation of courteous behavior among class peers.</i>	3.71
<i>Working with peers during class.</i>	3.64
<i>The welcoming, inclusive atmosphere of this class.</i>	3.64
<i>The use of visual resources in class.</i>	3.57
<i>The willingness of class peers to help each other.</i>	3.57
<i>The use of differing methods of learning.</i>	3.43
<i>Participating in group work during class.</i>	3.43
<i>The “active” nature of this class compared to more traditional classes.</i>	3.29
<i>Using online resources.</i>	3.07
<i>Working with peers outside of class.</i>	2.46

* Sample size for each item was 14 except “Working with peers outside of class” which had a sample size of 13.

Students responded to three questions about their feelings regarding the course. The first question asked if the course should be offered again at Elon University. All 14 of the students agreed that it should. Another item asked if they would recommend the course to a friend. Thirteen students indicated that they would. The final question asked if they would take the course again, knowing what they knew about the class. Ten of the students indicated they would.

Students provided reasons for why they thought the course should be offered again. These responses are categorized in Table 2. Responses were evenly distributed across five reasons. Three students mentioned that the class provided a real-world experience with one student noting “any class that serves as an experience on a professional level should be taught at Elon.” Other reasons cited included providing insights into the field, covering an unusual subject not offered at the university, and that philanthropy is an important subject.

In response to this question, three students offered suggestions for course improvement. One wanted a greater emphasis on grants. Another wanted a greater service learning component. The last student believed that changes should be made to the course before being offered again.

Table 2: Students’ reasons for offering the course again

Reasons to Offer Course Again	Frequency
<i>Provided a real-world experience</i>	3
<i>Provides insight into philanthropy and non-profit sector</i>	2
<i>It covers a different/atypical subject</i>	2
<i>Provided a hands-on experience</i>	2
<i>It is an important subject</i>	2

Students discussed how acting as board of directors influenced their understanding and views of philanthropy. Their responses are summarized in Table 3. (One student stated that the board experience was not influential in his or her understanding of philanthropy.) The most common benefit mentioned were the insights into how grantmakers decided on whom to fund. A student commented that “it made the concepts of class come to life.”

Several students mentioned they developed an appreciation for the difficulty of deciding on whom to give a grant. One student commented “it definitely let me see that choosing organizations to give money to is hard because there are so many good organizations out there doing so much.” Students also mentioned their greater appreciation of how to deal with a board’s diversity of opinion and reaching agreement on one organization.

Table 3: Students’ perceptions of the benefits of being on a board of directors

Benefits of Acting as a Grantmaking Board of Directors	Frequency
<i>Provided insights into how grantmaking decisions were made.</i>	7
<i>Gained appreciation for the difficult decision-making processes involved</i>	5
<i>Gained appreciation for dealing with diversity of opinion of board members</i>	5

* Several responses were cross-classified.

Understanding of Philanthropy

Students answered a number of questions related to their understanding of philanthropy before and after taking the class. These questions encompassed both open-ended and closed-ended formats. These results are summarized in Tables 4 through 6.

Table 4 categorizes the responses to the question of “What did you know about the field of philanthropy before taking this class”? About half of the responses showed that students knew little about the field of philanthropy. A similar number of students felt that had some knowledge of the non-profit sector or philanthropic foundations, either through a previous class or personal experience.

Table 4: Students’ beginning knowledge of philanthropy

Beginning Knowledge of Philanthropy	Frequency
<i>Had very little knowledge</i>	6
<i>Had some knowledge of the non-profit sector</i>	3
<i>Had some knowledge of philanthropic foundations</i>	2
<i>Other responses</i>	3

Students next responded to an item that asked them how they would explain philanthropy to someone if they were asked, having now taken this course. These responses are categorized in Table 5. Over half of the responses discussed philanthropy as a form of giving to an organization or cause. For example, one student wrote, “It is about giving. I always assumed philanthropy was about giving money, but time, a helping hand, all of this is philanthropy as

long as you give without expecting anything in return.” Two students viewed philanthropy as a means to solve problems and two other students discussed philanthropy as a structured approach to giving money. One example from a student was, “The practices of helping others, through multiple revenue streams, and the insights of professionals.”

Table 5: How students would explain philanthropy to others

Explanation of Philanthropy to Others	Frequency
<i>Giving in some way (money, time, support, etc.)</i>	7
<i>A way of solving problems</i>	2
<i>Giving money by a structured approach</i>	2
<i>Other response</i>	1

Students responded to a series of closed-ended questions about their understanding of philanthropy as a result of this course. These responses are summarized in Table 6. The response categories were “not at all” (coded as a 1), “just a little” (coded as a 2), “somewhat” (coded as a 3), “a lot” (coded as a 4), and “a great deal” (coded as a 5).

Two areas that students thought they understood “a lot” were how grantmaking can address social issues and help people address real world issues. To a slightly less extent, they also understood media articles about philanthropy. The area which they perceived the least understanding were ideas discussed in class and how they related to other disciplines that they had studied.

Table 6: Students’ perceiving understanding of various aspects of philanthropy

As a result of this course, I understand...	Average
<i>How grantmaking can be used to address social issues.</i>	4.29
<i>How grantmaking helps people address real world issues.</i>	4.00
<i>Articles in the media that discuss philanthropy.</i>	3.93
<i>How grantmakers match projects with non-profit agencies.</i>	3.79
<i>How grantmakers think about problems.</i>	3.79
<i>What professional work in philanthropy entails.</i>	3.71
<i>Current trends in philanthropy.</i>	3.14
<i>How ideas from this class relate to those encountered in other disciplines.</i>	3.07

* Sample size for each item was 14.

Attitudes about Philanthropy

Students answered a number of questions that addressed their attitudes about philanthropy as a result of their taking the course. These again were open-ended and closed-ended items. Results are displayed in Tables 7 through 10.

Students rated a group of items on the extent to which their feelings and attitudes about philanthropy were impacted by the course. These results are shown in Table 7. The response categories and codes were the same as those used for the items shown in Table 6.

Students indicated that they were very enthusiastic about the philanthropy as a result of the class. They also indicated that they had discussed philanthropy with others “a lot” and would be interested in taking additional classes in philanthropy, if it were possible for them to do so. Students responded that they were less than “somewhat” interested in attending graduate school in the non-profit field.

Table 7: Students’ perceived attitudes about philanthropy

As a RESULT of this course, I...	Average
<i>Am enthusiastic about philanthropy.</i>	4.00
<i>Have discussed philanthropy with friends or family.</i>	3.93
<i>Would be interested in taking or additional classes in this subject (if possible).</i>	3.92
<i>Would be interested in joining a club or organization that involves philanthropy (if possible).</i>	3.71
<i>Am interested in exploring career opportunities in philanthropy or the non-profit field.</i>	3.64
<i>Am confident that I understand philanthropy.</i>	3.29
<i>Am interested in reading about philanthropy in magazines, journals, or on the internet.</i>	3.21
<i>Would be interested in attending graduate school in the non-profit field.</i>	2.79

* Sample size for each item was 14 except “Would you be interested...” which had a sample size of 13.

Students commented on what insights, if any, they had gained from taking the course as well what, if anything, they would carry from the course into other aspects of their life. These responses are summarized in Tables 8 and 9. For both items, the greatest number of comments centered on having a better understanding of philanthropy. One student wrote, “I want to go into a non-profit field, so it’s great to understand how the foundation side works.” Along similar lines, several students also noted that they had gained insight into the complex nature of philanthropy. One student commented on “how complicated but blissfully vast the world of philanthropy is.”

A number of students indicated that they had learned the importance of giving and they would take that lesson with them. One student wrote that “I liked learning about the different online resources. I have passed on a lot of that information.” Two students also noted the positive experience serving on a board of directors.

Table 8: Students’ perceived insights on philanthropy

Insights Gained from the Course	Frequency
<i>An understanding of philanthropy</i>	4
<i>The complex and vast nature of philanthropy</i>	3
<i>Other response</i>	3

Table 9: Students' perceptions of course aspects they will take with them

Aspects that Students will take with them	Frequency
<i>A better understanding/appreciation of the complexity of philanthropy</i>	5
<i>The importance of giving</i>	4
<i>Their experience serving on a board of directors</i>	2
<i>Other response</i>	2

The final question concerning attitudes about philanthropy asked students if they thought the course might change the way they thought about their personal giving in the future. Ten students thought that the course would impact their thinking. The reasons listed are categorized in Table 10. The most common potential impact was the need to give more. One student summarized it in this way – “There is always room for philanthropy in your life in some capacity.”

Several students mentioned they had learned the importance of asking questions before giving money to an organization. This student stated that “it has helped me realize how much research should go into a grantmaking decision.” Several others discussed how the many different means that one could give might impact their personal giving.

Table 10: Students' perceptions of the course's impact on their giving

Potential Impact on Personal Giving	Frequency
<i>The need to give more</i>	4
<i>The need to research organizations before giving</i>	3
<i>The awareness of the different options for giving</i>	3
<i>Other response</i>	1

Three students felt the course would not change their thinking. Of these, only one cited a reason and that was that there were several issues they were passionate about and these had not changed during the course.

Conclusions

Students appeared to have responded positively to the course. All students indicated that the course should be offered again and 13 of 14 would recommend the course to a friend. The two most critical components of the course were well received. Thirteen of the 14 students cited benefits to their participation on a grantmaking board of directors. The most frequent benefit mentioned was that the experience provided insights into how grantmaking decisions are made. Hearing guest speakers was the highest rated item of classroom aspects helping learning.

The students believed they had a good understanding of the field of philanthropy. Nearly half began the semester with little or no knowledge of the field. By the end of the semester, they felt they knew how grantmaking addressed social issues and helped people address these issues. Their view of philanthropy was broad, including such aspects as money, time, and support.

The course appears to have a possible impact on how the students will approach personal giving in the future. Students reported being very enthusiastic about philanthropy and had discussed it

with family or friends. Ten of 13 students felt the course would impact their personal giving. The need to give more was cited as the top influence.

Personal Reflections

I think the course went well overall. The students seemed responsive to serving as a board of directors. The students took their responsibility seriously and used their mission, vision, and values to guide their search for a grantee. The students narrowed their choice to three excellent charitable organizations. The final grantmaking decision was perfect from a pedagogical point of view as the students were evenly divided and the board meeting became tense. Making the grantmaking decision was actually extended into the final exam period.

The students appeared to enjoy having guest speakers. A number of students mentioned to me how much they learned from them. The students also asked good questions of the speakers. I believe that I had too many speakers, particularly near the end of the semester. As a result, some content received short attention and some content was delivered in less than ideal order. In the future, I will need to use them more judiciously.

I brought in short media articles throughout the semester on current ideas, initiatives, proposed legal changes, and opinion pieces for the class to discuss. These discussions generally went really well. I believe the students saw that philanthropy is an active and vibrant field.

In retrospect, I should have utilized the board structure to have students explore concepts in more detail. I had them go through several board exercises but there were certainly more opportunities to do so. I believe additional activities would have also made them more cohesive as a unit, even though they did work fairly well together.

I encountered some “senioritis” and student attention began to drift near the end of the semester. Several students also missed class for interviews. The class time was in the evening so university events also impinged on several classes. The class will be taught in the fall for 2009 so some of these issues should be alleviated. Reducing the number of speakers near the end of the semester and increasing student responsibility for course content should help.

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Appendix A:

E-HOPE Mission, Vision, and Values Statements

Mission

The mission of *Elon Helping Other People Excel (E-HOPE)* is to support the aspirations of organizations that are committed to improving our society by focusing on health, poverty, and/or educational issues in North Carolina

Vision

The vision of *Elon Helping Other People Excel (E-HOPE)* is to provide support and opportunities to those in the state of North Carolina by fostering a better future for all citizens.

Values

We value INTEGRITY by being moral, fair, and ethical.

We value COMMITMENT by being dedicated, engaged, and responsible citizens to one another and the community.

We value COMMUNICATION by speaking freely and listening openly.

We value RESPECT by upholding the dignity and excellence of every person.

We value EMPOWERMENT of the individual and the community by recognizing potential, continuing self-improvement, and committing to life-long learning.