In recent years, foundations like the Gates Foundation and wealthy individuals like Mark Zuckerberg have become heavily involved in funding K-12 education, giving large sums of money to urban school districts, charter schools, and other education entities. This philanthropy has been controversial, leading to accusations that some non-profits are mere agents of philanthropists’ ideological education agendas. For example, Teach For America has been branded as a tool of its corporate funders, among them the conservative Walton Family Foundation. At the same time, foundations have been accused unduly influencing politics and policy. The Gates Foundation, for example, has been criticized for funding the development of the Common Core State Standards. This influence-seeking foundation giving is not new, although, as epitomized by foundations like Gates and Walton, it has become much more muscular, goal-oriented, and focused on education reform in recent decades.

This course will examine the trajectory of foundation involvement in education policy, with a focus on current education reform efforts. We will first examine what foundations do and what normative considerations they raise. Then, with this conceptual and ethical toolbox at our disposal, we will start broad, studying foundation involvement in social movements during the second half of the 20th century. During this period, they funded a variety of causes, from the civil rights movement to poverty alleviation, and – in backlash – the conservative legal education movement. Then, for the majority of the course, we will train our focus on recent foundation involvement in education policy. We will examine how foundations have become backers of current education reform initiatives, like charter schools, Teach For America, higher education standards, and changes in big cities. Throughout, we will draw on political science concepts to make sense of foundation behavior, and we will consider the ethics and consequences of philanthropic giving.

The overarching objectives of this course are threefold:

1) Students will be able to identify the evolution of foundation giving to education in the United States and the nature of current foundation involvement in education reform.
2) Students will be able to apply political science concepts to foundation behavior and evaluate the normative and political implications of foundation giving.

3) Students will be able to find and analyze publicly available data to compose an original research paper.

Who should take this course?
This course is appropriate for students interested in foundations, education, wealth inequality, or simply interest groups and American politics. It will touch on some seminal works in political science and will provide students expertise on an emerging literature on non-profits and foundations.

Requirements:

Class attendance and participation 20%
5 Memos (5% each) 25%
Research paper 55%
  Topic and Research Question (5%)
  Preliminary Prospectus (5%)
  Revised Prospectus (15%)
  Presentation of Preliminary Findings (10%)
  Final Paper (20%)

Class Attendance and Participation: Students are expected to attend all sessions and participate in all class discussions and activities. Students should plan to arrive on time and be prepared to discuss the readings. **Laptops and cell phones are not permitted for use in class.**

Memos: Five times during the semester, students will write 1 page memos on the readings. Memos are due by 10pm the night before class. Memos should tie together most or all of the readings and make a clear argument supported by ideas in the readings. Memos will be graded based on clarity (3 points), having a clear thesis (3 points), and drawing on evidence from multiple readings to support your case (4 points). Memos may also incorporate current events in education, where appropriate.

Research Paper: As part of this course, you will write a 12-15 page paper that advances an argument related to a foundation (or foundations) of your choosing. The argument will be based on original data that you will collect from publicly-available IRS tax data and other sources. This project will offer you a chance to produce original research, reveal something new about foundation behavior. This project is worth half of your course grade, but will be broken up into several pieces.

  **Topic and Research Question:** On Friday, October 6 (by 11:59pm), you will upload a paper describing your topic and research question. It should have something to do with foundations. I will provide comments and you will be required to meet with me to discuss the topic and your plans for the paper.

  **Prospectus:** You will hand in a 2-3 page preliminary prospectus by Friday, October 27 to me. I will read it and give you comments. Then we will meet and you will revise it **substantially** and write another, longer prospectus (5-6 pages), which you will hand in on Friday, November 10.

  **Presentation of Preliminary Findings:** The final class session, you will present your preliminary findings to the class. Two days prior to class (by Saturday night), you will provide a handout
with the key points you will present, and you will be expected to look at everybody's handout before class on Monday. During the presentation, your peers will have the opportunity to offer comments and suggestions (as will I), which you may choose to incorporate into your final draft.

Final Draft: The final draft will be due on Friday, December 8 at 11:59pm.

Late Assignments: All assignments are expected to be handed in on time. Late assignments will be docked a third of a letter grade for every day it is late. Exceptions may be made, however, in the case of a medical or family emergency.

Collaboration Policy: The exchange of ideas is essential to strong academic work. For assignments in this course, feel free to discuss with your classmates your ideas. For your research papers, you may find it useful to share sources or discuss your thinking, particularly if you are working on a similar topic. You may even read each other’s drafts and provide feedback. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit to me is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own thinking and approach to the topic. You must be sure to cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that you draw on.

All readings are available on the course website or at the listed URL.

Readings and Class Meetings:

The Basics

Wednesday, August 30: Introduction

Monday, September 4: Labor Day. NO CLASS


- **A small assignment for today:**
  - Go to the “Databases” section of Harvard Libraries and look up “Foundation Directory Online.” Click on “Foundation Directory Online.” At the website, click on “Search Grantmakers,” and write the name of a foundation in the search field. Click on the foundation and read through its profile. Then, in the “At a Glance” section of the foundation’s profile, click on one of the 990 forms and look through it. In no more than a page, write down what you notice about the foundation and its 990.

Monday, September 18: Are Foundations Democratic? Normative Considerations


**Foundations and Social Movements**

Monday, September 25: Foundations as Social Movement Patrons


- Read one of the case studies at [https://www.edfunders.org/resources/gfed-publications#block-views-1d12de4cc08a1a953ae78630a71e4](https://www.edfunders.org/resources/gfed-publications#block-views-1d12de4cc08a1a953ae78630a71e4).

Monday, October 2: How Philanthropy Shapes Interest Groups


- Theda Skocpol. 2003. *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American*


- In-class Research Topic: Coming up with a paper topic and a research question

**Due Friday, October 6 at 11:59pm: Topic and research question assignment.**
[To be arranged for the weeks of October 9 and October 16: Meetings with the instructor.]

Monday, October 9: Columbus Day. NO CLASS

Monday, October 16: Progressive and Conservative Philanthropic Activism


**Philanthropy and Education Reform**

Monday, October 23: Choosing Whom to Fund – Visitor from the Boston Foundation

- Readings TBD


- In-class Research Topic: Writing a Prospectus
**Due Friday, October 27 at 11:59pm: Preliminary Prospectus**
[To be arranged for the weeks of October 30 and November 6: Meetings with the instructor.]

Monday, October 30: New v. Old Foundations and Education Reform


Monday, November 6: Foundations and School Choice


**Due Friday, November 10 at 11:59pm: Revised Prospectus**
Monday, November 13: Philanthropic Policy Entrepreneurs in NYC and LA


Monday, November 20: Foundations and Federal Education Policymaking


- *In-class Research Topic: Presenting Ongoing Research*

Monday, November 27: Conclusion and Presentations of Preliminary Findings

- *Upload handout with main points for presentation by Saturday, Nov. 25. Read all uploaded handouts prior to class and come with questions or suggestions.*


*Due Friday, December 8 by 11:59pm: Final paper*