

# The Politics of Nonprofit Organizations

LGAF 6240 LH 4  
Legislative Affairs  
George Washington University  
Summer Term Session 1 2013

## Instructor Information

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Office hours by appointment (often before or after class)

## Course Overview and Objectives

Nonprofit organizations play an integral role in the economy of the United States and have an increasing impact in both major and minor public policy decisions. Nonprofit organizations constitute over a million organizations and over 4 percent of national income. Every American, in one way or another, is affected by the work and activities of nonprofit organizations and many of us participate in their work as employees, volunteers and contributors.

This course aims to provide a better understanding of the nonprofit sector including its roots, evolution and current structure with particular attention paid to their activities in the public policy process namely: in agenda setting, policy formulation and law-making. We explore how these organizations work to influence and shape the public debate and in particular the legislative process. In the years since the Citizen United case, nonprofit organizations in general, and 501c4 or “Social Welfare” organizations in particular, have proliferated and garnered increased attention from the media, watchdog groups and the increased and possibly, illegal scrutiny of the IRS itself. We hope to hear from a guest or two from these nonprofit organizations.

Each student is expected to read all the assignments, actively participate in our class discussions in class and online, write four micro essays, take a mid-term examination and complete a case study of a 501c4 organization.

The overall objective of this course is for each student to have a clearer appreciation for the interactions of nonprofit organizations in public policy and especially the legislative process.

## Text Books (required)

*Nonprofits and Government: Collaborations and Conflict*, edited by Elizabeth T. Boris and C. Eugene Steuerle, Washington DC: The Urban Institute Press, 2006

Additional reading assignments are assigned on Blackboard. Students are advised to check Blackboard frequently.

### **Reference Books (assigned readings will be available in Blackboard)**

*Interest Groups and Congress: Lobbying, Contributions, and Influence*, by John R. Wright, 1996. Boston: Allyn & Bacon

*Interest Group Politics*, edited by Alan J. Ciglar and Burdett A. Loomis, Washington DC: CQ Press, 2007

*The State of Nonprofit America*, edited by Lester M. Salamon, Washington DC: Brookings, 2002

### **Grading Policy**

Grades will be based on 1000 points in four components:

- |  |       |         |
|--|-------|---------|
| 1) Class participation and discussion boards | (20%) | 200 pts |
| 2) Two essays                                | (20%) | 200pts  |
| 3) Midterm exam                              | (20%) | 200pts  |
| 4) Case study                                | (30%) | 300pts  |

Any graduate seminar discussion is enlivened by the thoughtful contributions of all of the students in class. You shortchange yourself and your colleagues by not being prepared or not participating in our class discussions. Organization, clarity and precision in the spoken and written word are expected of graduate level work but thorough documentation, keen observations and critical insight demonstrate superior effort.

### **Class Participation, Online Postings and Discussion Boards**

During the seven weeks of this class, each student will participate both in our in class discussions and our online discussion boards. The primary vehicle for participation will be Blackboard Discussion Boards and through the Google + community for this class. Participation in these discussions is critical to attaining goals and objectives for the course. In addition to posting your own contributions to the discussions, students are expected to read and respond to their colleagues posts. Information and further guidance is provided in Blackboard under the appropriate tabs. My teaching assistant Rachel Trello is available for help with Google + and especially the Google Hangout feature which we will use once a week for live video chats.

The exact number and nature of posts and responses that will be required will vary depending on the nature of the discussion. Posting also has a social purpose: it encourages online collaboration, (2) develops a network within the community of online learners, and, (3) by listening to others informed opinions, expands our own perspectives on the key issues and controversies.

You may post in the Discussion Board on Blackboard or on Google + or both.

## **Google+ Hangouts and Video Class Chats**

To simulate the feel and substance of the face to face classroom we employ the use of the Goggle + feature called Hangout. This provides for up to nine individuals to see and hear each other in real time and will be used each week for Q&A and feedback. Students will sign up in advance for one of two weekly hangout sessions moderated by the instructor to review material and assignments as well as respond to issues that will be further developed on the discussion board. Though the hangout sessions are not graded per say students lose points if Hangout sessions are missed. The Hangout feature will also be employed for the Congressional Profile summaries at the end of the term. More about Google + and Hangouts can be viewed by going to the Google + tab in Blackboard.

## **Micro Essays**

Four micro essays are assigned during the course of the semester on topics related to our readings on nonprofits and in applying them to contemporary issues and situations. The micro essays are to be in 200-400 word range and may serve as quizzes. Appropriate footnoting is expected when citing sources in the micro essays. Email the essays directly to me at [kornacki@american.edu](mailto:kornacki@american.edu) or [LGAF6240.LH4@gmail.com](mailto:LGAF6240.LH4@gmail.com) by Monday evening of the following week. In other words the micro essay for Week 1 is due on or before Monday May 27.

## **Case Study**

As a final project, each student will undertake a case study of a 501c4 nonprofit organization of his or her choosing. This study will examine the origin, purpose and development of the organization and review its actions in the area of education and/or advocacy in the public policy realm and in particular, work devoted to the legislative branch. As part of this study, each student should provide an assessment of the organization's current effectiveness in influencing public policy and make suggestions for improvements. The case study should be no longer than 20 double-spaced pages and include a one paragraph, single-spaced executive summary. A bibliography should be appended. Each student will provide a make a (no more than) 10-minute oral presentation findings.

Students who wish to have their graded papers returned should provide two-copies and a self-addressed and pre-stamped document-sized envelope on the final day of class.

## **Statement on Scholarly Ethics**

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, as in all courses, students are expected to be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, recycled assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Verify the originality of your papers by using *Turnitin* and related software used by this university and others.

## **Schedule with Assignments** (version 5-21)

### **1. Tuesday, May 21 (in class)**

Class objectives: To clarify course parameters and expectations as well as let students become familiar with one another; to provide a brief overview of nonprofits in the U.S.

Assignment for next class:

Boris and Steuerle (B&S), Introduction and Chapter 1, pp 1-80.

Discussion questions for next time: What are the appropriate roles and responsibilities of nonprofits in the public sector? Why is this increasing? What role does politics play?

### **2. Thursday, May 23 (online)**

Class objectives: To understand the complementary, supplementary and sometimes adversarial nature of nonprofit-public sector relationships.

Assignment for next class:

Wright, Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 9-32

Essay #1 assigned

Discussion question for next time: How do you explain both the diversity and expansion of nonprofit groups in the U.S especially in matters of public policy?

### **3. Tuesday, May 28 (in class)**

Class objective: To review history, organization and regulation of nonprofit organizations in the public sphere.

Assignment for next class:

B&S. Chapter 2, pp. 81-106

### **4. Thursday, May 30 (online)**

Class objective: To examine/compare social needs in government and nonprofit sectors.

Essay #1 due.

Assignment for next class:

B&S, Chapters 3 and 4 pp. 107-217

Wright, pp.37-73

Discussion question for next time: Do today's nonprofits need more governmental regulation?

**5. Tuesday, June 4 (in class)**

Class objectives: To review how federal spending and tax policies affect the nonprofit sector; to better appreciate how nonprofit organizations work with Congress as well as, State and Local governments.

Assignment for next class:

Wright, Chapter 3, pp. 37-74

Discussion question for next time: What are some examples of effective inside and outside strategies employed by nonprofits in trying to affect public policy?

**6. Thursday, June 6 (online)**

Class objective: To assess overall understanding of course material and offer the opportunity to demonstrate the application of course concepts to real problems.

**Mid-term examination**

Assignment for next class:

B&S, Chapter 6 and 7, pp. 219-276

Discussion question for next time: Nonprofits deliver services at various service levels. Some say a local approach is superior to larger government units. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**7. Tuesday, June 11 (in class)**

Class objectives: To determine why and how government funds, guides and regulates nonprofit activities.

Assignments for next class:

Wright, Chapter 4, pp.74-114

Essay #2 assigned

**8. Thursday, June 13 (online)**

Class objective: To evaluate specific methods employed by nonprofits seeking

to influence decisions on Capitol Hill

Assignment for next class:

B&S, Chapter 8 and 9, pp. 277-342

Discussion question for next time: Are religious or sectarian nonprofit organizations handicapped by or enhanced by public laws and regulations? Should these laws and regulations be reviewed?

**9. Tuesday, June 18 (in class)**

Class objectives: To investigate ownership, conversion, culture and values of nonprofit actors in the policy process.

Essay #2 due

Assignment for next time:

B&S, 10 and 11, pp. 343-398

Discussion question for next time: Is the nonprofit sector too big and influential, why?

**10. Thursday, June 20 (online)**

Class objectives: To probe the future prospects for nonprofit advocacy.

Assignment for next class:

Wright, Chapters 5, 6 and 7, pp. 115-202

Discussion question for next time: Has the advocacy work of nonprofit interests helped or hindered the health care reform debate?

**11. Tuesday, June 25 (online)**

Class objective: To assess the effects of nonprofit actors in the policy sphere such increasing governmental spending, fueling gridlock, and providing greater access to decision-makers.

Assignment for next class:

Prepare oral presentations and complete case studies

**12. Thursday, June 27 (in class)**

Class objectives: To provide an opportunity to present case study findings, respond to respond to questions and receive feedback.

Oral presentations, Case Studies due. I want one hard copy.

*If you wish a hard copy of your paper returned with comments, please provide me **two** hard copies of your paper and a self addressed, pre-stamped, document-sized envelope.*

Have a great summer and I hope to see you in a future class!