Foundations in Social Entrepreneurship

The Harris School of Public Policy
WTR 2025 | Syllabus

Will Gossin, gossintw@uchicago.edu
Office Hours: Monday 1-2:30pm & As Needed

Monday 3pm - 5:50pm
Keller 0023

(*Week 3 - due to MLK holiday, we are tentatively scheduled to meet Friday 24th,
9-11:50am. We'll poll the class Week 1 to find the best time if there are many conflicts)

--- In-Person ---
---No Prerequisites Req'd ---

Course Objectives

This course aims to give students a comprehensive overview of the social entrepreneurship ecosystem and how they could contribute to it professionally. Rather than focus purely on new venture creation, this course will give students experience in the three main areas of the ecosystem. Students will learn the roles of: Impact Investors/Foundations, Product Managers, and Founders. As we explore each role within the ecosystem, students will learn the perspectives, mindsets, and tools that practitioners use to advance their declared impact in each area. By the end of the course, students will have produced deliverables for all three roles and understand how the mindset, incentives, and values of each role interact with and influence the others. Students will also create a Impact Guide/Checklist to serve as a resource throughout their careers to guide decision-making and maximize their impact.

Course Description

This is an introductory course that will explore the three fundamental roles within the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. The course aims to provide the skills and mindset

for deeper engagement with other courses focused on social impact and innovation at Harris and across the University. Additionally, this course is designed to guide students in their career considerations: What role do you want to play in creating impact? How is that role influenced and constrained? What will you need to be good at to make a meaningful contribution in that role?

Expectations for student preparation and out of class work are high. The readings aren't difficult to get through, but the concepts and assignment formats will be new to many of you, especially in this combination. Completion of each reading is required to make each class session worthwhile for all of us. You will also need to complete primary research interviews with beneficiaries for your selected impact challenge.

Students will have a high degree of autonomy in choosing the focus of their assignments, but will be required, when selecting projects, to give consideration of course criteria.

Use of AI/LLMs/ChatGPT - Students will utilize AI tools to accelerate their entrepreneurial experience throughout the course. ChatGPT and other LLMs provide an extraordinary mechanism to lower barriers to entrepreneurship and innovation which we will explore and proactively utilize throughout this course. That said, your deliverables must still reflect the concepts from this course (their specific uses, relationships, and definitions) and must be written by you. I recommend you use LLMs for conceptualization, research, and outlining. Any graded output has high expectations for relevance and cogence with respect to this class's point of view on social entrepreneurship.

Course Structure

Funders: Impact Investor/Foundations (Pairs)
We'll begin with the investor mindset which ultimately sets the boundaries for how the social entrepreneurship ecosystem functions. There is a tremendous diversity in this area with dramatic ranges for how even the concept of *impact* is defined and measured. We will explore the diversity of approaches to impact and students will produce a core deliverable (investment thesis - 2pg memo) used to guide investment decisions within these organizations. The audience for the investment thesis will be impact investors wanting to invest in climate-aware solutions to social challenges worldwide.

Contributor/Product Manager (Team)

Having learned in the first phase of the class how investors define risk, we'll flip to the first task of social innovation--systematically eliminating that risk by confirming that demand for a solution actually exists. Students will form teams based on ideas generated from Assignment 1. They will then learn how interdisciplinary teams work together to develop new products and services and get practice with those skills. We'll utilize human-centered design and prototyping to produce a written product narrative (1 page PR/FAQ memo). Students will learn how such documents enable effective coordination across teams and advances the mission of organizations. (**Teams will remain the same for Phases 2 and 3.)

Founder (Team)

We will finish the course by learning the foundational skills for effectively starting a new Organization--taking proof of demand and building a sustainable organization around it. Students will learn business model design, financial modeling, and how to prepare an investor pitch/presentation (final assignment).

Administrative Information

Instructor:
Will Gossin
Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Innovation, *Harris School of Public Policy*
Adjunct Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship*, Chicago Booth*
Email: gossintw@uchicago.edu

Teaching Assistants:
TBD

Course Experience

We'll use a combination of in-class lectures and workshops to integrate the concepts from readings/podcasts as well as your insights and questions. There will be a focus on interaction and participation. There will be regular office hours available for individuals and teams.

For team-based projects, students are expected to schedule and meet regularly as a small group and include the TA or professor when needed for support or feedback.

Course Requirements

Evaluation of Students' Work:

70% - Phase Assignments
- 1/3 Investor Deliverable (Pairs)
- 1/3 Contributor/Product Manager (Team)
- 1/3 Founder Deliverables (Team)

15% Participation Across Quarter
15% Impact Guide/Checklist (Individual)- due Finals Week (graded 10, 7, 0)

Peer Evaluation (adjustment to final grade): At the end of each team assignment, students are required to evaluate the relative performance of all team members. If an individual is rated negatively by 2 or more team members, their grade for the assignment may be adjusted downward up to 2 full letter grades. If an individual is rated very positively by 2 or more team members, their grade may be adjusted upward.

Class Participation: Class sessions will be interactive with workshops, case discussions, and presentations. Active engagement is essential for getting the most out of the class and diverse participation is necessary to make the class work well. The quality of the experience depends on your critical and creative contributions as well as your feedback to your peers. We'll spend part of our first week establishing an inclusive course culture using a method that I've found to speed up the trust of groups and the quality of their work.

Academic Materials

We'll work to get as many excerpts of the readings onto Canvas where whole books aren't required. But there are a few texts you should buy or check out from the library. And since you've made it this far in the syllabus, you must have some ambition to tackle challenges in the future and the required (and most of the recommended) books will serve you well in your personal library.

Texts

Required Texts:
- Weeks 1-3
    - *(see Canvas)*
- Week 4-6
    - ***MisMatch,* Kat Holmes** - *an excellent foundation in inclusive design that will serve as the basis for your human-centered research into your chosen problem.*
    - ***Talking to Humans*** & ***Testing with Humans*** (free online and on our Canvas)
- Week 7-10
    - ***Business Model Generation*, Osterwalder** - *a core framework for conceptualizing a sustainable social venture*.

- *+ See Canvas Weekly for articles and pods*

Recommended for Your Professional Library (we'll have chapters from these on Canvas for class)
- *Sprint*, Jake Knapp - a guide to managing innovation in 1-week cycles.
- *Slideology*, Nancy Duarte - a powerful reference for visual storytelling to complement your data and ideas.
- *Working Backwards*, Bryar and Carr on Amazon's lessons for innovation and leadership

Additional Course Information

Accommodation Policy: If you require any accommodations for this course, as soon as possible please provide the instructor with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that you may discuss with him/her how your accommodations may be implemented in this course. The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University's programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

A Note on Sexual Misconduct and Harassment: The University of Chicago is a community of scholars dedicated to research, academic excellence, and the pursuit and cultivation of learning. Members of the University community cannot thrive unless each is accepted as an autonomous individual and is treated without regard to characteristics irrelevant to participation in the life of the University. Our university is committed to fostering a safe, productive learning environment. Title IX and our school policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. Sexual misconduct — including harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking — is also prohibited at our university.

Our university encourages anyone experiencing sexual misconduct to talk to someone about what happened, so they can get the support they need and our university can respond appropriately. If you wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct, want more information about filing a report, or have questions about school policies and procedures, please contact Bridget Collier (Associate Provost for Equal Opportunity Programs and Title IX Coordinator for the University) at bcollier@uchicago.edu or 773.834.6367.

Our university is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, and therefore it cannot guarantee the confidentiality of a report, but it will consider a request for confidentiality and respect it to the extent possible. As an instructor, I am also required by our school to report incidents of sexual misconduct and thus cannot

guarantee confidentiality. I must provide our Title IX coordinator with relevant details such as the names of those involved in the incident.

Recordings and Copyrights
By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:
- They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.
- They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.
- Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.
- Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.