Frederick S. Pardee School of Global Studies
Boston University

SYLLABUS
(A work in progress)

IR426/626 NGOs and the Practice of Development
Spring 2020
Tuesdays, 12:30-3:15
Classroom: TBD

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Course Description

The course examines the role and modus operandi of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in processes of social change and international development. It critically reviews the theory and practice of NGOs in development and assesses NGO strategies and tactics for achieving their desired policy and social change outcomes, including their multi-level alliances and partnerships and their engagement in local contexts. The course aims to provide an understanding of the inner workings of NGOs in terms of strategic planning; program and project design, implementation, management, and evaluation; campaigning and policy advocacy; resource mobilization; and organizational leadership. Throughout the course, the examination emphasizes the vast heterogeneity of development NGOs and applies various lenses, including those of ethics, impact analysis, cost effectiveness, and the perspectives of people on the margins who engage with NGOs as well as the perspectives of NGOs themselves. Students will engage directly with international development NGOs through class visits to NGO offices in the Boston area, guest speakers in class, and independent participation in relevant events sponsored by the Boston Network for International Development (BNID)

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, students should be able to demonstrate:

• An understanding of how NGOs have informed and influenced global development policy, and how the global development landscape has in turn affected the roles, functions, strategies and business models of NGOs.
• An ability to critically engage with debates on civil society and popular participation in public policy.

Critical Thinking Skills

• How to listen for understanding to persons who have had very different experiences than one’s own.
• How to utilize ethical, theoretical and empirical arguments to critically evaluate different points of view.
• How to develop your own informed point of view in relation to contested and contemporary issues in global development and public policy.
• How to synthesize and summarize arguments.
**Professional Skills:**

- A foundational understanding of (a) NGO development practitioner skills such as strategic planning, theories of change, program evaluation, and fund-raising, (b) what further training would be necessary to develop such skills, and (c) where such training opportunities could be found, including at B.U..
- How to become a critical development practitioner.

**BU Hub Learning Outcomes**

**Diversity, Civic Engagement, and Global Citizenship: Individual in Community**

1. Students will analyze at least one of the dimensions of experience—historical, racial, socio-economic, political, gender, linguistic, religious, or cultural—that inform their own worldviews and beliefs as well as those of other individuals and societies. *This course critically examines the role of NGOs in supporting and transforming particular political, economic, and social agendas in comparative perspective. Students are required to prepare case studies of particular NGOs for in-class presentations.*

2. Students will participate respectfully in different communities such as campus, citywide, national and international groups, and recognize and reflect on the issues relevant to those communities. *Students visit NGO offices in the Boston area, as a group, and participate individually in relevant BNID events during the course. They are required to submit a critical reflection paper on their experience and the lessons learned.*

**Social Inquiry II**

1. Students will apply principles and methods from the social sciences based on collecting new or analyzing existing data in order to address questions, solve problems, or deepen understanding. They will understand the nature of evidence employed in the social sciences and will demonstrate a capacity to differentiate competing claims in such fields. This includes reflecting on and critically evaluating how social scientists formulate hypotheses, gather empirical evidence of multiple sorts, and analyze and interpret this evidence. *Throughout the course, students will engage with sophisticated social scientific analyses of NGOs and their activities through interdisciplinary lenses including political science, economics, development studies, and ethics.*

2. Using their knowledge of the natural and social sciences, students will engage with issues of public policy, such as climate change, inequality, and health that involve the intersection of perspectives from different disciplines. This would entail an ability to identify the evidentiary basis for scientific claims, the challenges to it, and the connections among the economic, social, and scientific factors that shape the creation and adoption of effective public policy. *Throughout the semester, this course addresses the activities of NGOs focused on public policy issues. All readings and written assignments develop this learning outcome.*

**Intellectual Toolkit: Critical Thinking**

1. Students will be able to identify key elements of critical thinking, such as habits of distinguishing deductive from inductive modes of inference, recognizing common logical fallacies and cognitive biases, translating ordinary language into formal argument, distinguishing empirical claims about matters of fact from normative or evaluative judgments, and recognizing the ways in which emotional responses can affect reasoning processes. *Throughout course discussion, students will critically evaluate analyses of NGOs and their activities derived from multiple disciplines and multiple points of view. In doing so, they will learn about the different ways in which*
empirical evidence can be used to draw conclusions in various social scientific traditions.

2. Drawing on skills developed in class, students will be able to evaluate the validity of arguments, including their own. In both the critical reflection paper and the review of a critical analysis of an NGO, students must critique arguments in the literature. Class discussions will also emphasize the quality of critical thinking and argumentation.

Course website

An active course website is available through the BU BlackBoard system. All course information, including announcements, weekly reading requirements, assignments, and deadlines will be maintained and updated on this site. In addition, in-class Power Point presentations, resources generated in class, and other relevant resources that may surface during our study will be posted on BlackBoard after class. You should check the course website regularly.

Books:


Assignments and Grading:

Class attendance, and participation (15% of the final course grade): Thoughtful participation in class is an important part of the learning process, both for the one speaking
as well as for others—including the professor. Students’ attendance, demonstrated preparation (e.g. the ability to discuss the required reading), and the quality of their contribution to class discussions will be significant factors in their final grade. All absences will be considered in the grade; what you and others miss when you are not in class can never be made-up 100%. However, absences for justifiable reasons with advance notice—whenever possible—will incur only relatively minor penalties.

Weekly reflections on the reading assignments and class visits to NGOs (25%):
Students write brief (400-500 words) reflection essays on three aspects of the course:

1. Reflections on each week’s reading. Each student submits her/his/their reflection on BlackBoard in advance of class and then reads the entries from other students before class begins. Students submit their thoughts via BlackBoard no later than 8 p.m. the night before class. For each student the lowest grade on these reading-related essays are dropped when calculating the average for this aspect of the course grade.

2. Reflections on each class visits to the offices of Boston-based NGOs. There likely will be two such visits. Each student submits her/his/their reflection on BlackBoard within one week of the visit.

3. Reflections on each student’s individual participation in a BNID event where international development NGOs are represented. Each student is required to attend at least two such events. Each student submits her/his/their reflection on BlackBoard within one week of the event. To assure that the events meets course requirements, students consult with the professor in advance.

Mid-Term Take-home Exam (18%): Mid-semester students are required to write one or more essays of 1500 words total that will help integrate the materials being read and the issues discussed. The questions will be handed out at least one week in advance.

Weekly Seminars - NGO Case Studies (17%): Each week (Wednesdays), when the class is not visiting an NGO office, a student team of at least 2 persons (depending on enrollment), presents an in-depth, critical review of at least 1 NGO (working on either environment, development or human rights issues). The review may be focused more generally on the NGO’s overall work or on one or two particular programs or projects. The team is given 30 minutes for its presentation A class discussion follows. All students are required to review in advance of class key documents identified by the case study presenters. Depending on enrollment and space in the schedule, we may invite NGO guest speakers to present a case study review that arises out of their practitioner experience.

Final paper (25%): Students have two options for this paper:
1. An individual 3000-word research paper in which the student would more deeply explore an issue related to the role of NGOs international development and propose policies or strategies at some level that would enhance the prospects of one NGO or NGOs more generally to improve well-being in the Global South.
2. A project of a group of 2-3 students that would compare and contrast two NGO case studies—one deemed to have successfully improved well-being and one considered to have been a disappointment. For the latter the students must present the basic foundation of an alternative theory of change and strategy. This group paper should be around 5000 words.

Requirements for Graduate Credit: Graduate students will be held to higher standards of preparation and application of theoretical perspectives and/or empirical verification than undergraduate students. In particular, this will be reflected in the submitted papers. For the
take-home mid-term, graduate students will be expected to submit somewhat longer papers (2000 words). Graduate students who choose to write an individual final paper will also submit a longer paper (4000 words) that seeks to test a body of theoretical work or that employs rigorous empirical analysis. Graduate students engaged in group projects (with either undergraduate or graduate students) will consult with the instructor to ensure that their contribution is commensurate with the requirement for individual final papers.

**Late submissions of assignments:** Unless I have approved an extension for an assignment, one-fourth of a letter grade will be deducted from the assignment’s grade for each day it is late. Please contact me in advance if you will not be able to submit an assignment on time.

**Academic integrity**

As in all courses at Boston University, you are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please read and be sure you understand the GRS Academic and Professional Conduct Code to which all students will be held accountable. The Conduct Code is available at [https://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/](https://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/). If you have any questions or doubts about the conduct code or about the instructions or expectations for any aspect of this course, you must ask for clarification.

**Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at (617) 353-3658 to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests. ODS is located at 19 Deerfield Street on the second floor.

**Classroom expectations**

As a courtesy to others and in the interest of creating a quality classroom learning environment, please respect the following guidelines:

- Please arrive on time, and leave the room while class is in session only when necessary.
- Please turn off or silence your cell phone and other non-computer electronic communication devices.
- Please do not text during class.
- Please limit your individual laptop use solely to course purposes (e.g. note taking). You should be on-line for either the web or email only when requested for a joint classroom activity.

Thanks.

**SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS**

**Week 1. Introduction: The Rise of NGOs and the Civil Society**


Horton-Smith, D. 1997. The International History of Grassroots Associations. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*


**Week 2 Theoretical Roots of NGOs**


**Week 3. NGO Legitimacy and Accountability**


Edwards, M. And Hulme, D. *NGOs, Performance and Accountability: Beyond the Magic Bullet*. London: Earthscan; (Chap 4)


**Week 4. NGOs and Poverty Reduction Policies and Practices**


**Week 5. NGOs and Empowerment**


**Week 6. NGOs and Humanitarian Assistance**


Week, 7. NGOs and Foreign Aid


Week 8. NGOs and Evidence based Policy Making


Parmesh Shah and Meera Kaul Shah, Participatory Methods for Increasing NGO Accountability: In Edwards and Hulme, 1995 *Beyond the Magic Bullet: NGO Performance and Accountability in the Post-Cold War World*


Week 9. NGO Leadership and Management


Week 10. NGO and Resource Mobilization


Week 11: NGOs: Monitoring, Learning and Evaluation


Week 12: Book Review:


Week 13: Book Review: