

[Return to syllabi search](#)

POLISCI 133: Ethics and Politics of Public Service (Brian Kenneth Coyne)

Ethics and Politics of Public Service

Political Science 133

Summer Quarter 2023

Instructor: Dr. Brian Coyne

bkcoyne@stanford.edu

Office: Encina Hall West, Room 419

Drop-in office hours Thursdays 1:45 - 3:15 pm in person in Encina Hall West Room 419: no appointment necessary: first-come, first-served. To meet at other times either in person or on Zoom, reach out by email.

Teaching Assistant: Chloe Stowell, stowell@stanford.edu

Class format and schedule:

In person lectures: Tues. and Thurs., 10:30 am to 12:20 pm. Building 160, Room B40.

One in-person 1-hour discussion section per week. Times TBD.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Henry David Thoreau once wrote: “There is no odor as bad as that which arises from goodness tainted...If I knew for certainty that a man was coming to my house with the conscious design of doing me good, I should run for my life...” Thoreau ends by saying, “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root, and it may be that he who bestows the largest amount of time and money on the needy is doing the most by his mode of life to produce that misery which he strives in vain to relieve.” Can public service be ineffective or, worse, cause harm or delay the day that justice is achieved? Is public service possibly a bad thing?

This course examines ethical and political questions that arise in doing public service work, whether volunteering, service learning, humanitarian endeavors overseas, or public service professions such as medicine and teaching. What motives do people have to engage in public service work? Are self-interested motives troublesome? What is the connection between service work and justice? Should the government or schools require citizens or students to perform service work? Is mandatory service an oxymoron?

This course satisfies the Ethical Reasoning Way and is cross-listed as Public Policy 103Z, CSRE 133P, and Urban Studies 122Z.

COURSE MATERIALS:

There is one required book, widely available online: Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1997). All other readings will be available via Canvas, organized in the modules. Readings should be done in preparation for the day in which they're listed. Small changes to reading assignments may be made during the quarter.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXPECTATIONS:

Students should expect to devote at least two hours of preparation out of class for each hour of class time. All written work should be submitted to Canvas.

Written assignments for the class are as follows:

- Two response papers: 500-750 words each, one due on a day of your choice in Weeks 2-3 and one due on a day of your choice in Weeks 4-8
- Midterm paper: 1000-1250 words, due July 23
- Final paper: 1800-2200 words due August 20, with draft introduction due in advance

GRADING BREAKDOWN:

- Response papers: 20%
- Participation and attendance: 20%
- Midterm paper: 25%
- Final paper: 35%

GRADING POLICIES

Final grades are calculated using the 100-point system. 93% and above = A, 90-92% = A-, 87-89% = B+, 83-86% = B, and so on. Grades below a D- (below 60%) receive a NP.

For students taking the class on a credit / no credit basis, credit requires earning a C- or above (at least 70%) and completing all the major assignments.

Stanford University policy is that Incompletes must be requested by the last day of class, and Incompletes are “restricted to cases in which the student has satisfactorily completed a substantial part of the course work.” See <https://registrar.stanford.edu/students/definition-grades/incomplete-and-repeat-grades>Links to an external site. (<https://registrar.stanford.edu/students/definition-grades/incomplete-and-repeat-grades>).

All students are responsible for knowing and following the Stanford honor code, available at: <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>Links to an external site. (<http://www.stanford.edu/dept/vpsa/judicialaffairs/guiding/honorcode.htm>)

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is expected and is part of your participation grade. Sufficient attendance is required to earn credit for the course. If you are taking this course for credit, you may *not* take another course that meets at overlapping times.

If you miss more than one session, you will be expected to write an additional response paper to make up that day’s participation. If you will miss a significant portion of the quarter for illness or another reason, we’ll develop an individual plan.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:

Stanford is committed to providing equal educational opportunities for disabled students. Disabled students are a valued and essential part of the Stanford community. We welcome you to our class. If you experience disability, please register with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate your needs, support appropriate and reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Academic Accommodation Letter for faculty. To get started, or to re-initiate services, please visit oea.stanford.edu. If you already have an Academic Accommodation Letter, we invite you to share your letter with us. Academic Accommodation Letters should be shared at the earliest possible opportunity so we may partner with you and OAE to identify any barriers to access and inclusion that might be encountered in your experience of this course.

COURSE CALENDAR

Part 1: The individual

Session 1.1: Tuesday, June 27: Introduction: Ethics, politics, public service

- In-class reading: Stanford Case Study: Sarah.
- In-class reading: Haas Center’s Pathways to Public Service

Session 1.2: Thursday, June 29: Motivations for service: Does true altruism exist? Does it matter?

- *The Onion*. “Soup-Kitchen Volunteers Hate College-Application Padding Brat.” 2003.
- Robert Coles. *The Call of Service*. 1993. Chapter 2 “Kinds of Service.”
- Larissa MacFarquhar. *Strangers Drowning*. 2015. Pages 8-17, 92-103.

Session 2.2: Thursday, July 6: Utilitarianism: Public service as maximizing the good

- *The Effective Altruism Handbook*. Edited by Ryan Carey. Pages 3-13.
- Larissa Macfarquhar. *Strangers Drowning*. 2015. Pages 57-90.

Session 3.1: Tuesday, July 11: Putting the ‘public’ in public service: the embedded individual

- Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone*. Chapter 1: “Thinking About Social Change in America” and Chapter 3: “Civic Participation.” Robert Putnam. *Bowling Alone*. [Skim Chapter 3]
- Michael Walzer. “Socialism and the Gift Relationship.” 1974.

Part 2: Organizations

Session 3.2: Thursday, July 13: Introducing the independent sector

- Alexis de Tocqueville. *Democracy in America*. Chapter 5: “Of the Use That Americans Make of Association in Civil Life.”
- Norman Silber. *A Corporate Model of Freedom: The Emergence of the Modern Nonprofit Sector*. Chapters 1-2.

Session 4.1: Tuesday, July 18: Where does a ‘public’ come from? How do groups organize?

- Saul Alinsky. *Rules for Radicals*. Excerpts.
- Rebecca Solnit. *A Paradise Built in Hell*. Excerpts.
- Jo Freeman. 1970. “The Tyranny of Structurelessness.”

Session 4.2: Thursday, July 20: Public subsidies for charitable giving

- Rob Reich. *Just Giving*. Chapter 2-3.
- Jane Mayer. “Covert Operations.” 2010. *The New Yorker*.

Midterm due Sunday, July 23

Session 5.1: Tuesday, July 25: Philanthropy in the 'New Gilded Age'

- Andrew Carnegie. "The Gospel of Wealth." 1889.
- Rob Reich. 2018. "Is Philanthropy Anti-Democratic?" *Boston Review*.

Part 3: The nation

Session 5.2: Thursday, July 27: Public service and (vs.) public provision: Education as a case study

- Sara Mosle, "The Vanity of Volunteerism." *The New York Times Magazine*. 2000.
- Annie Waldman. 2019. "How Teach for America Evolved into an Arm of the Charter School Movement." ProPublica.

Session 6.1: Tuesday, Aug. 1: Public service against the state

- Zeynep Tufekci. *Twitter and Tear Gas*. Excerpts.
- Timur Kuran. "Now out of Never." Excerpt.

Session 6.2: Thursday, Aug. 3: Power and culture in service

- Anne Fadiman. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. 1997. Chapters 1-7.
- Ivan Illich, "To Hell With Good Intentions." 1968.

Session 7.1: Tuesday, Aug. 8: Paternalism, law, and service

- Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*. 1997. Chapters 8-13.
- Additional reading TBA.

Part 4: The world

Session 7.2: Thursday, August 10: NGOs and global public service

- David Rieff. *A Bed for the Night*. Excerpts.
- Tracy Kidder. "The Good Doctor." *The New Yorker*.

Session 8.1: Tuesday, Aug. 15: Are there universal values? If not, is global service possible?

- Martha Nussbaum. 2000. Women and Human Development: The capabilities approach.
- Amartya Sen. "Democracy as a Universal Value."

Part 5: Conclusion: the local

Session 8.2: Thursday, August 17: Public service at Stanford and in the Bay Area

- Matt Turnbull, selections from his Stanford honors thesis, "Helping Without Hurting: The Ethical Issues in the Service Relationship Between East Palo Alto and Stanford University." (2006)
- Additional reading TBA.
(<https://www.stanford.edu>)

Final papers due Sunday, August 20.
(<https://www.stanford.edu>)

Stanford Home

Maps & Directions

Search Stanford

Emergency Info

Terms of Use

Privacy

Copyright

Trademarks

Non-Discrimination

Accessibility

Return to syllabus search

(<https://www.stanford.edu/site/terms/>)

(<https://www.stanford.edu/site/privacy/>)

([https://uit.stanford.edu/security/copyright-](https://uit.stanford.edu/security/copyright-infringement)

adminguide.stanford.edu/chapter-1/subchapter-5/policy-1-5-4)

(<http://exploreddegrees.stanford.edu/nonacademicregulation>)

(<https://www.stanford.edu/site/accessibility>)