

# ETHICS AND POLITICS OF PUBLIC SERVICE

Political Science 133  
Office: Encina Hall, Room 420

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Autumn 2005-06

This class is cross-listed in Comparative Studies in Race and Ethnicity (CSRE), Human Biology, American Studies, Urban Studies, Ethics in Society, and Public Policy.

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Course Website: <http://coursework.stanford.edu> (Enroll in Political Science 133)

## Course Description:

Henry David Thoreau once wrote: “There is no odor as bad as that which arises from goodness tainted. It is human, it is divine, carrion. 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 and delay that day that justice is achieved? Is public service possibly a bad thing?

This seminar will examine ethical and political questions that arise in doing public service work, whether that work is volunteering, service learning, humanitarian endeavors overseas, or public service professions such as medicine and teaching. What does it mean to “do” public service? 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?

Through readings of texts such as Anne Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, David Rieff’s *A Bed For the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis*, and specially written case studies, we will consider the history, hazards, responsibilities, and dilemmas of doing public service work. We discuss the historical context of public service work in the United States and abroad, and consider a range of ethical concerns involved with service, including the conflicts that can arise in cross-cultural service work and the notion that ‘the road to hell is paved with good intentions.’ We will also use the resources of the Haas Center for Public Service. If successful, the class will provide the basis for a more intimate connection between an undergraduate’s service activities and public service aspirations and his or her academic experiences at Stanford.

## Course Requirements and Assignments:

### Class participation [15% of grade]

Class participation can take a variety of forms, ranging from the obvious (e.g., talking intelligently in class) to the less obvious (e.g., volunteering to co-teach). At a minimum, it is crucial that you come to class *on time, having done the reading, and prepared to talk and engage your fellow classmates*. Because the class will use case studies every week, adequate preparation, willingness to contribute, and capacity for empathetic listening are all required. You are also required to attend a section every week. A portion of your grade will be based on your participation.

### Writing [85% of grade]

There will be four writing assignments.

- Assignment 1: An 8-12 page paper on Anne Fadiman's *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, Peter Singer's *Solution to World Poverty*, or David Rieff's *Humanitarianism in Crisis*. This essay will deal with questions of ethical obligations, cultural difference, reciprocal service, and your own thoughts on the best way to help Lia Lee or innocent, needy others in foreign countries.
- Assignment 2: For this assignment, there are two options.
  - A. Create a proposal for a fictional fellowship, the "Call To Action Fellowship" that is loosely modeled on the Echoing Green Fellowship. The aim will be to write a detailed proposal for funds that will allow you to start your own or join an organization in the year after you graduate from Stanford.
  - B. A case study, following the general guidelines of the case studies in the course reader. Your task is to compile a case study, and teaching notes, with an interview as the centerpiece.
- Assignment 3: Contributions to the web-based discussion forum. These are one page postings on the course discussion website, and will be discussed in more detail in class.
- Assignment 4: A take-home exam, early in the quarter. Aim is to synthesize theoretical readings.

*Please note that paper extensions require prior arrangements with the instructor. There will be no exceptions to this policy, barring absolute emergencies. Late assignments will be penalized one grade per day.*

## Grading:

The class is available for pass/no pass or for a grade.

If the grading option is chosen, grades will be computed from the following:

Participation: [15%]	On time attendance, adequate preparation, perceptive oral participation, and empathetic listening.
Assignment 1 [30%]	Essay on <i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down</i>
Assignment 2: [25%]	Research project on non-profit provider or compilation of a case study.
Assignment 3: [10%]	Four submissions to the web forum
Assignment 4: [20%]	Take-home exam

**Readings:**

There are TWO required course readers and TWO required books. All are available at the Stanford Bookstore.

(1) Ethics and Politics in Public Service Readings

(2) Ethics and Politics in Public Service Case Studies

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).

David Rieff, *A Bed For the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

## Course Outline

Monday, Sept. 26  
Introduction

Wednesday, Sept. 28

Exploring the meaning(s) of "service"

*Why do public service? What does it mean to "do" service? What does service mean to you? Is service by definition a good thing? How is service different from charity?*

Robert Coles, "The Disparity Between Intellect and Character" (reader) (1995)

Robert Coles, Introduction, Chapter 1 (Method), Chapter 2 (Kinds of Service) (1993)

Case Study: "Am I doing this because I want this to be on my resume or am I doing this because I want to be here?"

Stanford Case Study: Sarah

Monday, Oct. 3

Motivations and Reasons to Serve

*What are the various motivations people have to do or give service? Can these motivations conflict? Does service arise out of altruism or obligation? Where do religious or spiritual motives come in?*

Mike Martin, selections from *Virtuous Giving* (Preface; Chapter 5, Mixed Motives) (1994)

Will Kymlicka, "Altruism in Philosophical and Ethical Traditions: Two Views" (2001)

The Onion, "Soup-Kitchen Volunteers Hate College-Application Padding Brat (2003)

Wednesday, Oct. 5

Case Study: The Religious Motives to Service

Stanford Case Study: Kristine

Stanford Case Study: Cathy

Stanford Case Study: Rev. Jim Burklo

Monday, Oct. 10

Philosophical Perspectives: Service : Justice or Charity?

*"It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world." Mary Wollstonecraft*

*What are the ethical dimensions of service? What is the connection between justice and service? What is the connection between charity and service? Would service be necessary in a just world? What is the value of philosophy or theory to an activist?*

Judith Shklar, selection from *The Faces of Injustice* (Chapter 2, Misfortune and Injustice) (1990)

Ted Steinberg, selection from *Acts of God* (Introduction) (2000)

bell hooks, selection from *Teaching to Transgress* (Chapter 5, Theory as Liberatory Practice) (1994)

Wednesday, Oct. 12

Case Study A: Does Volunteerism Perpetuate Injustice?

Sara Mosle, "The Vanity of Volunteerism," New York Times Magazine (2000).

Case Study B: Teach For America, Part 1 (An Undergraduate Thesis)

Teach For America case, part 1

\*\*\*\* *Take-home exam distributed Friday, Oct. 14* \*\*\*\*

Monday, Oct. 17

Dilemmas, Hazards, and Complexity of Public Service: Part 1

*What ethical dilemmas or problems can arise when doing service? Can service do harm? What to do when service fails?*

Robert Coles, Chapter 4 (Hazards) (1993)

Ivan Illich, "To Hell With Good Intentions" (1968)

\*\*\*\* *Take-home exam due Tuesday, Oct. 18* \*\*\*\*

Wednesday, Oct. 19

Case Study: Dilemmas and Hazards

Stanford Case Study: Chaya

Monday, Oct. 24

Dilemmas, Hazards, and Complexity of Public Service: Part 2

*What cultures are colliding in Fadiman's book? Are Lia Lee's parents negligent? Are the doctors or social workers negligent?*

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997)

Wednesday, Oct. 26

Cross-cultural issues of service

*Evaluate Kleinman's principles of cross-cultural medicine. If you were Lia Lee's physician, what course of treatment would you have recommended? From the perspective of any particular party, what would it mean to "do good" by Lia?*

Anne Fadiman, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (1997)

Monday, Oct. 31

Ethical Issues in Humanitarian Aid

*What do we, as individuals, owe the global poor? What do Americans, as a wealthy nation, owe the global poor? What are the moral hazards of humanitarian intervention?*

Peter Singer, "The Singer Solution to Global Poverty" (1999)

David Rieff, "The Humanitarian Paradox" and "The Hazards of Charity" from *A Bed For the Night* (2002)

Recommended Reading:

Fiona Terry, "Humanitarian Action in Second-Best World" from *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (2002).

Wednesday, Nov. 2

Case Study A: Overseas Service

Stanford Case Study: Leela

Stanford Case Study: Jenny

Case Study B: Live Aid and Live 8

Live 8: [www.live8live.com/whatsitabout](http://www.live8live.com/whatsitabout)

David Rieff, "Dangerous Pity"

William Easterly, "Tone Deaf on Africa"

Jefferson Morely, "Live 8 Short on Africans: The Benevolence of Rock Stars is Not Enough"

\*\*\*\* *First essay due on Friday, Nov. 4* \*\*\*\*

Monday, Nov. 7

Should we refrain from judging? Moral dogmatism vs. moral relativism.

*What is the basis for making cross-cultural judgments? What constitutes an adequate basis for making judgments at all?*

Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal" (1992)

Allan Bloom, selection from *The Closing of the American Mind* (1987)

Wednesday, Nov. 9

Case Study: Making or Withholding Judgment

Stanford Case Study, Emilie

Palo Alto Case Study, David Schrom

Monday, Nov. 14

Public Service in the National Arena: Why no National Service?

*How is service connected to conceptions of citizenship? Should the United States pursue conscription or an all-voluntary military force?*

Rogers Smith, "American Conceptions of Citizenship and National Service" (1995)

Selections from *United We Serve* (2003)

Wednesday, Nov. 16

Case Study: Teach For America, Part 2 (A Moral Challenge to TFA)

Teach For America case, Part 2 and appendices

Week of Nov. 21:

NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Break

Monday, Nov. 28

Public Service in the Bay Area: The Local Context

*Why, amidst unbelievable wealth in surrounding communities, is East Palo Alto a comparatively poor city? What is the history of East Palo Alto? What are the demographic and socioeconomic conditions of the Bay Area? What is the One East Palo Alto Initiative?*

Film, *Dreams of a City: Creating East Palo Alto* (1997)

Alison Post, selections from her Stanford honors thesis, "The Great Society and its Discontents: The Story and Impact of 'Community Action' in East Palo Alto" (Chapter 1, *White to Blue to Black; Epilogue*) (1997)

Chuck Carlson, "Bled Dry by the Cutting Edge: A Short History of Silicon Valley" (1997)

Thaï Walker and Kim Vo, "Stanford, East Palo Alto Uneasy Partners" (2002)

Wednesday, Nov. 30

Case Study: TFA in the Bay Area

Teach For America case, Part 3 (Multiculturalism and TFA in the Bay Area)

Monday, Dec. 5

Elite Universities, Higher Education, Civic Responsibility, and Service

*Does or should a large university have responsibilities to surrounding communities?*

Benjamin Barber, "Civic Mission of the University" (1991)

Gerhard Casper address, "The University as Public Service" (1998)

Woodrow Wilson, "Princeton for the Nation's Service" (1902)

David Brooks, "The Organization Kid," *Atlantic Monthly* (2001)

David Brooks, "Making It: Love and Success at America's Finest Universities" (2002)

Wednesday, Dec. 7

Service Learning, Final Reflections, and Next Steps

Robert Coles, "Putting Head and Heart on the Line" (reader)

Robert Coles, Chapter 5 ("Doing and Learning") (1993)

bell hooks, "Engaged Pedagogy" (1994)

Peter Singer, *Ethics Into Action: Henry Spira and the Animal Rights Movement*, Introduction, Chapter 6 ("Pushing the Peanut Forward") (1998)

Tyler Currie, "Reaching Rommel," *Washington Post*, Feb. 23 (2003)

\*\*\*\* *Second writing assignment due Friday, Dec. 9* \*\*\*\*