

# **AEM 3380: Social Entrepreneurs, Innovators, and Problem Solvers**

4 credit hours

Fall 2017, Tues and Thurs 1:25-2:40pm

Anabel Taylor Hall: Founders' Room

Instructor: Anke Wessels

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3-4pm, and by appointment

## **Course Description:**

This course introduces you to social entrepreneurs, innovators, and visionaries—people who are coming up with new methods to resolve pressing social problems. We contrast traditional methods of activism with a new approach that combines the pragmatism of social entrepreneurship with the compassionate, collaborative engagement of Transformative Action. This cutting-edge movement tends to be less ideological, less adversarial, more locally specific and more solutions-oriented than previous collective actions for change. You will learn about social entrepreneurs and innovators through readings and case studies. In addition, you will develop a set of skills, tools and practices intended to support you in being an agent for change, no matter where you go from here. This learning process will involve self-reflection, critical analysis, research, and action.

In the first few weeks of the course we will use the story of Jacqueline Novogratz, founder of the Acumen Fund, to consider how social entrepreneurs work in communities to co-create equity, justice and environmental sustainability. We will then tackle the questions of why and how to create a just, sustainable, and resilient economy based on principles of equity and inclusivity. We will also spend time on the important role creativity and imagination play in the process of resolving pressing social problems. Finally, you will conceive and design your own bold social change initiative, informed by the cautionary tale of Wendy Kopp's near failure in establishing Teach for America.

This course is not a traditional lecture course. It is highly interactive, experiential, and dynamic. You will be meeting in groups to practice the basic empathic skills of Transformative Action and to benefit from the perspectives and insights of others to deepen your own work. While there are no tests, the written assignments and exercises make this a challenging course. That said, when approached with enthusiasm and whole-hearted participation, this course promises to be inspirational, fun, and even transformational.

## **Learning Outcomes**

Upon completion of the course you will be able to:

- Describe and explain key characteristics of social entrepreneurship and how this movement compares to traditional entrepreneurship and previous collective actions for social change;
- Demonstrate an understanding of how social entrepreneurship contributes to creating an economy that is socially just, ecologically sound, and resilient;
- Understand and apply strategies for creative thinking, inclusivity, and increased personal/collective empowerment;
- Utilize a set of skills, tools and practices that will support you in being an agent for change;
- Evaluate and create business models for mission driven social ventures;
- Conceive and design your own Big Idea for Social Change.

## **Required Texts**

Novogratz, Jacqueline, (2009) *The Blue Sweater: Bridging the Gap Between Rich and Poor in an Interconnected World*; Rodale

Kopp, Wendy (2001) *One Day, All Children...The Unlikely Triumph of Teach for America and What I Learned Along the Way*; Public Affairs NY

## **Academic Integrity**

Students should be familiar with and adhere to the Code of Academic Integrity. Violations of the Code will result in serious consequences, including a failing grade if appropriate.

## **Policy regarding disabilities**

It is Cornell policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students who have a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, or systemic) that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services and their instructors for a confidential discussion of their individual need for academic accommodations. Student Disability Services is located in 420 CCC. Staff can be reached by calling 607.254.4545.

## **Instructor:**

**Anke Wessels** is the Executive Director of the Center for Transformative Action (CTA). CTA is an independent education-based 501(c)3 affiliated with Cornell University, that provides fiscal sponsorship to social entrepreneurs with innovative non-profit ventures. Our services allow these change makers to focus on their social mission while we provide a well-established back office infrastructure, with business services and mentorship that most start up nonprofits are unable to afford. We also offer educational programs--courses, conferences, and workshops--to help a diverse group of new or experienced social entrepreneurs develop the skills necessary to establish effective social ventures, and learn the leadership practices associated with Transformative Action. Transformative Action is an alternative paradigm for social action that moves us beyond complaint, competition and "us vs. them" thinking. Inspired by the non-violent organizing that erupted in the last century, Transformative Action has three components: (1) break the silence that surrounds injustice, (2) build bridges across difference to transform animosity into understanding and adversaries into allies, and (3) articulate an inspiring, proactive vision.

Dr. Wessels teaches AEM 3380, Social Entrepreneurs, Innovators, and Problem Solvers. She organizes the Finger Lakes Social Entrepreneurship Institute and leads Cornell's relationship with [Ashoka U](#) as a changemaker campus. She received her a BA in French and Economics, an MS in Agricultural Economics, and a PhD in Geography, specializing in environmental politics and social movements. She was previously on the faculty at Syracuse University, teaching domestic and international environmental politics.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**PLEASE NOTE:** *Homework and reading assignments are listed on the day they are due. I expect you to have them done in preparation for that day's class discussion. Please read the additional material on grading and expectations carefully. There are many moving parts to this course that fit together to create a powerful experience as long as you work on everything as assigned. If you fall behind in one area, it will impact other areas and you will not benefit fully from the design. I **do not** accept late work. While one of the central goals of this course is to create a non-competitive learning environment, this course is also quite challenging. It will serve you well to stay up-to-date with all your assignments.*

### Class 1 8/22

#### Introduction to the course and its principles

**Homework for tomorrow:** *For tomorrow, you will complete the first two questions in the Portfolio assignment. However, you will not be submitting your responses to me until the entire Portfolio is due on October 12<sup>th</sup>. Instead you will be sharing your Portfolio responses with the members in your Transformation Group on a weekly basis. You will be assigned to a Transformation Groups on day 3.*

*You will meet with your groups weekly for one hour outside of class. The purpose of this group is for you to have several committed listeners who offer encouragement, feedback, and a sounding board to help you deepen your reflections and portfolio responses. If, at any time, you are not comfortable sharing a response with others, simply share your reactions to that particular question. For example, "This question was hard because it made me think about things I usually don't talk about." Also, please let me know if there are any responses that are too personal to share with me. You can withhold these from your final Portfolio, including instead a reflection about what you learned from writing the response. The fundamental purpose of this assignment is for you to benefit from the reflection process regardless of whether others read what you have written.*

*Students overwhelmingly report that their transformation group experience was one of the best aspects of the course! While a bit nerve-racking at first, they say that what they learned from their transformation groups was, in the end, very meaningful and well beyond what they could have imagined.*

### Class 2 8/24

#### Why do people engage in social change?

"There is no passion to be found playing small-- in settling for a life that is less than the one you are capable of living." Nelson Mandela

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive." Howard Thurman

There are many reasons why people don't get involved in social change: everything from feeling powerless, to the belief that it will take too much time and energy. In today's class, we look at why people *do* engage in social change. We will consider what motivates social entrepreneurs, their characteristics, and the "moments of obligation" that launched them on their journeys.

**Home Work:** Portfolio Questions 1 & 2 (The Portfolio Assignment is on Blackboard)

**Reading:** The Blue Sweater, Chapters 1-3

### **Class 3 8/29**

#### **What is Social Entrepreneurship Anyway?**

The term “social entrepreneurship” gets used in a variety of ways to describe a wide range of business or nonprofit ventures. Today we propose a definition and show how social entrepreneurship fits within a continuum of ventures, from the purely for-profit businesses to the purely charity based nonprofit. *Transformation Group Assignments today*

**HW:** Portfolio Question 3

**Reading:** The Blue Sweater, Chapters 4-6; “From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces” (regarding Transformation Group)

### **Class 4 8/31**

#### **Leadership, Power, and your Leadership Journey**

In contrast to a traditional view of leadership—where one charismatic person is out front - we will consider how leadership emerges from community and through community engagement. We will contrast previous models of leadership with an approach—steeped in dignity and respect--that is collaborative and empowering of others.

**HW:** Portfolio Questions 4 & 5

**Reading:** Paul Schmitz, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-13 and pp. 29-34) & Chapter 4 (this reading is on Blackboard)  
Ivan Illich, “To Hell With Good Intentions”  
[http://www.swaraj.org/illich\\_hell.htm](http://www.swaraj.org/illich_hell.htm) (also found as a pdf on Blackboard)

### **Class 5 9/5**

#### **Discussing your Big Idea Problem Area**

Today, you will come to class ready to share the environmental or social issue you are interested in addressing for your final project. Be prepared to share briefly why you are interested in this issue. After hearing from everyone, I encourage you to team up with others. This isn’t necessary, but can make the Big Idea assignment easier and more fruitful. *If you decide to work in a group, this group should meet weekly also (in addition to your transformation group).*

**HW:** Portfolio Question 6

Big Idea Roadmap Questions 1 & 2 (The Big Idea Roadmap assignment is on Blackboard)

### **Class 6 9/7**

#### **Leadership and Transformative Action**

Today we will continue our discussion of leadership for social change. We will explore what it takes to engage in the co-created, transformative leadership essential to finding solutions that accurately address the needs and the desires of those most affected by social problems. We will consider the principles of Transformative Action and how social entrepreneurs practice these principles as collaborators, bridge-builders, and visionaries of what is possible.

**HW:** Portfolio Question 7

**Reading:** The Blue Sweater, Chapters 7-9

### **Class 7 9/12**

#### **Reconciliation, Healing, and Economic Growth in Rwanda**

This is a remarkably powerful story of how, despite the horrors of genocide, a people have engaged in empathy and forgiveness in order to embrace a positive vision for their collective future. Although not perfect, the story of this country shows the importance of healing and empowerment in revitalization.

**HW:** Portfolio Questions 8 & 9  
**Reading:** The Blue Sweater, Chapters 10-12

***It is time to begin designing the artistic or creative presentation of your portfolio!***  
*The portfolio includes a creative element because it is through creativity and imagination that we tap into new ways of understanding ourselves and the world around us. This process is essential to self-reflection, transformation, and innovation. Remember to use your transformation group to brainstorm and explore different creative elements for your portfolio.*

## **Class 8 9/14**

### **Shifting Habits of Mind**

Today we will pull together themes and threads from our previous discussions by turning common habits of mind on their heads!

**HW:** Portfolio Questions 10 & 11  
Big Idea Roadmap Question 3  
**Reading:** The Blue Sweater, Chapters 13-16

## **Class 9 9/19**

### **Human-Centered Design**

Human-centered design is a creative approach to problem solving. It's a process that starts with the people you're designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. Human-centered design is all about building a deep empathy with the people you're designing for; generating tons of ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you've made with the people you're designing for; and eventually putting your innovative new solution out in the world. Today you will begin this process by writing a succinct design challenge question.

**HW:** Portfolio Questions 12 & 13  
Big Idea Roadmap Question 4  
*First Reflection Paper due September 26*

## **Class 10 9/21**

### **Creativity, innovation, and invention**

Today we will continue the Design Process by tapping into our creative and innovative genius! We will engage in many exercises designed to help us think out of the box and connect ideas in new ways.

**HW:** Portfolio Question 14  
Big Idea Roadmap Question 5  
**Reading:** "Slow Ideas: some innovations spread fast. How do you speed the ones that don't? (Found on Blackboard)

## **Class 11 9/26**

### **Designing for Social Impact, Not for the Product or Service**

Today we will consider an essential practice for the social entrepreneur. When approaching a design challenge, our focus is on the impact we hope to have not on the thing we hope to create.

**HW:** Portfolio Question 15  
Big Idea Roadmap Question 6  
**First Reflection Paper is due today at midnight!**

## **Class 12 9/28**

### **Pursuing Your Dream: Extraordinary? Magical? Foolhardy?**

Why do some people live ordinary lives, while others achieve extraordinary results? Successful social change agents dare to try new things, experiment, take risks, and leap into action. Rather than becoming stuck in the "paralysis of analysis," effective social

entrepreneurs and activists pursue their dreams, take chances, and learn from their mistakes. Are they Foolhardy? Extraordinary?

**HW:** Portfolio Questions 16 & 17  
**Reading:** One Day All Children...Chapters 1-5

**SMART Goals shared with your transformation group.**

*The entire class is participating in a SMART goals exercise. You will define 2 goals that you would like to attain by the end of the semester. These can be in any area of your life. They have to be SMART--Specific, Measurable, Action-oriented, Realistic, and Time-Sensitive. Each week, for each goal, you will be setting yourself specific small steps that will culminate in achieving your goal by the end of the semester. For instance, if one of my goals is to be eating no dairy by the end of the semester, my first step for week one may be to research dairy substitutes and new recipes. My second step for week two might be to purchase these items and plan a meal or two. Each subsequent week I will build on the previous steps so that by the end of the semester I am no longer eating dairy. This is a cumulative process, with the small steps building on each other until the final goal is achieved. From now on, every Thursday you will be sharing your weekly steps and your weekly progress on these actions steps to your Transformation Group members and to me via email.*

**Class 13 10/3**

**Your Big Idea Prototypes and the BMG Canvas**

The Business Model Canvas, is a strategic management and entrepreneurial tool. It allows you to “describe, design, challenge, invent, and pivot your business model.” Today we will learn how to use this canvas to map out the critical components of any project, organization or venture. You will use this canvas to define the business model of a your own Big Idea. You will also be sharing rough prototypes of your preliminary venture ideas in small groups to get feedback today.

**HW:** Bring in your Big Idea Prototypes to share in small groups!  
Portfolio Question 18  
Big Idea Roadmap Question 7

**Class 14 10/5**

**Revenue Models**

Many nonprofits are developing sustainable revenue streams so that they aren't as dependent on donations and grants. Many for-profit social ventures are finding ways to stay true to their social values while still making a profit. Today we will explore these models and consider what revenue model will work for your Big Idea.

**HW:** Portfolio Revisions  
SMART goals progress report  
**Reading:** One Day All Children...Chapters 6-8; TfA's Business Plan 2010-15: focus on their Financial Plan & Revenue Model, pp. 21-23 (reading found on BlackBoard)

**Class 15 10/12**

**Portfolios are due today!**

*We will exhibit your portfolios in the Founders Room. Submit the hardcopy of your responses in class.*

**Class 16 10/17**

**Creating a social just and ecologically sound economy:  
Rethinking what's possible.**

Who does the economy serve and for what purpose? Can we create value through markets that truly lift all boats? What does it mean to have equity be the driver for economic growth? Today we will consider these questions and more.

**HW:** Work on all Big Idea Roadmap questions assigned to date. It is very important to conduct a thorough environmental scan and to involve potential beneficiaries in your design process! Explore a wide range of possibilities so see how your venture can have the most social impact and be financially sound. This takes time. Be creative and iterate!

**Reading:** “Why Income Inequality Threatens Democracy” in Psychology Today.  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/wired-success/201508/why-income-inequality-threatens-democracy>

## **Class 17 10/19**

### **Prosperity for All?**

Prosperity economics concludes that there is no trade-off between creating a strong, dynamic economy and fostering a society marked by greater health, broader security, increased equality of opportunity, and more broadly distributed growth. Today we will examine some of the pillars of this framework, including the concept of Shared Value from the Harvard Business School and the growing body of law that supports sharing practices such as co-housing, shared cars, and shared vegetable gardens.

**HW:** Big Idea Roadmap Questions 8 & 9  
SMART goals progress report  
*Second Reflection Paper due October 26*

## **Class 18 10/24**

### **Legal Structures for Social Ventures**

The lines between the typical for-profit and nonprofit are beginning to blur. Benefit Corporations (B Corps) and Worker-owned Cooperatives are alternatives to the traditional for-profit corporate structure that allow for-profit ventures to embed social values into their operations. Meanwhile, many nonprofits are developing sustainable revenue streams so that they aren't as dependent on donations and grants. Today we will take a look at these alternative structures and discuss their strengths and limitations.

**Readings:** On Legal Structures for Social Ventures  
<https://hbr.org/2014/07/5-bad-reasons-to-start-a-for-profit-social-enterprise>

<https://hbr.org/2013/02/should-your-business-be-nonpro>

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2013/07/17/social-enterprise-making-the-choice-between-for-profit-and-nonprofit/>

## **Class 19 10/26**

### **Living by your Vision, Mission, and Values**

What is your vision for society—one where the problem you are addressing does not exist? How will your project help bring about that vision? What is the specific role of your venture in realizing this vision? What values will guide your decision making as you build and develop this project? Why is it important to the survival of your venture to articulate the vision, mission, and values of your organization and to live by them?

**HW:** **Second Reflection Paper due today at midnight!**  
SMART goals progress report

**Reading:** “Cause for Reflection” (found on Blackboard)  
The Oregon Public House website <http://oregonpublichouse.com/>

## **Class 20 10/31**

### **Theory of Change**

How will your venture actually create the change you wish to see, and how exactly will you track whether it is doing so? Today you will create the outline of your Theory of Change.

**Reading:** One Day All Children... Chapters 9 -11 and Afterword  
TfA's Business Plan 2010-15: focus on their Theory of Change & Impact, pp. 5-8 and Appendix 1 (reading found on Blackboard)

**HW:** Big Idea Roadmap Questions 10-12

## **Class 21 11/2**

### **Scaling Social Impact**

As social entrepreneurship becomes more mainstream, investors in both non-profit ventures and for profit ventures are demanding information on how their resources are being used and for what good. They are looking for ventures that have the potential to scale their impact. Today, will look at how to understand 'scale' in the context of social impact and how it differs from the traditional business understanding of scale.

**HW:** Big Idea Roadmap Questions 13 & 14  
SMART Goals Progress Report

**Reading:** "What's Your Endgame?" (reading found on Blackboard)

## **Class 22 11/7**

### **Budgets and Financials**

*"What I learned, in essence, was that if I was to fulfill my mission, it would take more than an idealistic vision. In the end, the big idea was important and essential. But it would work only with a lot of attention to the nuts and bolts of effective execution."* One Day, All Children, pg. 125

Today we will take a look at the nuts and bolts of developing a detailed budget: expenses and revenue. Because the budget shows where you will allocate resources, it provides another picture of your venture's purpose and values—putting your money where your mouth is!

**HW:** Big Idea Roadmap Questions 15-17

## **Class 23 11/09**

### **Telling a Great Story!**

Great leaders are storytellers. They are able to engage their communities, and tell a compelling narrative about how the world works. They use language powerfully and communicate in ways that uplift and inspire others. Today we will look at the power of telling a compelling story about your social change effort, and how to do so in just 4 minutes!

**HW:** Big Idea Roadmap Question 18  
SMART Goals Progress Report

## **11/10**

**Matt Stinchcomb of Etsy.com and the Good Work Institute** is the keynote speaker for the Finger Lakes Social Entrepreneurship Institute: November 10 at 5:30pm in the Africana Studies and Research Center.



**Class 24 11/14****Finalizing your pitches.**

You are now finishing up with your Big Idea Roadmap, creating clear vision, mission, and theory of change statements. These will be the foundation of your 4-minute pitch.

**HW:**

*Third Reflection Paper due December 6.*

**Class 25 11/16****Student Presentations**

*Each of you will be presenting a 4-minute pitch for your Big Idea to the entire class. There will be time for feedback and Q & A.*

**HW:**

Last SMART Goals Progress Report

**Class 26 11/21****Student Presentations****Class 27 11/28****Student Presentations****Class 28 11/30****Conclusions**

We conclude the course by reflecting on what we learned together.

**HW:**

**Completed Big Idea Roadmap and BMG Canvas are due today!**

**December 6**

**Third reflection paper is due today at midnight!**

**Your peer feedback forms as well as your reflection on the experience with your Transformation Group (the two parts of your participation grade with this group) are also due today by midnight. The reflection on your experience with your Transformation Group is unstructured. It need only be 1-2 pages long.**

**Important due dates:**

- Reflection Essay 1: 9/26
- Completed Portfolio with creative component: 10/12
- Reflection Essay 2: 10/26
- Big Idea Roadmap and BMG Canvas: 11/30
- Reflection Essay 3: 12/6
- Reflection paper on Transformation Group experience: 12/6
- Transformation Group Peer Feedback Form: 12/6

## Class Requirements

### 1. Class Participation

The success of this course depends on the active, enthusiastic participation of each student. Students ought to display great initiative, motivation, and a passion for learning. It is essential that students be here every day. It's also imperative that you come to class on time. It is astounding how much more effective you can be in your life and your work if you maintain basic integrity—simply do what you said you would do. **Assessment criteria are found below.**

### 2. Reflection Essays

You will write 3 brief reflection essays during the semester. Their purpose is for you to take stock of what you have learned. **An evaluation rubric is provided on Blackboard**

### 3. The Transformation Groups

Your project group will also be your “transformation group.” In this capacity you will encourage each other to excel on your portfolio answers by sharing them with each other and exploring the questions deeper. You will practice the skills of empathic listening and trust building. These groups are designed to help you achieve dramatic results in both personal and social change in a supportive “win-win” atmosphere. **You will write a brief reflection on your experience in this group and provide feedback on all your Transformation Group members.**

### 4. Portfolio

The portfolio is a record of your progress in this class. You will be given a series of questions that are meant to be fun, intellectually stimulating, thought provoking, and exciting. In addition to your written responses, you will provide a creative representation of your portfolio that conveys your dreams and visions for yourself and your contribution to the world. Many students have called the portfolio the most meaningful and significant educational assignment they have ever had. I hope you will agree. (Details are in the Portfolio document provided.) **An evaluation rubric is provided on Blackboard**

### 5. Big Idea Roadmap and BMG Canvas

In this class, you will learn the fundamental principles for solving problems, fostering innovation, and creating social change, and then apply these lessons by developing your own Big Idea for Social Change using the Big Idea Roadmap. You can choose to work individually or in groups. In addition to the Roadmap, you will develop a BMG canvas for your venture. **An evaluation rubric is provided on Blackboard**

## **GRADING POLICIES**

There are no tests in this class. Instead the grade breakdown is as follows:

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| Attendance and participation:                          | 15 percent |
| Three Reflection Essays                                | 30 percent |
| Participation in Transformation Groups (peer reviewed) | 15 percent |
| Final Portfolio  | 20 percent |
| Big Idea for Social Change Roadmap and BMG Canvas      | 20 percent |

## Participation grading scale:

Your participation is critical to the success of this course. Not only do you get more from the experience if you engage fully, but you contribute tremendously to the rest of us in the class, enhancing our experience. What constitutes participation? This is a difficult question to answer. Some people, who are fully engaged and listen deeply, may say very little. Others say a lot, but aren't listening well, so their contributions hardly further the conversation.

I can never know what's going on inside of your head. I can only detect the signs of apparent interest -- whether you are making eye contact, whether you seem bored, whether your contributions seem to come from listening to the conversation closely, whether you seem like you would rather be somewhere else, or whether you seem like you are asleep or daydreaming. I will attempt to make a fair assessment of your class contribution based on the following rubric.

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**A** - You are an outstanding, invaluable contributor to class discussions. The class would be considerably poorer without your presence. You listen actively, and you appear to respect the opinions of your fellow students. When you speak, you engage your fellow students, and offer intelligent, thoughtful opinions. Your level of energy and enthusiasm is very high. You are passionate about learning; you show great motivation and interest. You miss fewer than 3 class sessions in the semester. You know the names of all of your fellow students and help empower other people to do their best. You care about your classmates and how they are doing in class.

**B** - You are an active participant in class discussions. You seem to be showing a great deal of interest. You listen actively, and you appear to respect the opinions of your fellow students. You often contribute many valuable ideas to the class discussions. You miss only 3-5 class sessions in the semester. You know at least 80 percent of your classmates' names.

**C** - You have an acceptable level of class participation. You occasionally participate in a class discussion, although not very much. If you are a naturally quiet person, you at least seem to be paying attention and showing interest. You miss 6-7 class sessions in the semester. You know at least 67 percent of your classmates' names.

**D** - You are physically present in class, but your mind seems to be somewhere else. You do not seem to pay attention (or even to disguise your boredom). You rarely participate in class discussions. Even when called on to answer a question, you have very little to say. Sometimes you seem to be on the verge of sleeping, or melting into your chair. You miss 8-9 class sessions in the semester. You know less than 67 percent of your classmates' names.

**F** - You miss class often. You do not participate at all. You show no interest whatsoever in the subject matter, the readings, or the opinions of your fellow students. Overall, you put no effort into the class. You miss more than 9 class sessions in the semester. You know less than 50 percent of your classmates' names.

## Written assignments - grading scale:

Grading may seem like a subjective enterprise. However, we have discovered a remarkable consensus as to what grade a paper deserves. We use the following guidelines for assigning letter grades to papers. These are derived from the work of Bill Ingram, a professor at the University of Michigan. In addition to these guidelines, I have provided rubrics for each type of writing assignment.

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**A** - This grade is reserved for outstanding work. It dazzles everyone who reads it. In fact, it has the "wow factor" -- i.e., if you showed it to 5 people, including a stranger who doesn't know you, all of them would enthusiastically shower it with genuine praise. If it is a personal project (e.g., the portfolio), it will reveal much about your unique character. If it is a persuasive paper (the big idea proposal), it will win people over, skillfully overcome any objections, and help them gain new insights. Overall, your work meets the highest standards of professionalism. It is hard to imagine that you could produce better work than this.

**B** - This paper is good. It goes beyond merely fulfilling the assignment; indeed, it shows evidence of significant thought and planning. It contains no major distracting errors, and is well developed with good supporting material

and transitions. I am pleasantly surprised as I read it. Still I believe that you have a greater potential than this. With more work, you could push yourself to produce something that meets the standards of an A paper above.

**C** - This paper is acceptable. It fulfills all the requirements of the assignment, though in a routine way. It shows evidence of engagement with the topic and makes what I consider an adequate response to it. It contains few distracting errors. I can follow and understand the argument without difficulty, but also without much pleasure; the writing is not vigorous nor are the ideas fresh. It's an okay paper; it meets the requirements of the assignment and I am satisfied as I read it.

**D** - This is a weak paper that relates to the assignment but shows no evidence of real engagement with the topic. It is marred by enough errors to distract me seriously as I read it. It seems unprofessional and not carefully proofread. It also suffers from vague, ambiguous writing that makes it difficult for me to understand the content or the direction of the argument. I am disappointed as I read it.

**F** - This paper is a disaster. It shows no thought. It is so poorly constructed and so carelessly written that I cannot follow the sequence of ideas. Additionally, it is marred by so many errors in mechanics and usage that the message is difficult to decipher. I am dismayed as I read it. **Note:** A paper can also receive a failing grade if it does not respond to the subject of the assignment. That is one way to show "no thought."

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**There is no curve in this class. Anyone who does extraordinary work will receive an A. My hope is that you all do!**