

Engaging a New Generation of Philanthropists:

FINDINGS FROM THE PAY IT FORWARD
STUDENT PHILANTHROPY INITIATIVE



AUTHORS: Jodi Benenson, Erika Moldow, Ph.D., Andrew Hahn, Ph.D.

ABOUT THE SILLERMAN CENTER FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF PHILANTHROPY

The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, established in 2008, builds upon the policy and social justice expertise of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University. The Center develops and diffuses knowledge by conducting original research on social justice philanthropy, supporting doctoral students, offering *Practicing Philanthropy* and *Social Justice Philanthropy* courses, running a graduate internship program that places students in foundations, coordinating an annual competition to stimulate innovation and creative thinking in philanthropy on college campuses, and sponsoring public events. Sillerman Center staff members consult with foundations, sit on foundation and nonprofit boards, and write a monthly blog on philanthropy for *The Huffington Post*.



ABOUT OHIO CAMPUS COMPACT

Ohio Campus Compact is a statewide nonprofit coalition of college and university presidents and their campuses working to promote civic purposes of higher education. Ohio Campus Compact envisions Ohio colleges and universities as centers of civic engagement and renewal where co-curricular and curricular learning, teaching, and scholarship advance the public good and prepare students for active citizenship and democratic participation. Its mission is to provide statewide leadership in mobilizing resources, services, and partnerships that help Ohio colleges and universities deepen their ability to educate students for civic and social responsibility and to improve community life.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was made possible by general operating grants from The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy and Ohio Campus Compact. The authors wish to thank Elenore Garton and Kirsten Fox for their efforts in initiating this research partnership, Richard Kinsley and Brenna Limbrick for continuing to support the Pay it Forward initiative at Ohio Campus Compact, and Heller School colleagues Matthew Hoover, Claudia Jacobs, Susan Lanspery, and Rebecca Riccio for their invaluable comments on early drafts of this report.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, indications of changes and declines in civic engagement have spurred academic- and community-based conversations concerning how to engage the next generation of philanthropists. While higher education institutions have historically served as venues to develop civically engaged students through service-learning and non-curricular programming, many schools have begun to invite students to engage in philanthropy by awarding grants to local nonprofits. This report focuses on an emerging trend in higher education called *student philanthropy*, an experiential learning approach where students study social issues in the community and make decisions about distributing funds to nonprofit organizations. Previous research in the field of student philanthropy has revealed promising results: those enrolled in student philanthropy courses have shown a greater awareness of social problems and nonprofits, a heightened sense of responsibility to help others in need, and a greater likelihood to give their time and money in the future to support their community. However, little is known about the ways previous philanthropy experiences of students and components of student philanthropy courses may explain these outcomes.

This report examines students enrolled in student philanthropy courses through Pay it Forward, an initiative of the Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio Campus Compacts that seeks to develop a new generation of philanthropists through infusing the practice of philanthropy as a core component of college coursework. Pay it Forward courses are taught across diverse academic disciplines at more than 30 universities in Kentucky, Michigan, and Ohio. In each

course students research social needs and nonprofit organizations, invite a number of nonprofits to apply for grants through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, evaluate applications and proposals, and make collective decisions about which organizations to fund.

Campus Compact has partnered with The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at Brandeis University to examine the impact on students enrolled in courses through the Pay it Forward student philanthropy initiative. The Sillerman Center analyzed 1,628 end-of-course surveys from students participating in 96 philanthropy courses across 31 universities from January 2010-August 2011.

This report asks three key questions about the Pay it Forward course:

- What are the prior philanthropic experiences of Pay it Forward participants?
- What features of a Pay it Forward course predict student confidence in their philanthropic skills, abilities, and knowledge?
- What aspects of a Pay it Forward course predict changes in students' plans to donate money to, volunteer in, and otherwise support their communities?

Key findings from the report include:

- **FINDING 1: College students enter the Pay it Forward courses with a variety of prior experiences in the nonprofit sector, but many students have not been previously exposed to philanthropy.** While many students enrolled in the Pay it Forward courses

had prior experiences with giving and volunteering, not all have engaged in philanthropy early on in life. About half of survey respondents had never discussed their parents/guardians' volunteer or philanthropic work with them.

- **FINDING 2: While the goals of Pay it Forward are consistent across courses, the types of activities offered, students' investment of time, and students' level of engagement varied.** Most respondents had direct contact with nonprofits, did research into issue areas, and developed selection criteria for grants, but varied in terms of overall course engagement. Although most students in the courses spent less than half of their of their course time on the philanthropy component of the course, the majority of students made at least one visit to a nonprofit they were considering for a grant award.
- **FINDING 3: Student respondents' level of engagement, investment of time, and participation in hands-on activities during the course are significant predictors of confidence in their philanthropic skills, abilities, and knowledge.** When controlling for prior philanthropic experiences, our analyses suggest that specific course components and activities – most significantly, their level of engagement in the course, investment of time, and participation in hands-on activities – do make a difference in students' confidence in their philanthropic skills, abilities, and knowledge.
- **FINDING 4: Overall course engagement, rather than specific course activities, predicts changes in student respondents' plans to donate money**

to, volunteer in, and otherwise support their communities. This finding suggests that overall engagement is more significant than any single component of the course. In addition, the course gave students a greater understanding of the importance of nonprofit organizations, tools for selecting worthy organizations, and a recognition that they can contribute both through donating funds and through giving their time.

This research contributes to our emerging understanding of the ways student philanthropy courses, particularly through the Pay it Forward initiative, can most effectively engage a new generation of philanthropists. The findings from this report suggest that what occurs in a Pay it Forward course matters and is predictive of students' confidence in their philanthropic skills and changes in their plans to donate, volunteer, and support their communities. This study can inform the ways instructors design the curricular components of student philanthropy courses to balance disciplinary learning objectives with the engaging, hands-on philanthropy components. Future research and continued funding of philanthropy courses in higher education will bring answers to new questions about the practice of teaching student philanthropy.