

**School of Social Policy & Practice
University of Pennsylvania
Fall 2025
NPLD 788**

Social Impact Entrepreneurship Meets Mass Incarceration

Class Time:

Wednesdays, 5:15PM -7:15PM

McNeill 395

Instructor: Tom Duffin, Ph.D.

Office Hours: by appointment

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T/A's

Melissa Berkowitz

Ferrisa Connell

Course Description

This Academically Based Community Service (ABCS) course brings together Penn students and formerly incarcerated individuals to explore how social entrepreneurship can support community reintegration. Students will engage directly in the **Penn Restorative Entrepreneurship Program (PREP)**, a SP2-led initiative that provides intensive training for justice-impacted entrepreneurs to develop business plans and pitch their ventures.

The course is designed not only as a hands-on practicum but also as a space for critical reflection. While we explore entrepreneurship as a tool for reentry, we will also grapple with its limitations as a response to systemic inequality, racism, and structural barriers. Readings and discussions will include both critics of social impact investing and advocates of stakeholder capitalism, challenging students to develop their own informed perspectives.

Our Approach to Learning: A Freirean Philosophy

Inspired by Paulo Freire's vision of education, this course treats students as active co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients. Learning happens in dialogue, across differences in background and lived experience.

Your experiences matter here. Whether you bring insights from living under different economic systems and regimes, navigating scarcity, working in informal economies, laboring behind walls,

or studying social systems, your perspective will deepen our shared understanding of entrepreneurship in practice. Together, we will pair theory with lived knowledge through reflection, discussion, and applied work.

This classroom is a space for curiosity, critical thinking, and respectful exchange. Everyone has something to teach, and everyone has something to learn.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain the theory and principles of social impact entrepreneurship in the context of reentry.
2. Apply hands-on skills in program development (e.g., launching a business, building micro-enterprises, conducting stakeholder analysis, or designing evaluation frameworks).
3. Analyze critiques of social impact investing and understand debates about its effectiveness in addressing structural inequities.
4. Propose innovative solutions that address reentry challenges and related social problems.
5. Understand the reentry landscape, including its practices, limitations, and opportunities.

Course Requirements & Grading

Requirement	Weight	Description
Leading Class Discussion	20%	Students facilitate one class session by preparing discussion questions, connecting readings to course themes, and fostering dialogue.
First Paper	20%	A 5–6 page essay on social impact entrepreneurship and mass incarceration. Due Nov 9, 11:59 PM .
Guiding Clients' Business Plans	25%	Ongoing group work with PREP clients, including feedback on weekly assignments, email communication, and intensive prep for Sessions 12 & 13.
Final PREP Report	25%	A 5–6 page individual business-style report reflecting on the PREP experience. Due December 10, 11:59 PM .
Participation	10%	Active, thoughtful engagement in class discussions, group work, and collaboration with clients.

Grading Policy

- **Quality over quantity:** Participation grades emphasize the thoughtfulness of contributions, not how often you speak.
 - **Late assignments:** Assignments submitted late without prior approval will lose **one-third of a grade (e.g., A → A-) per day late**. Extensions must be requested **before the due date**.
 - **Collaboration:** Group work with clients requires professionalism, reliability, and consistent communication. Failure to meet expectations may affect both the group and individual grade.
 - **Academic integrity:** All written work must be your own and properly cite sources. Violations will be addressed according to University policy.
 - **Respect and inclusivity:** This is a collaborative, cross-experience learning space. Students are expected to listen actively, engage respectfully, and contribute to a constructive classroom environment.
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Field Partners

- **STAR Program** – A federal reentry court for Philadelphia residents on supervised release.
- **Rescue Mission of Trenton** – A public charity in Trenton, NJ, serving currently and formerly incarcerated individuals.
- **The Fountain Fund** – Provides microloans to expand economic opportunities for justice-impacted individuals.

Course Policies

- **Attendance**
This is a collaborative, community-based course. Regular attendance is essential; more than one unexcused absence will affect your grade.
- **Extensions**
Extensions must be requested before the due date. Approval is at the instructor's discretion.
- **Respect & Professionalism**
Given the sensitive nature of our subject matter and the collaboration with formerly incarcerated entrepreneurs, professionalism, respect, and confidentiality are expected at all times.
- **Academic Integrity**
Students must adhere to Penn's Code of Academic Integrity. All work must be original and appropriately cited.
- **Communication**
Email is the primary mode of communication. When contacting clients, always copy the instructor for record-keeping.

Weekly Schedule

Session 1 – August 27 Kickoff Session!

- PREP introduction
- Course design and requirements
- Review of syllabus
- Sharing experiences of working with formerly incarcerated people
- Co-creating the class

Session 2 – Sept 3

- Topic: Mass Incarceration, Structural Racism and the War on Drugs

Required Readings for Students:

- Furman, J. & Holtz-Eakin, D. (2016, April 21). NYTimes. Why mass incarceration doesn't pay. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/opinion/why-mass-incarceration-doesnt-pay.html>Links to an external site.
- Balko. (2020) Washington Post. There's overwhelming evidence that the criminal justice system is racist. Here's the proof. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/opinions/systemic-racism-police-evidence-criminal-justice-system/>Links to an external site.
- Lopez. (2016). Vox. Mass incarceration in America; Explained in 22 maps and charts <https://www.vox.com/2015/7/13/8913297/mass-incarceration-maps-charts>Links to an external site.

Additional recommended reading

- Coates, Ta-Nehisi. (2015) The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/10/the-black-family-in-the-age-of-mass-incarceration/403246/>Links to an external site.

First Meeting with Clients

Deliverable: Write down your business idea and email it to Tom before our first meeting

Orientation & Goal Setting

- Introductions and overview of the program.
 - Setting individual goals and understanding entrepreneurial readiness.
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Session 3 – Sept 10

Topics:

- Barriers to employment for people with criminal records
- Entrepreneurship as a potential solution
- Importance of cultural humility

Guest Speaker: Wharton Professor Damon Phillips

Required Readings for Students:

- Hwang, Kylie Jiwon; Phillips, Damon J. (2024). The American journal of sociology. Entrepreneurship as a Response to Labor Market Discrimination for Formerly Incarcerated People. https://upenn.alma.exlibrisgroup.com/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=ctx62873177870003681&context=SP&vid=01UPENN_INST:Services&lang=enLinks to an external site. Links to an external site.
 - Bergen. (2017) Philadelphia Inquirer. <https://www.inquirer.com/philly/business/reentry-ex-offenders-jobs-philly-records-ceo-graterford-genomind-browns-20171027.htmlLinks to an external site.>
 - Mullainathan. (2015). NYTimes. Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/upshot/the-measuring-sticks-of-racial-bias-.htmlLinks to an external site.>
 - Williams. (2019) NYTimes. Rap Sheets Haunt Former Inmates. California May Change That. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/11/us/california-criminal-records-bill.html?action=click&module=News&pgtype=HomepageLinks to an external site.>
 - **Client Work:** Ideation and Concept Development
 - Deliverable: Write a one-minute elevator pitch summarizing your business idea for the next class activity.
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Session 4 – Sept 17

Topic: Social Impact Businesses

Guest Speaker: Muhammad Abdul-Hadi, Founder, Down North Pizza

Market Research & Validation

- Deliverable: Conduct and complete a SWOT analysis.

- Business location
- Customer profile and market size
- Product/service definition

Client Assignment:

Written and oral response:

- Define product/service
- Choose and justify location
- Identify customer characteristics and estimate market size

Required Readings for Students:

- Drayton, W. (2002). California Management Review. The Citizen Sector Becoming as Entrepreneurial and Competitive as Business. https://libsearch.cbs.dk/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_miscellaneous_39056425&context=PC&vid=45KBDK_CBS:CBS&lang=da&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=EverythingLinks to an external site.

Session 5 – Sept 24

Topics:

- Stakeholder capitalism
- B Corporations, Benefit Corporations

Guest Speaker: Jay Coen Gilbert, co-founder of B Labs and And1 Apparel

Alternate Guest speaker: Tess Hart, Founder of Triple Bottom Brewery

Readings:

- Surowiecki, “Companies with Benefits” (*New Yorker*)
- Vaughan & Arsneault, “The Public Benefit of Benefit Corporations”
- Giridharadas, *Winners Take All* (pp. 3–34)
- SSIR review of *Winners Take All*

Discussion: Double & triple bottom line businesses; connections to client business ideas.

Business Model Development

- Deliverable: Start to fill out a Business Model Canvas for your idea

<https://www.canva.com/graphs/business-model-canvas/>

Session 6 – Oct 1

Topics:

- Social Impact Bonds
- **Guest Speaker:** Darrell Alston, Founder & CEO, Bungee Brand
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Client Assignment:

Branding & Marketing Fundamentals

- Deliverable: Create a mood board and write a brief description of your brand identity

A **mood board** is a visual tool that serves as a collage of inspiration for defining and communicating the aesthetic, tone, and overall feel of a brand, product, or project. It's a collection of curated visual elements, like images, colors, typography, textures, and patterns, that help entrepreneurs clarify and visualize their brand's identity and its emotional resonance with their target audience.

Readings:

- Magretta, “Why Business Models Matter” (*HBR*)
 - Liebman, “Social Impact Bonds” (CAP report)
 - Social Finance, “Social Impact Bonds: An Overview”
 - NYT, “Goldman to Invest in City Jail Program”
 - Ross, “Tackling Mass Incarceration” (*NYT*)
 - Furman & Holtz-Eakin, “Why Mass Incarceration Doesn’t Pay” (*NYT*)
 - Brookings: “Impact Bonds” overview
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Session 7 – Oct 8

Topic: Microfinance & Microlending

Guest Speaker: Mike Butler, Executive Director, The Fountain Fund

Client Work: Financial Basics

- Deliverable: Outline startup costs and develop a basic budget.

Readings:

- Yunus, “Microfinance and Poverty” (*NYT*)
- Morduch, “Not So Fast: The Realities of Impact Investing” (*Americas Quarterly*)
- CGAP, “Reflections on the Compartamos IPO”

Session 8 – Oct 15

Session 9 – Oct 22

Topic: Limits to Entrepreneurship & Legal Foundations

Guest Speaker: Shuja Moore, President of Do Moore Good

Client Work: “How” — Launching & Managing Your Business

- Registration requirements
- Licenses & permits
- Choosing a business entity
- Taxes and compliance basics

Client Assignment:

Update business plan draft:

- Identify legal/structural requirements for your business
- Outline steps to achieve compliance

Readings:

- Giridharadas, *Winners Take All* (Ch. 2–3, pp. 35–86)
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Session 10 – Oct 29

Topic: Storytelling & the Entrepreneurial Pitch

Guest Speaker: Nat Chen, Senior Associate Director of Wharton MBA Program

Client Work: Creating a Pitch Deck

- Essentials of storytelling for entrepreneurs
- Designing slides for clarity and persuasion
- Framing social impact to investors and community

Client Assignment:

Draft first version of pitch deck (5–7 slides).

- **Podcast:** (I recommend fast forwarding through the first 7 minutes) Nancy Duarte, *Resonate* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcN9HRtycgs>
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 - Stanford: *Storytelling for Influence* toolkit
<https://www.scribd.com/document/754131228/Copy-of-02-Toolkit-Storytelling-for-Influence>
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Session 11 – Nov 5

Topic: Legal and Compliance Considerations

Guest Speaker: Praveen Kosuri, Deputy Dean for Clinical Education, Director of Entrepreneurship Legal Clinic

Readings: TBA

Client Work: Strengthening the Pitch Deck

Client Assignment:

Deliverable: Research licensing requirements and identify potential legal challenges

Readings:

Session 12 – Nov 12

Topic: Perfecting the Pitch and transforming it into a business plan

Client Work: Advanced Pitch Coaching

- Refining slide decks
- Anticipating investor questions

- Practicing delivery with feedback

Client Assignment:

Deliverable: Combine all previous assignments into a cohesive business plan with student group.

Readings:

- Giridharadas, *Winners Take All* (Ch. 7 & Epilogue, pp. 201–263)
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Session 13 – Nov 19

Topic: Final Preparations

Client Work: Mock Presentations

- Small-group practice runs
- Peer and instructor feedback
- Last adjustments to slides and delivery

Client Assignment:

Submit final pitch deck.

Session 14 – Dec 3

Final Event: Pitch to Panel of Angel Investors

- PREP clients present their business pitches to a panel of invited funders, practitioners, and community stakeholders.
 - Students support client teams in preparation and logistics.
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Final Deliverables

- **First Paper:** Due Nov 9, 2025 at 11:59 PM
 - **Final Pitch:** Dec 3, 2025 (in-class event)
 - **Final PREP Report:** Due Dec 10, 2025 at 11:59 PM
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