Grantmaking in the classroom is becoming more common. The Learning by Giving Foundation now sponsors 27 universities with five more on the way. These grantmaking programs provide undergraduate students with $10,000 to distribute to community nonprofit organizations. The mission of the program is to “promote the teaching of effective charitable giving. We do this by supporting academically rigorous full-credit courses with grants of $10,000 for each class to distribute to local nonprofit organizations” (Learning by Giving Foundation, 2013). One of the missions of the program is to develop “informed, skilled, thoughtful philanthropic leaders and change agents now and in the future to address our greatest challenges” (Learning by Giving Foundation, 2013). Since the initial partnership with universities, the Foundation has created a Massive Open Online Course (M.O.O.C.) in philanthropy to further expand their reach.

Another class based philanthropy program at Northern Kentucky University found evidence that its program “had a strong and positive effect on the awareness, beliefs, values, and intentions of participating students” (Ahmed & Olberding, p. 612). A survey of students taking this MPA class showed an increase in awareness of social problems and nonprofit organizations, a sense of responsibility to help others in need and their community, and in increased intention to donate time or money to a nonprofit organization (Ahmed & Olberding). Olberding (2012) cites at least 40 colleges and universities that incorporate student philanthropy into its curriculum.

This paper will examine the grantmaking curriculum at the University of Memphis. As part of the Strengthening Communities Initiative, both graduate and undergraduate students participate in the grantmaking process. The Strengthening Communities Initiative “awards capacity-building and small grants to grow and develop community organizations, enhance student skills and knowledge, and further the engaged scholarship goals of the faculty” (University of Memphis, 2013) in the areas of economic development, education, health, housing, transportation, or safety issues. The Learning by Giving Foundation funds the grants awarded by the undergraduate students. The graduate students participate in a multi-tiered review process funded by the Community Foundation of Greater Memphis, the United Way of the Mid-South and the University of Memphis Research Foundation.

The paper starts with an overview of the program and how it fits into the coursework. As a member of the NASPAA and the Nonprofit Leadership Alliance, the program has standard learning objectives that need to be met. The connection between the coursework and these primary learning objectives will be examined. In addition, survey results from the students will be shared to reveal if these learning objectives are met. Drawing from Olberding (2012) the survey will explore common themes of increased knowledge of the nonprofit sector, an understanding of philanthropy and the individual’s role in serving the community. All of the elements lead to a stronger civil society. In addition, the survey
addresses questions related to the expected learning outcomes of the project as it relates to accreditation and certification requirements. Lastly, the paper will address the implementation of the project, identifying helpful practices to enable replication of the grantmaking experience in other programs. This paper will add to the growing literature of student philanthropy and lead to a better understanding on if this form of experiential learning is meeting common outcomes required for program expectations. Initial results show that the classroom philanthropy program meets many of these desired outcomes. Another semester of classes will be surveyed to expand the response pool and further develop the results.

References