Course Overview

The primary policy question in international development is: “How effective are efforts to enhance well-being in developing countries?” This question is relevant at the aggregate level, as countries decide how much of their GDP to direct toward foreign aid, but also for individual projects, as organizations allocate scarce resources across projects. This course examines this question, and provides an overview of international development policy in the process.

We begin with a discussion of the history of global income disparities and development policy, with particular attention to the role played by international institutions and non-governmental organizations. In the process, we consider case studies of successful and unsuccessful aid projects. We then turn to the empirical literature on the effectiveness of various policies, such as: family planning programs, infrastructure development projects, human capital interventions, conditional cash transfers, property rights reforms, and the alleviation of credit constraints (i.e. micro-finance and micro-insurance). We review concepts from the program evaluation literature, as necessary, to understand this literature. We also pay special attention to corruption, intra-household bargaining, spillover effects, and incomplete markets, and how these concepts impact the optimal design of international development policy.

Class Meetings & Office Hours

Classes will be held Fridays from 9:55 to 11:50 a.m. in Education L155.

My office hours this semester are Wednesdays from 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. in Social Science 7321. However, my other class this semester is a large lecture, so office hours may be crowded. So I encourage you to send me an e-mail instead and we’ll set up a time to meet – we can do this as often as is useful, and this way you’ll avoid the rush.

Evaluation

Your overall grade for this course will be based on four components:

• Class Participation (10%): You are expected to attend class and participate in class discussion. Classes will have a lecture format, but these lectures will be far more interesting if everyone comes to class prepared to discuss the topic at hand.
• Class Reading Assessments (30%): To promote discussion, it is important for everyone to complete assigned readings before lecture. Also, as a policy practitioner, it is vital to be able to read articles and critically assess their quality. To encourage this kind of reading, everyone is required to submit one criticism and one question about each assigned reading. Beginning the second week of classes, these should be submitted on Canvas each Thursday by 8:00 PM.

• Book Review (30%): Write a short review (4-5 pages) of a popular press development policy book which you have not previously read. The review is due Friday, April 3. Your focus should be on critically evaluating the book, not just providing a summary of the book’s argument. You may pick a book from the following list or feel free to submit another book for approval:

• Final Exam (30%): There will be a “take-home” final examination at the end of the term. We will discuss the exact timing on the first day of class.

Credits

The credit standard for this course is met by an expectation of a total of 135 hours of student engagement with the courses learning activities, which include weekly lectures, reading assignments, and writing assignments, as described on this syllabus.

Learning Outcomes

• Students will demonstrate understanding of major current and past policy debates, research findings, and analytical methodologies in international development policy

• Students will demonstrate critical thinking skills. They will retrieve and examine the policy literature and evaluate evidence for and against hypotheses, identify knowledge gaps, strengths and weaknesses in existing literature, synthesize knowledge, and develop conclusions

• Students will read, comprehend, and effectively summarize policy research and policy-relevant academic research
• Students will communicate in clear written language: a real-world policy problem, relevant scholarly studies and practical applications, a policy-analytic method to investigate the problem, and client-oriented advice to mitigate the problem.

• Students will demonstrate the ability to maintain fidelity to objective social science-based research methods.

Course Webpage

Lecture notes, readings, and other course materials will be posted on Canvas: https://canvas.wisc.edu/

Course Outline

This section provides a roadmap of the topics we will be covering each week. Mandatory readings are marked with an asterisk and be posted each week on Canvas. Readings are subject to change, so please check with me before reading ahead.

Week 1 - Overview of the Problem


Week 2 - The Role of International Institutions and Non-Governmental Institutions; Foreign Aid Effectiveness; Possible Solutions


**Week 3 - Physical Capital & Infrastructure**


**Week 4 - Human Capital (Education)**


**Week 5 - Human Capital (Health)**


**Week 6 - Family Planning**


**Week 7 - Conditional Cash Transfers**


**Week 8 - Credit Constraints (Micro-Finance)**


Week 9 - Credit Constraints (Micro-Insurance)


Week 10 - Property Rights


Week 11 - Migration and Brain-Drain


Week 12: Topics on Women’s Empowerment: Missing Women, Intra-Household Bargaining, and Increasing Political Engagement


**Week 13 - Conflict**


**Week 14 - Corruption**


