Overview: The demand for the use of evidence in designing international development programs and policy continues to grow. However, policy makers’ often have questions about how to interpret and use the evidence generated. How generalizable are these results? How to interpret null results? Mixed outcomes? Short- and long-term effects? Are these results scalable? Additionally, what are the political barriers to using evidence? In this course, we will explore how to think about these issues and others in relation to designing policies and programs in the international development sphere. We will examine these questions through various development sectors: economic development, governance, food security, refugees, education and peacebuilding.

In this course we will cover various topics related to evidence-based policy making, including:

- Elements of Policy and Program Design
  - Theories of Change
- Generalizability and Context Specificity
- External Validity
- How and when do you scale a program?
- Ethical Considerations
- Political Barriers

Each week, we will dive into at least one evaluation of a program or policy. We will ask ourselves if and how policy makers could and/or should use this evidence. I will bring in guest speakers occasionally, either those who worked on the evaluation or practitioners who are figuring out how to use the evidence.

Course Structure (tentative based on numbers): This is a discussion-based course. There are no clear-cut answers to many of these questions. My aim is to have you become more comfortable with the questions and think through how to wrestle with the dilemmas they pose and think critically about a) how to generate relevant evidence and b) when and how to use it. I will normally start classes with about 30-40 minutes of lecture, and then open to discussion. We also likely will have more discussion in Wednesdays class than Mondays (see Weekly Readings and Class Participation below).
Assignments:
Note: All written assignments are expected to be single-spaced, 12-point font, with one-inch margins. Those submitted that don’t follow these instructions will not be graded. All submissions through Canvas.

The crux of your grade will be a three-part assignment which has two building blocks before the final assignment, which is writing a program or policy for a donor within some technical sector (economic development, education, governance, etc.) in a country in the Global South. At the beginning of the term, you will select a type of intervention (e.g., food aid, cash, elections, vocational training, teacher training, etc.) and a context. Topics and Contexts are due to me by October 12th via Canvas.

1. Collecting the Evidence (20%): Due October 21 at midnight. The first building block is collecting the evidence for your intervention. Has it been conducted in your chosen context? In a similar context (e.g., similar level of fragility/poverty, similar political and economic systems)? What are the outcomes? Can you tell how it was implemented? Systematic reviews and Evidence Gap Maps can provide a good starting place for this paper. Note: not all evidence needs to be from RCTs. Quasi-experimental evaluations and strong qualitative evaluations are acceptable. If there is no relevant causal evidence, please make note, and review what does exist. Provide no more than a 4-page summary of the evidence. Feel free to use tables to summarize the evidence. See Canvas for an example. Tables are included in the page limit.

2. Evaluating the Use (25%): November 18 at midnight. For the second paper, you will find a request for proposal (oddly, called an RFA) or a Policy (e.g., Food for Peace, DFID stabilization framework) and grade the RFA/policy on how well the donor has incorporated the evidence. The RFA/policy will be in the technical area you have chosen, and ideally in your context. For a policy, it may be a bit broader than your specific area, so you can limit it yourself to grading how it uses the specific area you are interested. If you are not able to find a relevant RFA in your chosen context, we will identify a reasonable alternative. If you have chosen a policy, you will note how well the policy addresses the context you have chosen (e.g., education policy where much of the population is displaced). You will give the RFA a grade (A to F) and justify the grade based on the evidence you collected in your earlier paper. Did the donor reference relevant evidence? Did it acknowledge mixed outcomes or where the intervention worked and didn’t? Will the implementation of the program/policy lead to generation of more evidence (i.e., what is the Monitoring and Evaluation plan)? Page limit: 2 pages

3. Using the Evidence (30%): Due December 11 at midnight. For the final paper, you will design a program based on the RFA or policy you identified for the previous assignment. See sample on Canvas. The paper will include the following sections:
   • Context and Problem Statement: (2 pages). This is a description of the context, and what is the problem the program will address. You need to
write this section to justify why this is a critical issue in this country to solve. For example, in Afghanistan, there are a host of problems to solve: education, governance, poverty. And while they are all interrelated, focus your context analysis on the area of interest. (i.e., girls education lags behind in Afghanistan reducing economic prosperity, etc.).

- Theory of Change (hypothesis) and Summary of Evidence (2 pages)
  - The summary of evidence is to justify your Theory of Change. Why do you think this program will have desirable outcomes?
- Activities: I recognize it will be difficult to design the activities in some cases (particularly if you are designing a program based off a policy). But I want you think through what are the things necessary to operationalize the theory. What is the dosage for the program? (e.g., number of trainings) Do you want there to be spillover? Should cash be given in one large tranche or in smaller tranches? You can bullet point this section. The activity section will only be 5% of your overall grade on the assignment (1 page).
- Evaluation Plan: How will the program generate further evidence? What type of evaluation will you try to conduct? What is the sampling strategy (e.g., individual, household, community, etc?) What are the main indicators? (1 page)

The total page limit for this assignment is 6 pages. This may seem extremely short, but most donors are requiring shorter and shorter proposals. This will help you hone your writing skills.

**Weekly Reading and Class Participation (25%):** It is expected students come to discussions prepared to discuss the topic and some of the readings. This is your opportunity to engage more with the material, ask me questions, and debate the thorny issues that are at the heart of evidence-based policy making. In your professional career, you will need to back your opinions with evidence (most of the time), and so use class as an opportunity to hone those skills.

To help prepare for the discussions, please submit 2-3 bullet points on the readings by Wednesday morning at 10 AM CT on Canvas. These could be reflections, questions, etc. Quality is more important the quantity. Over the course of the term, you may take 1 “pass” and not submit the bullet points.

**Late policy:** Unless arrangements are made in advance, any assignment that is late will receive 10% penalty for each day late.

**Academic Integrity:** All University of Chicago students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Among other things, this means that students shall not represent another’s work as their own, use un-allowed materials during exams, or otherwise gain unfair academic advantage. All students suspected of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Harris Dean of Students for investigation and adjudication. The disciplinary process can result in sanctions up to and including suspension or expulsion from the University.
In addition to disciplinary sanctions, I will impose a grade penalty of 0 on the assignment and cannot earn higher than a C in the course for students who have committed academic dishonesty. The Harris policy and procedures related to academic integrity can be found at https://harris.uchicago.edu/gateways/current-students/policies. The University of Chicago Policy on Academic Honesty & Plagiarism can be found at https://studentmanual.uchicago.edu/academic-policies/academic-honesty-plagiarism/

**ADA student accommodations:** Any student who believes they may need assistance should inform the Office of Student Disability Services by the end of the first week of class. Once you have received an accommodation letter, it should be presented to the course instructor immediately: https://disabilities.uchicago.edu/

**Course Schedule and Readings (or podcasts, videos)**

**Week 1: September 30**

**Overview of course**

Evidence to Policy: https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evidence-to-policy

Read: Ruth Levine, “The Moral Case for Evidence in Policy Making
https://hewlett.org/moral-case-evidence-policymaking/

Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IrarsRtUHO0&feature=youtu.be

**Week 2: October 5 & 7**

**What is (Good Enough) Evidence? Whose evidence? Ethics?**

Case: Deworming


Humphreys, M. and Scacco, A. (2020):

Kabeer, N. https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/naila-kabeer-on-why-randomized-controlled-trials-need-to-include-human-agency/ (includes podcast)


Other criticisms of RCTs (optional):
https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/impoverished-economics-unpacking-economics-nobel-prize/


Week 3: October 12 & 14

**Elements of Program and Policy Design**

Theories of Change Readings:
Brown, A. (May 2016). What is this thing called “Theory of Change”
https://www.annmurraybrown.com/post/2016/03/09/what-is-this-thing-called-theory-of-change

Examples from DFID:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a66ed915d622c000703/Appendix_3_ToC_Examples.pdf

**Case:** Contact Theory and Peacebuilding

Choose at least 1:

Lowe, M. Types of contact: A field experiment on collaborative and adversarial caste integration (CESifo Working Paper Series 8089, 2019); https://osf.io/u2d9x/.


Week 4: October 19 & 21

**Mixed Outcomes** (various outcomes and short vs. long-term)

**Case: Cash in Kenya, Uganda and Afghanistan**


Optional

Week 5: October 26 & 28

Null Results and Operationalization of Concepts
Case: CDD


Skim to compare with academic article: http://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/ie7_1.pdf


Humphrey’s commentary: http://macartan.nyc/posts/cdd-what-is-it-good-for/

Week 6: November 2 & 4

Scaling: Issues of Implementation
Case: Community Health


Optional Reading:

Week 7: November 9 & 11

**Generalizability and Context Specificity**
Case: Information and Elections, plus a return to Community Health and Contact Theory


Return to Community Health:

Week 8: November 16 & 18
External Validity and Systems Thinking

Case: TBD


Summary: https://voxeu.org/article/limitations-randomised-controlled-trials

Optional commentary:

Raudenbush:  
Sampson: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0277953618301783

Week 9: Thanksgiving week (no classes)

Week 10: November 30 & December 2  
**Political Barriers to Evidence Use**


Week 11: Final Paper Due December 11 at midnight