

PPHA 35560 - Translating Evidence for Public Policy and Program Design (Draft Syllabus)

Prof: Rebecca Wolfe

M, W: 3:30-4:50 PM CT

Zoom

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 8 AM -10 AM

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 than 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=2IrasRtUHO0&feature=youtu.be>

Week 2: October 5 & 7

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

Case: Deworming

Hamory, Joan, Edward Miguel, Michael Walker, Michael Kremer, and Sarah Baird. (2020). "Twenty Year Economic Impacts of Deworming", unpublished working paper. <http://emiguel.econ.berkeley.edu/research/twenty-year-economic-impacts-of-deworming>

Wolfe, R. (forthcoming). The challenges and promises of using RCTs in conflict environments: A scholar-practitioner perspective. In Acar, O, Moss, S., & Uluğ, Y., eds. *Researching Peace and Conflict: Field Experiences and Methodological Reflections*. London: Springer. (On Canvas)

Humphreys, M. and Scacco, A. (2020): <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X19304553>

Muller, S., Chelwa, G., and Hoffman, N. (2019): <https://qz.com/africa/1766686/the-problem-with-economists-using-randomized-trials-in-africa/>

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

Reddy, S. (2019) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/22/economics-development-rcts-esther-duflo-abhijit-banerjee-michael-kremer-nobel/>

Other criticisms of RCTs (optional):

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/oureconomy/impooverished-economics-unpacking-economics-nobel-prize/>

Rao, V: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X19304723>

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

Social Impact Report: [https://www.dmeformpeace.org/wp-](https://www.dmeformpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CMM20Evaluative20Learning20Review_Synthesis20Report20Final20March202014_USAID_040714.pdf)

[content/uploads/2017/06/CMM20Evaluative20Learning20Review_Synthesis20Report20Final20March202014_USAID_040714.pdf](https://www.dmeformpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/CMM20Evaluative20Learning20Review_Synthesis20Report20Final20March202014_USAID_040714.pdf)

Choose at least 1:

Scacco, A. and Warren, S. (2018). Can social contact reduce prejudice and discrimination? Evidence from a field experiment in Nigeria. *Am. Polit. Sci. Rev.* **112**, 654–677 doi:10.1017/S0003055418000151:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-political-science-review/article/can-social-contact-reduce-prejudice-and-discrimination-evidence-from-a-field-experiment-in-nigeria/230FAEB8E4E9E756BF8560FE62E2FBAC>

Mousa, S. (2020). Building social cohesion between Christians and Muslims through soccer in post-ISIS Iraq. *Science* 369 (6505), 866-870.

<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/sci/369/6505/866.full.pdf>

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

Paler, Laura, Leslie Marshall, and Sami Atallah. 2020. "How Cross-Cutting Discussion Shapes Support for Ethnic Politics: Evidence from an Experiment in Lebanon." *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 15(1): 33-71: https://laurapaler.files.wordpress.com/2020/01/leb_diag_gips_final.pdf

Week 4: October 19 & 21

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

Case: Cash in Kenya, Uganda and Afghanistan

Haushofer, J., & Shapiro, J. (2016). The Short-Term Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfers to the Poor: Experimental Evidence from Kenya. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(4), 1973–2042.

https://www.princeton.edu/haushofer/publications/Haushofer_S Shapiro_UCT_QJE_2016.pdf

Haushofer, J. & Shapiro, J. (2018b). The Long-Term Impact of Unconditional Cash Transfers to the Poor: Experimental Evidence from Kenya. Working Paper.

https://www.princeton.edu/haushofer/publications/Haushofer_S Shapiro_UCT2_2018.pdf

Blattman, C., Fiala, N., & Martinez, S. (2014). "Generating skilled self-employment in developing countries: Experimental evidence from Uganda," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 129(2), p. 697–752.

<https://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2014.GeneratingSkilledEmployment.QJE.pdf>

Blattman, C., Fiala, N., & Martinez, S. (2019, April 16). The long term impacts of grants on poverty: 9-year evidence from Uganda's Youth Opportunities Program.

<https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/vctuh>: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/vctuh/>

Optional

Lyall, J., Zhou, Y.Y., and Imai, K. (2020) "Experimental Evidence from Afghanistan." With Yang-Yang Zhou and Kosuke Imai. *American Political Science Review*.

http://www.jasonlyall.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/APSR_LyallZhouImai.pdf

Summary: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/02/19/to-win-hearts-and-minds-in-afghanistan-some-aid-programs-worked-better-than-others/>

Week 5: October 26 & 28

Null Results and Operationalization of Concepts

Case: CDD

Katherine Casey (2018). Radical Decentralization: Does Community-Driven Development Work? Annual Review of Economics 2018 10:1, 139-163.

<https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-economics-080217-053339>

Humphreys, M. , Sanchez de la Sierra, R., and Van der Windt, P. (2019). Exporting democratic practices: Evidence from a village governance intervention in Eastern Congo. Journal of Development Economics. Volume 140, Pages 279-301.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0304387818305078>

Skim to compare with academic article:

http://3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2019-01/ie7_1.pdf

Bennett, S. and D’Onofrio, A. (2015). Community-Driven? Concepts, Clarity and Choices for Community-Driven Development in Conflict-Affected Countries. IRC.

<https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/567/communitydrivenlowresfinalshereehandalyoscia0.pdf>

White, H., Menon, R., and Waddington, H. (2018). Community-driven development: does it build social cohesion or infrastructure? A mixed-method evidence synthesis. 3ie Working Paper 30.

<https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/wp30-cdd.pdf>

Related Brief: http://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/CDD-brief-wp30_0.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

Björkman, M and J Svensson (2009), "Power to the people: Evidence from a randomised field experiment on community-based monitoring in Uganda", *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124(2): 735-769.: <https://academic.oup.com/qje/article-abstract/124/2/735/1905094>

Björkman Nyqvist, M, D de Walquen and J Svensson (2017), "Experimental evidence on the long-run impact of community based monitoring", *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 9(1): 33-69.
<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/app.20150027>

Raffler, P., Posner., D and Parkerson. D. (under review). The Weakness of Bottom-Up Accountability: Experimental Evidence from the Ugandan Health Sector.
http://piaraffler.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RPP_Weakness-of-Bottom-Up.pdf
Summary of study: <https://voxdev.org/topic/health-education/does-bottom-accountability-work-evidence-uganda>

Mobarack, M., Levy, K., and Reiamo, M. (Nov 14, 2017). The path to scale: From randomized control trial to scalable program. VoxDev.
<https://voxdev.org/topic/methods-measurement/path-scale-randomised-control-trial-scalable-programme>

Mobarack, M., Levy, K., and Reiamo, M. (Nov 21, 2017). The path to scale: Replication, equilibrium effects and new settings. VoxDev. <https://voxdev.org/topic/methods-measurement/path-scale-replication-general-equilibrium-effects-and-new-settings>

Piper, K. (Nov. 29, 2019). A charity just admitted that its program wasn't working. That's a big deal. <https://www.vox.com/2018/11/29/18114585/poverty-charity-randomized-controlled-trial-evidence-action>

Mobarak, M. Davis, C.A. (2020).
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X19304668>

Optional Reading:

DellaVigna, S. & Linos, E. (2020) "[RCTs to Scale: Comprehensive Evidence from Two Nudge Units](https://www.nber.org/papers/w27594?utm_campaign=ntwh&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ntwg19)"
https://www.nber.org/papers/w27594?utm_campaign=ntwh&utm_medium=email&utm_source=ntwg19

Summary: <https://www.bi.team/blogs/do-nudges-actually-work/>

Week 7: November 9 & 11

Generalizability and Context Specificity

Case: Information and Elections, plus a return to Community Health and Contact Theory

The Metaketa Initiative; Chapter 2 (2019). In T. Dunning, G. Grossman, M. Humphreys, S. Hyde, C. McIntosh, & G. Nellis (Eds.), *Information, Accountability, and Cumulative Learning: Lessons from Metaketa I* (Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics, pp. 16-49). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108381390.003 (On Canvas Reserve)

Dunning, T. et al (2019) Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials. *Science Advances*: EAAW2612: <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/7/eaaw2612>

Adida, C., Gottlieb, J., Kramon, E., & McClendon, G. (2020). When Does Information Influence Voters? The Joint Importance of Salience and Coordination. *Comparative Political Studies*, 53(6), 851–891. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414019879945>

Murdoch, J.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X1930467X>

Return to Community Health:

Darin Christensen, Oeindrila Dube Johannes Haushofer, Bilal Siddiqi and Maarten Voors [“Building Resilient Health Systems: Experimental Evidence from Sierra Leone and the 2014 Ebola Outbreak”](http://odube.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Ebola_Sierra_Leone.pdf): http://odube.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Ebola_Sierra_Leone.pdf

Week 8: November 16 & 18

External Validity and Systems Thinking

Case: TBD

Quisumbing, A. et al. (2020)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X19304711>

Deaton, A. and Cartwright, N. (2018)

<https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0277953617307359?token=BF7F8A345E4D6B26AEE3CE172BFB6894E8B26443D8724551336CD6DB801DEC25CB217F2137F2B097531B27977F516824>

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

Optional commentary:

Oakes: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S027795361830193X>

Raudenbush:

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0277953618301977>

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

Das., S. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X19304413>

Dreze, J. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0305750X19304462>

Week 11: Final Paper Due December 11 at midnight