

Harris School of Public Policy  
University of Chicago  
PPHA 35575

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## **Behavioral Experiments in International Development: From Theory to Practice**

### **Background**

This course brings together some of the most exciting developments in international development policy in the past years: The emphasis on evidence-based policy, the insights used from experiments, the greater attention being paid to behavioral aspects that determine whether policies work (or actually help improve people's lives) and the deep, heated, thoughtful and necessary discussion about what it means to do research ethically, for the right reasons, and grounded in the realities of the everyday lives of the people who are supposed to benefit from good development policy.

Taking a practical hands-on approach, the course unpacks how experiments can be a powerful tool for good policy, what is necessary to consider when designing an experiment (from conducting formative research to make sure to ask the right question, considering ethical issues, and the often-challenging logistics of actually conducting an experiment) to thinking through what makes a good policy recommendation.

To be able to do this, this course offers a very different learning experience: You will be participating—remotely—in the groundwork that is needed to design good experiments for development policy. You will be working with staff of Busara, based in Nairobi, Kenya, who are seasoned in implementing experiments for development policy. Throughout the course, you will work in teams to refine a research question, examine the extent to which it is relevant in the context you are researching, remotely participate in preliminary data collection for formative research in Kenya, and learn how to use what you learned from conducting formative interviews to create better research designs.

This is a unique opportunity to work directly with researchers and field officers who every day grapple with questions of good research design, ethics, inclusion and participation and who are working with you while being in a context in which a lot of research for development policy is implemented. The course will also offer you first-hand exposure to flexibility and adaptation needed when conducting research: things often do not go as planned and those unexpected moments might offer the most valuable insights.

## About your instructors

This course is taught by staff of Busara ([www.busara.global](http://www.busara.global)). Busara is a research organisation seeking to apply and advance behavioural science in the Global South with the aim to alleviate poverty and improve policies. We work with non-profit organisations, private sector, multilaterals and academic researchers to help them apply the insights gained from our rigorous, contextually-appropriate, multi-method policy-relevant research. Busara is headquartered in Kenya, with further offices in Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda.

**Jennifer Adhiambo** is a Senior Research Manager at Busara. She is an experienced research expert with more than ten years work in research and development programs. Her experience cuts across project management, experimental/study design and conducting economic experiments through the appropriate frameworks and methodologies. Over the years, Jennifer has worked with researchers in adapting protocols/WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) behavioral concepts into the developing world context. In Busara, she manages a portfolio of projects working directly with a team of local and international researchers from the project design phase, budgeting, contracting and direct supervision during implementation. She has a lot of experience running experiments in a controlled environment (Behavioral Lab). Jennifer holds a Bachelor of Education Arts in Economics & Commerce from University of Nairobi.

**Engy Saleh** is the Director of Behavioral Research and Academic Engagements (BRACE) at Busara. She is a development economics professional with extensive experience in quantitative methods and running randomized evaluations, as well as public policy. Before joining Busara, Engy worked as a research manager at Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) MENA Office in Egypt where she managed a randomized evaluation of interventions addressing irregular migration in Egypt and led the partnership with the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Agency (MSMEDA). She also held key research positions within organizations such as the African Development Bank in Tunisia, The Ministry of International Cooperation in Egypt, and the United Nations for Women. In Busara, Engy leads the portfolio of academic research studies to understand human behavioral mechanisms under poverty conditions. She ensures that teams keep an eye on rigor, relevance and contextualization of the research and its findings. Engy holds a Master of Public Administration (MPA) in Economic and Public Policy from the London School of Economics and Political Science and a BA in Economics from the American University in Cairo.

**Mareike Schomerus**, (PhD, London School of Economics and Political Science) is Vice President at Busara. She was formerly Director of Programme [Politics and Governance](#) at ODI in London (formerly Overseas Development Institute), and Research Director of the [Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium](#) (SLRC), also at ODI. At Busara, she heads the Center's work that links behavioral science, governance, fragility and violent conflict. She is a widely published researcher with a body of work on violent conflict, political contestation and peace processes in South Sudan and Uganda and across borders, as well as behavioral mechanisms in post-conflict recovery, for which she has developed a body of work on the '[mental landscape](#)' of lives in or after situations of violence conflict. In addition to conducting and leading academic research, she has conducted applied research for a wide range of international organisations. She is the co-editor of two volumes (on [African secessionism](#) and [South Sudan's borderlands](#) (Palgrave Macmillan 2020, 2013) and author of the monographs *The Lord's Resistance Army: Violence*

*and Peacemaking in Africa* (Cambridge University Press 2021) and *Lives Amid Violence: Transforming Development in the Wake of Conflict* (Bloomsbury, 2023). At Harris, she also teaches a course on qualitative research methods for international development policy. She is currently writing a textbook on multi-method research for political science with Anouk S.Rigterink for SAGE Publications.

This course will further be supported by staff from Busara's lab. Each working group will be liaising with lab staff members based in Nairobi to ensure hands-on engagement for students' research.

## **Aims of this course and learning outcomes**

The aim of this experiential and practical course is to equip students with knowledge and practical skills needed to design and run an experiment in ways that are ethical, inclusive, grounded in local realities, academically rigorous, thoughtful, designed to produce data that can guide towards sensible policy recommendations, and that emphasise the dignity of the research respondents. It does so through a practical approach in which students will use their theoretical knowledge to directly apply to designing an experiment and conducting—remotely and with the help of Busara staff—the necessary formative research with respondents in Kenya.

Students will work, in groups, on an experiment design that they will refine throughout the course as we go through the steps of understanding good research design (including considerations of what produces good evidence for policy), being ethical and inclusive, designing, conducting, and analysing formative interviews, learning from formative research and identifying policy implications.

Specifically, the course aims to

- Recognize current debates in international development policy regarding approaches, effectiveness and impact;
- Equip students with practical skills needed to design thoughtful, ethical and locally-grounded experiments for development policy;
- Introduce students to a range of examples of experiments and enable them to assess them for the quality of insight they generated or ethical challenges they posed;
- Familiarize students with integrating qualitative and quantitative research and the practical challenges of conducting experimental research;
- Sensitize students to working as researchers across different cultures, ways of knowing and interacting.

By the end of the course students will be able to

- Follow the steps needed to design an experiment and how to adjust it based on learning or the realities of the research situation;
- Assess the appropriateness of a research design to an identified research question;
- Recognise the role of formative research and other groundwork for experiment design;
- Design and analyse interviews for formative research;
- Identify what is needed for research to be ethical, inclusive and preserving the dignity of research participants;
- Articulate policy implications of a research question.

## **Who is this course for?**

This course has no specific prerequisites beyond being interested in experimental design. If you have taken courses in statistics or quantitative methods, and are keen on applying those skills practically, this course is a good continuation, but it is explicitly not designed to further your quantitative skills. Rather, it will expand your quantitative perspective towards taking qualitative research into account for better research designs. The emphasis on practice runs throughout the course, asking students to reflect their increasing knowledge in their changing research designs.

In addition, this course is of particular interest to those wanting to work in international development, as it provides a good introduction to some of the very practical challenges and unique responses this work requires—for example working in teams with different backgrounds, working across time zones, handling technical challenges (internet breakdowns, rain that interrupts data collection, translation errors). The practical aspect of the course spans to a different time zone, as formative research will be conducted remotely in Kenya; thus, students wanting to listen in on formative interviews will be required to do so at very odd hours for Chicago.

The course also requires an interest in understanding that research is always ethically complex and that designing research for policy in ways that maintain the dignity of research participants requires thoughtful and committed effort.

Students who are interested in taking the course and are unsure if it is a good fit for them are advised to speak to the instructors during the first week of class. Above all, the course is for students interested in learning what it means to actually conduct research for international development policy.

## **How this class will work**

### **Class meeting time and location**

The class meets in person on Wednesdays (9am – 11.50am) in Keller (room tbd), except in week 5 (April 17). In week 5 the class is held fully online for everyone to facilitate a more equitable participation of colleagues in Kenya in an in-depth feedback session on the formative instruments. A Zoom link will be provided and students are expected to join on Zoom with cameras on where possible. The last week of teaching is week 9.

Class time is split differently each week to cover lectures, presentations and practical team work—we will be mixing things up as appropriate. Class attendance is mandatory. Your presence in the classroom is really important as this is a course that relies on teamwork. Your team collaboration will be much stronger if you all see each other in person. We offer you a lot of time to get on with your team work in class, so making use of that is really helpful to everyone. However, in case of sickness, students need to notify the teaching assistant (TA) of absences, particularly if having to isolate due to Covid. In such a case, the TA will provide the Zoom link to the class. When attending class via Zoom, students are expected to mute their microphones and activate their cameras when possible. Class recordings can be made available upon prior request with a reasonable explanation as to why a recording is needed only.

Up-to-date information on UChicago's attendance policies may be found at:

- <https://goforward.uchicago.edu/>
- <https://teachingremotely.uchicago.edu/>
- <https://learningremotely.uchicago.edu/>

Because students will be working on field studies in Kenya and with staff based in Kenya, teaching will be delivered in a hybrid format, with one of the instructors present in Chicago in person. Parts of the class will be taught virtually, and connecting with the lab staff in Nairobi will also require a hybrid model. In addition, due to the time zone difference, students who would like to listen in when interviews with research participants are conducted might have to do that at rather odd hours for Chicago: lab staff will be interviewing research participants during Nairobi work hours, which means from about midnight to 8am Chicago time. Due to working in teams, students will need to organize additional meeting times with their teams. Below are some suggestions about how to plan your quarter.

## **Canvas and other teaching tools**

We will use Canvas as the main teaching tool and way to communicate. All readings will be uploaded here, organised by week. The Canvas calendar will also give you the relevant dates.

## **Office hours and how to contact the instructors**

All instructors will have office hours, some in person, some virtual. To make the best use of your time in an office hour, it is often helpful to come prepared with a specific question or concern, regardless of whether it is related directly to the course or, for example, your career planning.

For all matters related to the running of the course (such as questions about where to find readings, questions about Canvas, or other logistical questions), please get in touch with the TA (tbd.)

**Mareike** will have office hours in Keller (room tbd) at the following times:

- Wednesdays (March 20 – May 15), 3 – 5pm

Sign-up sheets for 15-minute slots will be on Canvas. If you have trouble making any of these slots work, please reach out separately. However, it might help to plan ahead and sign up for a slot in advance if you know you might have questions at a particular time in the quarter. It is usually really tough to put on extra office hours in the last weeks of term, so please do plan ahead. However, at the same time, please do not blanket sign up for as many slots as possible but be thoughtful about when you might need help. If you have signed up for a slot and can no longer make it, please be courteous to your fellow students and delete your name so someone else can take your slot. Students who have missed two appointments without cancelling with reasonable time for others to take the slot might no longer be allowed to sign up to an office hour slot. Please just don't do it.

You can contact Mareike at [mareikeschomerus@uchicago.edu](mailto:mareikeschomerus@uchicago.edu).

**Engy** will hold flexible zoom office hours which will be announced at the start of the course, with sign-up sheets for all office hours posted on Canvas.

You can contact Engy at [Engy.Saleh@busara.global](mailto:Engy.Saleh@busara.global).

**Jennifer** will be available during class time and will have some zoom office hours for feedback particularly on the formative instrument.

We will allocate team times to Jennifer's office hours to make sure all teams have booked enough time with her. If a team struggles to make any of the times, we'll adjust to make it work.

You can contact Jennifer at [jennifer.adhiambo@busara.global](mailto:jennifer.adhiambo@busara.global)

The TA will be available to discuss assignments and other matters with you.

## Team work

A huge part of the experience of this course is to work in teams to design a behavioral experiment, design formative research, and participate in the organising and collecting of preliminary formative data (ten interviews per team, collected by Busara field officers in Kenya), and then working jointly as a team on refining a research design.

Team work can be extremely rewarding and challenging. We have designed it to optimise your learning about the processes that inform research and policy making. We will form diverse teams with different skill sets and backgrounds based on criteria that we will jointly develop in a class exercise. Clearly assigning responsibilities within your team, putting together a schedule early on, and maintaining communication channels will make sure that you make the most use of everyone's skills while avoiding frustrations.

## Assignments and assessment

Students will submit three graded written assignments, of which two are conducted individually and one is a group project. In addition, there are two ungraded team submissions. Students will also assess each other for peer feedback, which will feed into the final grade a student receives.

**A student's individual grade will be made up of the following:**

**Barriers and enablers audit (15%):** This is an **individual assignment** that asks students to identify possible behavioral barriers and enablers for a problem that they are observing. Detailed instructions will be given in the first week of class. The barriers and enablers audit is due early on in the course to ensure that students have internalised thinking about behavioral barriers and enablers for a contextualised problem. A detailed description of the assignment will be posted on Canvas. Page limit: 2 pages.

- **Due: April 7**

**Research design (45%):** This is a **group assignment**, on which student teams will work throughout the course. It forms the core of this course. Students will work with their group on identifying a research question using background research, drafting a preliminary research design, designing formative research questions, assisting remotely in conducting formative interviews, analysing formative data and using it to finalise the design of an experiment.

The final research design forms the main part of this grade and is a summary of all steps in the following format: Executive summary, research question and rationale, methods description and limitations, evolution of design (through formative interviews), conclusion. A suggested template and detailed instructions will be provided. Page limit: 6 pages.

- **Due: May 24**

**Implications Brief (20%):** This is an **individual assignment** that concludes the course. It is a succinct, two-page briefing paper that pulls together the student's learning on what policy

recommendations might emerge from the team experimental research design and what steps would be needed to ensure the recommendations are meaningful. Page limit: 2 pages.

- **Due: May 26 (May 24 for graduating students)**

**Class Participation and Peer Feedback 20%:** Students are expected to attend class and actively contribute to class discussions and teamwork. This grade will also be drawn from your contribution to discussions of readings, particularly in the week you have been assigned to lead the discussion. At the end of the term, we will request peer feedback from you to fairly assess contributions made in teamwork.

**Group efforts that will receive feedback:** In addition, four other group efforts are required that will be used to offer students feedback on their learning. Such feedback is not directly assessed but can feed into a student grade if a student sits between two final grades. The group efforts are:

- **Light-touch literature review:** this is a team light-touch literature review on your chosen research problem submitted in a template we will provide. The review should emerge quite organically from the team work you are doing. (due date: April 15).
- **Preliminary formative research instrument:** Your team's preliminary formative research instrument is due on April 15 to allow feedback in class on April 17.
- **Final formative research instrument:** Your team's preliminary formative research instrument is due on April 21 to allow timely conducting of interviews in Kenya.
- **Group presentations** (in class on May 15, please upload your presentation by May 13 to give instructors time to prepare feedback). In presentations, we will look for originality and succinctness in presenting.

## Grading policies

All assignments should be submitted as soft copies via Canvas in 12-point font with a standard margin of about one inch/2.5 centimeters. Assignments that are longer than the stated page limit will have points deducted for each page that overruns the page or paragraph limit. The page limit includes references (which can be included in smaller font footnotes). The reason why we are strict on the page limit is that particularly in the policy world, people's tolerance for reading beyond expected length is very limited. Thus, learning how to be succinct is part of this course. Late submissions will be subject to deduction of one half-grade per day. Extensions can only be granted if requested in a timely manner before the deadline and with a viable reason, such as sickness. Students will receive feedback on their assignments within a week of the deadline.

### Pass/Fail Policy

Because this course so heavily relies on team work, we encourage students to not take the pass/fail option. If you are considering a pass/fail option, please speak to the instructor to see what solution we can offer.

### Grading rubrics

This course does not share grading rubrics with students. The assignments will receive very clear instructions, so following those instructions with depth and reflection should assure that you meet the necessary requirements. We find that giving grading rubrics limits student engagement with what an assignment asks of them.

## Readings

We will be reading mainly articles, a few book chapters, some reports and some blogs. This means that the readings listed here are of very different length. The reading list is not excessive as we want to make sure that you do read the texts listed here, with a particular emphasis on the main reading for the week. We are also frontloading the reading in the earlier part of the course, when you are learning the foundations and are less busy with conducting the formative research. We expect students to be prepared to discuss readings in class. We will randomly assign people to lead the class discussion on featured reading and publish those assignments in the second week of the class, so you will know when your turn is coming up.

Most readings listed here are available online or through library access. We will upload core readings to Canvas for ease of access, including book chapters where possible. Some of the books are open access, which is noted here. However, since some of the books are quite fundamental to this area of work, we also ordered some of the non-open access books through the bookstore. Relevant books are:

Artavia-Mora, L and Z.Khan, eds. (2023). *Behavioral Science for Development: Insights and Strategies for Global Impact*. Dallas: BeScy Publishing. **(NOTE: This book is available open access online).**

Fejerskov, A. (2022). *The Global Lab: Inequality, Technology, and the Experimental Movement*. Oxford: OUP.

Criado Perez, C. (2019). *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. London: Vintage/Penguin.

Guyan, K. (2022). *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Luca, M., & Bazerman, M. H. (2020). *The Power of Experiments: Decision-Making in a Data-Driven World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. **(NOTE: This book is available open access online).**

Schomerus, M. (2023). *Lives Amid Violence: Transforming Development in the Wake of Conflict*. London: Bloomsbury. **(NOTE: This book is available open access online).**

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

### Organizing your quarter: Important dates and ideas for planning ahead

This section gives you a general sense of how to plan your workload for the quarter. The course is roughly divided into three sections: introductory weeks where we lay a lot of the foundational knowledge; formative research weeks where you work in teams to design formative research, collect and analyse data; and refinement weeks where you work with your team on the finer points of your final design. The table below allows you to plan accordingly.

	<b>Part 1: Foundations (weeks 1, 2)</b>	<b>Part 2: Formative research (weeks 3, 4, 5, 6)</b>	<b>Part 3: Refinement (weeks 7, 8, 9, 10)</b>
<b>Scheduling</b>	- Foreground background reading to give yourself a head start; focus on	- Schedule ample team time/ office hour time	- Schedule ample team time/ office hour time to



	<p>understanding what a behavioral approach is and where experiments sit in the current discourse on international development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Schedule time for your barriers and enablers audit assignment. You need to spend a few hours doing fieldwork and then write up your findings.</li> </ul>	<p>to work on your designs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have team time scheduled between April 10 - 15 to finalise your preliminary instrument and literature review submissions.</li> <li>- Make sure you have team time scheduled after class on April 17 and before the deadline for the formative instrument on April 21 to adjust your questionnaire based on feedback.</li> </ul>	<p>work on your data analysis and design refinement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Week of April 29: You'll get your interview transcripts to analyse.</li> <li>- Schedule time to prepare the team presentation between May 8 and 13.</li> <li>- Schedule some team time after class on May 15 and before the final deadline on May 24 to incorporate feedback.</li> <li>- Schedule time for your implications brief.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Assignments and crucial dates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In class: a reading discussed each week by assigned people.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In class: a reading discussed each week by assigned people</li> <li>- April 7: Barriers and Enablers audit due</li> <li>- April 15: Team literature review due</li> <li>- April 15: Preliminary instrument due</li> <li>- April 21: Your final formative research instrument is due to your field officer</li> <li>- April 24 – 28: your interviews are being conducted in Kenya</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- April 29: You'll receive your interview transcripts</li> <li>- May 13: upload your group presentation for instructors to prepare feedback</li> <li>- May 15: Group presentations in class</li> <li>- May 24: final team research design due (Implications briefs due for graduating students)</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- May 26: Implications brief due for non-graduating students.</li> <li>- Enjoy your summer!</li> </ul>
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## Course outline: Readings, topics, and schedules

### Week 1 (March 20): Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Approaches to international development and critiques

The course's introductory week introduces students to the key debates on how to use evidence for international development and how considerations on what constitutes good evidence have evolved. How do these debates link to how context is understood in international development? How are barriers to development defined, and how are solutions imagined? And what is the link between current trends in international development and broader movements towards big data, evidence-based policy and a search for indicators that can better capture the human experience?

We will explore the use of randomized controlled trials to solving challenges related to international development related with a few key case studies. At the same time, we will look at what is missing from these approaches (and the debates they have created). We will explore the power imbalances that exist between the researcher and the researched, between collaborators from the Global South and the Global North, between implementing researchers and funding partners, and within research contexts themselves. Without understanding one's own power and biases and without a focused effort to preserve and celebrate the dignity of the research participants, these power imbalances are likely to be replicated all the way through development policies.

This week we will also go in detail over how the course will be run and how you might want to organise yourself to make the most of it and spend some time on introductions across the continents so you get to meet the Busara staff with whom you will be working on your formative research and learn about their experiences of running experiments in Kenya.

#### ***Featured Readings***

de Souza Leão, L. (2020). What's on trial? The making of field experiments in international development. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 71(3), 444-459. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12723>

Alarian, Hannah M., Graeme Blair, Alex P. Dyzenhaus, Allison N. Grossman, Biz Herman, Ken Ochieng' Opalo, Nicholas Owsley, Amma Panin, Lindsey D. Pruett, Yvonne Tan, and Elizabeth Iams Wellman. 2022. "Field Experiments in the Global South: Assessing Risks, Localizing

Benefits, and Addressing Positionality." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 55 (4):769-772. doi: 10.1017/S1049096522000063.

### **Readings**

Criado Perez, C. (2019). 'Chapter 1 Can Snow-Clearing Be Sexist' and 'Chapter 2: Gender Neutral With Urinals' in: *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*. London: Vintage/Penguin.

Duflo, E., Glennerster, R., & Kremer, M. (2006). Using Randomization in Development Economics Research: A Toolkit. *NBER Technical Working Paper 0333*. doi:10.3386/t0333

Guyan, K. (2022). 'Introduction: Data and Difference'. In: *Queer Data: Using Gender, Sex and Sexuality Data for Action*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Lange Salvia, A; W L Filho, L Londero Brandli,; J Sapper Griebeler (2019). 'Assessing research trends related to Sustainable Development Goals: local and global issues'. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, Volume 208, Pages 841-849, (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0959652618329810>)

Saltelli, A., & Giampietro, M. (2017). What is wrong with evidence-based policy, and how can it be improved? *Futures*, 91, 62-71. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2016.11.01>

## **Week 2 (March 27): Critiques continued: What can be done differently? Introducing behavioral thinking and approaches**

One of the most rewarding aspects of being a researcher is the privilege to delve into the lives, experiences and opinions of other people. One of the most difficult aspects of being a researcher is to accept that opinions of people are not just different, but that their experience of the world and their lives is profoundly different from one's own, leaving the researcher to struggle to find the analytical tools that allow for such differences to unfold.

This week, we will ask ourselves: What does an approach look like that puts others' mental models and behavior at the center? How can we break down an international development issue into specific behaviors that can be targeted with a programmatic intervention? How does adopting a behavioral approach change thinking on this question? How can a behavioral approach be used to understand the barriers in place and levers that need to be pulled to overcome the barriers? This week we will wrap up the discussion on critiques of current approaches in international development and introduce the behavioral approach to solving problems.

### **Featured Reading**

Fejerskov, Adam (2022). Chapters: 'The Global Lab'; 'Randomistas'. *The Global Lab: Inequality, Technology, and the Experimental Movement*. Oxford: OUP.

### **Readings**

Ijzerman, Hans, Neil A. Lewis, Andrew K. Przybylski, Netta Weinstein, Lisa DeBruine, Stuart J. Ritchie, Simine Vazire, Patrick S. Forscher, Richard D. Morey, James D. Ivory, and Farid

Anvari. 2020. "Use caution when applying behavioural science to policy." *Nature Human Behaviour* 4 (11):1092-1094. doi: 10.1038/s41562-020-00990-w.

Saldanha, Neela , Varun Gauri, Saugato Datta, and Josh Martin (2023). "Localizing research." In *Behavioral Science for Development: Insights and Strategies for Global Impact*, edited by Luis Artavia-Mora and Zarak Khan. Dallas: BeScy Publishing.

Schomerus, M. (2023). 'Chapter 1: Goodbye Yellow Brick Road: Beyond the Status Quo of Development in the Wake of Conflict'. In: *Lives Amid Violence: Transforming Development in the Wake of Conflict*. London: Bloomsbury.

Syal, Supriya 2018. "Why policy-makers should care about behavioural science." *Policy Options Politiques*. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/january-2018/why-policy-makers-should-care-about-behavioural-science/#:~:text=Behavioural%20science%20promises%20empirically%20validated,they%20can%20lead%20better%20lives.>

Wambua, Joel, Nicholas Owsley, and Tom Wein (2023). *Participant voice first: Busara's research agenda on ethical research in the Global South. Busara Groundwork No.3 (Research Agenda)*. Nairobi: Busara.

Wein, Tom, and Mallika Sobti (2023). "Dignity in Applied Research." In *Behavioral Science for Development: Insights and Strategies for Global Impact*, edited by Luis Artavia-Mora and Zarak Khan. Dallas: BeScy Publishing.

### **Week 3 (April 3): Now change: Behavioral approaches and experiments in action**

This week, we delve deeper into understanding a behavioral perspective and how this informs thinking about experiments that seek to understand what determines human behavior. We will compare and contrast a behavioral perspective with other approaches and discuss practical behavioral frameworks that can be used to solve problems. We will introduce the nuances of behavioral experiments and take you through some case studies showcasing behavioral experiments for development.

**Guest lecturer on the real-world experience of experiments:** Salim Kombo, Busara.

**Assignment due (individual): Barriers and Enablers Audit, April 7**

#### **Featured Reading**

Darnton, Andrew (2008). Chapter 2: 'Understanding Behaviour'. In: *Reference Report: An overview of behaviour change models and their uses*. London: GSR Behaviour Change Knowledge Review. <https://research.fit.edu/media/site-specific/researchfitedu/coast-climate-adaptation-library/climate-communications/psychology-amp-behavior/Darnton.-2008.-Behaviour-Change-Models-Overview.pdf>

West, R and S Michie (2020). 'A brief introduction to the COM-B Model of behaviour and the PRIME Theory of motivation'. *Qeios*. <https://doi.org/10.32388/WW04E6>  
<https://www.qeios.com/read/WW04E6>

### **Readings**

Brown, J and L Wolff (2022). *Opinion: The overlooked field of SBCC could change the race for SDGs*. DevEx blog. <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-the-overlooked-field-of-sbcc-could-change-the-race-for-sdgs-104463>

Cialdini, R, and Cliffe S. 2013. "The uses (and abuses) of influence." *Harvard Business Review* 91 (7-8):76-81. doi: PMID: 24730172.

Cox, W, and Taylor Laimaka. 2022. "Developing scientifically validated bias and diversity trainings that work: empowering agents of change to reduce bias, create inclusion, and promote equity." *Management Decision* 61 (4):1038-1061.

Irrational Labs. (not dated). Designing Experiments. <https://gumroad.com/l/Gpkt?src=email-referral>.

OECD (2019), *Tools and Ethics for Applied Behavioural Insights: The BASIC Toolkit*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/9ea76a8f-en>.

Schomerus, M. (2023). Chapter 'Vertical Columns of Accelerated Air: The Mental Landscape. In: *Lives Amid Violence: Transforming Development in the Wake of Conflict*. London: Bloomsbury.

## **Week 4 (April 10): What do you know? Groundwork for ethical and rigorous evidence generation**

Experiments in international development policy have produced both some of the most convincing and the most controversial policy insights. Whether an experiment is rigorous or controversial often depends on the research design and the amount of care taken with the groundwork for an experiment. This week we focus on what research work is necessary to set up a good experiment, how to identify a research problem and what background and formative research is required.

What does a researcher need to consider to harness the power of experiments? Why is it that experiments can tell us a lot about whether a proposed solution works or not? What do people designing and conducting experiments need to bear in mind to make sure they ask the right question, their experimental research does not harm the people they want to help and contributes to good knowledge about a problem.

**Assignment (team): Your preliminary formative research instrument is due by April 15 to allow feedback in class.**

**Assignment due (team): Your team will conduct a light touch literature review on your chosen research problem and insert your findings into a template we will provide. Due date: April 15**

### **Featured Reading**

Prentice, D., and E. L. Paluck. 2020. "Engineering social change using social norms: lessons from the study of collective action." *Curr Opin Psychol* 35:138-142. doi: 10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.06.012.

Luca, M., & Bazerman, M. H. (2020). Part One: Breaking Out of the Lab. In *The Power of Experiments: Decision-Making in a Data-Driven World*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

### **Readings**

Entwistle, T. (2021). Why nudge sometimes fails: fatalism and the problem of behaviour change, *Policy & Politics*, 49(1), 87-103. Retrieved Feb 20, 2023, from <https://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com/view/journals/pp/49/1/article-p87.xml>

Schomerus, M. (2023). Chapter 'A Satellite Image of the Neighbourhood: Why Who You Are Matters'. In: *Lives Amid Violence: Transforming Development in the Wake of Conflict*. London: Bloomsbury.

## **Week 5 (April 17): Do I have to wear a lab coat? Designing ethical behavioral experiments in international development (virtual class)**

**NOTE: The class of week 5 is held fully remote for everyone to facilitate an in-depth feedback session with colleagues from Kenya on the formative instruments. Zoom link to be provided.**

This week we focus on what research work is necessary to set up a good experiment, how to identify a research problem and what background and formative research is required. While we are thinking through what exactly we want to achieve with an experiment, it is crucial to consider ethical implications. But ethical dilemmas come in many guises, requiring us to consider the ethics of working with research participants, of working for policy decisions, of working in collaboration between institutions and researchers that might have very different levels of power? What guidelines can help consider all these ethical challenges? How can one assess if a research question is ethical in seeking an answer or in the recommendations the findings might provide? What do we need to know even in the set-up phase of an experiment to make sure that formative research also adheres to the highest standards of ethics? What are the consequences of unethical research?

**Assignment (team): Your final formative research instrument is due to your field officer by April 21.**

### **Featured Reading**

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books; Chapters 2 and 3 (Research through imperial eyes; Colonizing knowledges).

Lanthorn, Heather E. (not dated). Ethical research: reflections from three sites. <https://hlanthorn.com/2021/10/15/ethical-research-reflections-from-three-sites/>.

### **Readings**

Please also look at Module 1: Introduction to Research Ethics of the Training and Resources in Research Ethics Evaluation (TREE) Consortium. The course is free to do, but you have to register at <https://elearning.tree.org/enrol/index.php?id=18>

Corey, E. (2011). Formative Research: What, Why and How. *Training Course in Sexual and Reproductive Health Research, WHO* <https://www.gfmer.ch/SRH-Course-2010/Geneva-Workshop/pdf/Formative-research-Corey-2011.pdf>.

Mughogho, W., Adhiambo, J. and Forscher, P.S (2023). African researchers must be full participants in behavioural science research. *Nature Human Behaviour*. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-023-01536-6>

Saleh, Engy. 2024. "We are intentionally much more than an experimentation lab in the Global South." In *Tafakari Busara Yearbook. You are not alone: human behavior under pressure*. Nairobi: Busara.

Shipow, A., & Singh, A. (2020). Is your data inclusive? Optimizing results by eliminating the hidden costs of research participation. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/busara-center-blog/is-your-data-inclusive-ddd59933f108>

## **Week 6 (April 24): Bringing it all together: how to use formative insights for better experimental design**

Experiments in international development policy have produced both some of the most convincing and the most controversial policy insights. Whether an experiment is rigorous or controversial often depends on the research design and the amount of care taken with the groundwork for an experiment. This week, we will look in detail about what we can learn from formative research and how this changes the experimental designs. How can formative findings—often based on just a small number of interviews—be analysed in rigorous ways to give maximum insight into how a research question needs to be framed, what contextual factors the researcher needs to consider and how to choose the right people to participate in a future experiment?

***Dates to note: Formative research: Interviews are being conducted in Kenya from April 22 - 26. You will receive your transcripts by April 29.***

### **Featured Reading**

Irwin, Neil (2017, March 17). ‘What if Sociologists Had as Much Influence as Economists?’. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/upshot/what-if-sociologists-had-as-much-influence-as-economists.html>

### **Readings**

Czerniewska, A., Muangi, W. C., Aunger, R., Massa, K., & Curtis, V. (2019). Theory-driven formative research to inform the design of a national sanitation campaign in Tanzania. *PLoS ONE*, <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article/metrics?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0221445>. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0221445>

Deaton, A. (2020). Randomization in the Tropics Revisited: A Theme and Eleven Variations’. *NBER Working Series, Working Paper 27600*. Retrieved from [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w27600/w27600.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w27600/w27600.pdf)

Huda, K. (2012). Understanding What Works: Why Qualitative Research Matters. *CGAP*. Retrieved from <https://www.cgap.org/blog/understanding-what-works-why-qualitative-research-matters>

Strumm, B. (2020). Using critical reflection to question self and power in international development. *Gender & Development*, 28(1), 175-192. doi:10.1080/13552074.2020.1717173

Creswell, J W and C N Pooth (2018). Chapter: 'Three Analysis Strategies (p.183- 195)'. In: *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## **Week 7 (May 1): What am I missing? Rainbow shades of humanity**

Much international development policy aims to alleviate poverty, but poverty has many different faces across the world. To develop a nuanced view on poverty is a necessary precondition when seeking to design targeted policies that help alleviate poverty as it is experienced by different people. For researchers, developing such a nuanced view is a crucial skill and requires seeking knowledge on the rainbow shades of humanity through reflection on positionality, through multi-method interdisciplinary research approaches, and by understanding how behavioral biases are different in different contexts and what that means for research. You will use these insights to refine your analysis of your formative research data.

### **Featured Reading**

Coren Apicella; A Norenzayan; J Henrich (2020). Beyond WEIRD: A review of the last decade and a look ahead to the global laboratory of the future. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, Volume 41, Issue 5, pages 319-329, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2020.07.015>.  
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1090513820300957>

### **Readings**

Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2007). The Economic Lives of the Poor. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 21(1), 141-168. doi:10.1257/jep.21.1.141

Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The Weirdest People in the World? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 33(2/3), 61-83.

Laumas, A., Owsley, N., & Haldea, P. (2020). How Preeti was born: A beginner's guide to contextualizing behavioral measures. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/busara-center-blog/how-preeti-was-born-af4583208fc9>

World Bank. (2015). The Biases of Development Professionals. In *World Development Report 2015: Mind, Society, and Behavior*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

Pugh, A. J. (2013). What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 1(1), 42-68. doi:10.1057/ajcs.2012.4



## **Week 8 (May 8): When the real world interferes: The politics of data for policy**

What if a researcher had conducted a perfectly-designed and executed experiment? What if all ethical concerns had been successfully addressed? What if research subjects had participated and felt well treated and represented by the findings? What if the policy recommendations were clear and practical? And what if, despite having met all those conditions, those policy recommendations simply fall flat? That is when the real world and research meet. This week, we look at the politics of using data for policy and how good policy recommendations might require spelling out the political trade-offs for decision-makers.

This week is further dedicated to the practical work of refining the experiment design by incorporating the formative findings. Throughout the class, we will seek feedback from lab staff on how designs have evolved and test them against some of the concepts we covered: Is the design ethical? Has it paid attention to possible unintended consequences? What information is still missing?

**Assignment (team): Please upload your presentation by May 13 to allow the instructors time to prepare feedback. Group presentations will happen in class on May 15.**

### **Featured Reading**

Drèze, J. (2020). Policy beyond evidence. *World Development*, 127, 104797. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104797>

Drèze, Jean. 2022. "On the perils of embedded experiments." *Ideas for India for more evidence-based policy*. <https://www.ideasforindia.in/topics/miscellany/on-the-perils-of-embedded-experiments.html>

### **Readings**

Das, S. (2020). (Don't) leave politics out of it: Reflections on public policies, experiments, and interventions. *World Development*, 127, 104792. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104792>

Krause, P., & Hernández Licona, G. (2020). From experimental findings to evidence-based policy. *World Development*, 127, 104812. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104812>

Mamidi, Pavan, and Aayush Agarwal (2023). "Challenges to Scaling Interventions in the Global South." In *Behavioral Science for Development: Insights and Strategies for Global Impact*, edited by Luis Artavia-Mora and Zarak Khan. Dallas: BeScy Publishing.

Nesterak, Evan. 2023. "Harvard Professor Under Scrutiny for Alleged Data Fraud." *Behavioral Scientist*. <https://behavioralscientist.org/harvard-professor-under-scrutiny-for-alleged-data-fraud/>

Pankhurst, J. (2017). Chapter 3: Bias and the Politics of Evidence'. In Part II: The Politics of Evidence. In *From Evidence- Based Policy to the Good Governance of Evidence*. Routledge Studies in Governance and Public Policy. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rao, V. (2020). Evidence-Based Development Needs a Diversity of Tools, with a Bottom-up Process of "Embedded" Dialogue. *Science Direct*, 127(104823). Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X19304723>

## Week 9 (May 15): Class presentations of research designs

This week, we will dedicate to class presentations and in-class feedback on your research designs. The readings are chosen to help you in thinking through your implications brief and to reflect overall on what you have learned.

### Readings (no featured reading this week)

Fejerskov, Adam (2022). Chapter: Experimental Futures. *The Global Lab: Inequality, Technology, and the Experimental Movement*. Oxford: OUP.

Kaufman, J; Glassman, A; Levine, R; Madan, J. (2022). *Breakthrough to Policy Use: Reinvigorating Impact Evaluation for Global Development*. Washington, DC: Center for Global Development. <https://www.cgdev.org/sites/default/files/breakthrough-to-policy-use-summary-brief.pdf>

Koch, D.-J., Vis, J., van der Harst, M., Tendron, E., & de Laat, J. (2021). Assessing International Development Cooperation: Becoming Intentional about Unintended Effects. *Sustainability* 13(11571). doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su132111571>

## Week 10: No class, preparation of final submission

### Assignments due:

Final experimental research design (team): May 24

Implications brief: (individual): May 26 (May 24 for graduating students)

## General Resources Available to Students

UChicago and the Harris School offer a wide range of support programs for students. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the resources listed below or talk to your instructor.

For your wellbeing:

- <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/>
- [student health services](#).
- Counselling services: <https://wellness.uchicago.edu/mental-health/>. *Students needing urgent mental health care can speak with clinicians over the phone 24/7 by calling the Therapist-on-Call at 773.702.3625.*

For your learning:

- <https://learningremotely.uchicago.edu/learning-resources/>
- <https://harris.uchicago.edu/student-life/dean-of-students-office/academic-support-programs>

## Harris School and University of Chicago Policies

Below, you can find an overview of general university policies (including on academic dishonesty), as well as on how to treat audio and video recordings of classes.

- General [University Policies](#)
- [Academic Polices](#) at the University
- [Harris School Policies](#)

- Policies on audio and video recordings:  
<https://teachingremotely.uchicago.edu/recording-policy/>  
<https://teachingremotely.uchicago.edu/recording-deletion-policy/>

## 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.

- The University's policies regarding academic integrity and dishonesty are described [here](#). The University's approach is that "it is contrary to justice, academic integrity, and to the spirit of intellectual inquiry to submit another's statements or ideas as one's own work. To do so is plagiarism or cheating, offenses punishable under the University's disciplinary system. Because these offenses undercut the distinctive moral and intellectual character of the University, we take them very seriously."
- The Harris School's student policies are available on the [policies page of our website](#).
  - The *Academic Honesty and Plagiarism* section expresses the main principles.
  - Detailed guidelines for more specialized student work (e.g., problem sets including computer code) are offered in the sub-section titled *Harris Integrity Policy for Problem Sets Involving Code*.
- Harris's specific procedures for handling suspected violations of these policies are available in the section *Harris Procedures for Allegations of Plagiarism, Cheating, and Academic Dishonesty*.
- In addition to disciplinary sanctions, instructors will impose a grade penalty for students who have committed academic dishonesty.
  - The student will receive a grade of 0 on the assignment in question.
  - The student will receive an individual grade of C- on the team work, regardless of the overall team grade.

## Disability Accommodations

The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring equitable access to our academic programs and services. Students with disabilities who have been approved for the use of academic accommodations by Student Disability Services (SDS) and need a reasonable accommodation(s) to participate fully in this course must follow the [procedures established by the Harris School of Public Policy](#).

Timely notifications are required to ensure that your accommodations can be implemented. Currently registered students are asked to notify the Harris Student Disability Liaison, Eman Alsamara ([ealsamara@uchicago.edu](mailto:ealsamara@uchicago.edu)) of their access requests by the end of the first week of the quarter. The Harris Student Disability Liaison will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the implementation of student accommodations. *Harris students are not required to submit their accommodations letter to the instructor*. Students from other divisions in the University must submit their accommodations letter to Eman Alsamara ([ealsamara@uchicago.edu](mailto:ealsamara@uchicago.edu)) in the Harris Dean of Students Office.

Students who are facing extenuating circumstances at any point during the quarter should reach out to their Academic Advisor in the Dean of Students Office for support. If you feel you need accommodations on an ongoing basis, contact Student Disability Services. To contact SDS: website: [disabilities.uchicago.edu](http://disabilities.uchicago.edu) phone: (773) 702-6000 email: [disabilities@uchicago.edu](mailto:disabilities@uchicago.edu).

## Diversity and Inclusion

The Harris School welcomes, values, and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences, and we believe that rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the expression and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions. The University and the Harris School have developed distinct but overlapping principles and guidelines to insure that we remain a place where difficult issues are discussed with kindness and respect for all.

- The University's policies are available [here](#). Specifically, the University identifies the [freedom of expression](#) as being "vital to our shared goal of the pursuit of knowledge, as is the right of all members of the community to explore new ideas and learn from one another. To preserve an environment of spirited and open debate, we should all have the opportunity to contribute to intellectual exchanges and participate fully in the life of the University."
- The Harris School's commitments to lively, principled, and respectful engagement are available [here](#): "The Harris School of Public Policy welcomes and respects students, faculty, and staff from a wide range of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives as part of our commitment to building an inclusive community. *Fostering an environment that encourages rigorous inquiry and effective public policy problem-solving requires the involvement and understanding of diverse viewpoints, experiences, and traditions.* As a leading public policy school, Harris holds diversity as a core value. That includes not only diversity of opinion, but diversity along a broad spectrum of factors, including race, ethnicity, national origin, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, religion, socio-economic background, and social or political belief. Recognizing the value of diversity and inclusion is essential to combating discrimination, addressing disparities, and cultivating ethical and clear-eyed policy leadership."
- Since English language proficiency also varies within the student body, instructors are also encouraged to affirmatively communicate to students, particularly international students, how class participation features in the classroom experience and affects final course grades, since some students have limited experience expressing their ideas in English. Other course components, such as regular TA sessions, TA or instructor office hours, etc. should also be carefully explained since some international students have had little to no previous exposure to the U.S. academic system.

## Video and Audio Recordings

The University has developed specific policies and procedures regarding the use of video/audio recordings: these policies are explicitly described in the University's [student manual](#) as well as in the guidelines for instructors available [here](#). Perhaps the key components of this policy are worth spelling out in your syllabus:

*By attending course sessions, students acknowledge that:*

- i. They will not: (i) record, share, or disseminate University of Chicago course sessions, videos, transcripts, audio, or chats; (ii) retain such materials after the end of the course; or (iii) use such materials for any purpose other than in connection with participation in the course.*
- ii. They will not share links to University of Chicago course sessions with any persons not authorized to be in the course session. Sharing course materials with persons authorized to be in the relevant course is permitted. Syllabi, handouts, slides, and other documents may be shared at the discretion of the instructor.*
- iii. Course recordings, content, and materials may be covered by copyrights held by the University, the instructor, or third parties. Any unauthorized use of such recordings or course materials may violate such copyrights.*
- iv. Any violation of this policy will be referred to the Area Dean of Students.*