



PPHA 35540
How to Change the World:
The Social Science of Policymaking in
International Development

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Fall 2021

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How elaborate and obsessive can a syllabus be? You're about to find out! Please read everything in detail. Consider this your first book for the course.

Course Description

So you want to make the world a better place, but how? So much policy fails. So many good intentions go awry. Why? What makes for good policy? What makes it bad? This is a class on the social science of policy-making—the lessons from economics, political science, sociology, and anthropology, plus the practical experiences of practitioners. We will focus on policy-making in a global context, especially international policy and development. While we will look at international organizations, the focus is on national and local development strategies and domestic policymakers and institutions.

This is also a course about learning to read and write well. Readings each week will be heavy and difficult, but rewarding. There will be also weekly writing assignments that involve critical reviews of books, papers, and ideas.

Prerequisites

There are no requirements for the class. Any Masters student or advanced undergraduate is welcome to join the class. A class on economic development is highly recommended.

Course Objectives

By the end of the quarter, my goal is that students have learned to:

- Read social science more efficiently
- Write more briefly, clearly, and persuasively
- Think critically about what they read
- Think in a nuanced way about policy-making and social change

There are also some specific lessons and insights. I hope students will:

- Broaden their concept of development beyond economic progress
- Understand limits facing outsiders, elites, and states in social and economic change
- How to design policy in an uncertain, complex world
- Some of the special challenges of policy in fragile settings

Course Structure

Each week we will:

- Read a book or a collection of articles
- Write a 250-750-word discussion and commentary on the readings
- Discuss and debate the ideas in class

This is a lot of reading per week. Also, I think it will be easier to have discussions in smaller groups. Therefore, after the first week, I want to try seeing half the class on Mondays and half the class on Wednesdays. We will see how that goes, then re-assess.

Required Materials

Most of the readings are articles or books where a PDF version are hyperlinked on the syllabus. They will also be available on the course website. In addition to this, however, there are a handful of required books you will need to buy and read in full.

- Kelkar, Vijay, and Ajay Shah. 2019. *In Service Of The Republic: The Art And Science of Economic Policy*. Penguin Random House India.
- Tendler, Judith. 1997. *Good Government in the Tropics*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rodrik, Dani. 2008. *One Economics, Many Recipes: Globalization, Institutions, and Economic Growth*. Princeton University Press.

The following book you may want to buy, but UChicago Library also offers access through its VPN service:

- Scott, James C., 2020. Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed. [[Amazon link](#)] [[UChicago access](#)] Yale University Press.

Instructions for VPN access are [here](#).

Class structure (including online guidelines)

This will be a small, intimate discussion class. There will be virtually no lecture. I will expect you to have completed the readings and written something insightful about them, which I will read before class. I will call on you in class to share what you wrote.

30+ people is a large size for in-depth discussion. There will be a poll the week before class begins. If a majority of the class agrees, we will break into two groups. One half will meet on Mondays, one on Wednesdays. This will mean less class time but more intimate discussion and engagement. It will give you more time outside of class for reading and writing. It will also give me more opportunity to read what you write and give feedback in class.

If there are a small number of online students, they can join by Zoom into the classroom. Probably we will concentrate them on one of the two meeting days. If the number of online students is large enough (either from the start or due to outbreaks or quarantines midway through the semester) I may move one of the days to Zoom only.

For those that must join online, to keep the experience as rich and natural as possible, I am setting a few guidelines:

- *Synchronous only*. You cannot take the class asynchronously. You'll need to be sure you can join all classes live.

- *Cameras on.* You'll all be employed professionals soon, and this is the norm at most organizations I know, so it will be good to get used to it. If you need to be off camera on occasion, of course that's fine. But let's make "on" the default.
- *No recording.* In order to promote free discussion on challenging topics, I do not plan to record the classes. There is little lecture component. I also ask that you do not record the conversation.

Final project

You will write a 2500–3500 word that chooses a policy problem and:

1. Diagnoses the problem
2. Assesses past attempts to solve the problem, either successes and failures
3. Proposes alternate ways to approach the problem based on the lessons in the course

I will send detailed instructions on the final assignment to the class. But good papers will:

- Use the readings and concepts from the class
- Draw extensively from a wide literature on your country/policy of choice
- Be well-organized and clearly written
- Be well researched and persuasive
- Be dense with ideas

Original ideas are great, but a thoughtful and critical synthesis of existing sources and ideas is the core skill I want you to develop

You will hand in a 1-page proposal plus a suggested bibliography halfway through the quarter, for feedback.

Papers will be due online a week after our last class, to give us time to grade before the due date for graduating students.

Weekly writing assignments

Every week, you will hand in a short commentary *by 8pm the evening before class*. This will give me and the TA time to read a selection of them before we meet. These comments have three purposes. One is to critically reflect on the readings, showing that you have thought about what you have read. The second is to help move your final paper forward. The third is to become a better reader and writer.

- There is no comment in Week 1, meaning there are 8 total
- We will grade you on your *best 6*, and so you can skip 2 or you can hand in more and I will drop your worst grades
- Your TA will generally do most grading, with input from me, and graded assignments will generally be handed back within 2 weeks of submission.
- Each commentary should be roughly 400–800 words
- You should use the space to discuss any number of things: critical reactions; counterarguments; extensions; applications to the policy you are studying for class; new ideas it spurs
- This is a formal piece of writing, not a stream of consciousness, and you will be rewarded for concise, well-organized, compelling ideas and prose
- The purpose is not to summarize the argument, and so you should assume the reader (your instructor and classmates) have read the material
- Part of the goal is to get you thinking about what you read—things you disagree with, things you agree with and get inspired by, problems it helps you solve, policies it suggests, contrasts or complements with other ideas you have been reading about
- Part of the goal is also helping you learn to write concisely, clearly, persuasively. See the writing tips and resources below. We will work on this throughout the quarter

Grading Policy

Your grade will have three components:

- **33%** for the quality of participation in class (asking and answering questions, high quality of commentary, ability to engage civilly with other students, ability to listen to other views, not dominating the conversation, ...)
- **33%** for the weekly written comments
- **33%** for the final project

Pass/Fail option To earn a passing grade, students taking the course pass/fail must attend class regularly, participate actively, complete and submit all assignments, earning passing grades on all.

How to get a good grade First of all, for most of you, no one will ever look at your grades again for as long as you live, so don't worry about the grade. I am happy to have you switch to Pass/Fail if you need to. For the rest of you, I do not grade on a curve, but your work will be evaluated relative to the quality of your peers in the class. All that said, there is a simple way to excel in this class:

- Read the readings. I think reading and writing are the main way we all change how we understand the world and influence others. Virtually every reading in this course is one that deeply influenced my own perspective and that of many others.
- Think critically about what you read. Every paper and book is wrong in some way. Usually it has major flaws or oversights. Your job is to figure out what the problems are and the limits of the argument. For the rest of your career, approach every paper or book with the idea that your job is partly to figure out why it is wrong.
- Make notes and think about your essay answers along the way. You will have some of the essay questions quite early. When reading the readings and taking class notes, write down your ideas and thoughts in real time.
- Given that we may only be interacting 9–10 times, it's especially important that you join class. Of course, everyone falls sick, has family circumstances, or has religious observances. It's best if you can let me know in advance. You will not be penalized.
- Hand in all assignments.
- When writing something: Organize, organize, organize. Even in a short assignment, make a plan for your answer, or the point you want to make. Have a clear structure. Use subheadings liberally. Enumerate your arguments ("I have two objections. First, ..."). Paragraphs should be about a single idea. The main point should come in the first sentence and the rest of the paragraph should be supportive, add detail, continue the theme.
- When writing something: Revise, revise, revise. Most of the time you can make the point in half the words. Most of the time you can strengthen your piece by dropping your weakest arguments.
- While organization, clarity and brevity all help, fundamentally I'll be evaluating you on the depth, thoughtfulness, and persuasiveness of your written work. There are many ingredients into that, but reading widely and critically is the first and most important step. Often the best grades go to the students who have evidently put in the most time.

Late policy The late penalty is generally one grade level per day (e.g. from an A- to a B+). I can waive the penalty if you have a timely, legitimate, and documented excuse. (See disruptions, above.)

- If you are missing classes or have a late assignment because of sickness or religious observance (e.g. Ramadan), we can accommodate you. If predictable, please alert the TA by email in advance. Please make specific arrangements for extensions of any assignments.
- Do not wait until weeks after a missed assignment to talk to us. I especially advise against waiting to contact us until the last week of classes or after final grades have been submitted. It is easier to accommodate timely requests.

Re-grading policies Feel free to discuss your grades with me to get clarification. If, following such a conversation, you feel that an error was made, please submit a re-grade request in writing, by email, within two weeks of the assignment being handed back. Please include an explanation or justification for the re-grade request.

A poor way to ask for a re-grade is to simply lobby non-specifically for a better grade, or to explain there is some reason you need to maintain a certain grade level. A good way to ask for a regrading is to substantively discuss why you thought you answered the question well, ask for clarification, and if a mistake was made we can correct it. Or, if you have a legitimate medical or related excuse, please follow the instructions above.

What to do if you're having problems

I'm committed to helping everyone pass the class, in a way that you still learn the materials and gets the work done. If you find yourself unable to join a class or complete an assignment for physical health, mental health, or other personal reasons, just let me know. Here is what I suggest if a problem comes up:

- As soon as possible, email me and *copy your student services advisor*, with a note about the missed work and an explanation. *I hold everything in the strictest confidence.* But if you would like to explain the situation to your advisor only and have them contact me directly without the personal details, that is fine too.
- I don't really care when you put in the effort, so long as you find the time to read and reflect on the material in the course. In general, I will identify a way for you to make up an assignment. This will often be an extension of the deadline. If we discuss answers in depth the following class, it may be that I ask you to submit an essay on a different question.
- In extreme cases, students have sometimes taken time over the break or subsequent quarter to finalize the assignments and the class.
- Try not to tell me last minute. Advance notice is always a good policy.

Developing reading & writing skills

This is a highly reading and writing intensive course. I know this can be especially challenging for students who speak English as a second language. At the same time, it's an essential skill. One goal of mine is for you to learn to read more efficiently and write more effectively. We will talk about strategies in class, and you should feel free to ask me for feedback.

For those who want some additional help, Harris has some resources for students who feel they need help developing their academic reading and writing skills.

- For a reading assessment (and academic skills assessment in general), the best option at the University would be the [Academic Skills Assessment Program \(ASAP\)](#).
- We also have the [Harris Writing Program](#), which does not particularly focus on reading, but might indirectly help students get a better grasp of the written word and academic text comprehension.
- [The English Language Institute](#) also offers workshops and courses to help ESL students. Some are free, some are not.

Learning to write well

You may also want to invest in books and materials on writing effectively. Here are some starting suggestions for tools and books on writing:

- Use the [Hemingway Editor](#) to learn how to write more clearly. Aim for a grade 8–10 reading level in what you write. Avoid jargon. Write shorter, simpler sentences on average. Use the active voice most of the time. Some long sentences and complex phrases or words are going to be necessary, but learn to use them sparingly.
- The classic book is [The Elements of Style](#) by Strunk and White
- Another classic, Zinnser's [On Writing Well](#) is superb
- I have also found Clark's [Writing Tools](#) a very helpful guide.

The trick with these books and guides is not to try to do it all at once. Get a couple of tips, and try to pay attention to them as you write. Then after a little while, get another couple tips, and work on those. It's a gradual process.

Harris Policies

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](#). It is worth explicitly stating the University's approach here: "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 policies are available in the Harris Student Handbook Canvas site.

- 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 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 and are also re-produced as an Appendix to this document.
- 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 for students who have committed academic dishonesty.
- Other penalties for violations could be imposed instead, alone or in combination, including a zero grade on the assignment or a failing grade in the course.

Disability Accommodations

The University's policies regarding students with disabilities are available [here](#). Students who have disability accommodations awarded by the University Student Disability Services Office should inform the Harris Dean of Students office by the end of the first week of class. The Harris Dean of Students Office will work with the student and instructor to coordinate the students' accommodations implementation.

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 either the instructor or the Harris Dean of Students Office.

Students who do not yet have formal accommodations in place but who feel they need accommodations on a temporary or ongoing basis should contact the Harris Dean of Students Office or Student Disability Services.

It is also worth noting that teaching in a remote environment may generate other questions and issues related to providing accommodations to students with disabilities. Some suggestions are available [here](#).

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](#): "Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to open discourse and free expression, Harris encourages members of the leadership, faculty, student body, and administrative staff to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial." We foster thought-provoking discourse by encouraging community members not only to speak freely about all issues but also to listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others.

Weekly Topics and Readings

The readings focus on the *how* of doing policy, not the *what*. I assume some familiarity with development theory and the major debates in development economics. Thus, I don't teach **growth models**, and I've omitted some of the most influential books of the past two decades, which I'll assume you have read, including: **Poor Economics** by Banerjee and Duflo; **Why Nations Fail** by Acemoglu and Robinson; **The End of Poverty by Sachs**; or Easterly's **Elusive Quest for Growth** and **White Man's Burden**.

The first week of class will be a chance to figure out who is taking the course and collective interests. I am always open to suggestions. So please regard the schedule and reading list below as tentative and subject to change.

1 Anti-politics machines

No assignment this week. Just readings.

- *New York Times* excerpt from Singer, Peter. 2010. **The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty**. Random House Incorporated.
- Ferguson, James. 1994. **The Anti-Politics Machine**. (Short version) *The Ecologist* 24(5).
- Introduction and Chapter 1 of Autesserre, Séverine. 2014. **Peaceland: Conflict Resolution and the Everyday Politics of International Intervention**. Cambridge University Press. [[Amazon link to book](#)].
- *Recommended*: Ferguson, James. 1990. **The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho**. Cambridge University Press.
- *Recommended*: Célestin Monga. 2020. **Discrimination and prejudice in development**, Brookings (July 15, 2020).
- *Recommended*: Mwambari, David. 2019. **Local positionality in the production of knowledge in Northern Uganda**. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18.

2 Seeing like a state

Assignment this week: Describe 1–3 initial ideas for your class project. This should be a successful development strategy, a failing one, or a strategy you would like to propose for a particular place.

- Scott, James C., 2020. **Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed**. Yale University Press. [*Note: The full text is online through the UChicago Library/VPN*]

- Paul Seabright. 1999. [The Aestheticising Vice](#), London Review of Books 21(11), p.26–27
- *Recommended:* [Economists on Zoom Getting Coffee, S1E6: Bill Easterly and Dany Bahar](#)
- *Recommended:* Chapters 1–2 of Easterly, William. 2014. [The Tyranny of Experts: Economists, Dictators, and the Forgotten Rights of the Poor](#). Basic Books. [Note: The link takes you to the free eBook version through UChicago Library, so you may need your UChicago VPN to access]

3 Iterative, adaptive policy

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

- Andrews, Matt, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock. 2017. [Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action](#). Oxford University Press.
- *Recommended:* Chapter 1 of Thomas, Melissa. 2015. [Govern like us: US expectations of poor countries](#). Columbia University Press. [Note: The full book is excellent, and you can [download for free via the UChicago Library via VPN](#)]

4 Competitive authoritarianism

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

- Xu, Chenggang. 2011. [The Fundamental Institutions of China's Reforms and Development](#). Journal of Economic Literature 49(4): 1076–1151.
- Chang-Tai Hsieh [Crony capitalism with Chinese Characteristics](#) YouTube video of a BFI & IMF talk (52:15). Paper version is [here](#).
- Bardhan, Pranab. 2002. [Decentralization of Governance and Development](#). Journal of Economic perspectives 16(4): 185–205.
- *Recommended:* Mkandawire, Thandika. [Thinking About Developmental States in Africa](#). Cambridge Journal of Economics 25, no. 3 (2001): 289-314.
- *Recommended:* Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2016. [How China Escaped the Poverty Trap](#). Cornell University Press.

- *Recommended:* Ang, Yuen Yuen. 2020. [China's Gilded Age: The Paradox of Economic Boom and Vast Corruption](#). Cambridge University Press.

5 The liberal democratic approach

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

- Kelkar, Vijay, and Ajay Shah. 2019. [In Service Of The Republic: The Art And Science of Economic Policy](#). Penguin Random House India.
- *Recommended:* [Podcast interview with the authors by Shruti Rajagopalan](#)

6 International bureaucracies

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class.

- Barnett, Michael, and Martha Finnemore. [Rules for the World: International Organizations in Global Politics](#). Cornell University Press, 2004.
- *Recommended:* Grindle, Merilee. 2004. [Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries](#). *Governance* 17(4): 525–48. [Decentralization and Development: The New Panacea](#). In *Challenges to Democracy*, 237-256. Palgrave Macmillan.
- *Recommended:* Gibson, Clark C., Krister Andersson, Elinor Ostrom, and Sujai Shivakumar. 2005. [The Samaritan's Dilemma: The Political Economy of Development Aid](#). Oxford University Press. [Here is a one chapter summary](#).
- *Recommended:* *Chapter 1* of Barron, Patrick, Rachael Diprose, and Michael Woolcock. 2011. [Contesting development: Participatory projects and local conflict dynamics in Indonesia](#). Yale University Press. *Recommended:* [Chapter 8](#).

7 Decentralization?

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. *In addition, at the end of your assignment, list 1–2 new references that will be relevant for your final paper.*

- *Chapters 1 and 6, plus one of chapters 3–5* of Tandler, Judith. 1997. **Good Government in the Tropics**. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor. 2001. **Decentralization and Development: The New Panacea**. In *Challenges to Democracy*, 237-256. Palgrave Macmillan.
- *Recommended*: Honig, Dan. 2019. **The Power of Letting Go**. Stanford Social Innovation Review.
- *Recommended*: Hirschman, Albert O. 2014 [1967]. **Development Projects Observed**. Brookings Institution Press.
- *Recommended*: Leonard, David K. 1991. **African successes: Four public managers of Kenyan rural development**. Univ of California Press.

8 Many paths or one?

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. *In addition, at the end of your assignment, list 1–2 new references that will be relevant for your final paper.*

- *Chapters 1 to 5* of Rodrik, Dani. 2008. **One Economics, Many Recipes: Globalization, Institutions, and Economic Growth**. Princeton University Press.
- Rodrik, Dani. 2008. **The New Development Economics: We Shall Experiment, But How Shall We Learn?**

9 The micro-economic approach to politics

Assignment this week: Read the readings. Discuss how they impact your thinking on your project/strategy. Or discuss limitations of what you read. Critical reflections on the readings are also welcome. Be prepared to discuss the readings in class. *In addition, at the end of your assignment, list 1–2 new references that will be relevant for your final paper.*

- Finan, Frederico, Benjamin A. Olken, and Rohini Pande. **The Personnel Economics of the Developing State**. *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments 2* (2017): 467-514.
- *Chapter 10 and Conclusion* of Duflo, Esther, and Abhijit Banerjee. **Poor Economics**. PublicAffairs, 2011.

10 Exam week: Final paper due

There is no class this week. Your final papers are due December 10.