Harris School of Public Policy
University of Chicago
PPHA 35575

Dr Mareike Schomerus
Jaspreet Singh
Jennifer Adhiambo
Contact:
mareike.schomerus@uchicago.edu

Spring Quarter 2025:
PPHA 35575:
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). Busara works with researchers and organizations to advance and apply behavioral science in pursuit of poverty alleviation, pursuing a future where global human development activities respond to people's lived experience; value knowledge generated in the context in which it is applied; and promote culturally-appropriate and inclusive practices.

To help achieve this, Busara advances ethical behavioral science and equitable scholarship in the Global South through interdisciplinary research (using qualitative, quantitative and experimental methods) As the largest behavioral science lab in the world with 133,000+ lab participants, Busara works with partners—such as implementing non-profit and private sector partners, academics, governments and multilaterals—on a learning journey to find out how to increase the impact of their programs. 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. IAt 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 the University of Nairobi.

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. Her book *Research Design in Politics and International Relations* (with Anouk S.Rigterink) on multi-method research for political science will be published by SAGE in 2026.

Jaspreet Singh is a behavioral and data science professional who is passionate about leveraging quantitative research to address global development challenges through novel ways to analyse social data. At Busara, he leads the Quantitative Research vertical, designing causal inference

studies (RCTs, cRCTs, quasi-experiments), implementing machine learning models on social science data, and executing methodologies like digital financial diaries and spatial analysis. Over 4+ years, he has applied behavioral science across financial inclusion, digital privacy, agriculture, and health. Previously, he was as an economics researcher at Willis Towers Watson, working on economic modelling, financial analysis and market research. He holds a Master's degree in Human Decision Science from Maastricht University and a Bachelors in Economics from Delhi University's Shri Ram College of Commerce.

This course will further be supported by Busara staff in doing data collection.

Goals 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 a behavioral 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 apply their theoretical knowledge to design a behavioral experiment. This will include real-world data collection In Kenya for the necessary formative research, which will be done by Busara staff with Kenyan respondents.

Students will work, in groups, on the design of a behavioral experiment, which 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 behavioral 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;
- Offer students practical experience of challenging team work.

By the end of the course, students will be able to

- Follow the steps needed to design a behavioral experiment, including how to adjust it based on learning or the realities of the research situation;
- Assess the appropriateness of an experimental 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.

Prerequisites: Who is this course for?

This course has no prerequisites beyond being interested in behavioral experimental design and willingness to work in a team. 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 for the students in Kenya.

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.

Relationship to other programs

This course is part of the Pearson Institute International Policy and Development Specialization.

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 6 (April 30). This class is a *hybrid class* with combined online and some offline teaching. During most weeks, one instructor will be in the classroom, while two instructors will join the class remotely, including delivering lectures remotely.

In week 6, the class is held fully online for everyone to facilitate a more equitable participation of colleagues in Kenya in an in-depth feedback session. A Zoom link will be provided and students are expected to join on Zoom with cameras on where possible.

If appropriate, one other class will be held fully online at the instructor's discretion.

Special dates: planning your quarter

The course is divided into three sections: introductory weeks for foundational knowledge; formative research weeks teams design formative research, collect and analyse data; and refinement weeks where teams refine their experimental design. The table below allows you to plan your individual assignments and your team work.

Week	Class Date	What needs to be done	What your team needs to do	What you need to do	Deadline	Regulars
1	**March 26**					
2	**April 2**	Team selection	Establish team ways of working		April 7	Reading group
3	**April 9**	Barriers and enablers audit/		Conduct fieldwork and submit audit	April 14	Reading group/ Glossary
4	**April 16**	Choosing a topic	Conduct a light touch literature review		April 18	Reading group/ Glossary
5	**April 23**	Preliminary instrument	Design your preliminary instrument		April 23	Reading group/ Glossary
6	**April 30 (fully online)**	Final instrument	Submit your final instrument		May 2	Reading group/ Glossary
7	**May 7**	IRB application	Prepare your IRB application		For class May 7	Reading group/ Glossary
8	**May 14**	**_NOTE: This is a busy week !_** Qualitative data analysis	Analyse your transcripts			Reading group/ Glossary
9	**May 21**	Class presentation	Finalise your class presentation		Upload presentation on May 20	
10	**May 28**	No class: final assignments	Submit experimental design	Submit your implications brief	May 30	

Canvas and other teaching tools

Canvas is our main teaching and communication tool. All readings will be uploaded here, organised by week. The Canvas calendar will give you the relevant dates. We will save the running glossary of crucial terms on Canvas, too.

Use of artificial intelligence (AI) in this course

AI can increase productivity, but it can also severely curtail your learning. Since this is a practical, hands-on course, there are only a few instances where the use of AI might be a possibility. We discourage using AI to generate your text or your literature review (since AI is very good at making up fake references). It is not allowed to hand in assignments where text is entirely written by AI.

There are a number of acceptable uses of AI:

- generating images for your presentation;
- generating Chicago-style references from URLs;
- checking your own writing for grammar;
- project management;
- note taking and summarizing papers;
- brain storming;
- Web searches and mapping of papers.

If you use AI for any purpose, please include a citation to that effect. You are responsible for the content of any AI-generated images or references in terms of accuracy and appropriateness. If the use of AI to check grammar turns your text into an AI-written submission, this breaches the allowed usage of AI for this class.

This policy is designed to maximise student learning and to minimise the danger of plagiarism (which often happens when using AI without checking), while making use of the power of AI. If a student is found to have used AI beyond the acceptable uses outlined above, this may affect the grade, depending on the extent of the usage and clarifications in follow-up conversation. How the use of AI influences a student's grade is decided on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the instructor.

Use of technology in this class

This class is intermittently tech free. This means that during lectures or specific classroom activities, no open technology is accepted. This is to support student focus and interaction. To facilitate note-taking, the instructors will share the slides with students the day before class. The instructor will make explicit when tech-free sessions begin. Adherence to this classroom etiquette will be reflected in the classroom participation grade.

How we will use class time

Class time is split differently each week to cover lectures, presentations and practical team work—we will be mixing things up as appropriate.

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, while parts of the class will be taught virtually. 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: field will be interviewing research participants during Nairobi work hours, which means from about midnight to 8am Chicago time.

We will try to allow as much time as possible for the team work in class. However, students will need to organize additional meeting times with their teams before submissions.

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 date (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 extremely 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.

Reading group

Each week, we will ask a group of people to lead in discussing the readings. This does not mean that you present a presentation on the readings, but prepare a class discussion. The schedule for the reading group will be released at the end of week 1.

Glossary

Throughout the term, we will be working on a join glossary to compile all the terms that are used throughout class. The TA will kick off the glossary, but we will ask people to specifically take turns in compiling the terms that made an appearance in class that week.

Attendance policy

In line with the attendance policy for Harris courses (which requires regular in-person class attendance as a condition for receiving course credit), class attendance is mandatory. In case of sickness, students need to notify the teaching assistant (TA) of absences prior to class, particularly if having to isolate due to Covid. In such a case, the TA will provide a 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 only be made available upon prior request with a reasonable explanation as to why a recording is needed only.

Any absence about which the teacher or TA is only notified after the class has passed will be considered as a missed class.

Failure to attend class will result in a grade penalty. In line with Harris School attendance policy, students who miss more than two weeks' worth of classes should expect to withdraw from the course or request an incomplete. This also applies if a student has kept up with course work.

During classes, there will be regular breaks so students can avoid leaving during class.

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.

Assignments and assessment

Students will submit two individually graded written assignments and one written group assignment. 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. All work is submitted on Canvas at the end of the day of the deadline, except the in-class presentations, which are delivered in class.

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 and on Canvas. 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 14**

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 30**

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 30**

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, five other group efforts are required that will be used to offer students feedback on their learning. 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 18).
- **Preliminary formative research instrument**: Your preliminary formative research instrument is due on April 23 to allow submission to the Institutional Review Board.
- **Final formative research instrument**: Your preliminary formative research instrument is due on May 2 to allow timely conducting of interviews in Kenya.
- **An informal submission to the class IRB**: You will be presenting your research to a research ethics and compliance specialist on May 7.
- **Group presentations** (please submit on May 20 and present in class on May 21). In presentations, we will look for originality and succinctness in presenting.

Course outline: Readings, topics, and schedules

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. 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 with the assignment made publicly available so you know when you will be called on.

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. 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 book store. 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*).

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

Forscher P.S. & Schmidt, M. (eds). (2024). *A better how: notes on developmental meta-research.* Busara. DOI: doi.org/10.62372/ISCI6112 (**NOTE**: *This book is available open access online*).

Week 1 (March 26): 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 views 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. We will 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 Reading

Opalo, Ken. (2025). *An Africanist perspective: On American aid cuts/disruptions*. https://www.africanistperspective.com/p/american-aid-cutsdisruptions?r=1v5i9i&utm_campaign=023a55a37d-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_15_06_12_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&triedRedirect=true&utm_source=Busara%2BGlobal&utm_term=0_6e99e6465f-023a55a37d-265664381

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

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

Readings

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.

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 (April 2): 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 which levers could 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.

Albarracín, Dolores, Bita Fayaz-Farkhad, and Javier A. Granados Samayoa. (2024) "Determinants of behaviour and their efficacy as targets of behavioural change interventions." *Nature Reviews Psychology*: 1-16.

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.

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.

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 9): Now change: Behavioral approaches and experiments in action
Guest lecturer on the real-world experience of experiments:
- Salim Kombo, Associate Engagement Director Social Stability, Busara (in person)

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.

Assignment due (individual): Barriers and Enablers Audit, April 14

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.

Week 4 (April 16): What do you know? Groundwork for ethical and rigorous evidence generation

Experiments in international development policy have produced some of the most convincing and the most controversial policy insights. Whether an experiment is convincing 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 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 18

Featured Reading

Wambua, J., Singh, A., Kihindas, K., Gachungi, I., & Forscher, P. S. (2024) "Manage relationships when starting and ending research with human participants". In P.S. Forscher & M. Schmidt (eds), *A better how: notes on developmental meta-research*. Nairobi: Busara. (pp 161-167). DOI:doi.org/10.62372/ISCI6112

Kistler, Linda. (2024) "How Poor Kenyans Became Economists' Guinea Pigs." *The Economist 1843 Magazine*. March 1. https://www.economist.com/1843/2024/03/01/how-poor-kenyans-became-economists-guinea-pigs

Kast, F., Meier, S., & Pomeranz, D. (2018). "Saving more in groups: Field experimental evidence from Chile". *Journal of Development Economics*, 133, 275-294.

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

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

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.

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.

Week 5 (April 23): Do I have to wear a lab coat? Designing ethical behavioral experiments in international development

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 preliminary formative research instrument is due by April 23 (the same day as the class) to allow us to submit it for IRB approval.

Featured Reading

Schmidt, M. (2024). "Do the randomized know that they have been randomized? A critique of the turn towards randomization in high stakes development cooperation initiatives". In P.S. Forscher & M. Schmidt (eds), *A better how: notes on developmental meta-research* (pp 155-160). Nairobi: Busara. DOI:doi.org/10.62372/ISCI6112

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

Readings

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.

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

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

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

Sood, N., & Wagner, Z. (2016). "Impact of health insurance for tertiary care on postoperative outcomes and seeking care for symptoms: quasi-experimental evidence from Karnataka, India". *BMJ open*, 6(1), e010512.

Week 6 (April 30): Bringing it all together: how to use formative insights for better experimental design

NOTE: The class of week 6 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.

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?

Assignment (team): Your final formative research instrument is due on May 2.

Featured Reading –

Jang, Chaning; Koki, Edel; Nyaga, Robert; Okafor, Arize; Singh, Jaspreet; Vang, Aya;

Wendel, Steve. (2024) *The Busara toolkit: leveraging behavioral science for development.*

Busara Groundwork No. 10 (Research Agenda). Nairobi: Busara. DOI: doi.

org/10.62372/WQSB6195 (Pages 32-43; 55-60)

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

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

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 7): What am I missing? Rainbow shades of humanity

Guest lecturers on ethics approvals:

- Engy Saleh, Director of Behavioral Researcn and Academic Engagements

- Antony Mutunga Mutwiri, Research Integrity and Compliance
- *Dates to note: Formative research: Interviews are being conducted in Kenya from May 5 -9. You will receive your transcripts at the latest by May 14.*
- *You will be making an informal presentation on your research to the class IRB.*

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

Tapscott, Rebecca and Daniel Rincón Machón (2024)Procedural ethics for social science research: Introducing the Research Ethics Governance dataset. *Journal of Peace Research*. (doi: 10.1177/00223433241249352)

For preparing this week's IRB submission, 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.trree.org/enrol/index.php?id=18

Additionally, please take a look at UChicago's IRB requirements.

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.

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 14): 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 analysing your qualitative data and incorporating it into the formative findings.

Featured Reading

Rigterink, Anouk S and Mareike Schomerus (2026). Qualitative Data Analysis. In: *Research Design in Politics and International Relations*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

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

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

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

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.

Week 9 (May 21): 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.
Assignment (team): Please upload your presentation for May 21 by May 20 to allow the instructors time to prepare feedback.

Readings

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 30
Implications brief: (individual): May 30

Grading policies

Submission of assignments

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.

Length of assignments

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

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.

Requests for Regrades

If a student wants to requests a regrade, this requires submitting a written argument why the student feels the grade is inappropriate. Regrades cannot be requested on the basis that no grading rubric was provided to students prior to assignment submission.

Grading rubrics

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

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.

Course scores and letter grades

The course is graded on the common 4-point scale: 4.0 = A, 3.7 = A-, 3.3=B+, 3.0 = B, 2.7 = B-, 2.3 = C+, 2.0 = C, 1.7 = C-, 1.3 = D+, 1.0 = D, F = 0. (Note that there is no A+ or D- in the common grade scale.)

Individual assignments are graded on a 20-point scale, which are translated to letter grades for the final grade:

- 18-20 points = 4.0 (A)
- 16-17 points = 3.5 (B+)
- 14-15 points = 3.0 (B)
- 12-13 points = 2.5 (C+)
- 10-11 points = 2.0 (C)
- 8-9 points = 1.5 (D+)
- Below 8 points = 0.0 (F)

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 26 – May 21), 3 – 5pm

Sign-up sheets for 15 min 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.

Jaspreet 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 Jaspreet at Jaspreet.singh@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

Teaching assistant(s) graders

We will share the names and contacts of TAs at the start of the course. TAs in this course help with the running of the course, will set up and guide the glossary and support grading of assignments.

The TA who has taken the course in the past will be available to discuss assignments and other matters with students.

We will share ways to contact the TA and office hours in the first week of class.

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.

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.

- University General Policies
- University Academic Polices
- Harris Academic Support Programs and Handbook
- Policy on audio and video recordings
- UChicagoGRAD

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://harris.uchicago.edu/student-life/dean-of-students-office/academic-support-programs

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) 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) 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 phone: (773) 702-6000 email: 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.*