

Foundations in Global Sustainability
SAMPLE SYLLABUS

(weekly two 80 minutes sessions)

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This foundations course presents a critical, interdisciplinary overview of the history, structure, and operation of development organizations. Particular attention is paid to the ethical and sociological orientation of development organizations of varying size and mission, as a means to inform students' experiences working remotely for small nonprofits around the world. Simulations, role playing, readings, lectures and in-person discussion sessions will create an experiential learning experience focused on real-world decision-making processes. Further, guest lecturers will occasionally visit the foundations course to provide students with alternative perspectives, opinions, and personal experiences to reinforce the teachings of the instructor and the importance of global affairs in professional settings. Guest lecturers will often vary from one quarter to another, contingent on lecturers' availability, expertise in relevant current events featured in case studies, and their area of specialization. The dynamic selection of guest lecturers ensures that the content remains fresh and relevant, enhancing the students' understanding of the subject matter.

We will explore: How are sustainable development interventions grounded in moral and political ideology? Moreover, how do international development projects construct their communities of intervention? The aim of the course is therefore not to provide simplistic answers in condemnation or celebration of development outfits, but to engage seriously with the complexities of this industry and consider both dangerous pitfalls and transformative potential.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Recognize, articulate, and think critically about concepts, paradigms, and institutions in the sustainability and development industry; to analyze reciprocal relationships between societal forces as described and/or furthered in theories, policies, and strategies employed to address global inequality, and how they limit or expand the potential for organizing toward social change. This will include changing development trends, knowledge of theories on culture and power and group dynamics, specifically participatory and community-based approaches.
- Develop the ability to critique theories, claims, and policies in development from a social scientific perspective, through careful evaluation of the field's major assertions, assumptions, evidential basis, and explanatory utility. This will also mean examining the social structures, conditions of power and privilege that influence development projects, and include examination of one's own positionality in these contexts.

- To maximize students' capacity to work collaboratively, and reflexively in their understanding of development (and "underdevelopment"), recognizing the complexity of the ethical issues involved, considering multiple alternatives to development, while appreciating the insights available in one or more development strand
- To introduce students to the bureaucratic, social and institutional work that underlies contemporary global efforts in behavioral, social, and infrastructural change through an experiential project design model. To lead students to think critically about the vast array of relationships that must be built and maintained in order for sustainable development projects to take shape.

EVALUATION

Quarter-long collaborative project:

Students scope their project, present a detailed proposal, evaluate similar case studies and are provided data they will collectively analyze toward a final presentation, framed as a proposal, to address an issue within the Northwestern community's campus. They will thus need to consider technical, ethical, social, political, and environmental risks and issues in development project design and potential implementation.

- Three graded check-ins with document deliverables
- Final multimodal presentation/proposal
- Personal learning report at quarter's end

Course evaluation will be based on three components weighed equally: participation in class, groupwork, and periodic project updates/multi-modal reports.

Attendance to groupwork sessions is mandatory. Students will have 1 excused absence, no questions asked, but will need to consult with the instructor(s) about missing more classes without penalty. In this flipped classroom model, groupwork sessions are where most of the work takes place.

The students also write individual reflection notes, in the mode of auto-ethnography, recording observations made around the process of cooperation and collaboration with their groups, as well as the issues that arise in their projects. The field notes will be used as the basis for the final reflection report.

COURSE BREAKDOWN

Week 1: Identifying and Analyzing the Causes of Global Inequality

What are causes that produce conditions of poverty? How can we think about the proximate and root causes? What are the differences between individual and structural causes? How do

different causes interact and reinforce one another? How can understanding the causes of poverty help guide choices and priorities for how to intervene to create positive social change?

- Veltmeyer, H., & Bowles, P. (Eds.). 2021. Chapter 1. *The essential guide to critical development studies*. Routledge.
- Díaz, P., dir. 2008. *The end of poverty?*. Cinema Libre Studio. [Film]
- Barrett, J., H. Coninck, and C.F.D. Morejon. 2014. Drivers, Trends and Mitigation. Chapter 5, Sect 5.8. In *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*. IPCC. Cambridge University Press. https://www.ipcc.ch/pdf/assessment-report/ar5/wg3/ipcc_wg3_ar5_full.pdf (excerpts)

Week 2: What is “Development”?

What are the experiences and legacies of previous development efforts? What are the trends, assumptions and models animating development debates and approaches today? What does it mean to enact change through the development model and what could it mean? Development work comes with a particular idea of how to enact social change. The goals of development projects are not always met smoothly. This isn't necessarily a “failure” of development, but rather an existential aspect of collaboration. Development workers may not always be fully aware of their impact (or lack thereof). In this session, we will learn what “development” means in practice. What are some successes? What are some avenues for critique and improvement?

- Brainard, L., & Chollet, D. (Eds.). (2009). *Global Development 2.0: Can Philanthropists, the Public, and the Poor Make Poverty History?*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Haskell, Thomas. 1985. “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility.” *American Historical Review* 90(2): 339–361.
- Crewe, E & Harrison, E. (1998). Chapter 5. *Whose Development? An ethnography of aid*.

Week 3: Participation and its Challenges

In this session, we take a closer look at a concept that has become a central component of development practice around the world: ‘participation’. We explore the difficulties inherent in defining ‘community’ and putting ‘community’ in charge. How are community members thought about and encouraged to participate in the issue or initiative your organization is working on, and what do you make of this framing?

- Cornwall, A. (2008). Unpacking ‘Participation’: models, meanings and practices. *Community development journal*, 43(3), 269-283.
- Mansuri, G., & Rao, V. (2012). “Chapter 5: Does Participation Improve Development Outcomes?” *Localizing development: Does participation work?*. World Bank Report. pp. 161-234.

- Mitchell, Tania. 2015. "Identity and Social Action: The Role of Self-Examination in Systemic Change." AAC&U Diversity and Democracy, Fall Issue.

Week 4: Power, Privilege and Humility

How do systems of privilege and power produce and reproduce communities of poor and otherwise marginalized people? How do systems of privilege and power affect international development efforts? How does your own positionality fit into this context? During this session we look in particular at assumptions of privilege embedded in ideas of cultural competence, and we introduce students to the importance of practicing cultural humility.

- Fanon, F. 1967. "Medicine and Colonialism". In *A dying colonialism*. New York: Grove Press.
- Fisher-Borne, Marcie, Jessie Montana Cain, and Suzanne L. Martin. 2015. "From Mastery to Accountability: Cultural Humility as an Alternative to Cultural Competence." *Social Work Education* 34.2: 165–81.
- Carollo, L., & Guerci, M. (2018). 'Activists in a suit': Paradoxes and metaphors in sustainability managers' identity work. *Journal of business ethics*, 148(2), 249-268.

Week 5: Global ethics

What ethics should guide social and political action in a world marked by conspicuous global inequality? Is such a thing as ethical international development even possible? In this session, we read a case study of a charity who resist the planning and evaluation imperatives of European donors, and we consider the possibilities and pitfalls of imagining ethics and political action on a global scale.

- Scherz, C. (2013). Let us make God our banker: Ethics, temporality, and agency in a Ugandan charity home. *American Ethnologist*, 40(4), 624-636.
- Jaggar, Alison M. 1998. "Globalizing Feminist Ethics." *Hypatia* 13.2: 7–31.
- Rahman, R. (2017). Dignity, not pity: fundraising, zakat, and spiritual exchange. *The request and the gift in religious and humanitarian endeavors*, 145-170.

Week 6: Non- Profit and Development Institutions

How do non-profits and development organizations set goals, plan projects and make decisions? This session explores the institutional, bureaucratic and relational work that underlie development and non-profit work. And we look at how decisions are made in NGOs, including at efforts to engage diverse stakeholders in decision making.

- Mosse, David. 2005. *Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice*. London: Pluto Press. Ch. 5 "Implementation: Regime and Relationships "

- Renz, D.O. & Herman, R.D. eds. 2016. *The Jossey-Bass Handbook of Nonprofit Leadership and Management* Fourth Edition. (excerpts)
- Fransen, L. 2012. Multi-stakeholder governance and voluntary programme interactions: legitimation politics in the institutional design of Corporate Social Responsibility. *Socio-Economic Review* 10.1: 163–192

Week 7: Funding, Structure, Evaluation

The history of development organizations, their funding structures, and the expansion of the business sector model into all forms of social organization have placed nonprofits in a series of binds. How is it that nonprofits sustain themselves, yet also attempt to fulfill their mission? How do engaging with such contradictions in the model allow for a path forward? This session introduces a key practice in the work of many organizations: monitoring and evaluation or ‘M&E’. We explore how M&E practices attempt to combine the potentially conflicting goals of a) reflexive learning; b) accountability to project participants; and c) accountability to project donors.

- Bornstein, Lisa. 2006. “Systems of Accountability, Webs of Deceit? Monitoring and Evaluation in South African NGOs.” *Development* 49.2: 52–61.
- Harrell-Bond, Barbara, Eftihia Voutira, and Mark Leopold. 1992 Counting the Refugees: Gifts, Givers, Patrons and Clients. *Journal of Refugee Studies* 5(3-4): 205–225.
- Grant, M.M. & Crutchfield, L. (2007) “Creating High-Impact Nonprofits.” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Fall.

Week 8: Killing With Kindness (or how NOT to save the world)

To what extent does international development work need to address and change power relationships in society to be successful? What degree and type of development is possible given existent socio-economic and political structures? Under what conditions is it more or less likely that power relationships can be effectively challenged? How does this inform your view of the relationship between power and development outcomes? What are your reflections about what it takes to live out a commitment to sustainable development and social change? In this session, we consider circumstances in which good intentions in international aid do not necessarily match good outcomes. By now, you should be reflecting on your specific project, and your particular subject position can productively interphase with issues of inequality, development, and participation-driven social change at your GESI site, and beyond.

- McBride, Amanda and Mlyn, Eric. “Innovation Alone Won’t Fix Social Problems.” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 2, 2015
- Collins, A. E. (2009). “Chapter 2: Viewing Disasters from the Perspective of Development.” *Disaster and development*. Routledge.

- Schuller, Mark. 2012. *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press. Chapters TBD.

Week 9: Participation and Community-Led Development

What is your assessment of community-based development as an approach to development and social change? What do you think community-based, participatory development approaches can do well and what do they not do well? To what extent are these approaches scalable? Under what conditions? What are the implications for community development work at home and abroad? Does this newfound drive motivate you to take action in some way? Are there communities, organizations or opportunities you want to get connected with?

- Spade, D. (2020). Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival. *Social Text*, 38(1 (142)), 131-151.
- Biruk, C., & Trapence, G. (2018). “Community engagement in an economy of harms: Reflections from an LGBTI-rights NGO in Malawi.” *Critical Public Health*, 28(3), 340-351.
- Green, M. 2016. *A Power and Systems Approach to Making Change Happen*. “Chapter 2: Power Lies at the Heart of Change.” Oxford UP.