Syllabus last updated: September 21, 2025

GLBL 3225: Approaches to International Development

Tues & Thurs 1:00 PM – 2:15 PM
and Weekly Data Labs
Fall 2025

Prof. Ardina Hasanbasri
304 Horchow Hall
ardina.hasanbasri@yale.edu

Teaching Fellow:
Shreya Bajaj
Andres Daniels

See the canvas homepage for the most updated course information, email contacts and office hours.

The world has experienced a dramatic decline in poverty rates since 1960 when 49% of the world's population was living in extreme poverty (less than about 2 dollars a day). By 1990, this number reduced to 35%, and by 2023, the world 8.4% of its population in extreme poverty. These patterns raise questions about how countries were able to lift their citizens' well-being and what they should do next. Are there 'growth traps' that prevent certain countries from growing? Can a 'big push', such as accelerating educational attainment or improving financial access, solve the growth problem? What should policymakers and development stakeholders choose to do? Furthermore, there is still work to be done in eradicating poverty as well as improving other indicators of well-being, those that are not necessarily captured by income alone.

This course is designed to expose students to the field of international development and gain practice in the various tools that practitioners, researchers, and policymakers use to answer development questions. The learning goals for this class are:

1. Students gain a basic understanding of key issues in the field of development economics

The course discusses foundational knowledge used for anyone interested in working in the field of international development and wanting to explore the field further in the future. Lectures, discussions, and assignments will expose students to the building blocks of the field and several topics of study.

2. Students gain a basic skillset from a development toolkit

Students will gain practice in some basic quantitative development tools that allow them to understand development reports and research, while also allowing them to see how indicators and data are used to diagnose issues in development. There will be many case studies in this

class. A case study consists of an activity of investigating a key development indicator, a data analysis exercise, or a class discussion related to a skillset in development.

To achieve the two learning goals, the course is divided into two parts. The first part consists of topics that are meant to be "building blocks". We will start by discussing what do people mean when they say development, who are the key stakeholders, what are the different subfields, and how has development thought evolved throughout history. We will cover two most basic areas of development: diagnosing sources of growth and poverty rates. Example case studies:

- Macro-level Growth: What determines the high GDP growth rates of Singapore and Hongkong? Are they similar and can they be replicated by other countries or regions?
- Measuring Poverty Rates: How can we identify those living below the poverty line using household surveys in Malawi? Are there pros and cons to using different measures?

At the same time, we will start building the basic skills in using cross-country data and household surveys using R. No coding background is necessary. We assume that students do not necessarily have experience in R and provide many resources to learn. The last building block topic has to do with how to evaluate whether a program is effective.

After the building blocks are covered, the second part of the course explores several development topics. The selected topics for this semester are issues concerning labor markets, international trade, development aid and its effectiveness, and the effect of institutions on development.

Students also work on a group policy report on a development topic of their choice. Using the skills developed throughout the course, students will design a policy report as a final project. This brief report is done in groups, requires a data visualization component, and is about 3 to 5 pages long (in text excluding graphs). The purpose of the report is to influence a development stakeholder of the students' choice. A list of approved topics will be provided.

Students are encouraged to explore ways that the topic lessons and skillset can be used in future endeavors. Previous students have used the knowledge from this class as a foundation to take on other development economics classes. Some students have ended up using the survey data tools on their summer internship working for development non-profits. The policy report assignment has also been helpful in interviews with potential employers since students are able to discuss how they organize their own project and ability to work in a team.

Course prerequisite: GLBL 3121 Applied Quantitative Analysis or approved substitutes.

Canvas Website, Textbooks, and Readings

The canvas course site is the go-to place for all information concerning the course. The weekly course page will have upcoming deadlines or required readings, slides, case study data and codes, and other materials. The page will be updated weekly on Mondays at 8:00 AM.

The main (required) textbook that we will use is ***Development Economics: Theory and Practice, 2nd Edition, by Janvry and Sadoulet***. This book does a good job in balancing the discussion of theory and the more applied practice of economic development. Students are expected to read the associated chapter before the class on a topic. Class discussion questions are provided beforehand so students can prepare their answers before class. A link to the library copy of the book which can be read online is on canvas page (course reserve tab). Please make sure you are getting the second edition for the most up-to-date version (the text of the first version differs quite a bit).

Other supplemental readings, such as journal articles, will be available on canvas. No need to purchase.

Lab Section, RStudio, and R

This course has weekly discussion/lab sections led by the teaching fellow. Data analytics skills require practice and building this will make you more confident in completing class exercises, assignments, and the final policy report. Each lab goes through an exercise that closely relates to the material or assignment covered that week. The lab sections are optional (except the first one which is required); you do not need to attend if you already feel confident in covering the exercises on your own. You may attend any of the lab section times that work for you. There will be no lab section in the first week of class.

We will use R-Studio in this class. R and R-Studio are free for public use. The download instructions will be available on canvas. Students can also use R-Studio Cloud if they prefer—this is R-Studio in a browser; must create an account; limited use and sometimes can be slow.

AI and LLM Policy

Governments around the world and other development stakeholders are currently trying to understand how Large Language Models (LLM) can be integrated in their day-to-day functioning and assist with their development goals. The World Bank, for example, recently launched in early 2025, Impact AI, a platform to help development practitioners with their work.

As students, you need to prepare yourself for the workplace by understanding the ways LLMs can complement your work but it's also critical to understand its weakness. LLMs can be very useful in aiding your studies and finishing assignments. I encourage you to explore ways LLM can help you in this class for learning to code, brainstorm ideas, and find relevant literature. Some lectures and assignments are designed to include strategies on how to incorporate LLMs. Additionally, having a good basic knowledge of development and coding will allow you to better work with LLMs instead of trusting it blindly. Remember, it should be a complement, not a substitute.

Assessment and Grading

The grading for this class consists of four components: Attendance and participation 8%, Quizzes 35%, Data Analytics Assignments 22%, and Group Policy Report 35%. To determine your final grade, we will rank students according to their final score and decide on the grade cutoff for the class. We do not have a predetermined curve; the cutoffs are determined based on how the class performed overall (final score distribution) and consistency in grade distribution relative to other core courses in Jackson.

Attendance and Participation **(**8%)

- We take attendance in this class. Attendance and discussion are important components of class participation. You will learn a lot from hearing the different perspectives of your peers on a development issue, as well as doing the data analysis exercise related to a case study. Students are allowed to miss up to 3 classes without needing to notify the instructor.

- We will take attendance for the first discussion section as well due to the material. All other sections are optional.

- If a student actively participates in class discussion, the instructor and teaching fellow reserve the right to increase the participation grade accordingly. This is typically done for students who are on the margin of a grade cutoff.

Quizzes (35%)

- There will be several short quizzes (five scheduled throughout the semester) conducted in person for about 30 minutes at the beginning of class. If a student is late, no additional time will be given. A quiz consists of multiple choice and short answer questions. These quizzes are used to assess the student's understanding of the material and provide feedback. If accommodations are needed, please contact the instructor as soon as possible.

- After each lecture slides, there is a study guide for the quiz. Lab sessions also cover practice questions before a quiz day.

- If a student has an emergency or is sick, a dean's extension is required to miss a quiz. With a Dean's Extension, the quiz will then be replaced by the average of all other quizzes in the class. No makeup quizzes will be given.

- For all students, the lowest quiz is dropped at the very end of the class, and the remaining five will make up the final quiz score.

Data Analytics Assignment (22%)

- Continued practice will help students improve their data analytics for development skills. Each data analytics assignment covers one or two topics. These assignments are related to the exercises done in the case studies. Collaboration is allowed on the completion of these assignments, and students can receive additional help in lab sessions and/or office hours. The use of AI tools for completing assignments is also allowed. In most cases, the reference code needed to complete an assignment is provided during the case study lecture.

- Extensions can be requested if a dean's extension is provided. Late submissions are not accepted otherwise. There are no drops for the data analytics assignments.

Group Policy Report (35%)

- Students will choose a group and a topic for their policy brief. Topics should be related to those covered in class or from the textbook topic list. If students cannot find a group or if a group does not have enough members, the instructor can help assign or add to the group. Although we try to assign groups based on interest, this might not always be possible.

- The group policy report grade consists of several components: initial proposals, draft sections and visualizations, peer comments, presentation, and the report itself. Each member is also responsible for at least 1 visualization. A rubric will be provided for each component, and all components sum up to 35% of the grade.

- Students will showcase their policy brief in a 10-minute presentation followed by feedback and discussion with the class.

Course Support and Communication

Your instructor and teaching fellow are happy to discuss course material or other topics related to development. We offer office hours through Zoom or in person. See canvas on how to set up an appointment using *Calendly*. You can also email the instructor or the TF with any questions and classroom support. Emails will be answered during business hours, at most within 48 business hours.

Value Statements

Debate and discussions are a big part of the economics discipline. Economic and development policies are heavily debated, as there are various perspectives on how to approach development (as we will learn in the first week of class). We hope that the class provides a respectful and supportive environment to generate meaningful discussions about development and growth.

Students come from various backgrounds with their own point of view. Sharing, challenging and discussing these perspectives is crucial to your development as a student and a global citizen.

We also recognize that students have diverse learning styles and needs. Several resources are available to students: slides with notes are provided after each class, different modes of office hours, problem set support, and additional practice in class and in the lab. If other types of resource are needed for accessibility, please email the instructor.

In general, if you have problems during the course, your instructor, teaching fellow, and pedagogical partner are available to chat and collaboratively find solutions.

Tentative Course Schedule

The following is a preliminary schedule with the associated chapters for each topic. Additional readings might be assigned and can be accessed through canvas. The instructor reserves the right to make changes to topics, dates, and readings depending on how the class progresses.

Week 1	Thurs	Aug 28	**Introduction and Course Overview**
Part I Building Blocks of Development			
Week 2	Tues	Sep 2	**Key Debates and Issues in Development; Why should we focus on data and indicators?** (Read introduction from textbook)
	Thurs	Sep 4	**History of Thought in Development Economics** (Ch. 3)
Week 3	Tues	Sep 9	**Explaining Economic Growth: The Macro Level** (Ch. 8)
	Thurs	Sep 11	Setting up and Getting Started with R -- **Quiz 1**
Week 4	Tues	Sep 16	Indicators and Case Study
	Thurs	Sep 18	Growth Accounting Discussion of Limitation
Week 5	Tues	Sep 23	**Poverty and Vulnerability (Ch. 5) & Introduction to Household Surveys**
	Thurs	Sep 25	Indicators and Case Study
Week 6	Tues	Sep 30	Starting the Policy Report Assignment -- **Quiz 2**
	Thurs	Oct 2	**Impact Evaluations** (Ch. 4) - **Randomized Control Trials**
Week 7	Tues	Oct 7	Indicators and Case Study
Part II: Select Topics in Development Economics			

	Thurs	Oct 9	**Development Issues Concerning Labor Markets**
Week 8	Tues	Oct 14	**Policy Report Group Time -- Quiz 3**
	Thurs	*Oct 16*	*Fall Break*
Week 9	Tues	Oct 21	Indicators and Case Study
	Thurs	Oct 23	**International Trade** (parts of Ch. 7)
Week 10	Tues	Oct 28	Indicators and Case Study
	Thurs	Oct 30	**Policy Report Group Time -- Quiz 4**
Week 11	Tues	Nov 4	**Development Aid & It's Effectiveness** (Ch. 19)
	Thurs	Nov 6	Indicators and Case Study
Week 12	Tues	Nov 11	**The Effect of Institutions on Development**
	Thurs	Nov 13	**Policy Report Group Time --- Quiz 5**
Week 13	Tues	Nov 18	**Group Presentations Day 1 – 4 groups**
	Thurs	Nov 20	**Group Presentations Day 2 – 4 groups**
	Tues/Thurs	Nov 25/Nov 27	Thanksgiving Break
Week 13	Tues	Dec 2	**Group Presentations Day 3 – 4 groups**
	Thurs	Dec 4	**Group Presentations Day 4 – 4 groups**
Reading Period from Mon Dec 6 - Tues, Dec 9 Final examination period begins May 10			Policy report submission is on Friday, Dec 12.