POLI 328B: The Politics of Development and Government Accountability

Winter Session Term 1
MWF, 4:00-5:00 in BUCH A104

Professor Yang-Yang Zhou (she/her)  
Email: yangyang.zhou@ubc.ca  
Office Hours: Fridays, 10:00-11:00AM  
Location: 323 CK Choi Building, 1855 West Mall

Teaching Assistant: Li Guo (she/her)  
Email: guol2013@alumni.ubc.ca  
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 2:00-3:00PM  
Location: 1st floor lobby, CK Choi Building, 1855 West Mall

1. Course Overview

What political factors help explain patterns of development – in terms of health, education, prosperity, and security – around the world? Why are some societies more unequal than others? How have policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty and inequality fared? We will explore these and related questions in this advanced undergraduate seminar. While there are no easy answers to these questions, this course aims to equip you with the conceptual and analytic tools from a social science approach to study development.

The first part of this course considers how development is conceptualized and measured, as well as the influence of historical legacies, the role of the modern state and political institutions in driving development outcomes. The second part of this course focuses on development traps: geography, natural resources, conflict. Finally, we explore contemporary development initiatives such as democratic governance, information campaigns, foreign aid, and channels for citizen participation.

To be clear, by undertaking a social scientific approach to the study of development, we will focus on understanding general explanations and evidence of patterns across time and space. There will be much less emphasis on detailed histories of politics and development in particular countries and places than what would be presented in area studies courses. Knowledge and insights from those courses will be an excellent complement to the materials presented here. Since we will cover a range of topics, each of which could become its own course, you will have the opportunity to delve in more detail the topics and regions that interest you for the final assignment.

2. Learning Objectives

- Understand the various conceptualizations and dimensions of “development,”
- Assess the political drivers of development.
- Critically evaluate initiatives and policies considering these political factors, using a causal inference framework,
• Practice being active, informed citizens on political issues surrounding development
• Learn about and prepare for careers in development research and policy analysis.

3. Readings and Resources

There are no books required for this course. All required readings will be available online via our class Canvas site or through the library. Section 7 in this syllabus lists both required reading and further reading. You will be expected to have completed all the required readings before class to the point where you can be called on to critique or defend any reading.

We will use Top Hat for class participation, so access to a laptop or smartphone is necessary. If you do not have access, please borrow from a classmate during the exercise or come speak with me. When applicable, please listen/watch the linked media pieces that highlight these issues.

Development-Related Blogs and Podcasts:
• Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). [https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog)
• Center for Global Development (CGD) Blog. [https://www.cgdev.org/section/opinions/blogs](https://www.cgdev.org/section/opinions/blogs)
• Gapminder. Data Visualization about Global Facts. [https://www.gapminder.org/about-gapminder](https://www.gapminder.org/about-gapminder)
• Goats and Soda NPA Podcast. [https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/502900047/development](https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/502900047/development)
• Development Drums Podcast. [http://developmentdrums.org](http://developmentdrums.org)
• International Growth Centre Blog. [https://www.theigc.org/blog](https://www.theigc.org/blog)
• Ken Opalo: An Africanist Perspective. [https://kenopalo.com](https://kenopalo.com)
• VoxDev Blog. [https://voxdev.org](https://voxdev.org)

4. Course Format

The class will meet three times each week for the duration of the semester. Each of the topics is paired with required readings that should be completed midweek, before Wednesday’s class. The lectures will review the concepts discussed in these readings, but do not substitute for them. Friday will mostly be discussion-based, so please come prepared to engage in the readings.

Note that this is a hands-on class intended to introduce you to potential careers in research and policy analysis. This means that part of the objectives include learning to communicate effectively and operate in a professional context. This includes time management (arriving to class and
submitting assignments on time), constructive participation in class activities, and ability to work effectively in both individual and group contexts.

Attendance is required. If you have to miss class, you are responsible for coordinating with a classmate to catch up on any material that you may have missed. You do not need to notify the instructor or TA about missing class, but if you anticipate missing several classes, please refer to Arts Advising for an academic concession.

Lecture slides will be posted at the end of each week, but you are responsible for taking your own notes. Forming study groups is encouraged.

You must use [www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com) to submit your memos and final assignment.

ClassID: 22251824 Enrollment Key: POLI328B

---

5. Grading Criteria

1. **Class Participation (5%)**: In-class exercises, participation in discussions, and contributing to the course blog. While speaking up in class is highly encouraged, we recognize it may be difficult in a class of our size. Therefore, this blog, which you can find on Canvas, is another opportunity for you to share with your classmates relevant news articles, op-eds, and your thoughts on how they connect to the course materials.

2. **Three Critical Reading Memos (20%)**: These memos are not summaries of the assigned readings but rather analyze key concepts and findings, highlight practical implications for policymakers, and include 2-3 discussion questions. Further details of this assignment will be discussed in class.

   In the introduction survey, you will be asked to choose 3 weeks to write your critical reading memos (2-3 pages each, double spaced). This is a commitment and planning device for you, so if you need to change weeks, you do not need to inform the instructor or TA. These memos are due by midnight on **Wednesday** of that week, and we will select some of your proposed questions for Friday’s in-class discussions.

   We will drop the lowest grade out of the three memos, so you can treat the first one as practice or if you are satisfied with the grades on your first two, you can skip the third.

3. **Midterm Exams (2 x 20%)**: The exams will be in-class, closed-book exercises that will encourage you to review the terms, concepts, and theories presented in lectures and in readings through week 6 (midterm 1) on **Friday, October 11** and through week 12 (midterm 2) on **Friday, November 22**. Except in cases of severe medical emergency, these exams will not be re-scheduled under any circumstances.

4. **Final Op-Ed Assignment (30%)**: Your final assignment is to write an op-ed (5-7 pages, double spaced), making a real-world relevant argument from a social science perspective. This assignment asks you to write an op-ed piece either evaluating an existing policy or proposing a policy change. You will need to back up your argument with studies from the readings
or lecture as well as outside research. Check out [https://www.theopedproject.org/](https://www.theopedproject.org/) for examples.

A first draft will be due on **Friday, November 15**. It will then be randomly assigned to your fellow classmates for comments. The final draft will be due on **Monday, December 9** (automatic 24-hour grace period for submitting the report in case of emergencies).

**Extra credit:** Forward us an email showing that you sent your op-ed to an online or print publication, seeking to have it published and you will receive 5 points on this assignment. Actual publication is cause for celebration!

5. **Peer Review of Op-Ed Draft (5%)**: You will be randomly assigned an op-ed first draft of a fellow classmate. Help them improve their draft for publication by pointing out where they can improve their arguments and evidence. Constructive feedback will be due on **Friday, November 29**.

### 6. Course Policies

**Office Hours.** I am delighted to discuss the course materials with you, so I encourage you to come to my office hours. However, particularly in a large class like this one, please do not send me or the TA emails about small administrative points, missed lectures, etc. I would ask that you first ask a classmate; or post a query to our course blog. I appreciate your cooperation.

**Lateness Policy for Memos and Final Assignment.** Note the due dates for your assignments in Section 5. Assignments handed in after the deadline will lose 2 points on a 100-point scale for each day, including weekend days. The first day’s penalty will be incurred by papers that come in on the right day but after the time at which they are due.

**Academic Accommodations.** All individual academic accommodations must be requested through Arts Advising ([http://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising](http://students.arts.ubc.ca/advising)). Accommodations are already included in the course policies (dropping the lowest memo grade, 24-hour grace period for submitting the final assignment), so no further accommodations will be granted by either the TA or instructor. Nevertheless, your success in this class is important to me. We all need accommodations because we all learn differently. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we’ll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

**Access and Diversity.** The university accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the Access and Diversity Unit. Students must register with the Disability Resource Centre to be granted special accommodations for any on-going conditions. For more information, please refer to the following guide: [http://students.ubc.ca/about/access](http://students.ubc.ca/about/access).

**Religious Accommodation.** The university accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. However, you must notify the TA in the first week of class if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. For more information, please refer to the UBC Policy on Religious Holidays.
Children in the Classroom. UBC does not have an official policy, but in this class we will work together to create a welcoming environment for all students, including those with children. Nursing babies and those not old enough to attend daycare are welcome in class as necessary. For older babies and children, sometimes unforeseen disruptions in childcare will place parents in the position of having to miss class to stay home. In these cases, you are welcome to bring your child to class to cover unexpected gaps in childcare, but please remember that this policy is only intended for childcare emergencies and is not meant to be a long term solution.

Academic Integrity. Students in this course are expected to comply with UBC’s policy on academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas. We will use https://www.turnitin.com/ to avoid plagiarism. You should do all readings, attend all lectures, and grapple with the material independently. But you are also encouraged to discuss these materials with other colleagues in and outside of the course.

7. Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1: Introduction and the Big Picture Sept. 4 and 6
- Take the introduction survey before class on Friday, September 6
- Check out the course site and blog on Canvas
- Readings:
  - Collier, Paul (2008). The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What can be Done about it. Chapter 1 (pp. 3 - 13).

Week 2: Conceptualizing and Measuring Development Sept. 9, 11 and 13
- Readings:
  - Listen to: The Invention of Money. This American Life. https://www.thisamericallife.org/423/the-invention-of-money
Week 3: Economic Growth and Inequality

- Readings:

Week 4: Historical Legacies

- Readings:

Week 5: The Modern State

- Readings:

Week 6: Institutions

- In-Class Midterm Exam 1 on Friday, Oct. 11

- Readings:
Monday, Oct 14: Thanksgiving – No Class

Week 7: Geography and Natural Resources

• Readings:
  – Collier, Paul (2008). The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What can be Done about it. Chapters 3 and 4.
  – Watch: Defying the Resource Curse, with Rajesh Mirchandani and Todd Moss. CGD. [Link](https://www.cgdev.org/blog/defying-resource-curse)

• Review exam, Mid-course evaluations on Friday, Oct 18

Week 8: Divisions and Conflict

• Readings:
  – Collier, Paul (2008). The Bottom Billion: Why the Poorest Countries are Failing and What can be Done about it. Chapter 2.

Week 9: Global Governance and Foreign Aid

• Readings:
  – Listen to: The Lies We Tell About Foreign Aid, Interview with Pablo Yanguas on Goats and Soda: [Link](http://tiny.cc/vp53bz)

Week 10: Information Campaigns and Accountability

• Readings:

Monday, Nov 11: Remembrance Day – No Class

Week 11: Evaluating Development Projects

• Readings:


Week 12: Gender and Development

• In-Class Midterm Exam 2 on Friday, Nov. 22

• Readings:


  – Ng, Edwin and Carles Muntaner (2019). The more women in government, the healthier a population. The Conversation. [http://tiny.cc/bnc4bz](http://tiny.cc/bnc4bz)

Week 13: Democratic Choice!

• During Mid-course evaluations, we will have a class vote on a topic intersected with development this last week should focus on. Options include: Environment, Indigenous Movements, Trade, Migration, Microcredit and Savings, Mobile Technology

• Readings tbd

8. Acknowledgement

UBCs Point Grey Campus is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Musqueam people. The land it is situated on has always been a place of learning for the Musqueam people, who for millennia have passed on in their culture, history, and traditions from one generation to the next on this site.