14.740x Foundations of Development Policy: Advanced Economic Development

Syllabus and Reading List

Instructors:

- Professor Abhijit V. Banerjee
- Professor Esther Duflo
- Professor Benjamin Olken
- Course Website:

 $\underline{https://www.edx.org/course/foundations-development-} \ \ \underline{policy-advanced-mitx-14-740x}$

Course Description:

In this course, we will study the different facets of human development: education, health, gender, the family, land relations, risk, informal and formal norms, public policy and institutions. While studying each of these topics, we will ask: What determines the decisions of poor households in developing countries? What constraints are they subject to? Is there a scope for policy (by government, international organizations, or NGOs)? What policies have been tried out? Have they been successful? At the time, you will be exposed to modern empirical methods in economics, and in particular to Randomized Control Trials: throughout the course, we will expose you to all the facets of these projects, from experimental design to ethical issues to data collection and analysis.

This Course and the MicroMasters:

This course is part of the new MITx MicroMasters in Data, Economics, and Development Policy (DEDP). The program, which consists of five online classes and proctored exams, is co-designed and run by MIT's Department of Economics and the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global leader in conducting randomized evaluations to test and improve the effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing poverty. The MicroMasters program is intended for learners who are interested in building a full set of tools and skills required for data analysis in the social sciences, understanding the problems facing the world's poor, and learning how to design and evaluate social policies that strive to solve them. You can learn more about this program by visiting the new MITx MicroMasters portal. We hope that many of you will decide to join us as part of the first MicroMasters cohort!

Prerequisites:

Math: You should be prepared to keep up with an approach to economics that is somewhat mathematical. We suggest that you have taken high school calculus or the equivalent. We will use algebra in the lectures, problem sets, and exams.

Statistics: You should also have some basic understanding of statistics. For

example, if you are not familiar with what a regression is, this class may be very challenging for you. In contrast to standard intermediate/introductory microeconomics courses, this is a heavily empirical class. For each topic, we will study several concrete examples chosen from around the world, and use statistics to understand these examples quantitatively.

Econometrics: Econometrics is not a prerequisite for this class, but you may be expected to familiarize yourself with basic econometric methods on your own. We will go over many of the relevant econometrics material in class in detail, but this coverage may be too quick for a first exposure to the material.

Lectures and Time Commitment:

The material for each topic will be posted weekly, and you should keep pace with the rest of the class. There will be about two lectures per week. You will have access to videos of the lecture presented in short segments (8-10 minutes on average), followed by finger exercises to test your understanding of the material. You will also have access to the presentation slides to follow along during the lecture.

The minimum commitment will be approximately 12 hours per week for watching the lectures, doing the readings, and completing the assignments.

Course Tracks:

This course has two tracks:

- You can enroll in this course on the MicroMasters track. If you pay the MicroMasters course fee, pass this online class, and pass an additional in person proctored exam, you will have fulfilled this component of the MicroMasters credential, and you will receive a certificate.
- You can also enroll in this course on the audit track, for free. You will not receive a certificate or credit. However, you can upgrade to the MicroMasters track by paying the course fee throughout the semester.

Please note that there is no longer a \$50 "verified" certificate track, nor is there any free "honor code" certificate track.

Assignments and Grading Scheme:

For each unit of the course, there will be a series of finger exercise questions after each video segment and a homework assignment. Homework assignments will be released on Mondays along with the videos, and will be due Sunday, giving you about a week to complete the assignment. Problem sets will contain empirical exercises, theory exercises, and short-answer written questions. We will provide resources to help you learn how to use R (a free, open source statistical software) to complete these exercises. Problem sets for this class are very important, and can be somewhat time-consuming. In addition, there will be a final exam for this course.

Grades of the edX course are calculated as follows:

• Homework Assignments: 45%

Finger Exercises: 30%Final Online Exam: 25%

Students who are taking this class in pursuit of the **MicroMasters** credential will also have to sit an in-person, proctored exam.

To be eligible to register for the proctored exam, you first have to pass the online component of this class on edX. Your final MicroMasters course grade will be calculated as follows:

edX course: 40%Proctored exam: 60%

Academic Honesty:

We take academic honesty very seriously. You must complete all graded materials by yourself and not engage in any activity that would dishonestly improve your results, or improve or hurt the results of others. You may use only one user account and not let anyone else use your username and/or password. Having two user accounts registered in this course constitutes cheating. We will be monitoring this diligently. Should we become aware of any suspicious activity, we reserve the right to remove course credit, not award a MicroMasters certificate, revoke a MicroMasters certificate, ban you from future MITx Economics classes, and exclude

Course Syllabus and Reading Assignments:

The textbook for the class is Abhijit Banerjee's and Esther Duflo's *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. The publishers have graciously agreed to make the book available in PDF format through the course platform. We also encourage you to purchase a copy of the book here. We will also refer to Debraj Ray's *Development Economics* for some material, although you are not required to buy the book. We will also rely heavily on articles. You are not expected to read every single article in detail, but you are expected to understand the methods used by the authors to reach their conclusions. Two general references for everything we will do, which you should read during the first couple of weeks and refer regularly to, are "Economics Lives of the Poor" (Banerjee and Duflo, 2007) and "What is Middle Class about the Middle Classes?" (Banerjee and Duflo, 2008).

* Note: Required readings are starred

*Note: Please check the online schedule for material release and due dates

UNIT 1: Introduction (Professor Duflo)

- Introduction I: Introduction to 14.740x
- Introduction II: Poverty and Undernutrition
- Readings Assignments
 - o World Development Report
 - o *Poor Economics: Foreword and Chapter 1
 - o Theoretical model: Ray, pp. 272-279; Ray, pp. 489-504

UNIT 2: Nutrition and productivity (Professor Duflo)

- Nutrition I: The Capacity Curve
 - o Methodological theme: The Causality Problem
- Nutrition II: Elasticity of Nutrition
 - o Methodological theme: Randomization Design
- Reading Assignments
 - o *Poor Economics: Chapter 2
 - o Evaluation of "Give Directly": Haushofer and Shapiro (2013)
 - o Giffen Behavior and Subsistence Consumption: Jensen and Miller (2008).
 - o Iron supplements: Thomas et al. (2006)
 - Children nutrition: Deworming Baird, Hicks, Kremer, and Miguel (2012)
 - o Iron supplement for adolescents: Chong et al. (2014)
- (Optional) Documentary Video: "The Name of the Disease"
 - o Available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOenEuclS30
- (Optional) Reading Assignments for Health
 - Health Status in Rajasthan: Banerjee, Deaton, and Duflo (2003) A case study (and a movie) that looks at various aspects of health delivery and health status
 - o The demand for health: *Poor Economics*: Chapter 3

UNIT 3: Education (Professor Duflo)

- Education I: Benefits of Education
 - An overview of the problems: Do parents care about education? Can they afford it? What is education good for?
 - What are the benefits of education? The Ghana Secondary School study
 - o Methodological theme: Experiments as an Instrumental Variable
- Education II: Schooling Decisions
 - The determinants of education decisions: The benefits of education, perceptions, information, etc.
 - o Methodological theme: Data Collection
- Readings Assignments
 - o *Poor Economics: Chapter 4
 - o Dizon-Ross (2014)
 - o Jensen (2010), Nguyen (2008)

UNIT 4: Gender (Professor Duflo)

- Gender I: Human Subjects
 - Methodological theme: Human subject protections
- Gender II: Household Bargaining and Gender
- Reading Assignments:
 - o The returns to girls: Jensen (2010)
 - o Norms and perception: Beaman et al. (2012)
 - The possible backlash of economic growth and development: Jayachandran (2015)

UNIT 5: Insurance (Professor Banerjee)

- Insurance I: How the Poor Deal with Risk
 - Agricultural incomes fluctuate enormously during the year and from year to year. Do consumption and investments fluctuate as well, or are households protected from these fluctuations? How costly is risk for poor households?
- Insurance II: Mutual Insurance in the Village Economy
- Reading Assignments:
 - o Poor Economics, Chapter 6
 - o Ray, chapter 15
 - o Insurance is only partial: the consumption of household members in Cote d'Ivoire is linked to their income: Deaton (1997), pp 372-383.
 - *In West Africa, villagers lend to each other and achieve a certain degree of insurance: Udry (1990)
 - o Mutual insurance in the village does not happen in the void. It depends on the strength of local institutions: Townsend (1995).

UNIT 6: Land (Professor Banerjee)

- Land I: Incentives and Effort
- Land II: Limited Liability, Risk Aversion, and Property Rights
- Reading Assignments:
 - o *Why land reform? Banerjee (1999)
 - *A successful tenancy reform in India: Banerjee, Gertler, and Ghatak (2002)

UNIT 7: Credit (Professor Banerjee)

- Credit I: Modeling the Credit Market
- Credit II: Understanding Credit Constraints
- Credit III: The Classic Microcredit Model
- Why does formal credit fail to reach the poor? Why has targeted lending organized by the government not worked? Why do the poor borrow from local moneylenders at very high rates?
- Reading Assignments:
 - o *Poor Economics: Chapter 7 and Chapter 9
 - o *Why do informal moneylenders charge interest rates that are so high?

- Aleem (1990)
- The miracle of microfinance? Banerjee, Duflo, Glennerster, and Kinnan (2015)

UNIT 8: Savings (Professor Banerjee)

- Savings: Behavioral Barriers to Savings
- Reading Assignments
 - o *Poor Economics: Chapter 8
 - *Do poor people save in good times in anticipation of bad times?
 Savings by rice farmers in Thailand: Paxson (1992)
 - o The psychological difficulty to save: Ashraf, Karlan, and Yin (2006) and
 - o *Duflo, Kremer, and Robinson (2011)

UNIT 9: Public Finance (Professor Olken)

- Public Finance I: Taxation
 - **Reading Assignments:** *Khan, Khwaja, and Olken (2014). Pomeranz (2013)
- Public Finance II: Targeting
 - o **Reading Assignments:** *Alatas et al (2012). Alatas et al (2014)
- Public Finance III: Transparency.
 - o Reading Assignment: Banerjee et al (2014).
 - Methodological theme: multi-faceted experimental design

UNIT 10: Political Economy (Professor Olken)

- Political Economy I: Deep Determinants of Development: Macro Evidence
 - Reading Assignments: Institutions: The big picture: *Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson (2001). Nunn (2008). Jones and Olken (2005, 200)
 - Methodological theme: Instrumental variables in a nonexperimental setting
- Political Economy II: Deep Determinants of Development: Micro Evidence
 - o **Reading Assignments:** Institutions: Micro evidence. * Dell (2010).
 - Michalopoulos and Papaioannou (2013)
 - Methodological theme: regression discontinuity

UNIT 11: Corruption (Professor Olken)

- Corruption I: Measuring and Modeling Corruption
- Corruption II: Combating Corruption
- Reading Assignments:
 - o The costs of corruption: *Bertrand, Djankov, Hanna, and Mullainathan (2007). Olken and Barron (2009)
 - o Controlling corruption: *Olken (2007)

References

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