

IDEV*4600: ADVOCATING & EFFECTING CHANGE

International Development Studies
University of Guelph

Fall 2025
Ryan Briggs

Classes: This course will be in-person in MacKinnon 224

Location and time: Tuesday and Thursday, 1-2:20pm

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Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10-11am in MacKinnon 904, or by appointment on Zoom.

Course Description

This course aims to equip students with the knowledge and understanding needed to advocate for, and bring about, change in policy and practice that impact inclusive and sustainable development within government, civil society organizations and the private sector. The course examines the actions and processes through which changes in policy and practice take place, and the barriers that need to be overcome in order to effect such changes. These might include formal legal, political and administrative engagement, use of social media, protest, civil disobedience, etc.

In this course you will advise me on how to do the most good with a \$2,000 donation to a Canadian charity. Everything in the course exists to help you do this well. At the end of the course, the class will vote on where I should donate and then I will make the donation.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, successful students will be able to:

1. Explain and critically assess the core principles of various ethical theories or normative approaches to conceptualizing and measuring welfare.
2. Evaluate the strengths and limitations of project evaluation techniques, including randomized controlled trials in development economics and portfolio approaches combining hard-to-evaluate projects with large upsides.
3. Critically apply cost-effectiveness analysis methods to evaluate charitable interventions.
4. Develop and present evidence-based proposals for allocating money by integrating ethical theory with quantitative and qualitative analysis.
5. Advocate effectively for programs you believe in

Readings

Readings for each week are defined below. All readings are either free and online or posted to Courselink. There is no required textbook.

Assessments

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Speaking intelligently and passionately in class	20	Rolling
In class quizzes on reading content	30	Rolling
Group presentation	25	Nov 18-20
Reflections on group presentation	10	Nov 18-20
Group written proposal	15	Nov 18-20

Speaking intelligently and passionately in class

This is a discussion class. I expect you to attend every class, and I expect you to be engaged in discussion in every class. Extended instructions are online.

In class quizzes on reading content

I will ask “easy” questions about reading content in many classes. I do this because I want to reward people for doing the readings and coming to class. If you do the readings and come to class you will get a good mark on these. I will aim to do 12 of these quizzes and in that case I will drop the lowest 2, so you should be able to safely score 0 on 2 without any overall penalty.

Group written proposal

This is your final written assessment, though in many ways it is just a written document that reinforces the (more important) presentation you will give to the class. You are to explain where you think I should donate the money and why it is the best use of the funds. I expect a combination of philosophy and empirical work, and I reserve the right to assign bonus points for creativity. This will be done in groups. It will be due at the same time as your presentation. Extended instructions will be posted to courselink.

Group presentation

This is your pitch for where I should donate money. I want you to be persuasive but honest. You should expect to take questions from me and from the class afterwards. This will be done in groups. Extended instructions will be posted to courselink.

Reflections on group presentations

On the day that you do not present, you will submit to me a 1-page “peer review” of one of the presentations. You will use the grading rubric, and leave a numeric grade as well as your comments. Your assigned grade will not influence the grade that I assign to the presenting group, but I may report the average of the peer review grades per presentation. Anonymous feedback from the peer reviews will be shared with class. Extended instructions will be posted to courselink.

Weekly Schedule

#	Date	Topic	Readings
1	Sept 4	Introduction to the course	• None
Philosophy			
2	Sept 9	Welfarism as Moral Calculus	• Keller, S. (2009). Welfarism. <i>Philosophy Compass</i> , 4(1), 82-95.
3	Sept 11	Capability approach	• Amartya Sen (1999) <i>Development as Freedom</i> . Chapter 2.
4	Sept 16	Social justice and equity	• Crisp, R., & Pummer, T. (2020). Effective Justice. <i>Journal of Moral Philosophy</i> , 17(4), 398-415.
5	Sept 18	In class discussion/debate	• None
6	Sept 23	Aggregating across people and over time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chappell (2022). <u>The Birth of Population Ethics</u>. • Mukherjee (2024). <u>Consequentialism implies a social discount rate of zero</u>. • Green (2025). <u>No one knows when they don't die</u>. (YouTube)
7	Sept 25	Other moral patients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sebo (2025) The Moral Circle. Chapter 4. • Optional podcast: 80k, <u>Beyond human minds</u>
Application			
8	Sept 30	Estimating direct effects of interventions with experiments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banerjee (2013). <u>Not fired with logic</u>. <i>Hindustan Times</i>. • Glennerster & Takavarasha (2013). <i>Running Randomized Evaluations</i>, Chapter 1.
9	Oct 2	Criticisms of RCTs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bryan (2019). <u>What randomisation can and cannot do: The 2019 Nobel Prize</u> • Pritchett (2017) <u>The Perils of Partial Attribution: Let's All Play for Team Development</u> • Briggs (2025) <u>Can We Trust Social Science Yet?</u>
10	Oct 7	Thinking across outcomes or moral agents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>DALYs and QALYs</u> (YouTube) • GiveWell (2025) <u>Moral Weights</u> • Fischer (2023) <u>Rethink Priorities' Welfare Range Estimates</u> (skim)

11	Oct 9	Introduction to cost-effectiveness analysis in theory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levin, H. M., & McEwan, P. J. (2001). <i>Cost-effectiveness analysis: Methods and applications</i>, 2nd ed. Chapter 6. • Read up to page 129
	Oct 14	Fall Break	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
	Oct 16	I'm at a conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
12	Oct 21	More discussion of cost-effectiveness analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levin, H. M., & McEwan, P. J. (2001). <i>Cost-effectiveness analysis: Methods and applications</i>, 2nd ed. Chapter 6. • Read the whole thing (past page 129)
13	Oct 23	Cost-effectiveness analysis in application, discounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GiveWell (2025) <u>Cost-Effectiveness</u> • GiveWell (2025) <u>How We Produce Impact Estimates</u> • OpenPhil (2025). <u>How we use back-of-the-envelope calculations in our grantmaking</u> • Karnofsky (2016) <u>Why we can't take expected value estimates literally (even when they're unbiased)</u>
14	Oct 28	Baseline expectations about variation in cost-effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Todd (2023) <u>How much do solutions to social problems differ in their effectiveness? A collection of all the studies we could find.</u>
15	Oct 30	Can we do better by accepting more uncertainty? Should we?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dixon (2015) <u>Performance Data and the 'Babe Ruth' Effect in Venture Capital</u> • Hashim (2022) <u>Donating like a startup investor: Hits-based giving, explained</u> • Karnofsky (2016) <u>Hits-Based Giving</u> • Bostrom (2009) <u>Pascal's mugging</u>. <i>Analysis</i>, 69(3), 443–445.
16	Nov 4	Existential risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ord (2020). <i>The Precipice: Existential Risk and the Future of Humanity</i>. Chapter 2. • Thorstad (2024) <u>Exaggerating the risks (Part 17).</u>
17	Nov 6	Criticisms of the general approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Özden (2023) <u>Tensions between different approaches to doing good</u> • Sander (2024) <u>PEPFAR and the Costs of Cost-Benefit Analysis</u>. <i>Asterisk</i>. • McCulloch (2025) <u>Start by accepting change comes from within: a new paradigm for aid</u>

18	Nov 11	Implementing the approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wiblin (2019) <u>A framework for comparing global problems in terms of expected impact</u> • Oehlsen, E. (2024). Philanthropic Cause Prioritization. <i>Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>, 38(2), 63-82.
19	Nov 13	Presentation workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
Presentations and charity selection			
20	Nov 18	Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
21	Nov 20	Presentations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
22	Nov 25	Vote and donation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
23	Nov 27	Debrief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None

Additional important course info

Late Policy

Please turn in your work on time. If you do not, I will deduct 10 percentage points per day late.

AI policy

AI is great. I use it daily, and I think you probably should too. However, it's not *always* great. In particular, leaning too hard on it can make it challenging to learn things for yourself. Secondly, presenting AI-created work as a reflection of your knowledge is cheating. It's hard to catch this kind of cheating when work is done at home, and for this reason (among others) a lot of our assessments will be done in class. While we are having a discussion in class we might sometimes use LLMs, but we will do so transparently.

Policy Statements

I basically have to include these statements. Sorry. I know they're overwhelming.

See: <https://www.uoguelph.ca/vpacademic/iqap/course-outlines/checklist>

Email Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their <uoguelph.ca> e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons, please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. See the Undergraduate Calendar for information on regulations and procedures for Academic Consideration.

Drop Date

Courses that are one semester long must be dropped by the end of the last day of classes; two-semester courses must be dropped by the last day of classes in the second semester. The regulations and procedures for Dropping Courses are available in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Copies of Out-Of-Class Assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required, however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to make a booking at least 14 days in advance, and no later than November 1 (fall), March 1 (winter) or July 1 (summer). Similarly, new or changed accommodations for online quizzes, tests and exams must be approved at least a week ahead of time.

More information: www.uoguelph.ca/sas

Academic Misconduct

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community – faculty, staff, and students – to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that discourages misconduct. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

The [Academic Misconduct Policy](#) is outlined in the Undergraduate Calendar.

Recording of Materials

Presentations which are made in relation to course work—including lectures—cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a classmate or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

Resources

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies and regulations which apply to undergraduate, graduate and diploma programs.

Disclaimer

Please note that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic may necessitate a revision of the format of course offerings, changes in classroom protocols, and academic schedules. Any such changes will be announced via Courselink and/or class email.

This includes on-campus scheduling during the semester, mid-terms and final examination schedules. All University-wide decisions will be posted on the COVID-19 website (<https://news.uoguelph.ca/2019-novel-coronavirus-information/>) and circulated by email.

Illness

Medical notes will not normally be required for singular instances of academic consideration, although students may be required to provide supporting documentation for multiple missed assessments or when involving a large part of a course (e.g., final exam or major assignment).