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Beliefs, Values, and Practices in Development Studies

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ABSTRACT *This article uses a survey of Development Studies (DS) professors and students in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom to answer three questions about academic DS. DS is defined in part by a commitment to improve the world, and the first questions ask if the respondents believe that DS lives up to this defining criteria. The second group of questions asks about the ethical commitments of DS academics and how these commitments inform our research and teaching. Finally, I explore cross-national variation in how we practice DS. I ask about the methods, training, and disciplinary norms of DS academics across the three countries. In asking about beliefs, values, and practices and in exploring cross-national variation in our answers, I seek to both build self-knowledge about DS academics as a cross-national epistemic community and also to encourage self-reflection about how we can harmonise our empirical beliefs, ethical commitments, and professional practices.*

KEYWORDS: international development; academia; ethics; survey research

This paper studies the academic Development Studies (DS) community in three high income and English-speaking countries. Using surveys of students and professors, I answer three questions related to the empirical beliefs, values, and practices of this community. The questions are intended to open conversation around the criteria that define DS as an area of scholarly inquiry and the factors that unite DS scholars as an epistemic community. I also hope to encourage reflection on how we can better align our beliefs, values, and practices.

The first set of questions are about our belief in the ability of DS to achieve its aims. Using paired questions, I compare the beliefs of professors against those of students. I show that both groups are fairly optimistic about the ability of DS to do good. However, I also present evidence suggesting that students become less optimistic about DS as they rise in their studies.

The second question is about the ethical commitments of DS professors and students. DS is defined in part by ethical motivations (Sumner, 2006, 2022; Sumner & Tribe, 2008). However, these motivations are typically not foregrounded or even mentioned in our research or teaching.[1] I show that while DS professors do not foreground ethics in their teaching or research, we claim that ethical commitments are quite important to what we choose to research and that

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they influence how we spend our money. I also show that DS professors tend to hold 'beneficentric' views, placing much weight on efficiently improving global welfare (however defined) (Chappell, forthcoming). Nevertheless, I find some inconsistencies between what DS professors claim to value and how they claim to allocate their money to charity. Drawing on research from the Effective Altruist (EA) community, I suggest that this inconsistency may be explained by DS professors lacking information about the cost-effectiveness of various charity interventions.

Third, I examine how disciplinary norms, practices, and training vary across the three countries in the sample. While each country is marked by some idiosyncratic features, there is quite a lot of agreement between them on questions like journal rankings or expectations around promotion. Despite professors having different disciplinary backgrounds and there being quite different organisational structures across countries, DS scholars in the three countries are quite similar in their beliefs, values, and practices.

1. The academic DS community

Much has been written about DS as an area of inquiry. For example, Sumner (2022) identifies four waves of relevant literature and we have whole books on the topic such as Kothari (2019). While there is 'perennial' debate about what constitutes DS (Copestake, 2015) and that will not be settled here, nevertheless there are commonalities that demarcate DS as an area of inquiry. For example, it focuses on 'developing countries', though definitions here vary and sometimes other countries are additionally included (Sumner, 2022). It also has a normative and applied slant: DS research aims to improve the world (Sumner, 2006, 2022; Sumner & Tribe, 2008).

While we have substantial debate if not agreement on what constitutes DS as an area of inquiry, we know less about the beliefs, values, and practices of its constituent members. Nonetheless these clearly matter for how we should think about DS. For example, while we have ample discussion of the fine distinctions between cross-, multi-, inter-, and transdisciplinary DS research (Moltebrg & Bergstrøm, 2000; Sumner & Tribe, 2008), we have much less evidence and discussion about the disciplines where DS academics received their PhDs or the kinds of research they do. Concretely, the latter must be relevant to the former.

Similarly, we have discussions about the importance of ethics in marking a boundary between area studies and DS—as only the latter is normatively committed to improving the world—but we know little about the actual ethical commitments of DS academics or how these commitments inform their research or teaching. This paper addresses this latter type of question, and it is intended as an opening rather than closing remark on the topic.

I use surveys of professor and students to describe the academic DS community in the Canada, the UK, and USA. I focus on three broad questions. First, I want to know about the beliefs and attitudes of DS scholars and students towards development as a practice and DS as a field of study. Second, I describe the ethical commitments of DS academics and students. If ethical claims are an important marker delineating DS from area studies, then it would be useful to understand the sorts of ethical commitments that are common among DS academics and students. Third, I examine disciplinary norms and expectations and how these vary across the three countries because has evolved differently across them, with the USA not having as coherent of a DS community as the UK or Canada (Sumner, 2006).

This paper is informed by past work on DS as a research and teaching area. On teaching, past work has tended to focus on what and how we teach (Denskus & Esser, 2015; Handler, Edmunds, Daniel, Susan, & Woldu, 2016; Kilby, 2018; McKenzie & Paffhausen, 2018; Woolcock, 2007) or what draws students to DS (Cameron & Haanstra, 2008). The present surveys of professors and students covers some of this topic as well, but I broaden the scope of questions to also cover the factual beliefs and motivations of students. The student survey portion of the article is closest to Child and Manion (2004), who survey upper-year undergraduate DS students in Canada and ask,

among other questions, what motivated them to enrol in a DS program. It also follows in the footsteps of Cameron, Tiessen, Grantham, and Husband-Ceperkovic (2019) and Tiessen, Grantham, and Cameron (2018), who survey DS undergraduates primarily to assess career outcomes.

One prominent finding of Child and Manion (2004, p. 183) was that as undergraduate students progressed through their studies they became 'much more cynical and pessimistic about the future'.[2] The first part of this paper examines this question. The student and professor surveys I use have two features that allow us to examine this question of optimism around DS in both levels and in change across years of study. First, I ask similar, paired questions to the professors and students, allowing us to judge if the students are more pessimistic than the professors. Second, I split many of the student questions by year of study (for the undergraduates), allowing us to see if student views on development change over time.[3]

The second part of the paper focuses on the values or ethical commitments of DS researchers. Despite the quite central role of ethics in international development (Sumner, 2006, 2022), the subject has received rather little attention in development studies (Nef, 2004). Anecdotally, ethical arguments about helping distant people (e.g. Singer, 1972, 2010) seem to have been quite influential among international development academics. For example, some of the first people to pledge to donate at least 10% of their income to highly effective charities through the early EA organisation Giving What We Can are prominent DS academics.[4] Despite this, we both know rather little about the personal ethical commitments of DS academics and have little discussion of ethical commitments or practices in the DS literature.

I show that DS academics subscribe to beneficentric ideals (Chappell, forthcoming) that are quite similar to those of EAs. This is not especially surprising given the applied ethical orientation of DS as a field of inquiry, but the overlap is notable given the dearth of discussion of ethics or EA in DS journals. For example, as of the time of writing, a simple Google Scholar search for 'effective altruism' in *World Development* returns only Gugerty, Mitchell, and Santamarina (2021), who mentions the topic only once in passing.

The third and final portion of the paper answers questions about how we practice DS. It helps us understand the coherence of DS as an area of study and focuses more on how understandings of DS vary across countries. To do this I examine if questions of disciplinary interest, such as journal rankings and the value of various applied research outputs, vary across countries. I also examine variation in features of the professors such as their discipline of PhD and whether they are based in disciplinary or interdisciplinary departments. In doing so, the present article contributes to studies examining the extent to which development studies is in practice interdisciplinary (Loxley, 2004; Madrueño & Tezanos, 2018; Mitra, Palmer, & Vuong, 2020; Tribe & Sumner, 2004) and how it is practiced across countries (Sumner, 2006, 2022; Sumner & Tribe, 2008).

2. Surveying DS professors and students

The majority of the paper is an analysis of a survey of DS professors working in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. A smaller survey of DS students was carried out after the professor survey. The sampling frame construction for the professor survey was straightforward in Canada and the United Kingdom, as both countries have professional academic DS organisations. For Canada, we recorded every university that was listed as a member of the CASID Canadian Consortium for Colleges and University Programs in International Development Studies. For the UK, we recorded all institutional members of the Development Studies Association, plus (after talking with colleagues in the United Kingdom) Cambridge, Bristol, Bath, and King's College London. We then visited the webpage of each listed universtiy and located the academic DS unit and then recorded the name and email address of every person listed as any kind of affiliated faculty.[5]

The United States lacks a similar professional DS organisation, so for the US we took two approaches. First, we recorded all 4-year universities that gave BA or advanced degrees and that had a program categorised as 'Development Economics and International Development' or 'International/Globalization Studies' or 'International Relations and Affairs' on College Navigator (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). Then, we recorded all Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA) member schools. For each recorded university, we then had a two-stage process. First, we Googled the name of the university and a series of keywords in order to discover if the university had a DS program.[6] Then if they did, we recorded all associated faculty in a manner similar to that of Canada and the UK. In total, we checked over 650 American universities, of which 249 had a DS program.

Probably the main drawback of this approach is that it will miss professors who teach DS content but are not in DS programs. The end result of this process was a list of 2,653 professors plus contact information, of which 410 answered at least some of the questions for a response rate of 15 percent.[7]

About one-fifth of the professor sample was located in Canada and just under half was based in the United States, with the remainder from the UK.[8] About 40 percent of the sample is female (Supplementary Materials Table SI-7). About three-quarters of the professors were born in high income countries, and about 10 percent were born in low income countries (Supplementary Materials Table SI-8). There is no interesting variation on these dimensions across countries.

At the end of the professor survey, respondents had the option to volunteer to field a survey of students in their programs or classes in Fall of 2022. In Canada, the survey was conducted at 2 universities and had 52 respondents. In the United States, the survey was conducted at 4 universities and had 96 respondents. The UK student survey had low single digit responses and was dropped. It is prudent to be somewhat sceptical of the student survey results, given that the sample comes from only a few universities.

The pooled student sample is 70 percent female (Supplementary Materials Table SI-14) and 80 percent undergraduate (Supplementary Materials Table SI-16). 60 percent of the sample was born in a high income country, and 10 percent was born in a low income country (Supplementary Materials Table SI-15). The most common majors were DS or international studies (Supplementary Materials Figure SI-10).

3. Beliefs about DS

The first set of substantive questions were aimed at gauging one's degree of optimism or pessimism about development. I did this with questions at the personal level, the national level, and questions aimed squarely at DS and its ability to achieve its goal of generating useful knowledge directed towards improving the world.[9] The questions were fielded to both professors and students. The answers to all questions are presented in Figure 1, and are split by country and whether the respondent was a student or professor.

The question about personal optimism asks how much the respondent agrees that their life will on net have a positive impact on the world. Across all countries the professors and students respond similarly. They generally agree with this statement.

The second question asks about whether or not the respondent agrees that on net their country's aid helps people in poorer countries. There is general but somewhat weaker agreement with the statement. A little over a quarter of professors in Canada and the US expressed at least some disagreement with the claim that on net their national aid programs help people in poorer countries, with professors in the UK feeling somewhat better about their aid.[10]

The final question asks whether or not the respondent agrees that it is important to research and teach about international development because this knowledge helps people to do good in the world. The students were somewhat more optimistic than the professors, but generally again there is strong agreement with this statement.

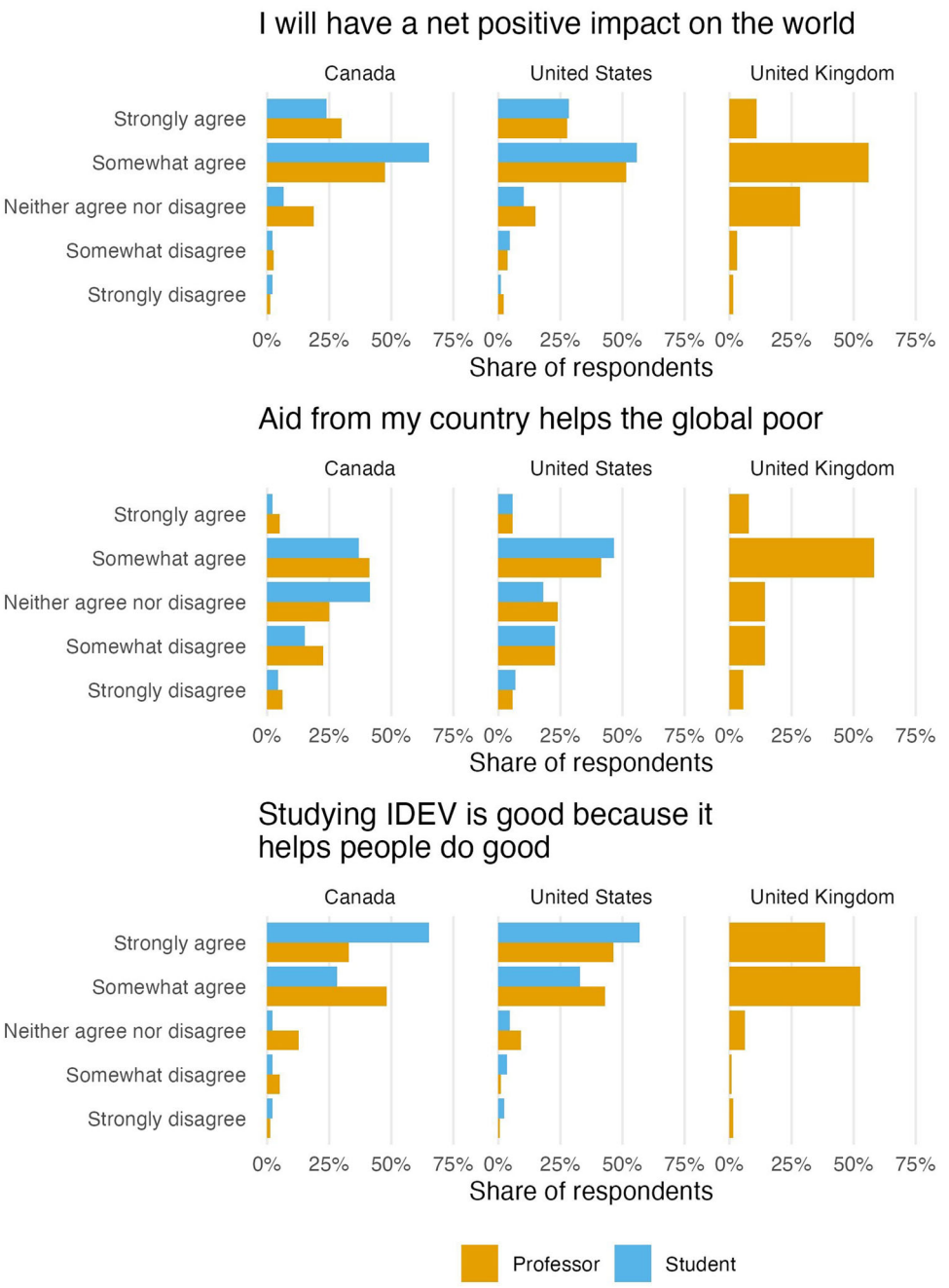

Figure 1. Optimism about DS.

The above results pool all students together, but there might be interesting variation by how long someone has been studying DS. To examine this I split the student results by their year of study in order to see if upper year students are more optimistic or pessimistic than new students. The first two questions show little variation over time. There is some evidence that as students rise in their program they are less likely to think that a DS education is good because it helps people to do good (see Supplementary Materials Figure SI-8 and Supplementary Materials Table SI-6).

In sum, across all three counties most students and professors have a positive view of their ability to enact change and the impact of a DS education. Canadians and Americans are

lukewarm about their countries' aid, with only about half thinking that it on net helps people in poorer countries.

I next asked the professors to gauge whether or not they felt that incoming students and graduating students were overly optimistic or pessimistic about their ability to help the global poor. The results are in Figure 2. Across all countries and levels of study, professors believe that students start overly optimistic. The professors believe that students graduate reasonably well calibrated, though in Canada about a quarter of the professors that primarily teach undergraduates think that their students end up too pessimistic.

I probe this same concept another way in Figure 3 by asking whether the professors thought that graduating students were more likely to be naive and unable to think critically about development or paralysed by critique, or if neither was at all likely.[11] Here the responses are different. Especially at the undergraduate level, and across all countries, 40% or more of the professors think that students are more likely to be paralysed by critique than naive and uncritical. This percentage is about the same or larger than the percentage that thought that neither outcome was at all likely.

Finally, I examined student sentiment towards DS by asking them about their ideal jobs after graduation (Figure 4).[12] Students have quite different career goals across countries and level of study. Likely reflecting the professional nature of their MA programs, American graduate students overwhelmingly are hoping to do practical DS work after graduation. There is no similar standout category among Canadian graduate students. Canadian undergraduates want practical or theoretical (academic) work in DS after graduation (a finding similar to that of Child and Manion (2004)), but this strong skew is not found in the American undergraduates.

As before, we can split this question by the student's year of study to see whether or not their desire to work in DS fades during their study. If we focus only on undergraduates and split students by year, one can see a nearly monotonic decline in interest in practical DS work as one moves from first year to their fourth year (Supplementary Materials Figure SI-9).

Reading across all of the above questions, it seems that students tend to start their studies wildly optimistic about DS and then in some cases mildly over-correct towards pessimism by the time of graduation. It is a bit difficult to pick apart the difference between over-optimism that turns into realism versus realism that turns into nihilism, but a sizable minority of professors, especially those in Canada, thought that many students were finishing their programs too negative on the prospects for development and their ability to enact positive change. We thus

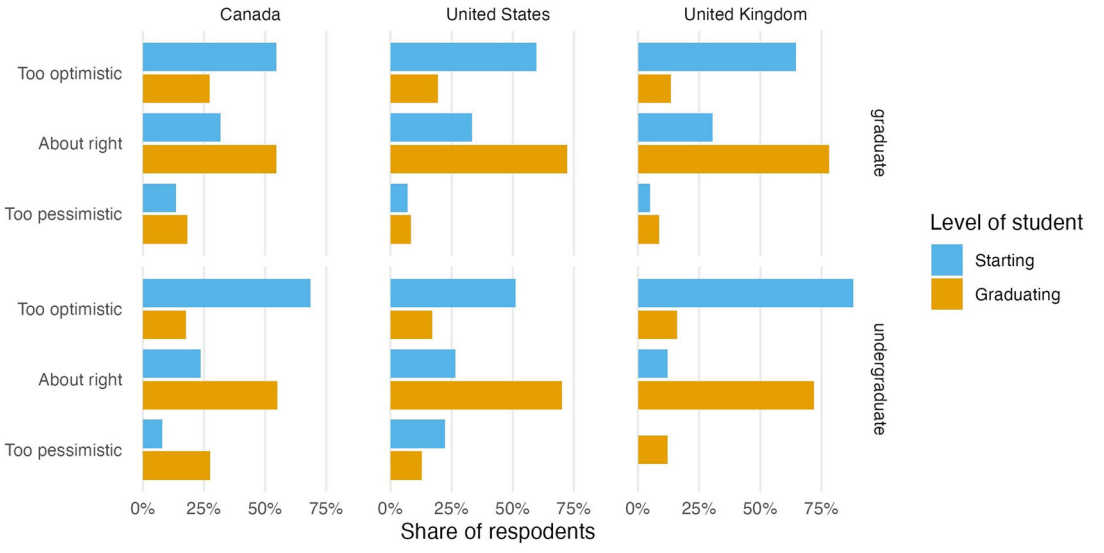

Figure 2. Do profs think that students are too optimistic or pessimistic about DS?

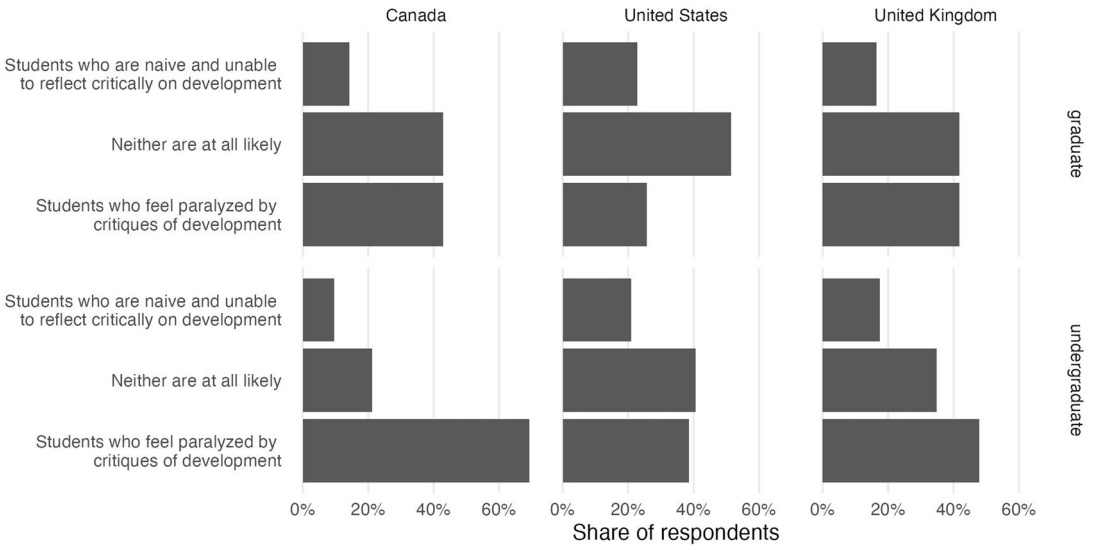

Figure 3. Do profs think that graduating students are miscalibrated?

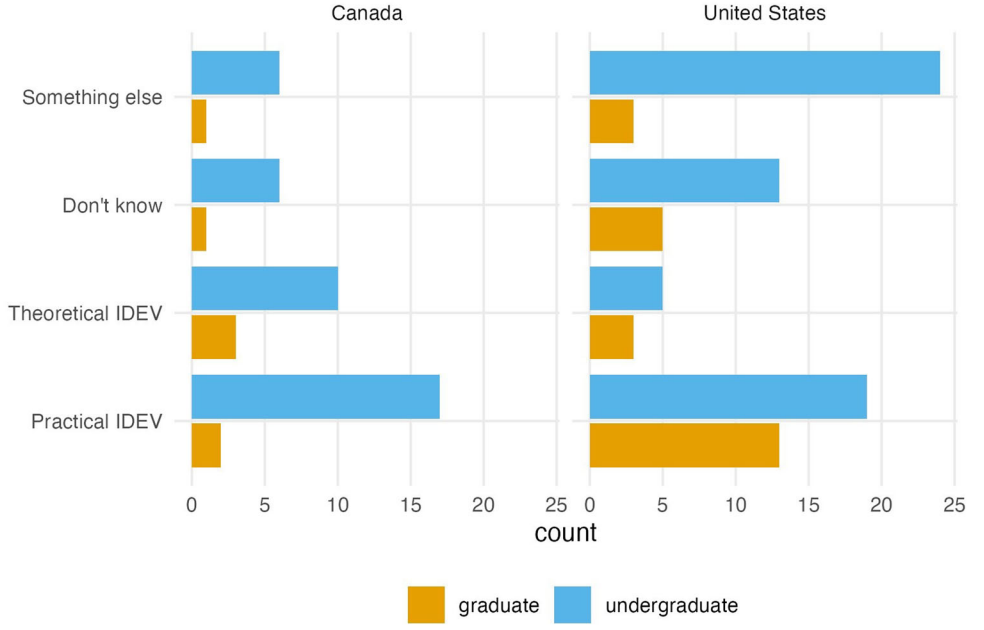

Figure 4. Preferred careers for students.

seem to be modestly successful at a key challenge identified in Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen (2013, p. 357), which was to 'help students to re-think ideas they have acquired through [...] 'spectacular' but overly simplistic representations of development and poverty without undermining their interest in global issues and convictions that the world can and should be more equitable, just and ecologically sustainable'.

4. Values and ethics

This next section moves from questions around personal optimism or views of the DS enterprise towards questions of personal ethics. This is interesting as a main source of differentiation

between DS and area studies or international studies is thought to be the ethical commitments underlying DS. To investigate if this run deeper than disciplinary boundaries and into personal beliefs, I first examine the ethical commitments of DS faculty and students. I then examine how these beliefs are put into practice by asking questions about how people spend their money and time.

Past research on students has suggested that one central concern motivating them to take DS courses is a concern with the welfare of distant people (Child & Manion, 2004). I test this in my sample in a few ways. First, I asked the professors what fraction of a typical DS cohort enrols because they feel a moral imperative to help the global poor (Figure 5). The professors thought the number was high, especially among the professors that typically taught graduate students. I also asked my student respondents whether or not they decided to study DS because they felt a moral imperative to help the global poor. About half of Canadian students and American undergraduates said they did. (Supplementary Materials Table SI-5).[13] This number rose to almost 80 percent when looking only at American graduate students.

Second, I ask respondents two questions to judge their commitment to 'beneficentrism', which is 'the view that promoting the general welfare is deeply important, and should be amongst one's central life projects' (Chappell, forthcoming). The first question is about one's commitment to *impartial beneficence*, which is the idea that one should consider the well-being of each moral agent as equally important. I use a question drawn from Kahane et al. (2018), who examine the moral intuitions underlying utilitarianism. Using surveys and factor analysis, they find that utilitarianism is a bundle of distinct intuitions, one of which is impartial beneficence. I ask respondents one of their impartial beneficence questions, which asks respondents the extent to which they agree with the statement 'From a moral perspective, people should care about the well-being of all human beings on the planet equally; they should not favour the well-being of people who are especially close to them either physically or emotionally' (Kahane et al., 2018, p. 146).

The second beneficentric question asks about the importance of considering magnitudes of impact when doing good.[14] This question taps into whether or not people have the intuition, often associated with utilitarians or effective altruists, that moral behaviour is not only about

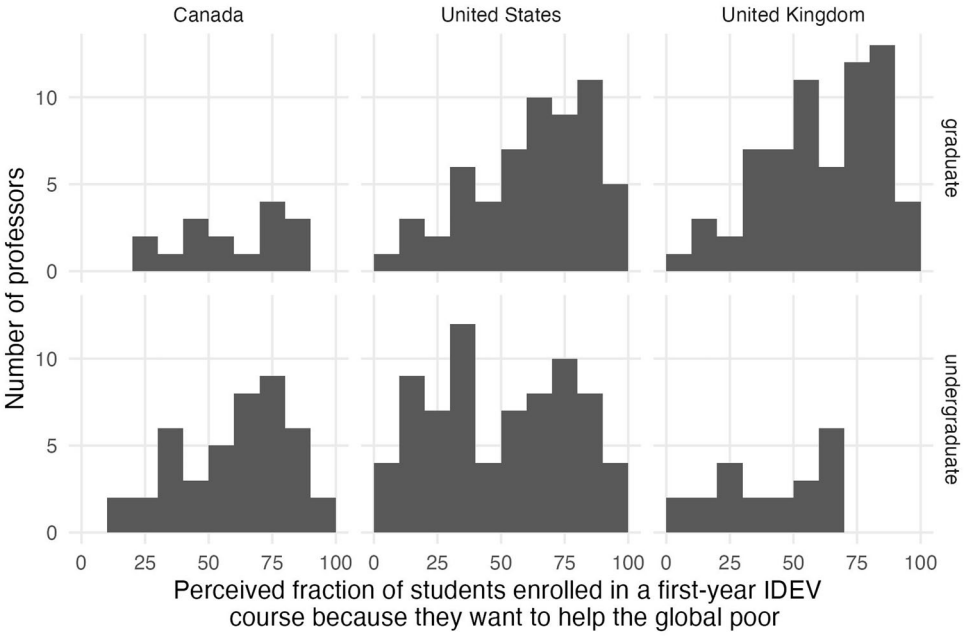

Figure 5. Perceived share of students in DS wanting to help the global poor.

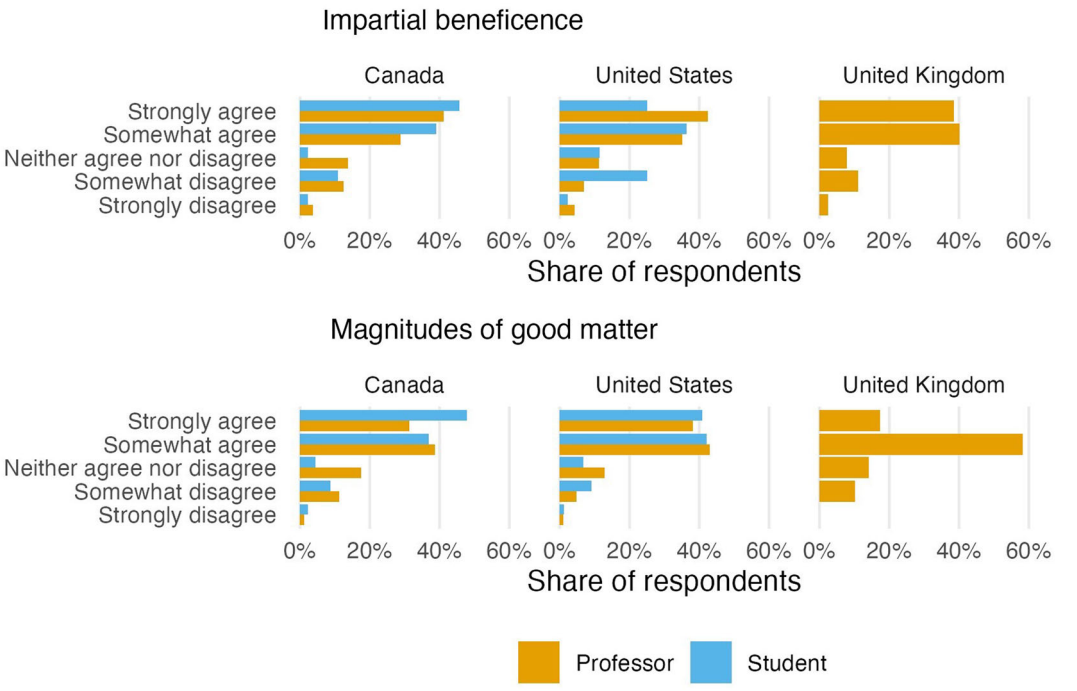

Figure 6. Agreement with beneficentric values.

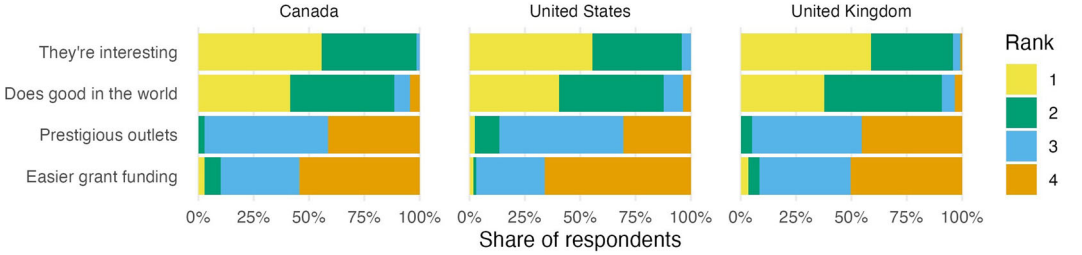

Figure 7. Research motivations for DS professors.

doing something that is more positive than negative but rather involves a careful consideration of the *magnitude* of good one can do. Results are in Figure 6.

There is fairly strong agreement with both claims.[15] Most of the professors and students think that from a moral perspective one should care equally about people regardless of their distance from you and that when giving one should care about how much good they do and not merely whether they do good. This is notable as these beliefs do not seem popular in general (Genç, Knowles, & Sullivan, 2021).

5. Putting ethics into practice

The academic DS community shares the values of impartial beneficence and a concern with magnitudes of good. However, it is unclear whether these actions translate into how we do our research or use our money. To examine this, I asked questions about how professors select research projects and about how and why students and professors give to charity.

For selecting research projects, the professors were given four options to rank as shown in Figure 7. Ethical consideration plays a very important role in why DS professors choose

research problems. About 40% of professors ranked 'I think working on these topics has the potential to do a lot of good in the world' as the most important consideration to them, and about 90% of professors said it was the first or second most important consideration. The only consideration to score higher was that they found the research problem interesting. Probability of publishing in prestigious outlets or the ease of securing grant funding are much less important. The responses are quite similar across countries.

Next, I asked the professors about their private charitable giving, which gives us a behavioural way to assess commitments to beneficentrism. Over 90% of the surveyed professors made a charitable donation in the past year (Supplementary Materials Table SI-2). Of those that gave to charity at least once in the past year, 80% made at least one donation to a charity that primarily works in a low or middle income country (Supplementary Materials Table SI-3). This pattern of giving accords well with the beneficentric results.

However, when asked why they chose the charities that they did, the professors were most likely to say that it was due to having a personal connection to the cause (see Supplementary Materials Figures SI-1 and SI-2). Their second most selected choice was having a personal connection to the specific charity. Maximizing cost-effectiveness came third and was about as important a factor as 'news or current events'. When forced to choose a single most important factor, the professors were over three times more likely to select one of the two 'personal connection' responses than maximizing cost-effectiveness. This is somewhat surprising, given that the professors mostly agree that when one is trying to do good they should care about the magnitude of good that they do.

One possible explanation for this divergence between beliefs and actions is that most professors, like the general public (Caviola et al., 2020), incorrectly believe that the distribution of cost-effectiveness for charities helping the global poor is fairly compressed.[16] If this is the case then one could do roughly the same amount of good regardless of which charity one selected, and so one could give weight to other considerations without much affecting the magnitude of good one is doing. They may also think that they can do a great deal of good with relatively little money. Holding both of these beliefs would likely limit the appeal of prioritising cost-effectiveness, even for people who think that it is an important consideration.

I tested this explanation with two questions and results are shown in Table 1. The first is taken from Caviola et al. (2020) and asks professors to estimate how much more effective is the most cost-effective (in terms of lives saved) global health charity than an average one. The median answer was 3–4x. This answer is close to answers from the general public, and is very far from the approximately 100x estimates given by experts in global poverty charity effectiveness (Caviola et al., 2020; Ord, 2013). There is of course a lot of error around this informed 100x estimate, so I also examined the share of answers within an order of magnitude of the anchoring 100x answer. Only about 10-20% of professors were within an order of magnitude of the 100x answer. Even if one believes that the 100x estimate is itself 10x too large, it still seems likely that the academic DS community greatly underestimates the benefits that we could produce by caring more about cost-effectiveness in our giving.

The second question asked the professors to consider all charities currently working to save the lives of children, and then to imagine the most cost-effective one. It then asked how much would they need to donate to this charity in order to expect that they would save the life of one child. Again this is quite hard to estimate, and I use the rounded GiveWell benchmark of USD

Table 1. Cost-effectiveness results

Country	Q1 median	10x < Answer < 1000x	Q2 median	$500 < Answer < 50k
Canada	3x	0.11	90 USD	0.22
United States	4x	0.20	100 USD	0.20
United Kingdom	3.5x	0.18	65 USD	0.09

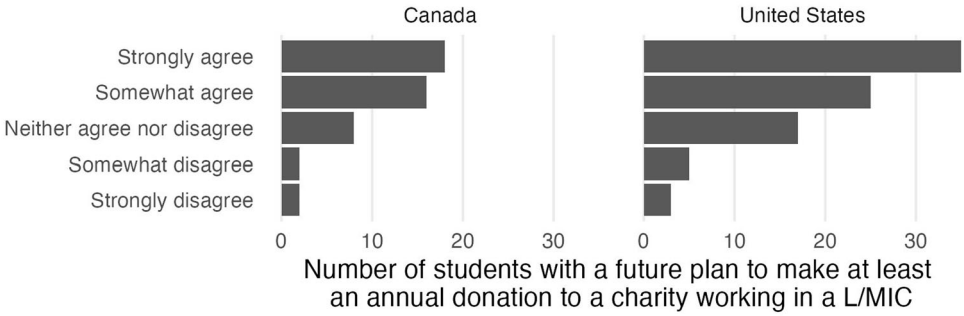

Figure 8. Student charity plans.

5,000.[17] As before, I show the median estimate and the share of answers within an order of magnitude of the best-guess answer. The professors think the cost to save a life is about $100 USD, with no important differences across countries. I am unaware of any serious cost-effectiveness estimate of a currently-running program that is this low.[18] Again only about 10–20% of professors selected an answer that was within an order of magnitude of the GiveWell estimate. It seems again that the DS professors are badly calibrated on this question. These inaccurate factual beliefs about charity effectiveness may help to explain why DS professors that are committed to impartial beneficence and care about how much good they do nevertheless give to charities to which they have a personal connection rather than ones with greater cost-effectiveness.

I did not ask DS students if they gave to charity as many of them likely had tight budgets. Instead, I asked if they planned to give to charity in the future. DS students in both Canada and the United States plan to give to charity later in their lives (Figure 8). However, this overall desire to give is highest among first-year undergraduate students (where it is quite high) and lowest among fourth-year students (Supplementary Materials Figure SI-7). This evidence is again consistent with a view where students start their studies more optimistic about their ability to do good via charity than when they graduate. However, this is because students start with a strong commitment to give that fades and not because they graduate planning not to give (see Supplementary Materials Table SI-6 and Supplementary Materials Figure SI-7).

This section has shown that moral commitments do not simply mark the boundary between DS and area or international studies, they also shape how DS professors spend their time and money. About 40% of professors said that the most important consideration when they select research problems is doing good in the world, with another half of professors ranking doing good second. Most DS professors gave to a charity working in a middle or low-income country in the past year. However, when it comes to selecting a specific charity they do it based on personal connections to the charity or cause. This may be due to misperceptions about the value of selecting a highly effective charity or the cost associated with doing a lot of good. Students overwhelmingly plan to give to charity later in their lives, though this effect seems to fade somewhat as they move towards graduation.

6. How DS is practiced

This final section examines cross-national variation in how DS is studied, taught, and organised. As noted above, the (lack of) structure of DS as a field in the United States means that one might expect the Americans to stand out relative to Canada and the UK. The data can also speak to perennial questions about the role and distribution of disciplines in DS, our views about what topics form the core of a DS course, and the degree to which DS rewards applied research. While I note differences across countries, there is quite a bit of cross-national agreement on these questions.

Table 2. Most influential journals according to IDEV professors

Journal	Canada	USA	UK
World Development	37	89	61
Development and Change	23	16	35
Journal of Development Economics	8	42	8
Journal of Development Studies	5	26	26
Third World Quarterly	13	14	18
American Economic Review	1	12	4
Journal of International Development	0	9	6
Development in Practice	3	6	4
Journal of Peasant Studies	9	2	2
Studies in Comparative International Development	2	8	3
Development Policy Review	1	4	6

A plurality of DS professors in Canada have a PhD in political science, with no clear second place discipline (Supplementary Materials Table SI-9). In the United States, political science is again the most common discipline of PhD, with economics a close second.[19] In the UK the largest discipline of PhD is development studies.[20] Most professors in the United States were primarily based in a disciplinary department, while most in Canada and the UK were primarily in interdisciplinary departments or schools (Supplementary Materials Table SI-10). The sample has primarily tenured or tenure track faculty.[21] In the UK, most of the professors primarily taught in graduate programs, while in Canada most taught in undergraduate. The split was more balanced the United States (Supplementary Materials Table SI-12).

On research methods, I asked the professors which broad research method best described their most recent work. Most professors in the sample use qualitative methods but there is wide variation across countries (Supplementary Materials Table SI-13). In Canada and the United Kingdom, between five and six times as many professors use either qualitative methods or interpretive or ethnographic methods as use statistical methods. In the United States statistical methods are a plurality. Only 5 percent of the professors in the survey engage in game theory, legal analysis, or ethical analysis.

The survey asked professors to list, in no particular order, up to three disciplinary or interdisciplinary journals that have the greatest influence on the way development studies scholars think about international development.[22] This question reveals how development studies professors understand the relative importance of our journals and how this varies across countries. The results are shown in Table 2, which shows all journals that were listed 10 or more times in total.

The most prominent result is the extent to which *World Development* stands out from the pack, a result in line with Madrueño and Tezanos (2018). After comes the more critical *Development and Change,* followed by the top economics subfield journal *Journal of Development Economics* and the more generalist development studies *Journal Of Development Studies* and critical *Third World Quarterly*. The rank of the economics journals in the list is driven largely by the Americans, which makes sense given the number of economists in that sample. This affirms the idea that American DS is more disciplinary and closely tied to development economics.

There was a fairly long tail of journals that did not make the table. 114 journals were listed fewer than 10 times across all countries, though collectively these made up only 30 percent of the total number of entries.

To assess what professors understood to be the core of DS, I presented them with a (non-exhaustive) list of topics and asked them which would receive at least 30 minutes of class time in a 1 semester or equivalent introductory international development course. They had the

option of selecting more than one topic. As noted above, professors had the option to skip questions so the relative frequency of topic selection is more informative than the absolute number. The results are shown in Figure 9 and are ordered according to the total number of times they were selected.

There is a good deal of agreement in the ranking of course topics across countries, suggesting a good deal of agreement in what constitutes the key parts of DS across countries. Climate change was the most selected topic overall, and it is near or at the top of the list for all countries. This is interesting as it epitomises a 'global' topic affecting all countries rather than one that only affects developing ones. Moral philosophy and effective altruism were the least likely topics to receive 30 minutes of coverage, being overall about 4 times less likely to be covered than climate change. This is interesting as other lines of research suggest that ethics is a key part of DS (Sumner, 2006, 2022).

Foreign aid was popular overall but relatively more popular in Canada while poverty traps are somewhat more popular in the US. 'Decolonizing development or related ideas' and post-development are somewhat less popular in the US.[23] One can read the results as showing that Americans having a more economic slant to their understanding of DS, but in general the results are quite similar across countries.

Finally, I asked the professors how various kinds of research output was valued by their peers at the time of a tenure decision (or the equivalent).[24] The outputs were scaled relative to an article in a top disciplinary journal, so 100 means the output is valued the same. This question is important for two reasons. First, it helps us understand how we treat disciplinary vs. interdisciplinary DS knowledge. Second, DS is thought to have 'a shared commitment to the practical or policy relevance of teaching and research' (Sumner, 2006, p. 645), but it is unclear how seriously that commitment is taken. In both cases, looking at how we consider various research outputs at the time of promotion can give a clear signal of our priorities. The results are shown in Figure 10.

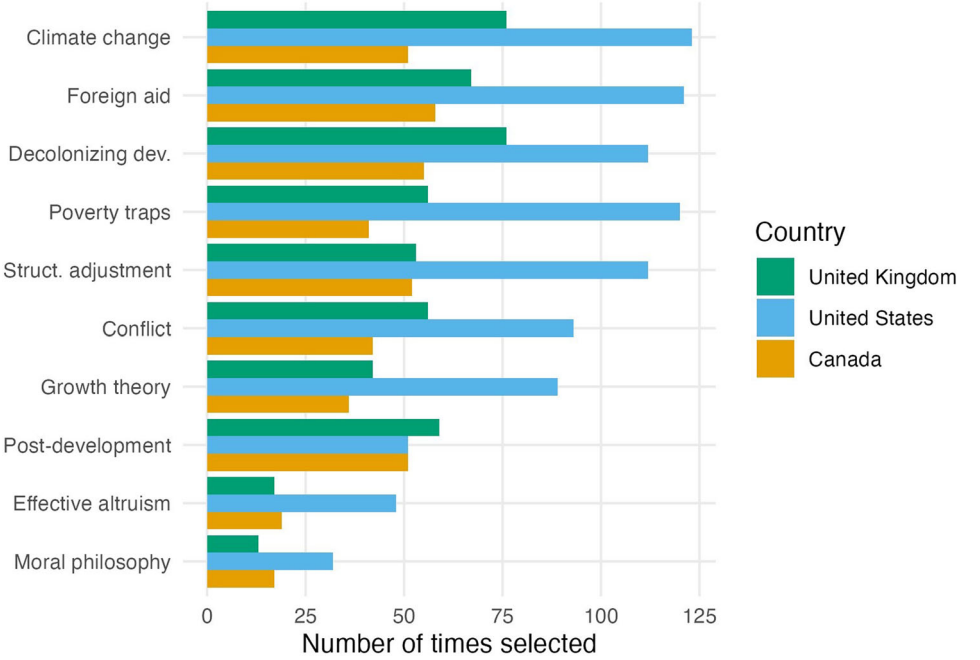

Figure 9. Frequency of topics covered in intro DS course.

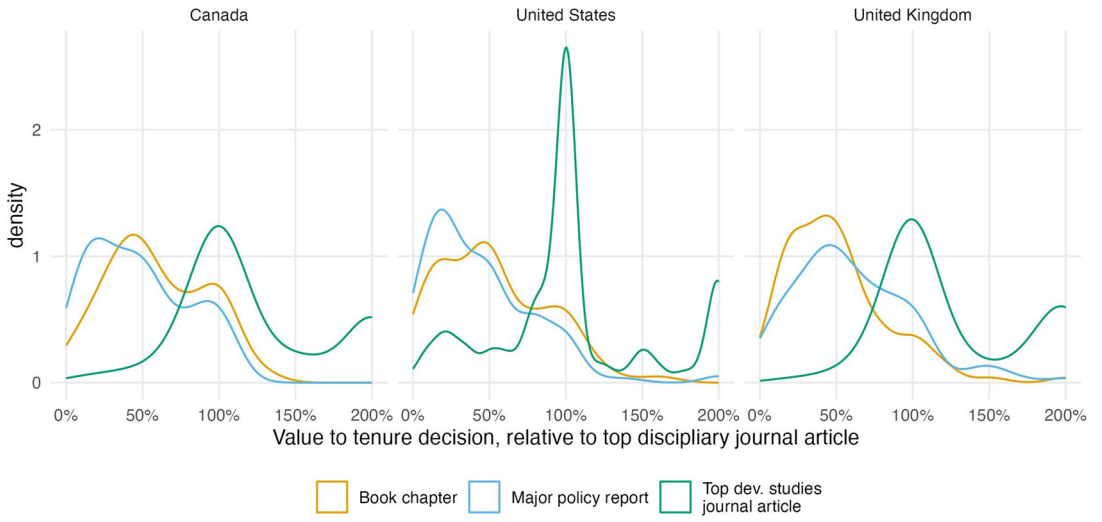

Figure 10. Value of various research outputs for tenure (or equivalent).

When it comes to tenure or an equivalent career decision, DS academics say that articles in top development studies journals, such as those in Table 2, are generally viewed as counting the same or higher in value than articles in top disciplinary journals. We seem to take interdisciplinary work seriously. There is also agreement across countries that an (applied) major policy report counts for about the same as a chapter in an edited book and has around half of the value of a top disciplinary journal article. While DS may be motivated by applied concerns, we do not reward applied work in our tenure or promotion decisions.

The responses are generally similar across countries, with the main exception being that Americans most strongly feel that an article in a top development studies journal is valued the same as one in a top disciplinary journal.

7. Conclusion

This paper has presented new information about the beliefs, values, and practices of DS academics. DS is fundamentally about creating knowledge that can be usefully applied to make progress towards the normative goal of development (Sumner, 2006, 2022). While there is not a crisis of pessimism among DS students, there is evidence that students decline in their optimism about DS as they move through their studies. This may well be due to students starting with inflated expectations, though at least some of results caution against this interpretation. For example, in Canada professors that primarily teach undergrads think that about 25% of them graduate too pessimistic about DS (Figure 2). Additionally across all countries and levels of education, the professors always think students are more likely to graduate paralysed by critique than naive and uncritical about DS (Figure 3). These results are thus largely but not uniformly positive. There are probably some areas where we over-correct when we try to move incoming DS students from idealised optimism to hardened realism.

DS academics express agreement with moral impartiality and with caring about how much good they do. These commitments are put into action when professors decide on research projects. Most of the professors give at least annually to charities that work in low or middle income countries and most of the students plan to give to charity later in life and many plan to work in DS. These values and actions align the DS community closely with EA, although few in DS know much about it. Only about a quarter of sampled DS professors said that they knew enough about EA to discuss it with a friend (Supplementary Materials Table SI-1).

This lack of knowledge of EA is unfortunate, as it may explain why professors that claim to believe fairly strongly in beneficentrism (Chappell, forthcoming) nevertheless claim to care very little about cost effectiveness when they give to charity. This would make sense if cost effectiveness barely varied across charities. While the professors believe this to be the case (Table 1), they are quite likely mistaken.[25] There are likely places where both communities could learn from the other.

Many students enrol in DS programs or courses because they feel a moral imperative to help the global poor. While the academic DS community clearly cares about ethics, we do not talk about it in the classroom. Moral philosophy was the topic least likely to be given at least 30 minutes in an introductory DS course. It is probably fair to say that we do not preach what we practice.

While there are differences in who does DS across countries, for example the Americans have many more economists, in general these differences are overshadowed by how much is shared. Most DS professors were born in high income countries. In Canada and the US, political scientists make up a large share of all DS professors. While not achieving parity with men, women make up a little over 40% of the surveyed professors in each country. Qualitative research predominates in Canada and the UK, while statistical research is a plurality in the US.

There is cross-national agreement on journal rankings, teaching topics, and the value of various outputs for promotion. Interdisciplinary work is taken seriously, as articles in top DS journals are considered to be about as valuable to promotion as those in top disciplinary journals. Applied work is not highly rewarded, with a major policy report being about as valuable as a chapter in an edited book.

This paper has summarised some key aspects of the beliefs, values, and practices of DS academics. It is hoped that this information will be useful for those in the DS community and for those who interact with it. The present results also suggest that we might benefit from a more informed, ethically engaged, and pragmatically optimistic perspective on development. This might better position us to make meaningful and effective contributions to our area of inquiry, and to the world.

Notes

1. In the words of Cameron et al. (2013, p. 356), 'To the extent that ethical and moral issues enter into Development Studies, the tendency is an under-scrutinised moral compulsion to help'.
2. Child and Manion (2004, p. 183) notes 'If a large percentage of undergraduate IDS students began their degrees full of optimism and hope, many of them will finish their degrees with a kind of bitter cynicism about 'development' in general'. This pessimism was not present in their graduate student sample.
3. I do not follow a panel of students over time and I do not have any kind of identification strategy, so these results are about changes in optimism across cross-sections of students split by years.
4. Rachel Glennerster and Michael Kremer where the 12th people to sign the pledge. The list of the first pledgers can be seen at: https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/about-us/members.
5. This includes teaching faculty or associated researchers. We did not record administrative staff, but we did include adjuncts or people pre-PhD so long as they taught in the program (there were not many cases like this).
6. The keywords were: 'international development', 'global development', and 'development studies'.
7. In Canada the survey was sent to 318 professors from 26 universities. In the UK it was sent to 859 professors from 26 universities. The USA had 1,407 professors from 249 universities. 351 respondents finished the survey. Respondents could skip most questions, so many question have fewer than 410 respondents. When calculating percentages, I drop people who skipped a question. This is typically inconsequential and ensures that the percentages add up to 100.
8. Supporting evidence (tables, figures) is in the appendices. To avoid awkward wording, I assume my samples are random draws from all professors and students. This seems roughly plausible to me, but I have no external information on which to check for balance on key variables, for example.
9. The questions asked the degree to which someone agreed with a statement. The first statement is essentially as shown in Figure 1. The second statement is: On net, [Canada's/the USA's/the UK's] foreign aid programs help people in poorer countries. The final statement was that studying DS is good because it helps people to do good in the world.
10. This would be in line with the evidence on aid efficacy and cross-national poverty targeting, which often shows the UK doing better than the US (Nunnenkamp & Thiele, 2006).

11. The question was 'Think of a capstone international development course at your university, or if one does not exist think of the graduating [undergraduate/graduate] students you know in your international development program. In this group, are there more likely to be students who feel paralysed by critiques of development or students who are naive and unable to reflect critically on development?'
12. The question was 'When you think of future careers that are stretch goals for you—something that is perhaps difficult to attain but attainable with some hard work and luck—what kind of career is currently most desirable to you?' The options are listed in Figure 4.
13. When Canadian undergraduates were asked a similar question in Child and Manion (2004), about half of students selected the similar 'Humanitarian reasons (i.e. concern for social justice; to help others)' as their reason for pursuing a DS program.
14. The question asked people how much they agreed to disagreed with the following prompt: 'When considering whether or not to devote time or money to a cause, one should think not merely about whether one will do good but also about how much good one will do'.
15. One small exception is that about 25% of American DS students somewhat disagreed with impartial beneficence.
16. This is hard to measure directly, but various lines of evidence suggest that variation in cost-effectiveness here is quite large. See for example Ord (2013) or the cost-effectiveness portions in Singer (2010). Caviola et al. (2020) surveys the public, effective altruists, and experts in cost-effectiveness and asks them to estimate how much more effective the most effective charities are than the average charity, among other questions. The public thinks the multiple is about 2x, EAs think it is about 50x, and the experts in cost-effectiveness think it is about 100x, a number which is roughly in line with Ord (2013). It is perhaps worth noting that if the distribution of cost-effectiveness has a heavy right tail, then merely picking a moderately cost-effective organisation is leaving a lot of value on the table. As a motivating example that should not be taken overly literally, in the DCP3 data (Horton, 2017) the median intervention produces 0.44 disability-adjusted life years per $100. The mean is 1.75 and the best intervention is 20 (author's calculations based on Annexe 7 A and using the midpoint for all ranges). If one prioritises doing good then picking the 75th percentile intervention over the 50th doesn't offer much improvement while selecting the top offers a very large improvement over the 75th.
17. As of 2020, this estimate was USD 4500 in current dollars. https://www.givewell.org/cost-to-save-a-life. I ask in the local currency and convert to USD using the exchange rates as of the close of the survey.
18. The lowest serious cost-effectiveness estimate of this type that I am aware of is for seasonal malaria chemoprevention in Niger, where one study put it at USD 530 (Gilmartin et al., 2021). The study looked at seven Sahelian countries, where Niger was lowest and The Gambia was highest at USD 2250.
19. On the low but growing linkages between development economics and development studies, see Mitra et al. (2020).
20. The United Kingdom also had a very large group of respondents selecting 'other', meaning they did not have a PhD in any of the large list of disciplines I offered. See Supplementary Materials Table SI-9.
21. Only 5 percent of the respondents were adjuncts or on annual contracts. This is surely an extreme underestimate relative to all of the professors teaching in DS programs. This bias likely occurred as a result of using a sampling strategy that depended on finding names on university webpages, combined with the apparent fact that universities are less likely to list contingent faculty on their webpages.
22. This question comes from the TRIP project (Maliniak, Oakes, Peterson, & Tierney, 2011). Answers were submitted in a text field, and I cleaned the data to harmonise spellings and abbreviations of journal names.
23. On the rise of 'decolonization' as a buzzword, see Sondarjee and Andrews (2023).
24. This question comes from the TRIP project (Maliniak et al., 2011, Maliniak, Peterson, & Tierney, 2019).
25. See discussion and sources in note 16.

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