

Syllabus: Seminar on the Study of Development Strategies (Fall 2010-Spring 2011)

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Public information on this class: <http://cu-csds.org/ssds-2010-11/>
Paper and data to be posted on courseworks (password protected)

1. Reading: The reading for every week will be based on the research of the guest speaker or the students presenting in the class. 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.

The reading loads are not especially heavy—typically the speaker will provide 1 or 2, perhaps 3 readings that give a sense of their research agenda. But some of the readings are hard. You should aim to read them carefully and reflectively. Before approaching each reading think about what the key questions are for the week and about how the questions from this week relate to what you know from previous weeks. Then skim over the reading to get a sense of the themes it covers, and, before reading further, jot down what questions you hope the reading will be able to answer for you. Next, read the introduction and conclusion. This is normally enough to get a sense of the big picture. Ask yourself: Are the claims in the text surprising? Do you believe them? Can you think of examples of places that do not seem consistent with the logic of the argument? Is the reading answering the questions you hoped it would answer? If not, is it answering more or less interesting questions than you had thought of? Next ask yourself: What types of evidence or arguments would you need to see in order to be convinced of the results?

Now read through the whole text, checking as you go through how the arguments used support the claims of the author. It is rare to find a piece of writing that you agree with entirely. So, as you come across issues that you are not convinced by, write them down and bring them along to class for discussion. Also note when you are pleasantly surprised, when the author produced a convincing argument that you had not thought of.

In all cases, presenters will be encouraged to share data and replication files with the seminar participants in advance so that students can replicate results before class.

2. Participation: The course will alternate between *External* and *Internal* weeks. During *External* weeks, guest speakers will present research to the class. Student research will be presented during *Internal* weeks.

EXTERNAL weeks: Guest speakers will be asked to share data in advance, and students are encouraged to replicate results and submit the results to robustness checks before each class.

- *Every* student will be expected to write a one page response paper in advance of the talk each week. This is due by midnight Wednesday.

- A *team of two* students will be assigned a formal role as discussants and prepare oral and written commentary for the guest speaker. Oral commentary should be 10-15 minutes in length and emphasize key strengths and weaknesses of the author's argument. Written commentary should be approximately 2 pages in length. It should summarize in a paragraph the core contention of the paper and then critique key aspects of the results and what revisions are required to improve it. If presenters share their data in advance, discussants should replicate their results and submit them to robustness checks.

INTERNAL weeks: During Internal weeks, student research will be presented.

- Priority is given to students returning from the field with main results in hand. The student will provide data and replication files to the class in advance but will not present his or her own research.
- Students that are not at that stage will be expected to provide an advanced draft of a research design by the end of the year. An advanced design means not only theory, hypothesis and identification strategy but also draft instruments and protocols and a "dummy" dataset and analysis.
- In internal weeks, two students will be assigned to present the research. The first will be assigned to act as the "defender" of the research and will prepare a presentation and defense of the research. The second student will serve as a "devil's advocate," preparing a critique of the presented research.

Over the course of the semester, each student will serve as a discussant for a guest speaker, have his or her research presented, and act as both a defender and a devil's advocate for another student's research.

3. Written Assignment: You will be expected to write a paper displaying original research and probing in depth one of the themes of the course to be presented during one of the internal weeks. These research papers will contain (i) a theoretical argument, engaging with one of the key themes of the course, (ii) an empirical test of that argument and (iii) a discussion of policy prescriptions resulting from the argument.

4 Lunches. On weeks in which we have external speakers groups of 8 students will be able to join the speaker for lunch (typically in the faculty house). Let us know which speakers you are most interested in joining.

Speakers

FALL 2010

1. September 10 Welcome and Introductions
2. September 17 Speaker: [Pascaline Dupas](#), UCLA
3. September 24 Student Presentations
4. October 1 Speaker: [Cristian Pop-Eleches](#), Columbia University
5. October 8 Student Presentations
6. October 15 Speaker : [Ana Lorena de la O](#), Yale University
7. October 22 Speaker: [Thad Dunning](#), Yale University
8. October 29 Student Presentations
9. November 5 Speaker: [Kosuke Imai](#), Princeton University
10. November 12 Speaker: [Ethan Kaplan](#), Institute for IIES
11. November 19 Student Presentations
12. December 3 Speaker: [Chris Blattman](#), Yale University
13. December 8 (Wednesday!) Speaker: [Asim Khwaja](#), Harvard University
14. December 10 Student Presentations

SPRING 2011 SEMESTER

15. January 21 Student Presentations
16. January 28 Speaker: [Rohini Pande](#), Harvard University
17. February 4 Speaker: [Ryan Sheely](#), Harvard University
18. February 11 Student Presentations
19. February 18 Speaker: [Rikhil Bhavnani](#), Stanford University
20. February 25 Speaker: [Elizabeth Levy Paluck](#), Princeton University
21. March 4 Student Presentations
22. March 11 Speaker TBD
23. March 18 Student Presentations
24. March 25 Speaker: [Jasjeet Sekhon](#), UC Berkeley
25. April 1 Student Presentations
26. April 8 Student Presentations
27. April 15 Speaker: [Oendriila Dube](#), NYU
28. April 29 Student Presentations

A Checklist for Discussants

Theory

- Is the theory internally consistent?
- Is it consistent with past literature and findings?
- Is it novel or surprising?
- Are elements that are excluded or simplified plausibly unimportant for the outcomes?
- Is the theory general or specific? Are there more general theories on which this theory could draw or contribute?

From Theory to Hypotheses

- Is the theory really needed to generate the hypotheses?
- Does the theory generate more hypotheses than considered?
- Are the hypotheses really implied by the theory? Or are there ambiguities arising from say non-monotonicities or multiple equilibria?
- Does the theory specify mechanisms?
- Does the theory suggest heterogeneous effects?

Hypotheses

- Are the hypotheses complex? (eg in fact 2 or 3 hypotheses bundled together)
- Are the hypotheses falsifiable?
- Are mechanisms implied by the hypotheses?

Evidence I: Design

- External validity: is the population examined representative of the larger population of interest?
- External validity: Are the conditions under which they are examined consistent with the conditions of interest?
- Measure validity: Do the measures capture the objects specified by the theory?
- Consistency: Is the empirical model used consistent with the theory?
- Mechanisms: Are mechanisms tested? How are they identified?
- Replicability: Has the study been done in a way that it can be replicated?
- Interpretation: Do the results admit rival interpretations?

Evidence II: Analysis and Testing

- Identification: are there concerns with reverse causality?
- Identification: are there concerns of omitted variable bias?
- Identification: does the model control for pre treatment variables only? Does it control or does it match?
- Identification: Are poorly identified claims flagged as such?
- Robustness: Are results robust to changes in the model, to subsetting the data, to changing the period of measurement or of analysis, to the addition or exclusion of plausible controls?

- Standard errors: does the calculation of test statistics make use of the design? Do standard errors take account of plausibly clustering structures/differences in levels?
- Presentation: Are the results presented in an intelligible way? Eg using fitted values or graphs? How can this be improved?
- Interpretation: Can no evidence of effect be interpreted as evidence of only weak effects?

Evidence III: Other sources of bias

- Fishing: were hypotheses generated prior to testing? Was any training data separated from test data?
- Measurement error: is error from sampling, case selection, or missing data plausibly correlated with outcomes?
- Spillovers / Contamination: Is it plausible that outcomes in control units were altered because of the treatment received by the treated?
- Compliance: Did the treated really get treatment? Did the controls really not?
- Hawthorne effects: Are subjects modifying behavior simply because they know they are under study?
- Measurement: Is treatment the only systematic difference between treatment and control or are there differences in how items were measured?
- Implications of Bias: Are any sources of bias likely to work for or against the hypothesis tested?

Policy Implications

- Do the policy implications really follow from the results?
- If implemented would the policy changes have effects other than those specified by the research?
- Have the policy claims been tested directly?
- Is the author overselling or underselling the findings?