Course description and objectives

In this course we will deepen our understanding of rural peoples in the Global South, including their life, landscapes, and livelihoods. We will explore the challenges to and opportunities for building thriving rural communities that foster well-being locally as well as sustainable ecosystems, food sovereignty, and regional development more broadly. Our goal will be to provide a comprehensive introduction to this field for students preparing for vocations in any area of international relations, and a solid foundation for those who wish to pursue further study and/or professional work specifically in rural studies and development.

Before digging into the specifics of our study, we will reflect on how we, most of us as “outsiders” to the rural experience, can learn from, with, and about rural people and communities while acknowledging and addressing biases that may result in misperceptions. We will also establish a framework for raising and analyzing questions of ethics, a framework we will apply throughout the course. We will continue with a brief examination of the history of rural development theory and practice, including so-called peasant studies. We then will seek to understand the multi-faceted and diverse rural contexts in the Global South and the frameworks and strategies for overcoming the challenges and building upon the opportunities for multi-dimensional rural development. We will assess the effectiveness of particular strategies, including community-led approaches, while making space to hear skeptics of the “development enterprise.” Among the learning tools employed will be case studies, including some that come directly from the instructor’s field experience, and several guest speakers.

Learning outcomes

**Overall learning goal:**
Students will strengthen their capacities to apply criteria of ethics, social science, community co-creation, environmental sustainability, and impact evaluation in order to critically and constructively assess and influence efforts to improve the well-being of rural people in the Global South.

**Learning objectives:**
a. Students will become more critical and conscious learners, aware of the sources of the information and perspectives engaged and the relative power of those sources, and able to listen for understanding to persons who have had very different experiences than their own.

b. Students will better understand the various “outside” actors in rural development and be able to critically evaluate their respective approaches and their style of interaction with rural people.

c. Likewise, students will better understand community level actors in rural development and be able to critically evaluate their respective approaches and their style of interaction with other actors.

d. Students will more deeply understand both the key common characteristics of rural communities in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, especially poor agrarian rural communities, as well as the important ways life, landscapes, and livelihoods vary within and between such communities at all geographical levels.

e. Students will be knowledgeable of primary rural and agricultural development theories, practices, and debates; competent in critically assessing various points of views; and able to develop their own informed and well-reasoned positions.

f. Students will be able to apply that deeper understanding of rural communities and development theory and practice towards strategic thinking and policy making for alleviating poverty and improving the well-being of rural people.

g. Students will understand the two-way links between rural development and national development more broadly.

h. In all of the above, students will be able to apply lenses of ethics, social analysis, and natural resource sustainability.

i. Students who are interested in further study of rural development and/or training for rural development practice, will know how and where they might pursue such interests.

j. Students will demonstrate written and oral communication skills that will strengthen their ability to express probing, critical questions of what they read and hear; synthesize, summarize, and contrast arguments; articulate one’s own arguments clearly and persuasively; prepare concise, information literature reviews; and formulate policy proposals.

HUB learning outcomes

A. Diversity, Civic Engagement, and Global Citizenship: Ethical reasoning
(requires both outcomes below)

1. Students will be able to identify, grapple with, and make a judgment about the ethical questions at stake in at least one major contemporary public debates, and engage in a civil discussion about it with those who hold views different from their own.

2. Students will demonstrate the skills and vocabulary needed to reflect on the ethical responsibilities that face individuals (or organizations, or societies or governments) as they grapple with issues affecting both the communities to which they belong and those identified as “other.” They should consider their
responsibilities to future generations of humankind, and to stewardship of the Earth.

Course alignment with these Ethical Reasoning outcomes: We will begin the course by establishing the importance of the ethical dimensions of the issues to be explored and a framework for asking and analyzing the ethical questions. Then, throughout the course we will identify, discuss, and debate the ethical dimensions of these issues. In particular, we will examine the ethical dimensions of poverty and inequality; of the creation of knowledge regarding what are “other” communities for most students; of the relationships between rural communities in the Global South and development actors such as NGOs, state agencies, bi-national and multi-lateral organizations; of proposed strategies and policies for rural development; and of natural resource “ownership” and stewardship.

B. Scientific and Social Inquiry: Social Inquiry II (requires at least one of the outcomes below)

1. Students will apply principles and methods from the social sciences based on collecting new or analyzing existing data in order to address questions, solve problems, or deepen understanding. They will understand the nature of evidence employed in the social sciences and will demonstrate a capacity to differentiate competing claims in such fields. This includes reflecting on and critically evaluating how social scientists formulate hypotheses, gather empirical evidence of multiple sorts, and analyze and interpret this evidence.

2. Using their knowledge of the natural and social sciences, students will engage with issues of public policy, such as climate change, inequality, and health that involve the intersection of perspectives from different disciplines. This would entail an ability to identify the evidentiary basis for scientific claims, the challenges to it, and the connections among the economic, social, and scientific factors that shape the creation and adoption of effective public policy.

Course alignment with these Social Inquiry II outcomes: As the Overall goal and Learning objectives above state, students will engage throughout the course with sophisticated social scientific analyses of rural poverty, small-scale agriculture, and rural development through interdisciplinary lenses, including political science, economics, anthropology, development studies, and ethics. In the latter half of the course students will focus primarily on critically assessing and debating current prevalent policies and formulating their own policy proposals. The culminating assignment is an extensive policy paper as described below.

C. Writing Intensive (requires at least #1 and #2 below)

1. Students will be able to craft responsible, considered, and well-structured written arguments, using media and modes of expression appropriate to the situation.

2. Students will be able to read with understanding, engagement, appreciation, and critical judgment.
Course alignment with these Writing Intensive outcomes: This course requires students to submit approximately 10,000 words of writing in total for three different types of writing assignments and to give an in-class oral presentation on their final papers. In their weekly reflection papers, students practice distilling key points in the reading, critiquing points of view expressed in the reading, and formulating more open-ended questions raised by those readings. The two take-home examination essays require students to integrate important parts of the course content and to put various authors into conversation with each other. The policy paper strengthens students’ abilities to compile relevant literature reviews, analyze their findings, assess policy options, and develop their own policy proposal. All of these writing assignments will receive substantive feedback. The policy paper assignment encourages students to consider the detailed written feedback and re-submit a revised paper for “progressive grading,” as explained below.

Students will enhance their comprehensive reading skills through writing the weekly reflection papers, reading their classmates’ reflection papers, discussing the readings in class, and writing their two take-home examination essays. In a significant part of each class we will discuss the reading material in various ways so as to encourage systematic review, open-ended responses and questions, and critical thinking and debate.

Course website

An active course website is available through the BU BlackBoard system. All course information, including announcements, weekly reading requirements, assignments, and deadlines will be maintained and updated on this site. In addition, in-class Power Point presentations, resources generated in class, and other relevant resources that may surface during our study will be posted on BlackBoard after class. You should check the course website regularly.

Accessing required reading

This course intentionally uses a diversity of sources, including peer-reviewed books and articles, so-called grey literature from relevant institutions, reports from development organizations, and unpublished manuscripts.

Books that are required for the course and that have been ordered by the B.U. Bookstore are as follows:


Other books we will use are available on-line through the B.U. Library:

Books listed above are denoted with an asterisk (*) in the schedule of required readings.

In addition to the books listed above, we will read a number of articles, reports, and chapters from other sources. Most of these articles are available on-line, either as public domain resources and/or as the B.U. Library subscriptions. The remaining resources will be available on the course BlackBoard site.

Course requirements and grading

♦ Class attendance, and participation (20% of the final course grade): Thoughtful participation in class is an important part of the learning process, both for the one speaking as well as for others—including the professor. This is especially true in a small class like this one. Your attendance, demonstrated preparation (e.g. the ability to discuss the required reading), and the quality of your contribution to class discussions will be significant factors in your final grade. You may occasionally be assigned in advance to explain/summarize some aspect of the assigned readings for a particular class. All absences will be considered in the grade; what you and others miss when you are not in class can never be made-up 100%. However, absences for justifiable reasons will incur only relatively minor penalties. So, if you need to be absent for a justifiable reason, please contact me in advance.

♦ Weekly reflections on the required readings (20%). You will be expected to come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. To help focus that preparation, you will submit a brief (400-500 words) reflection on that week’s readings in advance of class and then read the entries from other students before class begins. We will discuss the particular expectations for these reflection papers in class. For some weeks you may be asked to respond to particular questions drawn from the reading. You should submit your thoughts via BlackBoard no later than 9 p.m. the night before class. Your lowest grade on these exercises will be dropped when calculating the average for this aspect of the course grade.

♦ Two take-home exams (12.5% each→25% total): Two take-home exams will consist of writing one or more short essays that will help integrate the material we are reading and discussing. Each exam will require no more than 1000-1500 words total. The questions will be handed out at least one week in advance.
♦ **Policy paper (25%)**: You will write a paper of 2000-2500 words if you are an undergraduate student, or 3000-3500 words if you are a graduate student, to provide a literature review, analysis regarding a particular situation or problem related to rural development, and a policy proposal to address that issue. The goal of your proposal should be to provide a document that is well-grounded in reason, sound theory, and credible empirical evidence that would contribute towards policy decisions that will advance human welfare in some way within a scope that you will need to determine. That is, your paper can be grounded in one particular context or be more generally applies to rural development in the Global South. Course readings can serve as primary sources. However, you will be expected to do further research. You must submit in advance a brief proposal for your policy paper. Deadlines are noted in the “Schedule of Topics and Readings” below. Additional guidelines for the proposal, paper's content, format, sources, and citations will be provided in a separate hand-out. This paper will be evaluated using progressive grading. (Please see the explanation below.)

♦ **Presentation (10%)**: You will present your work on the policy paper to the class on either April 22 or 29. You will have 10-15 minutes to present. We will then spend a few minutes discussing what you have presented.

**Requirements for graduate credit**

Graduate students will be held to a higher, graduate-level standard in assessing their work in all aspects of the course, including class participation. In addition, requirements for the policy paper will be 1000 words longer for graduate students.

**Progressive grading**

For the policy paper you may choose to have your paper evaluated by progressive grading. In order to qualify for this option, you must submit your paper by the deadline for the first version. Under this arrangement, I will grade the paper and provide written comments and suggestions. I will also be available to meet with you to discuss your paper soon after. You may decide to accept the grade on the paper and do nothing more, or you may choose to submit a revised version by the final deadline. If you take the latter option, I will evaluate the second version. The final grade on the paper will be a composite score, weighting the second grade at 75% and the first at 25%. It is important to clarify that the first version of the paper should not be a rough draft. You should complete all research and should approach the writing as you would a final draft. If I judge the first version to be a rough draft, I will determine the final grade by weighting first and second versions equally at 50%.

**Late submissions of assignments**

Unless I have approved an extension for an assignment, one-fourth of a letter grade will be deducted from the assignment’s grade for each day it is late. Please contact me in advance if you will not be able to submit an assignment on time.

**Academic integrity**

As in all courses at Boston University, you are expected to be honest in all of your academic work. Please read and be sure you understand the GRS Academic and
Professional Conduct Code to which all students will be held accountable. The Conduct Code is available at https://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/grs-forms-policies-procedures/. If you have any questions or doubts about the conduct code or about the instructions or expectations for any aspect of this course, you must ask for clarification.

Accommodations for Students with Documented Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability or believe you might have a disability that requires accommodations, please contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at (617) 353-3658 to coordinate any reasonable accommodation requests. ODS is located at 19 Deerfield Street on the second floor.

Classroom expectations

As a courtesy to others and in the interest of creating a quality classroom learning environment, please respect the following guidelines:

- Please arrive on time, and leave the room while class is in session only when necessary.
- Please turn off or silence your cell phone and other non-computer electronic communication devices.
- Please do not text during class.
- Please limit your individual laptop use solely to course purposes (e.g. note taking). You should be on-line for either the web or email only when requested for a joint classroom activity.

Thanks.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND READINGS

**Please note:**

- For some readings you will not be required to read thoroughly all pages of a particular document. In such cases I will provide advance guidance on Blackboard regarding which sections you should read carefully, which sections you should skim, and which sections you may skip.
- It is also important to note that we will not explicitly discuss in-depth all material that is relevant to the course. You will be responsible in assignments and on take-home exams for required reading content that is not prioritized in class. If you do not clearly understand any of the course materials, please raise questions in class or visit me during office hours.

1. Mon., Jan. 28:
Introductions to the each other, the course, and several rural communities and their residents.

   Communities in Pakistan (from Salahuddin), El Salvador, Haiti, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Vietnam, and Mongolia.
2. Mon., Feb. 4:
(a) Development, knowledge, and roles as “insiders” and “outsiders.”
(b) Raising ethical questions.
(c) A brief history of thought on rural and agricultural development.

Required reading

For further reading

3. Mon., Feb. 11:
Key common characteristics of rural communities and how such communities

Required reading
- *Norton, George W. et al. 2015. Ch. 4, pp. 78-82 only. (4)
  - Ch. 3, Chs. 7-10, pp. 129-202. (69)

4. Tues., Feb. 19 (Mon., Feb. 18 is a holiday):
Nutrition, healthcare, and poverty in rural communities.

Required reading
• "Banerjee, Abhijit, and Esther Duflo.  2011.
  
  Ch. 2, “A billion hungry people?” pp. 19-40. (22)

Look over this document to get a sense of the major points. You will not be expected to remember all of these data.


**FEBRUARY 25: PROPOSAL FOR POLICY PAPER DUE IN CLASS**

5. Mon., Feb. 25:
(a) Agriculture and development in the Global South: Structures, transformations, and regional comparisons.
(b) Land grabs.
(c) The relationship of farm size and productivity.

Required reading
For further reading


6. Mon., Mar. 4:
(a) Poverty traps, risk, risk reduction, and the challenges of innovation adoption.
(b) The rural non-farm economy and its contribution to rural development.
(c) The future of small farms and the peasantry.

Required reading


THURSDAY, MARCH 8: FIRST TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE BY 5:00 P.M.

MARCH 9-17: SPRING BREAK RECESS

7. Mon., Mar. 18
(a) Recapping: The obstacles to rural development and potential strategies identified so far to overcome those obstacles.
(b) Frameworks for rural development.

Required reading
- Oxfam America. 2012. “Gender Analysis Tool Kit.” Skim, paying particular attention to pp. 8-12. A hard-copy will be handed out. (7)
- Norton, George W. et al. 2015. Skim very quickly, primarily the headings to survey the various issues addressed.

For further reading

**MONDAY, MARCH 25: SECOND TAKE-HOME EXAM DUE IN CLASS**

8. Mon., Mar. 25:
The roles of scale and supporting institutions in rural development - stories from the field.

**Guest speaker:** Owen Cortner, Ph.D. student, Department of Earth and Environment, Boston University.

**Required reading**

**Scale**

**Institutions**

9. Mon., Apr. 1
(a) Sustainable livelihood approaches to rural development.
(b) Community-led and community-driven development.

**Required reading**
• Shelley, Barry. 2016. “Thoughts on community-led development and the future of agriculture at Oxfam.” Manuscript. Copies will be provided. (9)

For further reading

10. Mon., Apr. 8:
(a) Grassroots finance for rural development.

Guest speaker: Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Senior Researcher, African Studies Center, Boston University. Dr. Rodima-Taylor teaches a course in grassroots finance for development in the Pardee School.

(b) Tentative: Rural youth—their aspirations and opportunities

Guest speaker by Skype: Zoe Vangelder, Ford Foundation consultant, Mexico.

Required reading -- TBD

TUESDAY, APRIL 16: FIRST DRAFT OF POLICY PAPER DUE

11. Wed., Apr. 17
Tentative: Eating Tomorrow: Agribusiness, family, farmers, and the battle for the future of food

Guest speaker: Timothy A. Wise. Tim directs the Land and Food Rights Program at Small Planet Institute and is a Research Fellow in the Globalization Program at Tufts University’s Global Development and Environment Institute.

Please note: Half of our class will be a public presentation by Tim Wise.

Required reading

12. Mon., Apr. 22
**Please note: Because of a scheduling conflict, our class will NOT meet in the GDP Center on this date. Our meeting location for this one day will be announced in advance.

(a) Student presentations of papers.
(b) Flex time for further exploration of topics chosen in consultation with students.

Required reading -- TBD

13. Mon. Apr. 29
(a) Student presentations of papers.
(b) The ethical dimension: “Choosing who we are.”
(c) Course conclusion, including evaluations.

Required reading

**FRIDAY, MAY 10: FINAL DRAFT OF POLICY PAPER DUE BY 5:00 P.M.**