

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology

Course Syllabus – Fall 2026/2027

Economic Development

SOSC 3120

3 Credits

Instructor

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Lecture: Tuesday and Thursday, 12:00-1:20pm at Room 2463 (Lift 25/26)

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Course Description

This course examines the economic situations of low and middle-income economies, considering many important topics in the field of development economics. It addresses questions such as what factors help explain why some countries are rich and others poor, and whether economic policies can affect these factors. We will study key aspects of life for poor households in the developing world, such as inequality, gender, education, health, firms, agriculture, and institutions. Building on these themes, the course also considers how emerging technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), may reshape the prospects for economic development, examining both the opportunities they create and the risks they pose for developing economies. Students will also study recent research in the field and examine empirical evidence on these topics.

Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

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

1. Demonstrate a comprehensive and well-founded knowledge of economic situations in the developing world.
2. Identify and explain critical issues in the developing world.
3. Apply core concepts of economics to critically analyze significant social phenomena and interpret important events related to the developing world.
4. Analyze the core issues in economic development strategies.

Assessment and Grading

This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Detailed rubrics for each assignment are provided below, outlining the criteria used for evaluation.

Assessments:

Assessment Task	Contribution to Overall Course grade (%)	Due date
Class participation	5%	Week 1 to 13
Referee report	10%	Week 5
Midterm exam	25%	Week 8
Group project – interim report	10%	Week 10
Group project- in-class presentation	20%	Week 13
Final examination	30%	TBA

* Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be released within two weeks of the due date.

- Class attendance and participation: Class attendance is mandatory. You are responsible for all materials presented in lecture. Please plan to get notes from a classmate if you cannot attend lecture. Class participation (e.g., asking questions or answering questions) is also highly recommended.
- Referee report - A referee report should be 2-4 pages long, double spaced. A list of papers for the referee report will be circulated in class during the semester. Referee report should be submitted through the course website on the due date until 11:59pm. Late submissions will not be accepted. Due date: Friday, October 2nd, 2026
- Group project – The impact of AI on economic development: In groups (group size determined based on class size), you will investigate how artificial intelligence affects a specific domain of development economics, such as health, education, gender, labor markets, agriculture, firms, or inequality. Each group will be assigned a standpoint (the potential benefits of AI, or the potential risks and costs of AI) and will build an evidence-based argument for that position, drawing on concepts, empirical methods, and readings covered in class. The project has two graded components: an interim progress report (10% of total grade) outlining your chosen topic, standpoint, key questions, and preliminary evidence; and a final in-class presentation (20% of total grade) presenting your full argument, engaging with counterarguments, and defending your position. Groups are expected to ground their claims in relevant theory and empirical evidence rather than general opinion. Consistent with the course AI policy, groups should also briefly reflect on how (if at all) they used generative AI tools in preparing the project. The interim report is due in Week 10, and presentations are scheduled for the last week of class (Week 13). More details on the format and content will be announced during the semester.
- Exam policy: The exams will cover materials in the required readings and all material presented in class. Exams will be closed book, closed notes. Programmable calculators, cell phones, PDAs, etc. are prohibited. There will be no make-up exams, except under extreme circumstances approved by the university office. In such cases, you must notify me in advance via email. Otherwise, you will receive a zero score. Midterm exam is scheduled for October 22nd during lecture.

Mapping of Course ILOs to Assessment Tasks

Assessed Task	Mapped ILOs	Explanation
Class participation	ILO1	This task assesses students' ability to demonstrate their knowledge on economic concepts and real-world applications in developing economies (ILO1).
Referee report	ILO3	The report evaluates students' ability to comprehend and analyze economic theory and empirical techniques used in recent academic research (ILO3).
Group project (interim progress report and in-class presentation)	ILO2, ILO4	This activity allows students to put into practice what they have learned in class. Specifically, students will learn how to identify critical issues arising from the adoption of AI in developing countries (ILO2), analyze the evidence on its effects, and develop and defend an evidence-based position on AI's role in economic development strategies (ILO4).
Midterm exam, Final exam	ILO1, ILO3	The exams evaluate students' understanding and knowledge on development economics (ILO1) and their ability to analyze key challenges faced by developing countries (ILO3).

Grading Rubrics

Referee Report Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail
Summary	Provides a clear summary of the question, methodology and results of the paper.	Provides a summary of the question, methodology and results but lacks some detail or context.	Provides a summary of the paper but lacks clarity and understanding of the paper.	Summary is poorly organized, unclear, or superficial.	Demonstrates no understanding of the paper.
Comments/ Criticisms/ Suggestions	Demonstrates strong understanding and critical thinking. Provides insightful comments, constructive criticisms, and helpful suggestions.	Demonstrates some understanding and critical thinking. Some of the comments and suggestions are useful.	Offers some reflection on the paper but lacks adequate understanding to provide constructive feedback.	Lacks understanding or critical thinking. Comments are often superficial or irrelevant to the paper.	Demonstrates no understanding. Critical thinking is absent or irrelevant to the paper.
Recommendation	Provides an evaluation with a well-developed argument, critical assessment of evidence, and insightful view on the contribution to the literature.	Offers a clear evaluation with coherent argument and evaluation of evidence.	Presents a basic evaluation with simple argument and some evaluation of evidence.	Evaluation is not supported with a sound argument or only provides minimal evaluation of evidence.	No clear argument or evaluation of evidence, and a lack of understanding on the paper's contribution.

Group Project (Interim progress report and in-class presentation) Rubric

Criteria	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Marginal	Fail
Identify and motivate the problem	Clearly defines the chosen domain and the AI-related question, and provides strong motivation for why it matters for development.	Defines the topic and question but lacks some clarity or adequate motivation.	Presents a topic but the question is vague or the motivation for its importance is weak.	Topic is poorly defined, unclear, or superficial.	Demonstrates no understanding of the topic.
Describe the context and background	Demonstrates strong understanding of the relevant development context and the current state of AI in that domain, with clear real-world connections.	Demonstrates good understanding of the context and background but lacks some detail.	Presents a basic introduction of the context but fails to provide adequate examples or connections to the real world.	Demonstrates limited knowledge about the context or background.	Lacks knowledge of the context or background.
Analyze evidence	Provides a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of relevant theory and empirical evidence on AI's effects, showing strong command of the concepts and methods used.	Provides a solid analysis of the evidence with a good grasp of the underlying concepts and methods.	Displays adequate use of evidence and explains key concepts, but analysis remains limited or partly descriptive.	Shows limited engagement with evidence; claims are largely unsupported.	Shows minimal understanding of the relevant evidence.
Develop and defend a standpoint	Builds an exceptionally coherent, well-supported argument for the assigned standpoint, and thoughtfully engages with and rebuts the strongest counterarguments. Claims are strongly grounded in theory or empirical evidence.	Presents a clear and well-supported argument for the standpoint and acknowledges relevant counterarguments. Provides sufficient examples and evidence.	Offers a basic argument for the standpoint with some supporting evidence; engagement with counterarguments is brief or superficial.	Argument is thin or one-sided; fails to acknowledge counterarguments or limitations.	Lacks a coherent argument or evidence for the standpoint.
Presentation	Speech and slides demonstrate professionalism, coherency, and are well-organized.	Speech and slides are mostly well-organized.	Speech or slides may be disorganized or unclear. Contains some grammatical errors.	Speech or slides are poorly organized and difficult to understand. Contains significant grammatical errors.	Lack of organization and preparation.

Final Grade Descriptors:

Grades	Short Description	Elaboration on subject grading description
A	Excellent Performance	Demonstrates a strong understanding of lecture materials, expertise in problem-solving, and significant creativity in thinking. Exhibits a high capacity for scholarship and collaboration, going beyond core requirements to achieve learning goals.
B	Good Performance	Demonstrates good knowledge and understanding of lecture materials, competence in problem-solving, and the ability to analyze and evaluate issues. Displays high motivation to learn and the ability to work effectively with others.

C	Satisfactory Performance	Possesses adequate knowledge of core lecture materials, competence in dealing with familiar problems, and some capacity for analysis and critical thinking. Shows persistence and effort to achieve broadly defined learning goals.
D	Marginal Pass	Has threshold knowledge of core lecture materials, potential to achieve key professional skills, and the ability to make basic judgments. Benefits from the course and has the potential to develop in the discipline.
F	Fail	Demonstrates insufficient understanding of the lecture materials and lacks the necessary problem-solving skills. Shows limited ability to think critically or analytically and exhibits minimal effort towards achieving learning goals. Does not meet the threshold requirements for professional practice or development in the discipline.

Course AI Policy

Students can use generative AI tools to enhance their assignments, provided that they properly cite any AI-generated content and ensure it adheres to academic integrity standards. When using generative AI for the assignments, please include a brief explanation of how the tool was used and the contributions it made to your work.

Communication and Feedback

Assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Feedback on assignments will include strengths and areas for improvement. Students who have further questions about the feedback including marks should consult the instructor or teaching assistant within five working days after the feedback is received.

Late Submission Policy

To ensure fairness for students who submit assignments on time, a penalty for late submission is listed as follows:

- Late submission within 24 hours, 50% penalty on total earned score
- Late submission for more than 24 hours will not be accepted

Required Texts and Materials

- Dwight Perkins, Steven Radelet, David Lindauer and Steven Block, Economics of Development, 7th Edition, W.W.Norton, 2013. (referred to as Textbook in the reading list)
- (Optional) Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty, New York, NY, USA: PublicAffairs, 2011.
- (Optional; for students without econometrics background) Joshua Angrist and Jörn-Steffen Pischke, Mastering Metrics, Princeton University Press, 2014.

Additional Resources

There will be a supplemental reading list comprising of peer-reviewed papers in the literature. Students will be expected to have read the assigned papers prior to lectures. Most readings will be made available in electronic form on Canvas.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the university's academic integrity policy. Students are expected to uphold HKUST's Academic Honor Code and to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. The University has zero tolerance of academic misconduct. Please refer to [Academic Integrity | HKUST – Academic Registry](#) for the University's definition of plagiarism and ways to avoid cheating and plagiarism.

Other Policies

Please be considerate in class. This means turning off your cell phones (and all other potentially noisy devices) or set it to "silent mode", limiting conversation to a minimum, and, if necessary, entering/leaving the classroom as quietly as possible. Not doing so creates a negative externality for your fellow students and will not be tolerated.