

ECON 520 - A01: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Summer Session: 2026 02; **CRN:** 31219 (A01) **Units:** 1.5; **Dates:** May 11 - June 26.

Lectures: Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday 12:30 p.m. – 2:20 p.m. **BEC, Room: 363.**

University of Victoria Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the Lək'wəḡən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory the university stands, and the Lək'wəḡən and WSÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

Instructor: Dr. Paola Beneras P., paolabeneras@uvic.ca

Office: BEC 376

Office Hours: Friday 2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., in-person or [Zoom](#) and via appointment (please email).

Teaching and Assessment Modality: this course is face to face; all presentations/exams are held in person.

Course Content: Causal analysis of development outcomes in low- and middle-income countries. Topics include human capital, child labour, gender and family, cash transfers, institutions, conflict, and climate change. Emphasis on identification strategies, seminal literature, and applied country analysis.

Learning Outcomes: students will be able to:

- Identify and critically evaluate causal identification strategies in development research.
- Trace how empirical findings on development questions evolve through replications, follow-ups, and methodological updates.
- Apply causal inference frameworks to analyze a specific country's development trajectory.
- Communicate empirical research clearly.
- Synthesize evidence across topics to develop integrated perspectives on development questions.

Course Prerequisites: Please see UVic's graduate calendar.

Brightspace: Brightspace is used extensively for the course. Materials for the course (including lecture notes, assignments, tutorials, additional reading materials, practice questions, solutions, and grades) will be posted on Brightspace. All students are expected to be fully functional with the system.

All announcements will be posted in Brightspace. Students are advised to check it frequently.

Lectures: Lectures are in-person. Lecture notes will be available on Brightspace as PDFs. These notes will be posted after class and are outlines of the information covered in the actual lectures. In addition to these notes, students are expected to work from their own notes and are strongly encouraged to attend all lectures to take their own notes during class.

Textbook: There is no required textbook for this course.

Reading List: All materials will be provided in a reading list that can be accessed via Brightspace. We will thoroughly study the news and journal articles listed under each topic of the reading list.

The articles listed under 'Additional Readings' for each topic are not mandatory, rather supplementary to the discussion.

Additional Reference Materials: (Recommended)

- *Mastering 'Metrics: The Path from Cause to Effect* by Angrist, J.D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2015). Princeton: Princeton University Press. ISBN: 9780691152844.
- *Causal Inference: The Mixtape* by Cunningham, S. (2021). New Haven: Yale University Press. Freely available [here](#).
- *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion* by Angrist, J.D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2009). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Grading Scheme and Assessments: The course grade is determined as follows:

	Percent of Final Grade	Due Dates
Laboratory Workshop	30%	Assigned Date (TBD)
Country Project - Group Component	20%	June 23, 2026
Country Project - Individual Component	15%	June 19, 2026
Final Exam	30%	June 26, 2026.
Participation	5%	Ongoing.

Course Components:

- a. **Laboratory: 30%** Each student will be assigned to a pair to lead one Wednesday laboratory during Weeks 2-6. Pairs will deliver a deep-dive on one paper, and then facilitate a country-application workshop. Laboratory assignments will be made by the instructor at the end of the first week. Each laboratory grade is composed of:

- *Report (12.5%)*: A thorough report on the paper, due 48 hours before assigned laboratory.
- *Workshop Design & Facilitation (15%)*: Pairs design and run a 45-minute hands-on workshop with two components. First, a (~35 min) presentation including Q&A, walking the class through the paper's identification strategy, results, threats to identification, and subsequent literature. Pairs must include a methods replication segment walking the class through the replication of a key result from the seminal paper, with code and data distributed 48 hours in advance. Replications may be done in Stata or R. Second, a country application component (~20 min) in which the pair presents each group a question to apply the paper's identification strategy to their assigned country (e.g., "what would the relevant instrument look like for your country, and what data would you need?").
- *Peer Evaluation (2.5%)*: Average of classmates' ratings of the laboratory/workshop.

Students **must** meet with the instructor in office hours during the week prior to their assigned laboratory to share a draft memo, presentation outline, and workshop plan. Sign-off is required to lead the laboratory.

- b. **Country Project: 35%** Students will be assigned to one of three country project groups (3-4 members) at the end of Week 1. Each group will be assigned a country and will produce a sustained development analysis of that country across the term. The final project is due on **June 23, 2026** and is presented in class the same day.

- *Group Component (20%)*: A country analysis, jointly authored by the group, synthesizing the six analytical lenses (human capital, health, cash transfers, institutions, conflict/historical roots, and climate) and depicting a coherent argument about the country's development trajectory.
- *Individual Component - Empirical Analysis (15%)*: Each student answers an empirical question about their assigned country, applying one of the research methods studied in the course.

Students must submit an analytical report and the code (with comments). The report must (i) pose a clear, answerable empirical question relevant to the country, (ii) identify a credible source of variation that allows for causal identification, (iii) execute the empirical analysis using publicly available data, (iv) discuss results, threats to identification, and limitations, and (v) connect findings to at least one paper from the course readings.

* *Considerations:*

- The method used must *not* be the method from the student's assigned laboratory;
- Each student in a country group must address a *different empirical question* from other group members;

* *Submissions:*

- **Research Plan** (due Friday May 29): A one-page document specifying the empirical question, the country context, the proposed identification strategy, and the rationale. Submitted individually but coordinated with country group to avoid overlap.
 - **Data** (due Friday June 5): A one-page document specifying the dataset(s) to be used, including source, coverage (years, geographic units, sample size), key variables, and any access requirements. Students must demonstrate that the data actually exists and is accessible.
 - **Methods** (due Friday June 12): A one-page document specifying the empirical model, including the specification, the identifying variation, controls, and threats to identification. Preliminary descriptive statistics from the dataset should be included.
 - **Final Submission** (due Friday June 19): The full country report and code.
- Failure to receive instructor approval at any point requires re-submission within 48 hours before progression to the next stage. Code must be submitted with the report and must run.
 - *Late submissions will not be accepted* unless prior arrangement (*at least 48 hours prior to the deadline*) has been made with the instructor. Please see [Academic Calendar](#) for the in-course academic concession policy.

c. **Final Exam: 30%** Comprehensive exam scheduled for June 26, 2026.

d. **Participation: 5%** Students are expected to attend every lecture, read assigned materials in advance, and engage substantively in discussions and country group breakouts. Participation is assessed across the term based on engagement in lectures, laboratories, and country group workshops.

Mandatory Course Components: The final exam is an essential course requirement, meaning, it must be attempted to pass the course. Failure to complete the final exam will result in a grade of 'N' regardless of the cumulative percentage on the course. N is a failing grade and factors into GPA as a value of 0.

Appealing Grades: Students who have questions or concerns regarding a grade for any of the assessments should notify the instructor as soon as possible.

All concerns should be addressed during office hours (please see email policy), **with specific questions and formal arguments** (i.e., no: "why did I get this grade?" rather: "I believe there is an error in the grading because after further investigation I have found that XYZ...").

Any concerns must be dealt with **within one week** after the grade was returned, otherwise, **the grade is final**.

Ensuring Progress and Learning:

This course is built around active engagement. Lectures introduce literature and methods; laboratories develop familiarity with one paper at a time; the country project requires sustained independent analytical work. Students should come to lectures having read the assigned papers, focusing notes on the question methods, context, rather than simply on results.

When studying or reviewing material for exams, a helpful way to do so is to develop thorough and clear study guides by reviewing class notes, assignments, readings, lecture slides and any supplementary materials.

Similarly, please know that I will always be happy to provide additional support during office hours. I strongly encourage students to come to office hours to seek additional help, especially if struggling with a particular concept. While I will not provide the solutions directly, I will help students understand the concepts so that they can arrive at the answers or understanding independently.

Missing Assessments:

Students requesting an academic concession are required to indicate the specific grounds for the request and to provide justification outlining the impact of the circumstances on their ability to complete course requirements. Please see [Academic Calendar](#) for more information on academic concessions.

In case you miss the final exam, see [Academic Calendar](#).

Students are advised not to make work or travel plans until after the end of the term. Students *do not* qualify for an academic concession if travel plans conflict with the examination.

E-mail Correspondence: I will do my best to respond to e-mails within 24 hours on a weekday, 48 hours on a weekend, according to the following policy:

- **Office hours are the primary channel for course-related questions.** Questions about course material, assessments, or grades should be brought to office hours or raised in class, not via email.
- Email is appropriate only for critical matters such as inability to attend class, illness, or scheduling. Course name and number must appear in the subject line, and emails must use full sentences and include your full name and V#.
- Use your @uvic.ca address to avoid spam filtering. Text message lingo will not receive a response.
- Emails requesting information available on Brightspace or in the syllabus, or asking about graded material, will not receive a reply, please check those resources first or come to office hours.

Class Cancellations: In the event of a cancelled class due to illness, campus closure or emergency, class will be automatically postponed and lectures will resume on the next scheduled class time.

Office Hours: The default format for this term is holding office hours in-person, office: BEC 376.

If office hours are moved to Zoom, an announcement will be made in-class and via Brightspace. The Zoom link is available [here](#). If there is a scheduling conflict with regular office hours, please email at least 48 hours in advance to make an appointment.

For **questions regarding the course material, please come prepared** and review the readings beforehand.

Electronic Devices: use of mobile phones, smart watches and laptops is **not permitted** during lectures (i.e.: they should not be in use nor visible). Students can take notes with a tablet by permission, only (please come see me during office hours). Ensure you bring something to write with (e.g.: pen, pencil) and to write on (e.g.: paper, notebook). The only exception to this policy is a CAL accommodation.

Use of Large Language Models, AI: Students are **strongly** discouraged from using AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini, etc.) in this course. The purpose of the course is for students to develop the analytical skills to read and critique empirical research, design causal identification strategies, and write defensible analytical work, AI significantly limits this learning. Evidence [links](#) LLM use to lower brain connectivity and reduced attention engagement. AI outputs are also frequently wrong on econometric content in ways that may not be obvious to students still learning the material.

If LLM use is suspected in *any* written deliverable, it will be treated as a violation of UVic’s [Policy on Academic Integrity](#), and a complaint will be filed accordingly. The University reserves the right to use plagiarism and AI detection software to verify the authenticity of submitted work.

Extremely limited use of AI for debugging code or looking up software syntax is hesitantly tolerated; if used it **must** be disclosed in a brief appendix. Use beyond these purposes is strictly prohibited.

Grading Scale: all course components above will be assessed following a numerical score. Each component of the course will be then assigned the appropriate weight resulting in a total final score out of 100. The following grading scale will be used:

A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	D	F or N
90–100	85–89	80–84	77–79	73–76	70–72	65–69	60–64	50–59	0–49

For the full grading scale and graduate evaluation policy, please see the [Graduate Calendar](#).

Course Structure:

- Cross-Country Differences & Convergence (Week 1)
- Causal Inference for Development: (Week 1, 2)
- Human Capital & Education (Week 2)
- Health & Nutrition (Week 3)
- Gender & Family (Week 3)
- Child Labour (Week 4)
- Cash Transfers & Social Welfare (Week 4)
- Growth & Development Accounting (Week 5)
- Institutions (Week 5)
- Conflict & Historical Roots of Underdevelopment (Week 6)
- Climate Change & Development (Week 6)
- Synthesis & Country Presentations (Week 7)

Course Calendar:

Week	Dates	Tuesday (Lecture)	Wednesday (Laboratory)	Friday (Lecture)
1	May 12-15	Cross-Country Diff. & Converg.	Lab 1: Foundations	Causal Inference for Dev.
2	May 19-22	Causal Inference (cont.)	Lab 2: Returns to Schooling	Returns to Schooling
3	May 26-29	Health & Nutrition	Lab 3: Worms	Gender & Family*
4	June 2-5	Child Labour	Lab 4: Cash Transfers	Cash Transfers
5	June 9-12	Growth & Dev. Accounting	Lab 5: Institutions	Institutions
6	June 16-19	Conflict & Historical Roots	Lab 6: Climate	Climate Change
7	June 23-26	Group Presentations	Course Synthesis	Final Exam

Note: *The calendar and due dates are subject to minor changes depending on the pace of the course.* (*) Denotes classes that will be *recorded* and posted on Brightspace rather than being in-person.

Important Deadlines:

Group Project Due Date: June 23, 2026.

Individual Project Due Dates:

- Research Plan: May 29, 2026
- Data Identification: June 5, 2026
- Methods Specification: June 12, 2026
- Final Submission: June 19, 2026.

Additional Course Policies: This course adheres to the [Faculty of Graduate Studies](#) policies.

The following policies are explicitly included because of their importance.

Repeating Courses: A student who fails a required course must repeat the course or complete an acceptable substitute within a period of time agreed to by the supervisor and Dean of Graduate Studies. A student who fails to do so will normally be refused permission to register again in the required course. A student may not attempt a course a third time without the prior approval of the Dean of the faculty and the Chair of the academic unit in which the course is offered unless the calendar course entry states that the course may be repeated for additional credit. A student who has not received this approval may be deregistered from the course at any point.

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students are expected to observe the same standards of scholarly integrity as their academic and professional counterparts. A student who is found to have engaged in unethical academic behaviour, including the practices described in the [Policy on Academic Integrity](#) in the University Calendar, is subject to penalty by the University. The University reserves the right to use a plagiarism software to detect violations of academic integrity.

Appeals: Depending on the nature of your concern, the order in which you should normally try to resolve the matter is:

- Me, the course instructor;
- the Associate Chair: econassoc@uvic.ca;
- the Associate Dean of Academic Advising;
- the Senate.

If you're seeking a formal review of an assigned grade, you should also consult the regulations in the academic calendar regarding review of an assigned grade.

University Policies:

- University Calendar - Section "Graduate Calendar."
- [Creating a respectful, inclusive and productive learning environment](#)
- [Academic Concessions, Academic Concessions and Accommodations](#), Academic Accommodation Policy AC1205
- [Accommodation of Religious Observance](#)
- [Student Conduct](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Diversity / EDI](#)
- [Equity Statement](#)
- [Sexualized Violence Prevention and Response](#)
- [Discrimination and Harassment Policy](#)

Resources for Students:

- [Student Wellness](#)
- [Centre for Accessible Learning](#)
- [UVic Learn](#). UVic Learn is the primary learning resource for students that offers many learning workshops and resources to help students with academics and learning strategies.
- [Library Resources](#).
- Academic Skills Centre ([ASC](#))
- Learning Assistance Program ([LAP](#))
- [Academic Advising](#)
- Economics Graduate Advising: egrad@uvic.ca
- [Student Awards and Financial Aid](#)
- [International Student Advising](#)
- Indigenous Student Services ([ISS](#))
- [Student groups and resources](#) including UVic Ombudsperson

Student Experience of Learning (SEL) Survey: I value your feedback on this course. Towards the end of term, you will have the opportunity to complete a confidential SEL survey regarding your learning experience. The survey is vital to providing feedback to me regarding the course and my teaching, as well as to help the department improve the overall program for students in the future.

Educational Technology Involving Storage Outside Canada

The following educational technologies, which stores or accesses your personal information outside Canada, is required for this course: Zoom. I will make you aware if this list changes. Personal information is required by the service. The privacy policy and the terms of use list the personal information stored outside of Canada and are available [here](#). Please read these documents. If you are not comfortable with your personal information being stored outside of Canada, please speak to me within the *first week* of class about using an alternative (such as using an alias or nickname). Otherwise, by continuing in this course, you agree to the use of the educational technology in the course and the storage of personal information outside of Canada.

Agreement:

I, _____ (student name), have read the entirety of the course outline and fully understand all course requirements for ECON 520. By signing this document, I agree to all the course policies set out in the syllabus, especially those related to Academic Integrity.

Signature

Once completed, please submit a signed copy of this page only to the Assignments > Syllabus Agreement Dropbox on Brightspace.