

Syllabus

Ethics and Security in “Field Research” for Development Economics

Summer Term 2025

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Responsible lecturer:

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1. General information

1.1 Course content

Economics and other social sciences have experienced a rapid increase in primary data collection activities, not only since the Nobel prize in economics for randomized controlled trials in 2019. Already during their studies, many students engage in primary data collection in partner countries of the Global South in the framework of internships or participation in field studies as student assistants or as part of their master thesis. Recent discussions have shown that primary data collection in partner countries often comes with ethical dilemmas, but also with security challenges.

As academic coursework rarely covers the examination of aspects of ethics and security, this course plans to provide knowledge in the following fields:

a) Research ethics and ethical research design

This module is designed to provide an overview about different aspects of research ethics. Students will learn and critically reflect on the goals of research and its design. While the module can obviously not cover the realm of research ethics all-inclusively, it will provide students with further references and indicate how they connect to the modules of this course.

b) Positionality

The aim of the module is to raise students' awareness of their role in the research context and as visitors in another country. In a similar manner, students will also reflect on how the identity of other team members may shape their position and access to the field. Questions on how to deal with local values and staff's privileges are also addressed.

c) Collaboration with local scientific partners

The students are sensitized to the complementarity between local and international knowledge. In particular, this module discusses opportunities to work together with local

partners already when designing the study and data collection as well as in the later evaluation and publication process.

d) Working conditions of translators, enumerators and colleagues in the Global South

While it is mandatory to provide clear statements on how to deal with respondents' wellbeing, especially in ethics reports, this does not apply to dealing with research personnel in the Global South (translators, enumerators, researchers). Potential pitfalls include working conditions (payment, insurance), security, emotional well-being, gender inequalities, power imbalances and conflicts in the team. While many of those challenges relate to proper project management, they are often not considered in planning, and thus, in combination with intercultural differences and budget constraints, lead to ethical and security problems.

e) Security

This module covers various topics explicitly on security. The central element is careful preparation with the help of checklists and references to important contact persons and resources. In addition, mobility, physical and mental health (e.g., resilience), as well as behavior in extreme situations are addressed. Students will learn which factors may contribute to risks both for the researchers themselves and for the extended research team (data collectors, translators, drivers).

f) Approaching participants in an ethical manner

The participants of a study play a key role in relevant development research. However, ambitious research designs result in a high effort for the respondents, which is often not compensated due to limited research budgets. In addition, research often has only indirect and long-term benefits for local communities. An ethical approach to local expectations will be discussed in this module. The aim of the module is to raise students' awareness of their role in the research context and as visitors in another country.

1.2 Course goals

The course is tailored to raise students' awareness of potential security and ethical challenges and how they are intertwined. Although those challenges are very context-specific, the course provides students with toolkits for better planning and reflection as well as knowledge about the relevant support structure.

The course can also help students and PhD candidates to prepare their own research project or "field research" stay.

1.3 Prerequisites

For master students

Knowledge of Introductory Development Economics (M.WIWI-VWL.0008: Development Economics I: Macro Issues in Economic Development; M.WIWI-VWL.0009: Development Economics II: Micro Issues in Development Economics)

For PhD students

Interest in “field research” and basic knowledge about research practices in the respective field of studies.

1.4 Registration

The number of participants is restricted to 12. To sign up for the course, please send an email to Lennart Kaplan (lennart.kaplan@wiwi.uni-goettingen.de) until June 30, 2025, 23:00pm. If more students are interested than slots are available, slots will be allocated by lottery. Registration on FlexNow starts on July 15, 2025, after the introduction meeting.

2 Specific information

2.1 Description of the teaching and learning methods

The course consists of six online modules, which consist of lectures and short videos, supplemented by self-study based on provided materials and literature. Short quizzes and vignettes provide an opportunity to reflect on the covered content. While we expect participants to have worked through the assigned material, meetings (digital or in person) will be held to critically reflect and discuss the topics covered. The meetings will also enable students to engage in group discussions and define their ethical standpoints. **The course language is English.**

2.2 Meetings

There will be reflection meetings of two hours for each module. In addition, there will be an introductory meeting to familiarize participants with the course platform. The exact dates are as follows:

Introduction to the course (online): July 15, 2025 from 10.00 am to 11.00 pm

Regular course meetings (Oec 1.162): August 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, and 19 from 2.00 am to 4.00 pm.

2.3 Examination and grading of the module

Master students

Master students can earn 6 ECTS. They will be required to deliver a written paper of max. 10 pages, which consists of reflections on the different modules covered by this course. Reflections build on a hypothetical or real-world research project, which the students propose themselves and summarize in a one-page description.

PhD students

PhD students can earn 3 ECTS. They will be required to deliver a reflection of their own or hypothetical research project of 3 pages.

2.4 Course materials

- We will read a mixture of academic papers and opinion pieces to account for ongoing status of the debate.
- Further course material includes recorded lectures, interviews, and other video material.
- Supplementary course materials will be announced and published on Stud.IP.
- Exercise questions will be announced during the reflection meetings and/or published on Stud.IP.

For curious students, take a look at this blog: <https://www.gicnetwork.be/silent-voices-blog/>