Creating social impact is hard. Hundreds of billions of dollars have been spent over the past 50 years, with very little to show: poverty, conflict and devastating diseases continue to ravage large parts of the world, even as generations of hard-working, well-meaning individuals dedicate their careers to stopping them. It would be an understatement to say that the underlying problems are extremely difficult to solve. Still, the social sector’s work on these issues has been undermined by a distinct lack of strategic thinking. This lack of results has forced a rapid evolution of the sector over the past decade. There is, now, an unprecedented emphasis on strategy, demonstration of impact and use of innovative business models.

With the above context in mind, this course aims to:

- Understand and analyze the historical, statistical and technical underpinnings of the range of issues involved in social development, including: (i) Poverty, (ii) Agriculture, (iii) Health, (iv) Education, (v) Human rights, (vi) Survival in conflict situations, and (vii) Access to financial services.
- Understand what various organizations can contribute to each issue: government agencies, multilateral institutions (e.g., the UN), private foundations, NGOs, large private sector companies, small/mid-sized businesses, and startup social entrepreneurs.
- Design and analyze approaches to addressing these issues: effective programs using a limited amount of funding over a 4-5 year period, defining and optimizing for (the appropriate subset of): (i) Reach (number of people directly impacted), (ii) Lift (magnitude of individual impact), (iii) Efficiency (cost of lift, per person impacted), (iv) Scalability (cost of lift per person, for additional people impacted), (v) Sustainability (longevity of reach and lift), (vi) Replicability (lift achieved, when the solution is applied to different populations and contexts), (vii) Catalytic effect (number/scale of “copycat” initiatives), (viii) Understanding and minimizing unintended consequences, and (ix) Probability of achieving the above, given the strength of the supporting ecosystem.
- Assessing the [projected or actual] impact of these programs.

In summary, this main objective of the course is to help students become effective practitioners in global development, by arming them with practical skills to help solve these important problems.

Dr. Shashi Buluswar is the founder and Executive Director of LIGTT, the Institute for Globally Transformative Technologies, at Lawrence Berkeley National Lab (LBNL). Launched in 2012, LIGTT’s mission is to bring scientific and technological breakthroughs to address global poverty and related social ills, through advanced research, robust and user-centric product engineering, sustainable business models, and a broad global network of partnerships. In its first year, LIGTT has developed the world’s first portable solar-powered vaccine refrigerator, an ultra-low-cost infant incubator, and an early version of a DNA-based diagnostic device for reliable low-cost diagnosis of TB. Prior to joining LIGTT, he was a Partner at Dalberg Global Development Advisors, where he served as a strategic advisor to various UN agencies, the Gates Foundation, and many other organizations working for social impact in the developing world. Prior to Dalberg, Shashi was an Associate Partner at McKinsey & Company. He holds a PhD from the University of Massachusetts in Robotics, and an MBA from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management.