Objectives:

Development programs and policies are intended to change outcomes such as raising incomes, increasing productivity, improving learning, or reducing illness. Whether or not these changes in outcomes are actually achieved are crucial public policy and business questions, yet are not often examined. This course covers the methods and applications of impact evaluations, which is the science of measuring the causal impact of a program or policy on outcomes of interest.

Simply put, an impact evaluation assesses the changes in the well-being of individuals or organizations that can be attributed to a particular project, program or policy. This focus on attribution is the hallmark of impact evaluations. This basic question incorporates an important causal dimension: we are only interested in the impact of the program, this is the effect on outcomes that is caused directly by the program. In other words, we are looking for the changes in outcome that are directly attributable to the program. Correspondingly, the central challenge in carrying out effective impact evaluations is to identify the causal relationship between the project, program or policy and the outcomes of interest. This course will cover the range of methods used in impact evaluation and survey what works in a wide variety of policy and business areas using the methods to access the quality of the evidence.

At its essence, impact evaluation is about generating evidence on which policies work, and which don’t. This subject matter should appeal to three main audiences: (1) those in decision-making positions, such as policy makers and business leaders, and need to consume the information generated from impact evaluations to make informed evidence-based decisions, (2) project managers, development practitioners and business managers who commission impact evaluations and (3) researchers who actually design and implement impact evaluations.