



IU BLOOMINGTON

EMERGING AREAS OF RESEARCH

Abstract Template -- Due June 30, 2017

Title of initiative to be proposed:

International Aid and Development: Risk, Context, and Learning

Name of lead PI, with title, department/school:

Dr. Nick Cullather, Executive Associate Dean, SGIS, Professor, Departments of International Studies & History;

Key team member names and departments/schools (up to 10 names):

Dr. Jessica Steinberg, Assistant Professor, Department of International Studies, SGIS; Dr Sarah Bauerle Danzman, Assistant Professor, Department of International Studies, SGIS; Dr. Stephen Macekura, Assistant Professor, Department of International Studies, SGIS; Dr. William K. Winecoff, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, COAS

Description of area to be proposed. What constitutes this area of research or creative activity as emerging?
(Word limit=500)

SGIS has launched a program to support research and teaching in the area of international development, aid, and foreign investment. Building on this initiative, we propose an ambitious, multi-disciplinary program to position IU at the forefront of development research and practice by reshaping the ways in which international development projects are designed, implemented, measured, and assessed.

Owing to the limited success of aid transfers to national governments, the development community increasingly recognizes the importance of small-scale, context-specific projects. However, most of our analytic tools for predicting and assessing the effectiveness of development interventions remain at the national, rather than local level. Development assistance organizations have struggled to learn from past interventions that foundered either by failing to account for multi-dimensional risk, or adjusting too slowly to changing circumstances.

Our project bridges this gap with three inter-related research endeavors. First, we will create a Local Correlates of Aid Effectiveness (LOCAE) metric. This metric will provide the first set of multi-dimensional, comparable, and subnational measures of the local factors that shape effectiveness of development projects. Second, we will develop a new conceptual framework to evaluate aid effectiveness that spotlights the importance of projects' adaptive capacity. We will focus on a specific sector of aid project implementation to calibrate our LOCAE metric and provide an assessment of the barriers to flexible and responsive implementation of development assistance. Finally, we will analyze how and when assistance agencies and organizations learn by assimilating their own historical experiences into practice. By interrogating in particular how aid agencies have relied upon various metrics in the past, we will investigate the possibilities and limitations of relying on quantitative indicators as effective tools for narrating the success or failure of aid interventions.

Our research program will make IU a leader in multi-disciplinary, contextual, and historical research related to international development. The LOCAE measure has the potential to be widely used among academic and practitioner communities, making IU the fulcrum for development policy discussion and innovation. IU can build upon existing strengths in qualitative historical research and area studies with a series of strategic hires in experimental developmental economics, networks and complexity science, and field research in international development program implementation. The resulting research team will further enable IU faculty to be at the forefront of worldwide debates on the challenges of poverty reduction, inequality, and sustainability.

Please submit to earprogram@indiana.edu