Over the past decade, interventions to promote the wellbeing of the world’s poorest citizens have been transformed by a shift from top-down to bottom-up approaches. Key to this shift has been a growing emphasis the role that citizen pressure can play in holding governments and service providers accountable for improved performance, and in the role that information can play in generating such bottom-up citizen pressure. This seminar looks critically at this trend. We first examine the theoretical basis for the claim that information deficits are the central stumbling block to improving government accountability. We then discuss a number of important recent studies that test the impact of information on accountability achieved through the ballot box and through citizen action in the education and health sectors. Our discussions will focus equally on the implications of the each study’s findings and the strengths and weaknesses of the research design it employs.

In the last two weeks of the course, we will take a close look at the Uwezo initiative, an education intervention designed to generate citizen pressure for improvements in children’s learning in East Africa. We will discuss the motivation and design of the Uwezo intervention and review the evidence to date for its impact. Students will then have the opportunity to work with the Uwezo data and project materials to design their own interventions to test unanswered questions in the context of this ongoing research project. Particularly promising proposals may be implemented in the field in summer 2014.

The course is designed for advanced Political Science Ph.D. students who have field research experience in developing countries. Professor Michael Callen’s graduate seminar on field experiments is a prerequisite.

REQUIREMENTS

There are three requirements for the course. First, students are required to attend all class meetings, come to seminar having read the assigned material for the week, and participate actively in class discussions. Students will be expected to have read—not just skinned, but really read, and read carefully—all of the readings before each class meeting.

Second, students will each write brief response papers on three of the studies we discuss during the sessions on voting, education and health. These paper, no more than two pages long, will summarize the main findings of the study, assess the strengths and weaknesses of its design, and evaluate its implications for the literature.

Third, each student will write, either alone or in collaboration, a “just-add-water-and-stir” research design proposal for an intervention that would advance our understanding of the relationship between information and accountability. Details will be distributed.
The weight attached to these three requirements is as follows:

- Attendance and participation 40%
- Response papers 30%
- Research proposal 30%

READINGS

Copies of all the course readings are posted on the course web page. You may download and print them for your own use.
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Oct 3: No Class Meeting

Oct 8: Introduction to the Course


Oct 15: Theory


Oct 22: Voting


Oct 29: *Education I*


Nov 5: *Education II*


Nov 12: *No Class Meeting*
Nov 19:  *Health*


Nov 26: *Private Action, General Equilibrium Effects and Other Complications*


Dec 3: *The Uwezo Initiative*

Tanzania Baseline Survey Questionnaire (Household Module; Community Module; Health Module; School Module)

Uwezo Assessment Questionnaire, 2013.

Dec 10: *Presentation/Discussion of Research Proposals (joint with MIT and Princeton Seminars)*