**Brandeis University The Heller School for Social Policy
and Management Program in Sustainable International
Development (SID)**

**Pro-Seminar: Digital Technologies for Sustainable
Development: Assessing the role of digital
technologies and media in the design of sustainable
development initiatives**

SYLLABUS

Rodrigo Morán and Emilio Velis
(Adjunct Lecturers)

October 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 2021
Hybrid format (in-person and synchronous
streaming)

Course
description:

The DMSD Pro-Seminar proposes a practical perspective on the new challenges and opportunities posed by digital technologies applied to international development. The core objective of this Pro-Seminar is to acquire the critical skills to understand the impact of past and current technology-based development interventions from theoretical and empirical standpoints.

The proseminar aims to provide students with the conceptual tools to assess the potential positive or negative impacts of using digital technologies and media in development projects, in addition to providing them with tools to conceptualize and design digital development projects and initiatives. After the seminar, participants will be equipped with the necessary tools to assess the role of digital technologies and media in their own organizations, understand the [Principles of Digital Development](#) and apply them in the conceptualization and design of development projects and initiatives.

The seminar will begin by offering an introductory conceptual basis of the use of technology in international development, accompanied by a series of selected international case studies and practical use of digital tools for diverse applications such as Multimedia content production and distribution; Collective intelligence; Financial technologies (Fintech); Education technologies

(Edtech); and Appropriate technologies.

The first session of the course will consist of a brief presentation of theoretical approaches and concepts linking the use of technologies (with an emphasis on digital technologies) for a variety of facets in sustainable development. Based on the required and recommended readings, the group will engage in a prospective design activity, using digital technologies applied to development problems chosen by students prior to the proseminar.

A second session will engage the group in considering how digital technologies are being applied to real situations through documented examples of effective digital development projects and related initiatives in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The session will be guided by the facilitators and by seasoned guests with expertise in digital development abroad. A practical part of this session will guide participants to explore different digital tools to assess the role of digital technologies and media in development projects. Participants will apply these tools to their project concepts as they reflect on digital principles and practices.

In the third session, the group will reflect on what constitutes good use of technology in international development, as well as the pitfalls of technological solutionism. The session will close with an open discussion based on the project proposals outlined by the students which will serve as a basis for the final assignment of the proseminar.

About the Pro-Seminar Facilitators:

Emilio Velis

Emilio Velis is an industrial engineer based in San Salvador from where he explores how sharing knowledge and technology can impact communities. He received the MIT Innovators Under 35 Award in Central America for an initiative that helped communities to design their own open hardware for social and environmental resilience. Emilio is currently the Executive Director of the Appropedia Foundation: the largest sustainability wiki in the world.

Rodrigo Morán
Rodrigo is a lawyer turned development practitioner, passionate about the intersection of technology, innovation and sustainable development. He has 10 years of experience working with civil society, municipal government, private development consulting, and the UN system. He currently serves as Head of Solutions Mapping at UNDP El Salvador's Accelerator Lab. Rodrigo completed his Heller SID MA ('16) as a Fulbright scholar, and is a fellow from the 14th class of the Central American Leadership Initiative (CALI) and the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Course methods:

- **Readings**, which provide relevant insights for students to engage in class discussions and to better understand the case studies (see **required and recommended readings**);
- **Short lectures** and discussion on the impact and application of technology and digital media in community empowerment and development;
- Presentation and discussion of selected international **case studies**, using videos, stories and frameworks such as the [Principles of Digital Development](#);
- **Lightning presentations** from global experts on different ICT and Multimedia fields with experience in development settings (Speedgeeking).
- **Final Assignmen**t (3-4 pages), to be concluded after the seminar. The assignment consists of a Concept Note for a technology/media-driven intervention aimed to address a community development issue.

Note: In order to receive course credit, the paper must be submitted for evaluation no later than 3 weeks after the Pro-Seminar, on **October 29th.**

Course requirements:
- Readings, in advance of the seminar
- Attendance at all sessions
- Engaged participation in discussions and practices
- Submission of project elevator pitch (3-min video) and final paper (Concept Note)

Grading:

Participation (30%)
Concept Note (50%)
Video elevator pitch (20%)

If you are a student with a documented disability on record at Brandeis University and wish to have an accommodation made for you in this class, please contact Assistant Dean Ravi Lakshmikanthan (kanthan@brandeis.edu). He will assist you with your accommodation.

Course Schedule

- **Podcast Introduction (Day 0) -** (40 min) available for students 5 days prior to the course
- **Day 1 -** Friday, October 1st, 2021 - 06:30 p.m.. -8:00 p.m. EST.
- **Day 2** - Saturday, October 2nd, 2021 - 09:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m. EST.
- **Day 3** - Sunday, October 3rd, 2021 - 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. EST
- **Office Hours (via Zoom):** Oct 4-8 (scheduling required).

Course outline

DAY 0

The 3D Podcast (Digital Development Debrief) 2021 podcast - Episode 1: Pilot
Introduction to the lecturers, objectives, key concepts, what to expect from the course?

Day 1: Friday, October 1st

[6:30 PM] Welcome and introductions: Participants will share their background and expectations for the course.

[7:00 PM] The role of digital technologies and media in development: Live lecture where facilitators discuss key concepts and notions about the intersection of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and development, and its social, ethical, and practical applications.

Discussion: How can development practitioners leverage digital technologies to address development challenges without perpetuating colonization patterns? How can digital technologies increase participation and diversity in designing

development projects and in decision-making processes? In addition to discussing these questions, participants will share their initial ideas for the use of various digital technologies in a development project.

Day 2: Saturday, October 2nd

[9:00 AM] Coffee and recap of initial discussion: Participants will reflect on Friday night's discussion and how it has impacted their preliminary digital development project ideas.

[9:30 AM] The T4D landscape: Facilitators will lay out the Technology for Development (T4D) landscape, introducing participants to the concepts of Multimedia content production and distribution; Collective intelligence; Financial technologies (Fintech); Education technologies (Edtech); and Appropriate technologies.

[10:30 AM] Break/Active Pause

[11:00 AM] The Good, the Bad and the Ugly of Digital Development: Live lecture where facilitators share real examples of digital development projects and dissect some of the most relevant aspects that determine their failure or success.

[12:30 PM] Lunch break

[01:45 PM] Brain reset

[2:00 PM] Speedgeeking: Two digital development professionals from around the world will deliver a lightning talk about the use of digital technologies and media in development contexts, followed by a short Q&A session.

[3:30 PM] Course Project Instructions and Design Workshop: Facilitators will explain the instructions for the course project and participants will join their classmates or work individually on conceptualizing their digital development projects, exploring the approaches and tools presented in the morning session and applying them to the topic of their choosing.

[5:00 PM] Break for the day

Day 3: Sunday, October 3rd

[9:00 AM] Coffee and Check-in: Reflections on group work and reviewed course materials (videos, articles, etc.)

[09:30 AM] Digital Development Case Studies: Presentation and discussion of digital development projects from across the world that have utilized diverse digital technologies in the design of development initiatives around health, financial inclusion, education, and other areas.

[10:30 AM] Hype Busters: Ludic exercise to revisit the key elements of a good digital development project.

[11:00 AM] Break/Active Pause

[11:20 AM] Course Conclusions and Final Discussion: Students will reflect on the different topics covered in the course and will share their conclusions on the role that technology and digital media can play in development.

[12:30 PM] It's a wrap!

Required Readings

- Srinivasan, R. (2006). Where Information Society and Community Voice Intersect.

  The Information Society, *22*(5), 355–365.

  https://doi.org/10.1080/01972240600904324

- Neophytou, L. (2022). Critical Media Literacy: A Comprehensive Approach

  Enabling Students (as Citizens) To Use ICT in the Quest for a Just Society. In L.

  Mâță (Ed.), *Ethical Use of Information Technology in Higher Education* (pp.

  145–161). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-1951-9_10

- Chikonzo, A. (2006). The potential of information and communication technologies in collecting, preserving and disseminating indigenous knowledge in Africa. *The International Information & Library Review*, *38*(3), 132–138. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iilr.2006.06.006

- Taylor, L. (2021). There Is an App for That: Technological Solutionism as COVID-19 Policy in the Global North. In E. Aarts, H. Fleuren, M. Sitskoorn, & T. Wilthagen (Eds.), *The New Common: How the COVID-19 Pandemic is Transforming Society* (pp. 209–215). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-65355-2_30

- Abdelnour-Nocera, J., & Densmore, M. (2017). A review of perspectives and challenges for international development in information and communication technologies. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *41*(3–4), 250–257. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2017.1392252