

## **Abstract and conclusion FNE-Project**

### **Responsible for the project**

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## **Introduction to Evidence-Based Research for Sustainable Social Development**

### **Abstract**

The lecture will give students the possibility to develop a deeper understanding of the role of evidence-based research for sustainable social development. A focus will lie on the behavioral sciences and their relevance for sustainability. The lecture will have strong focus on applications. How do we assess need, how do we randomize in the field, how do empirical results inform policy change? Guest speakers from different disciplines, all committed to using social science methods to study social development, will strengthen the importance of social science research methods for doing evidence-based research. One goal of the lecture is to initiate a dialogue among students from different disciplinary backgrounds at the University of Bern, but with a common interest in sustainable social development.

## Conclusion

1. An important aspect was that students were able to gain insights into cutting-edge research methods in the social sciences, and in particular how these methods are applied to tackle sustainability and development issues (presented by researcher from several countries and disciplines).
2. The biggest challenge was the heterogeneity of students. The heterogeneity made it difficult to respond to the different degrees of experience equally. Some students had in-depth training in social science research methods; others had no training at all. It was a challenge to get the methods across to everyone. However, it also made the lecture enjoyable to design. Speakers from many different disciplines (political science, sociology, psychology, public policy, and economics) were invited to present their research. The various speakers helped students to understand how research on sustainability and development is done across different disciplines and what the specific interest in sustainability and the respective methods were in a given discipline.
3. In future lectures and tutorials for this course, it will be essential to create a framework that challenges students enough but not too much. Ideally, students attending this class would already have some basic understanding of important research concepts. If this is not possible, having this heterogeneity of students will require different materials for both less and more experienced students. Various materials could be created via adaptive online learning tools, for instance, on statistical analyses. One could also alternate what students come to the class in some weeks and who does home studies instead. The online teaching in the spring term has shown that there are many opportunities for grouping students to do teaching with subgroups while others do independent assignments.
4. I think it would be essential to create group tasks at different levels of difficulty. Students could then select between these tasks and focus on concepts and methods students do not know yet. After setting a basis, one could have students deliberately read articles about a specific topic from their own discipline versus another discipline. That should deepen the understanding of the interdisciplinary nature of sustainability research. I would also group students into 'support groups'. Support groups could represent the heterogeneous backgrounds of the students, and allow students in small groups to discuss their challenges, explain each other key concepts of their disciplines concerning sustainability. Students could encourage each other by reading standard articles in different fields, and they could have internal discussions about the pros and cons of various social science research methods.