

Alex James Odlum, PhD

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I am an interdisciplinary researcher studying decision-making, data, knowledge, quantification and expertise in organizations that face ethically charged, uncertain, time- and resource-scarce environments, particularly in humanitarian crisis, disaster and extreme contexts. My research contributes to organization and management theory, the cognitive science of fast-and-frugal heuristics, and humanitarian studies, and is informed by my prior experience working as a professional humanitarian analyst for international organizations and NGOs.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

- Judgment, decision-making, heuristics and intuition.
- Individual, group and organizational behavior and cognition.
- Organizational theory and microfoundations of institutions.
- Ethics, politics and sociology of data, quantification, innovation, AI, knowledge and expertise.
- Public, non-profit and international management and global governance.
- Humanitarian action, health emergencies, disaster management, crisis anticipation and response.

Education

University of Lausanne, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC Lausanne)

[Lausanne, Switzerland](#)

PHD IN MANAGEMENT (ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR)

Sept 2020 - Jan 2026

- Title: Three Essays on Decision Making under Uncertainty: Insights from Humanitarian Organizations and Disaster Environments

Hertie School of Governance

[Berlin, Germany](#)

MASTER OF PUBLIC POLICY

Sept 2013 - Jun 2015

Australian National University

[Canberra, Australia](#)

GRADUATE DIPLOMA IN LEGAL PRACTICE

Nov 2012 - Feb 2015

University of Adelaide

[Adelaide, Australia](#)

BACHELOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (HONOURS) & BACHELOR OF LAWS (HONOURS)

Feb 2007 - Oct 2012

Academic Positions and Employment

Geneva Graduate Institute, Department of International Relations and Political Science

[Geneva, Switzerland](#)

VISITING POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOW & LECTURER

Mar 2026 - Feb 2027

- Researching how humanitarian organizations decide to enter/withdraw from crises by modelling how simple heuristic decision strategies perform in complex environments using evidence-driven computational models. Hosted by Prof Ravi Bhavnani.
- Lecturing a 6 ECTS Master's course on Fast-and-Frugal Heuristics: Simple Rules for Prediction Applied to Humanitarian Crisis.

University of Lausanne, Faculty of Business and Economics (HEC Lausanne)

[Lausanne, Switzerland](#)

GRADUATE ASSISTANT (ASSISTANT DIPLÔMÉ) THEN AFFILIATED POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER

Jul 2024 - Feb 2027

- Independent PhD thesis research on heuristic decision making in humanitarian settings alongside teaching, research and administrative duties.
- Evaluated 3 MSc in Management students' theses; translated (French-English) and updated Master's level Organizational Behavior course.
- Ongoing research on the ecological rationality of proverbs for disaster prediction and how to teach intuitive decision making.

Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies (Geneva Graduate Institute/Uni. of Geneva)

[Geneva, Switzerland](#)

RESEARCH COORDINATOR & LECTURER

Mar 2020 - Jun 2024

- Coordinated academic experts, humanitarian practitioners, linguistic analysts, web developers and communications specialists to deliver the Humanitarian Encyclopedia - a unique, collaborative, online knowledge base with information on 100+ concepts and relational databases.
- Tasks included editing and drafting concept entries, expertise notes, blogs, academic articles; managing databases, online knowledge repository, web content system, interactive forum; visualizing large sets of qualitative and quantitative data; conducting surveys, interviews, workshops; project management, budgeting, proposal writing, donor relations; designing and implementing communications strategy.
- Conducted field research for other humanitarian health projects including over 50 interviews for the COVID-19 Humanitarian project, and multiple field trips to Ethiopia and Nigeria for the PULSE project with IFRC on community engagement for vaccination.
- Supervised 6 Master's dissertations and taught courses on context analysis, presenting findings, essay writing, HDX (Humanitarian Data Exchange), humanitarian data ethics, critical thinking and analysis, writing a policy brief.
- Co-lectured a 6 ECTS Master's course - Doing Global Inquiries with Interviews and Surveys at the Geneva Graduate Institute in Spring 2024.

ACAPS – The Assessment Capacities Project

Geneva, Switzerland

INFORMATION ANALYST -> SENIOR ANALYST -> ANALYSIS TEAM LEADER -> KNOWLEDGE MANAGER

Sept 2015 - Sept 2019

- Progressed from a trainee to manager supervising 5-10 staff. Seconded as technical support to operational analysis projects in the field.
- Wrote, coordinated and edited briefing notes, global severity analysis, risk reports, scenarios and other independent, timely, and insightful analysis products for decision makers.
- Developed new organization-wide knowledge management and M&E systems. Led internal evaluations of traineeship and briefing notes.

Mixed Migration Center (Danish Refugee Council/Norwegian Refugee Council/ACAPS)

Amman, Jordan

SENIOR ANALYST (FIELD RESEARCH)

Nov 2016 - Sept 2017

- Seconded to set up an inter-agency analysis initiative on mixed migration in the Middle East with DRC, NRC/ACAPS, INTERSOS, REACH, GTS.
- Established research, analysis and knowledge management infrastructure. Built networks of interview participants with humanitarian staff and key informants in migrant and host communities.
- Published and presented briefing notes, articles, blogs on migration topics to policy makers, decision makers and academics. Sensitized programme staff to and advocated for a mixed migration lens to refugee response operations.

Teaching

Fast-and-Frugal Heuristics: Simple Rules for Prediction Applied to Humanitarian Crisis

Geneva, Switzerland

Settings, Geneva Graduate Institute

6 ECTS. LECTURER (FALL 2026 - IN PREPARATION)

2026 - 2027

- Preparing to deliver 13 weekly 2 hour sessions to Master's students in Department of International Relations and Political Science applying the science of fast-and-frugal heuristics to humanitarian decision and prediction problems.

Predicting Crises, Geneva Graduate Institute

Geneva, Switzerland

INVITED LECTURER

2026 - 2026

- Guest lecture: Fast-and-Frugal Heuristics: Simple Rules for Prediction in Humanitarian Crises, 17 March 2026.

Doing Global Inquiries with Interviews and Surveys, Geneva Graduate Institute

Geneva, Switzerland

6 ECTS. CO-LECTURER (SPRING 2024) AND INVITED LECTURER (AUTUMN 2023, 2024, 2025)

2023 - 2025

- Course outline: Introducing "Global inquiries with interviews and surveys", Histories of surveys and interviewing, The basics of research design, Research question design, Interview & survey question design, Sampling, Conducting interviews, Different types of interviews, Interview analysis, Building surveys, Survey analysis, Writing it up, Positionality and access, Ethics.

MAS/DAS Research Methods Workshops, Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies

Geneva, Switzerland

WORKSHOP DESIGNER AND FACILITATOR

2020 - 2025

- 2020-2021: Context analysis, Presenting findings, Essay writing.
- 2021-2022: Context analysis, Essay writing.
- 2022-2023: Humanitarian data and the HDX (Humanitarian Data Exchange).
- 2023-2024: Humanitarian data ethics: Navigating digital dilemmas in humanitarian data and knowledge production processes.
- 2024-2025: Four workshops on 1) How to identify a problem statement and research questions? 2) How to develop critical thinking and analysis? 3) How to practise data analysis? 4) How to write a policy brief?

Humanitarian Encyclopedia Workshops, Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies

Geneva, Switzerland

WORKSHOP DESIGNER AND FACILITATOR

2021 - 2022

- 2021-2022: "A Blast at the Port" - Communicating and coordinating in crisis.
- 2021-2022: Diverse perspectives on key humanitarian concepts.

Ethics in Refugee and Migration Research, German Jordanian University in Amman

Amman, Jordan

INVITED LECTURER

2017 - 2017

- Invited to provide two guest lectures on mixed migration research ethics.

Publications

PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL ARTICLES

1. Polonsky, J. A., Burns, R., Odlum, A., Hamza, Y. A., Mulugeta, Y., Abramowitz, S., Enria, L., & Blanchet, K. (2026). Community engagement for vaccine delivery in low- and middle-income countries and humanitarian settings: A scoping umbrella review. *PLOS Global Public Health*, 6(4), e0006307. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0006307>
2. Isaacs, L., Odlum, A., & León-Araúz, P. (2024). Quartz: A Template for Quantitative Corpus Data Visualization Tools. *Languages*, 9(3), 81. <https://doi.org/10.3390/languages9030081>
3. Odlum, A., James, R., Mahieu, A., Blanchet, K., Altare, C., Singh, N., & Spiegel, P. (2021). Use of COVID-19 evidence in humanitarian settings: The need for dynamic guidance adapted to changing humanitarian crisis contexts. *Conflict and Health*, 15(1), 83. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-021-00418-w>
4. Singh, N. S., Abraham, O., Altare, C., Blanchet, K., Favas, C., Odlum, A., & Spiegel, P. B. (2020). COVID-19 in humanitarian settings: Documenting and sharing context-specific programmatic experiences. *Conflict and Health*, 14(1), 79. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-020-00321-w>

PEER-REVIEWED CONFERENCE PAPERS

1. Odlum, A., Dietz, J., & Marewski, J. (2024, August 9–13). Humanity, impartiality, and data preferences: How values shape the quantification of human need. *Academy of Management Proceedings. Innovating for the Future - Policy, Purpose, and Organizations*. <https://journals.aom.org/doi/10.5465/AMPROC.2024.18408abstract>
2. Odlum, A., Marewski, J. N., & Dietz, J. (2024). Misfortunes never come singly: Reflections of the environment in a proverb. *Proceedings of the 46th Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4sm473zh>

BOOK CHAPTERS

1. Odlum, A. (2019). To Stay or to Go? Decision-Making of LGBTQI Syrians in Mixed Migration Flows. In A. Güler, M. Shevtsova, & D. Venturi (Eds.), *LGBTI Asylum Seekers and Refugees from a Legal and Political Perspective: Persecution, Asylum and Integration* (pp. 71–93). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91905-8_5

DISSERTATIONS

1. Odlum, A. J. (2026). *Three Essays on Decision Making under Uncertainty: Insights from Humanitarian Organizations and Disaster Environments* [PhD thesis, University of Lausanne]. <https://iris.unil.ch/handle/iris/279112>
2. Odlum, A. (2015). *Humanitarian Resilience? Impact of the Syrian Refugee Response on Adequate Housing in Egypt and Jordan*. Hertie School of Governance.
3. Odlum, A. (2012). *Re-envisioning support to civil society in Egypt*. University of Adelaide.
4. Odlum, A. (2011). *Home without a Home: The Challenges of Legal Pluralism for Returning Afghan Refugees' Right to Property Restitution*. University of Adelaide.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

1. Odlum, A. (2026, July). Legitimacy, Internal Evaluations and Humanitarian Knowledge Production. *WS U: Fractured Epistemic Orders: Politics of Knowledge and Expertise in Global Governance*.
2. Odlum, Alex. (2024, August). What Makes a Good Humanitarian? Local Emotion as Resistance to the Isomorphic Pull of Professionalised Aid. *16th ESA Conference Tension, Trust and Transformation*. <https://www.europeansociology.org/conference/2024/article/8f2cdaa5-23a9-4441-90df-49e07d7c6711>
3. Odlum, A., & Ramachandran, S. (2023, November). Power, language and localisation: Who defines “the local”? *World Conference on Humanitarian Studies*. <https://conference.ihsa.info/proposed-panels/view/4093/>
4. Odlum, A. (2022, November). Principled Humanitarian Analysis: What effect do humanitarian norms have on information quality? *Workshop 6 Years After the Agenda for Humanity - Humanitarianism Challenged*. <https://www.eur.nl/en/events/workshop-6-years-after-agenda-humanity-humanitarianism-challenged-2022-11-25>
5. Odlum, A. (2021, November). Determinants of conceptual evolution in humanitarian discourse. *Beyond the Local: Cultural Translatability in Humanitarian Interventions*. <https://conference.ihsa.info/call-for-papers/view/2971/>

EDITORIALS, COMMENTARIES AND OTHER ARTICLES

1. Odlum, A., & Muller, J. (2021). Exploring how humanitarian actors use key COVID-19 concepts. *SouthAsiaDisasters.net*, 191. <http://www.aidmi.org/publications.aspx>
2. Odlum, A. (2020). Preparing, responding and adapting existing programmes to Covid-19 in humanitarian settings: The Covid-19 Humanitarian platform. *Alternatives Humanitaires Humanitarian Alternatives*, 14, 115–117. <http://alternatives-humanitaires.org/en/2020/07/23/the-covid-19-pandemic-a-double-burden-in-humanitarian-crises/>

Science Communication

SEMINAR PRESENTATIONS

2026/03	The Ethics of Quantification: Organizational Values and Assessing Human Need. Centre for Operational Research, Management Sciences and Information Systems (CORMSIS) Seminar, University of Southampton.	United Kingdom
2025/05	Humanity, Impartiality, and Data Preferences: How values shape the quantification of human need. Department of Organizational Behavior Research Seminar, University of Lausanne.	Switzerland
2024/12	Misfortunes never come singly: Reflections of the environment in a proverb. Department of Organizational Behavior Research Seminar, University of Lausanne.	Switzerland
2021/10	The Humanitarian Encyclopedia: Analysing shifts in humanitarian discourse with Twitter data. Lunchtime Research Seminar, Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies.	Switzerland

Technical Skills

Methods	Computational modelling, Computational text analysis, Experiments (laboratory and online), Focus group discussions, In-depth text and content analysis, Interviews (semi-structured, open-ended), Simulations and serious games, Surveys
Software	Azure DevOps, Discourse, Dropbox/Dropbox Paper, Email, EndNote, GitHub, Google Data Studio, Google Docs, Google Drive, Google Forms, Google Sheets, Google Sites, Google Tasks, Hootsuite, Hugo, Leaflet, MS Excel, MS Word/Powerpoint, MailChimp, Mendeley, NVIVO, Open Science Framework (OSF), PowerBI, Qualtrics, R Markdown/Quarto, R/R Studio, STATA, SketchEngine, Slack/Teams, Survey Monkey, Switch Drive, Tableau, Taguette, Trello, WordPress, Zapier, Zotero

Language English (native), French (fluent), German (fluent), Spanish (basic)

Fieldwork Australia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Greece, Guinea Bissau, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Switzerland, Turkey, Uganda

Visits and Exchanges

2026-27 Visiting Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland

2014-15 Master's Exchange semester, The American University in Cairo, Egypt

2009-10 Bachelor's Exchange year, Université Grenoble Alpes, France (formerly Université Pierre-Mendès-France)

Prizes and Distinctions

2015 GPA of 90.5. For overall academic achievement. Hertie School of Governance.

2012 David Mattingley Prize. For Best Honours Thesis in International Studies/Politics. University of Adelaide.

2012 1st Class Honours. For overall academic achievement. University of Adelaide, School of History and Politics.

2012 2nd Class A Honours. For overall academic achievement. University of Adelaide Law School.

Funding and Grants

2013-15 Hertie School of Governance. Scholarship for 50% tuition fee waiver.

2013 Australian Government, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Creative Young Stars grant.

Academic Service

AD-HOC PEER REVIEW

2021- Cognition, Linguistics, Academy of Management Proceedings.

RECRUITMENT COMMITTEES

2013 Student representative on hiring committee for Professor of International Law, Hertie School of Governance.

SCIENTIFIC EVENT ORGANIZATION

2026/08 Migrants, refugees and humanitarian protections in a digitalized world, RS13 - Humanitarianism Under Pressure: Social Action, Governance, and Global Norms, 17th Conference of the European Sociological Association, Strengthening Democracies: Social Action, Solidarity, and Sustainable Futures, 25-28 August 2026 | Warsaw, Poland.

Session Chair

2021-22 Lunchtime Research Seminar, Geneva Centre of Humanitarian Studies.

Coordinator

Consulting, Research Assistance and Internships

International Organization for Migration (IOM), Regional Office for West Africa

Nigeria, & Guinea Bissau

CONSULTANT

Jan 2020 - Mar 2020

- Led two field missions to Nigeria and Guinea Bissau to evaluate the EU-IOM Joint Initiative For Migrant Protection and Reintegration.
- Tasks included liaising with field staff for logistics and operational support; traveling to field sites in rural and urban areas to collect observational and interview data; coding and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data; presenting insights to decision makers and programme staff.

Lessons Learned Simulations and Training (LLST), Remote-based

Geneva, Switzerland

CONSULTANT (DEVELOP SERIOUS GAMES; CLIENT OUTREACH IN GENEVA AND BERLIN)

Aug 2019 - Mar 2020

Tofta Educational Trust

Jinja, Uganda

CONSULTANT (EVALUATION OF PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME)

Sept 2016 - Oct 2016

Residential Tenancies Tribunal

Adelaide, Australia

CLERK (ASSIST TRIBUNAL MEMBERS WITH CASE MANAGEMENT AND HEARINGS)

Jan 2015 - Jan 2015

IOM, Department of Operations and Emergencies

Geneva, Switzerland

CONSULTANT (RESEARCH FOR LAND, PROPERTY & REPARATIONS DIVISION ON PEACE AGREEMENTS)

Jul 2014 - Aug 2014

Australian Embassy, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Berlin, Germany

INTERN (RESEARCH FOR POLITICAL & ECONOMIC SECTION; CULTURAL EVENTS; CONSULAR SUPPORT)

May 2014 - Jun 2014

Tactical Tech Collective

Berlin, Germany

INTERN (RESEARCH; POLICY ANALYSIS; WEBSITE DESIGN)

Jan 2014 - Mar 2014

M Taher & Co Solicitors

London, UK

CLERK (ASSIST SOLICITOR WITH CASE RESEARCH, HEARINGS, NEGOTIATIONS)

Jun 2013 - Aug 2013

Media Intelligence Partners

RESEARCHER (CLIENT BRIEFING NOTES; ATTEND PARLIAMENTARY SESSIONS)

London, UK

Jan 2012 - Sept 2012

Democracy Reporting International

INTERN (RESEARCH ON EGYPT PROJECT; ADMIN SUPPORT FOR BOARD MEETINGS)

Berlin, Germany

May 2012 - Sept 2012

Centre for Housing, Urban & Regional Planning, University of Adelaide

RESEARCH ASSISTANT (RESEARCH ON HOUSING AND HUMAN RIGHTS PROJECT)

Adelaide, Australia

Jan 2012 - May 2012

Global Public Policy Institute

INTERN (RESEARCH ON UN PEACEKEEPING PROJECT)

Berlin, Germany

Jan 2011 - Feb 2011

Volunteering and Extra-curricular

2020-26 Player and captain (2023-26), Geneva Jets Australian Rules Football (AFL) Club

Switzerland

2014-18 Volunteer, "14 KM" – The Shortest Distance between North Africa and Europe

Germany

2014 Teacher, Teacher of English class for Syrian refugees

Egypt

2013-15 Member, Hertie School of Governance clubs: Ambassador Series (Vice President); Schlossplatz3 student magazine, Hertie United Nations Society (WorldMUN), Social Entrepreneurship & Innovation Club

Germany

2013-14 Student Representative, MPP Class of 2015, Hertie School of Governance

Germany

2010-12 Volunteer, Migration Support, Australian Red Cross

Australia