1 Course Description and Objectives

This course is a 3-credit graduate seminar (class # 47808). It introduces graduate students to experimental methods in the social sciences, with specific application to political science. We will discuss the logic of experimentation, its strengths and weaknesses compared to other methodologies, and how experiments can be used to investigate social phenomena. Students will learn how to interpret, design, execute and analyze experiments. Each session of the course will be a combination of discussion guided by students, some mini-lectures where appropriate and small group work.

The main project will be an experiment that you will design, get IRB approval for, pilot and analyze (funding is available to each student). This can be done by yourself or in a group of up to three students.

This course is a traditional course according to the Carnegie definition (i.e. at least 1 hour of classroom instruction and 2 hours of out-of-class student work each week).

Students who closely and carefully engage course readings, attend and participate in class discussion, and complete course assignments will be able to:

• Explain important concepts and arguments made by prominent scholars in causal inference and experimental methods
• Design, analyze and field experiments suited to your own particular research question
• Understand and explain the ethical debates that surround experimental research
• Assess varied types of experimental designs on several dimensions
• Apply course concepts to analysis of current research and contemporary social scientific debates

2 Guidelines and Grading

• Grading is A-F (i.e., not pass/fail), and is based on a combination of class participation, your presentations and your written work.
• “Further Readings” are not required, but are listed in case you would like to delve more deeply into a topic.
• The goal for this course is to produce something useful: a chapter of your dissertation, a draft of an article, etc. Feel free to meet with me as soon as you begin to have an idea of what you’d like to work on for your written project.

• If you have a question, or want to know if a reading is available, please check my website for any announcements and download the latest copy of the syllabus before emailing.

• If you ever have any questions, or are confused about something, please do not hesitate to come to office hours and meet with me or email me. Office hours are Tuesdays between 10:30-11:45am, and you can make an appointment at the following website: [link to make an appointment]. If you are unavailable at that time, you can email me to schedule an appointment.

3 Policies

I expect you to complete the readings assigned for each week prior to our class meeting, to take notes on your readings and to actively participate in our seminar discussion. Active participation requires you bring the relevant readings to class each day (which may mean printing them beforehand) and that you respectfully engage with both the course content and your peers’ contributions. I agree entirely with the University’s institutional statement on inclusion and diversity, and value the contributions of each person and respect the ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich our intellectual community [https://diversity.wisc.edu].

You will need to complete your assignments on time, as I will accept no late work without an approved accommodation prior to the due date. Accommodations will be made for those students who have documented proof of an emergency or those students who have documented evidence of learning disabilities. I am firmly committed to ensuring equal learning access for all and therefore encourage individuals with disabilities to participate in the McBurney Center’s available programs and activities. If you need an accommodation, you must contact the center at (608) 263-2741 or email them at mcburney@studentlife.wisc.edu to obtain documentation for your specific needs. You must do so by the end of Week 2 and you must contact me in advance to make appropriate arrangements for papers, etc.

Finally, I strictly adhere to the UW Academic Misconduct Process and will report all incidents of academic misconduct the Dean of Students Office, as it is a prerequisite for maintaining academic integrity in our course.

4 Assignments & Grading

• 20% – Attendance/Participation
  → I expect you to attend all of the sessions of the course and contribute to discussion.

• 45% – Assignments
  - 20% – Review paper (x2)
  → You will write reviews of two “application papers” from two different weeks, due at the beginning of the session in which that paper is assigned. Weeks 2-13 (minus Week
9) all have application papers to choose from. These reviews should critically assess the paper in terms of the experimental methodology being employed. Your review should be no longer than 5 pages, double-spaced.

- 10% – Guiding class discussion (x2)

→ You will also be expected to lead the discussion of whatever paper you write about (see above) and help guide discussion for that class meeting more generally. That will require (in addition to writing the paper) coordinating with the other student(s) signed up for that week to think about how you’d like to focus class discussion.

→ Sign up [here].

- 15% – Misc. Assignments (x3)

1. Complete CITI human subjects training and submit proof to me via email. Due January 30th before class.
2. Sign up for a UW Qualtrics account and program a survey experiment copied from a published paper. Due February 13th before class (we will “test-drive” each of the experiments in class).
3. 2 Page research proposal. Due February 27th anytime. Set up meeting with me for the following week to discuss.

- 45% – Paper

→ You will design, implement, and analyze an actual lab or survey experiment. This can be done either by yourself or in groups (of up to 3 people). In consultation with me, you will write a research proposal, design your experiment, get IRB approval, run the experiment, analyze your data, and submit a written paper by the end of the semester. Ideally, this could lead to a publication! Options for this include a lab experiment at the UW BRITE laboratory, or a survey experiment.

Projects will be funded at $100 per student (this can be combined, so groups of three, for example, will have $300 to spend). No matter which option you choose, you will present in front of the class twice: an initial experimental design mid-semester and a final presentation at the end of the semester.

Timeline for project:

- February 27: 2 page research proposal due (schedule meeting with me to discuss that week or the following week)
- March 13: Experimental Design Presentations
- March 20: Submit instrument to IRB (this will give you 5 weeks to get through IRB and 2 weeks to run experiment and finish paper).
- May 1: Presentation of completed project
- May 8: Paper due
5 Required Books

Required texts: Most weeks will include some theoretical readings and some applications of the concepts in political or another social science. Students are expected to keep up with each week’s reading. Consider purchasing the following books, which we will use repeatedly throughout the semester (though I will do my best to get everything scanned and online if possible):


All the books should be available in the library, though of course, you may wish to purchase some (time to start thinking about building up your library). All of the journal articles should be available online through the UW library website. If not, I will send or post scanned copies.

6 Overview of Schedule

**Week 1**: Overview: Why Experiments?

**Week 2**: Validity

**Week 3**: Natural Experiments

**Week 4**: Lab Experiments

**Week 5**: Field Experiments

**Week 6**: Survey Experiments

**Week 7**: Survey Experiments: Alternative Designs

**Week 8**: Experimental Design Presentations

**Week 9**: Causal Mechanisms and Heterogenous Treatment Effects

**Week 10**: Elite Experiments

**Week 11**: Confounding and other barriers to inferences

**Week 12**: Pre-commitment and Replication

**Week 13**: Ethics and Research Transparency

**Week 14**: Final Presentations
Schedule

1. Introduction: Why Experiments?
   [January 23]
   
   - Gerber and Green, Chapter 1.
     ⇒ [link]
     ⇒ [link]
     ⇒ [link]

Further Reading:


2. Validity
   [January 30]
   Guest: Mark Copelovitch, Educational & Social/Behavioral Sciences IRB representative

⇒ Assignment #1 Due: Complete CITI human subjects training

- Morton and Williams, Chapters 7 and 8.
  ⇒ [link]
- Dunning, Chapter 10.


**Applications:**


**Further Reading:**


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3. Natural Experiments: “True” and “As-If” Randomization

[February 6]

Guest: Rikhil Bhavnani

Dunning, Chapter 2-4.


**Applications:**


**Further Reading:**


4. Lab Experiments

[February 13]

⇒ **Assignment #2 Due: Qualtrics Replication of Survey Experiment**

- Morton and Williams, Chapters 9 and 10.

  ⇒ [link](#)


**Applications:**


**Further Reading:**
5. Field Experiments

[FEBRUARY 20]

- Gerber & Green, Chapters 1, 4 and 12.

Applications:


Further Reading:

6. Survey Experiments I

Assignment #3 Due: 2 Page Research Proposal

  ➔ [link]

Applications


Further Reading:

7. Survey Experiments II: Alternative Designs

[March 6]


Applications


Further Reading:


8. Experimental Design Presentations

[March 13]

9. Causal Mechanisms and Heterogenous Treatment Effects

[March 20]


Applications


Further Reading:

  → [link]


• Coppock, A., Leeper, T. J., and Mullinix, K. J. The generalizability of heterogeneous treatment effect estimates across samples. Working Paper
  → [link]


10. Elite Experiments (and other issues related to samples)
  [April 3]

Applications:

Further Reading:
• Renshon, J., Yarhi-Milo, K., and Kertzer, J. D. (2016). Democratic leaders, crises and war paired experiments on the israeli knesset and public. Unpublished manuscript

11. Confounding and other barriers to inferences

[April 10]
• Gerber & Green, Chapters 5 and 6 (on noncompliance) and 8 (on interference).

**Applications**


12. Pre-commitment and Replication

[April 17]


**Applications**


**Further Reading:**


Coppock, A. (2016). Generalizing from survey experiments conducted on mechanical turk: A replication approach. In *annual meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association* → [link](#)


13. Ethics and Research Transparency

*April 24*

*Guest: Thomas Zeitzoff (American University)*

- Morton & Williams Chapter 12 (Ethics) and 13 (Deception)

Applications


Further Reading:

  – Chapter 1: Introduction
  – Chapter 2: The Ethics of Exclusion: When Experimenting in Impoverished Settings
  – Chapter 3: Considering the Political Consequences of Comparative Politics Experiments
  – Chapter 17: The Responsibilities of the Researcher and the Profession
  – Chapter 18: Journal Editors as Ethical Sheriffs
  – Chapter 19: Conclusion and Recommendations
• Nickerson, D. W. (2011). When the client owns the data. The experimental political scientist: Newsletter of the APSA experimental section, 2(2):5–6
  ⇨ link

14. Presentations

[May 1]