Stanford University

POLISCI 461: Advances in Experimental Political Science

Spring 2023
Mondays, 1:30-4:20pm
Encina West 106

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Course Description

In recent years there has been a surge in the use of experiments, both survey and field, in political science. This has resulted in substantial advances in experimental research within political science. This course will explore these advances by highlighting exceptional instances of experimental research. By evaluating and understanding the very best of cutting-edge, experimental research, students will learn how to design smart and effective survey and field experiments from the ground up. The focus of this course will be on the intersection of design and implementation. When are experiments the right tool for answering research questions and how can experiments be designed to test theories? How do we handle the many unexpected challenges that emerge in experimental implementation? In answering these questions, this course aims to interweave the methodological and the practical, preparing students to design and implement their own experiment research while also engaging with the core political science research questions answered through experimental research. The course will cover methodological issues such experimental design, random assignment, and measurement alongside practical issues such as field implementation and data collection challenges. Students will be exposed to canonical and cutting-edge applications of experimental research in political science and we hope will leave with an appreciation of the art of experimentation.

Course Materials

We will read large portions from two books so you may want to purchase a copy.

> Gerber, Alan S., and Donald P. Green. *Field experiments: Design, analysis, and interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012. (herein **FEDAI**)
>
> Karlan, Dean, and Jacob Appel. 2016. *Failing in the Field*. Princeton University Press. (herein **FITF**)

All additional readings will be made available on the Canvas site.

Course Structure

For each class students will be assigned to one of three teams and each team will concentrate on one paper ahead of class. During class, each team will evaluate that paper, with a focus on what is most valuable. The presentation of the team's evaluation will be limited to 15 minutes and should have the following structure: one slide on research question and hypotheses, one slide on experimental design, one slide on results, one slide on what we learn from this experiment.

Each class will be roughly structured as follows:

- 1:30-2:10 Paper 1 Presentation and Discussion
- 2:10-2:50 Paper 2 Presentation and Discussion
- 2:50-3:00 Break
- 3:00-3:40 Paper 3 Presentation and Discussion
- 3:40-4:20 General Discussion/Presentation on Technical Concepts

Course Requirements

In addition to regular participation in class, students will be assessed on the following three activities:

- **Weekly presentations (see Course Structure above).**
- **Two experimental research memos:** For two of the course sessions, students will identify a published or working paper that utilizes an experiment and write a short memo (~1,000 words) on what we learn from that experiment. A successful memo will only very briefly describe the experiment and spend the majority of the space evaluating how the experiment advances our knowledge both substantively and methodologically. These memos should be emailed to the instructors no later than Friday at 5:00pm before the week they relate to. Students may be invited to informally present their memos and the paper the memo discusses in class the following week.
- **Final Paper:** Over the course of the quarter, students will identify a research question or research topic that can be answered with a well-designed experiment(s). The final assignment for the course will take the form of a short grant proposal that will outline the design of an experiment(s) intended to address the research question. The grant proposal should not exceed five single-spaced pages in length and use 12-point font. It should clearly describe the proposed experiment and include:
    - A 100-150 word abstract of the study.
    - A motivating summary of the research question and description of hypotheses
    - A description of the treatment, evaluation design, measurement strategy, target population, and implementation plan.
    - A brief description of power calculations.
    - A discussion on whether you anticipate any risks during the course of the research and how will you mitigate them.
    - Consideration of the broader impacts of the proposed study.

  Your final grant proposal is due by **June 14 at 5:00pm**.

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topic
1	4/3	Introduction, assumptions, and types of experiments
Part 1: Survey Experiments		
2	4/10	Survey experiments as conversations
3	4/17	The challenge of disengaged respondents
Part 2: Field Experiments		
4	4/24	Field experiments as interventions
5	5/1	Randomization
6	5/8	The challenges of compliance and interference
Part 3: General Challenges		
7	5/15	The challenge of measurement
8	5/22	Designing for heterogeneity
9	5/29	MEMORIAL DAY: NO CLASS
10	6/5	The challenges of replication and generalizability

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. If something does come up that will inhibit your ability to attend class, such as illness, other obligations, or conflict with a religious observance, please email us to discuss possible accommodations.

Late Assignment Policy

Assignments submitted after the deadline will not be accepted unless an accommodation/extension was agreed to ahead of the deadline. Please email us at the earliest possible time if there is any foreseeable reason an assignment may not be able to be submitted by the deadline.

Academic Accommodation

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. The OAE is located at 563 Salvatierra Walk (phone: 723-1066, URL: http://oae.stanford.edu).

Course Expectations

What you can expect from us

We are here to guide your learning and will challenge you to actively engage in the course and to grow as scholars. We will strive for an inclusive and collaborative classroom and welcome any suggestions for improvement. We will do our best to give you the tools, feedback, and support to succeed. There is a lot of material that we will not be able to cover given time constraints. We aim to motivate students to seek out more information on such topics and will provide additional resources to do so. We highly encourage everyone to visit us in office hours or to set up a meeting, even if you don't feel that you have questions. We want to get to know you and support you in this learning experience!

What we expect from you

We expect you to take an active role in your learning by coming to class prepared and being ready to share your ideas through discussion with your classmates. To get the most out of the class, you should be prepared to share your ideas, ask questions, and listen actively. Each member of this class has different ideas and perspectives that will enrich the experience for everyone else, so we expect you to be respectful and thoughtful in your interactions. Please let us know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

Detailed Schedule

Week 1: Introduction, assumptions, and types of experiments

- Technical Readings:
  - FEDAI Ch 1 and Ch 2 (2.1 and 2.2 only)

PART 1 – SURVEY EXPERIMENTS

Week 2: Survey experiments as conversations

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Coppock, Alexander. "The persistence of survey experimental treatment effects." *Unpublished manuscript* (2016).
  - Albertson, Bethany, and Stephen Jessee. "Moderator Placement in Survey Experiments: Racial Resentment and the "Welfare" versus "Assistance to the Poor" Question Wording Experiment." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* (2022): 1-7.
  - Sniderman, Paul M. and Edward G. Carmines. "Color Blind Politics." In *Reaching Beyond Race*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Technical Readings:

- Coppock, Alexander, and Donald P. Green. "Do belief systems exhibit dynamic constraint?" *The Journal of Politics* 84.2 (2022): 725-738.
- Iyengar, Shanto and Matthew Tyler. "Testing the Robustness of the ANES Feeling Thermometer Indicators of Affective Polarization." *Unpublished manuscript* (2016).
- Montgomery, Jacob M., Brendan Nyhan, and Michelle Torres. "How conditioning on posttreatment variables can ruin your experiment and what to do about it." *American Journal of Political Science* 62.3 (2018): 760-775.

Week 3: The challenges of disengaged respondents

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Westwood, Sean J., Justin Grimmer, Matthew Tyler and Clayton Nall. "Current research overstates American support for political violence." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 119.12 (2022): e2116870119.
  - Hill, Seth J., and Margaret E. Roberts. "Acquiescence bias inflates estimates of conspiratorial beliefs and political misperceptions." *Political Analysis* (2021): 1-16.
  - Sullivan, John L., James E. Piereson, and George E. Marcus. "Ideological constraint in the mass public: A methodological critique and some new findings." *American Journal of Political Science* (1978): 233-249.
- Technical Readings:
  - Tyler, Matthew, Justin Grimmer and Sean Westwood. "A Statistical Framework to Engage the Problem of Disengaged Survey Respondents." *Unpublished manuscript* (2023).

PART 2 – FIELD EXPERIMENTS

Week 4: Field experiments as interventions

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Wantchekon, Leonard. "Clientelism and voting behavior: Evidence from a field experiment in Benin." *World politics* 55.3 (2003): 399-422.
  - Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. "Social pressure and voter turnout: Evidence from a large-scale field experiment." *American political Science review* 102.1 (2008): 33-48.
  - King, Gary, Benjamin Schneer, and Ariel White. "How the news media activate public expression and influence national agendas." *Science* 358.6364 (2017): 776-780.
- Technical Readings:
  - FITF: p.1-50, 84-93, and 105-124

Week 5: Randomization

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - White, Ariel R., Noah L. Nathan, and Julie K. Faller. "What do I need to vote? Bureaucratic discretion and discrimination by local election officials." *American Political Science Review* 109.1 (2015): 129-142.
  - King, Gary, et al. "Public policy for the poor? A randomised assessment of the Mexican universal health insurance programme." *The lancet* 373.9673 (2009): 1447-1454.
  - Davies, Emmerich. "The lessons private schools teach: Using a field experiment to understand the effects of private services on political behavior." *Comparative Political Studies* (2022).
- Technical Readings:
  - FEDAI Ch 2 (remaining sections) and Ch 3
  - Duflo, Esther, Rachel Glennerster, and Michael Kremer. "Using randomization in development economics research: A toolkit." *Handbook of development economics* 4 (2007): 3895-3962.

Week 6: The challenges of noncompliance and interference

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Giné, Xavier, and Ghazala Mansuri. "Together we will: experimental evidence on female voting behavior in Pakistan." *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* 10.1 (2018): 207-235.
  - Magaloni, Beatriz, Vanessa Melo, and Gustavo Robles. "Warriors and Vigilantes as Police Officers: Evidence from a field experiment with body-cameras in Rio de Janeiro." *Available at SSRN 4005710* (2022).
  - Beath, Andrew, Fotini Christia, Georgy Egorov, and Ruben Enikolopov. "Electoral rules and political selection: Theory and evidence from a field experiment in Afghanistan." *The Review of Economic Studies* 83.3 (2016): 932-968.
- Technical Readings:
  - FEDAI Chs 5-8
  - Sinclair, Betsy, Margaret McConnell, and Donald P. Green. "Detecting spillover effects: Design and analysis of multilevel experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 56.4 (2012): 1055-1069.

PART 3 – GENERAL CHALLENGES

Week 7: The challenges of measurement and mechanisms

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Clayton, Katherine, et al. "Three Theories of White Identity Politics." *Unpublished manuscript* (2023).

    - Prillaman, Soledad Artiz and Charity Troyer Moore. "Expanding Opportunity, Closing Gender Gaps: State-led Recruitment to Vocational Training in India." *Unpublished manuscript* (2023).
    - Fearon, James D., Macartan Humphreys, and Jeremy M. Weinstein. "How does development assistance affect collective action capacity? Results from a field experiment in post-conflict Liberia." *American Political Science Review* 109.3 (2015): 450-469.
- Technical Readings:
    - Erik Peterson, Sean J. Westwood, and Shanto Iyengar. "Beyond Attitudes: Incorporating Measures of Behavior in Survey Experiments." In *Cambridge Handbook on Experimental Political Science*, (Druckman and Green, eds.), Cambridge University Press Cambridge, 2021.
    - Blair, Graeme, Alexander Coppock, and Margaret Moor. "When to worry about sensitivity bias: A social reference theory and evidence from 30 years of list experiments." *American Political Science Review* 114.4 (2020): 1297-1315.
    - Bullock, John G., Donald P. Green, and Shang E. Ha. "Yes, but what's the mechanism? (don't expect an easy answer)." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 98.4 (2010): 550.

Week 8: The challenges of replication and generalizability

- Team Evaluation Readings:
    - Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth, and Paul M. Sniderman. "5. The Construction of National Identities." *The Struggle for Inclusion*. University of Chicago Press, 2022. 70-87.
    - Muralidharan, Karthik, Paul Niehaus, and Sandip Sukhtankar. "Building state capacity: Evidence from biometric smartcards in India." *American Economic Review* 106.10 (2016): 2895-2929.
    - Gerber, Alan S., James G. Gimpel, Donald P. Green, and Daron R. Shaw. "How large and long-lasting are the persuasive effects of televised campaign ads? Results from a randomized field experiment." *American Political Science Review* 105.1 (2011): 135-150.
- Technical Readings:
    - Hartman, Erin. "Generalizing experimental results." *Advances in Experimental Political Science* 385 (2021).
    - Deaton, Angus, and Nancy Cartwright. "Understanding and misunderstanding randomized controlled trials." *Social science & medicine* 210 (2018): 2-21.
    - Olken, Benjamin A. "Promises and perils of pre-analysis plans." *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29.3 (2015): 61-80.
    - Ofosu, George K., and Daniel N. Posner. "Pre-analysis plans: An early stocktaking." *Perspectives on Politics* (2021): 1-17.

Week 9: NO CLASS

Week 10: Ethics

- Team Evaluation Readings:
  - Coppock, Alexander, Donald P. Green, and Ethan Porter. "Does digital advertising affect vote choice? Evidence from a randomized field experiment." *Research & Politics* 9.1 (2022): 20531680221076901.
  - Bursztyn, Leonardo, Davide Cantoni, David Y. Yang, Noam Yuchtman, and Y. Jane Zhang. "Persistent political engagement: Social interactions and the dynamics of protest movements." *American Economic Review: Insights* 3.2 (2021): 233-50.
  - Young, Lauren E. "The psychology of state repression: Fear and dissent decisions in Zimbabwe." *American Political Science Review* 113.1 (2019): 140-155.
- Technical Readings:
  - Teele, Dawn Langan. "Reflections on the ethics of field experiments." *Field experiments and their critics: Essays on the uses and abuses of experimentation in the social sciences* (2014): 115-40.
  - Humphreys, Macartan. "Reflections on the ethics of social experimentation." *Journal of Globalization and Development* 6.1 (2015): 87-112.
  - Baron, Hannah, and Lauren E. Young. "From principles to practice: Methods to increase the transparency of research ethics in violent contexts." *Political Science Research and Methods* 10.4 (2022): 840-847.