Experimental Methods and Techniques in Political and Social Science – Course Syllabus
Winter Term 2012

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Time: Tuesday 17.15 – 19.15 (First session 10 January 2012)
Location: Seminar Room 2

Course description
In recent years a number of scholars have begun to augment our understandings of social and political behavior through the use of different kinds of experiments and experimental methods. This course is intended as a basic introduction to the use of experiments and these methods in political and social science. The course will begin at a very basic level and assumes no prior knowledge of experimental methods.

The course consists of three elements:
(1) Introducing experiments as a research method in political science, while placing it in the context of other disciplines (psychology and economy), which also make use of experimental research
(2) Understanding the basic methodology behind the experimental method and its challenges
(3) Critically exploring experimental studies and evaluates their designs and conclusions.

Course objectives
After taking this course the participants will:
• Have gained insights into the foundations and assumptions of experimental methods in political sciences
• Have developed an understanding of the key concepts and terminology used in experimental research
• Have gained insight into some of the empirical literature of experiments from political science, psychology and economics
• Be able to critically read experimental text and conclusions drawn from experiments
• Begin to develop and apply basic experimental designs that might be useful in our research.

Students will also be given the opportunity to construct their own “quazi-experiments” for the class. We will discuss this in the first sessions, but basically the idea will be to help those who would like attempt to conduct an experiment relevant to their dissertation research. As we will learn in this class, there are many different
types of experimental methods, from lab based experiments, to ‘field’ experiments, to internet based experiments and also survey experiments. Neither the professor nor the TA for this course are expert in these many types. But the idea here will be for us to help you learn more about these methods so that you may decide whether they are appropriate and/or useful for you in your research agenda.

Frankly, this should be fun.

**Requirements**
Each week each participant will be required to complete all the reading assigned in that week. Each student must submit a short question/essay (one to two paragraphs) on that week’s readings by 12pm the day before our class meeting (eg. 12pm Monday evening).

Students who wish to conduct experiments during the semester will be encouraged to do so and will be aided by the professor and TA in developing designs appropriate to their research questions. To be sure, these ‘quazi-experiments’ are unlikely to produce publishable results, but hopefully will give participants good hands on experience. Our final class period will be devoted to discussing and evaluating the findings. Students may receive course credit for writing up these results.

**Session 1: Experiments: What Are They All About?**
**Date:** 10 January 2012
**Aim of class:** Introduction to experimental research in social and political sciences.

**Literature:**
(Please note: these are two very basic introductory readings. Please read both before class and send your ‘thought question’ to professor Steinmo, by Monday 12pm Jan, 9.)

Chapter 1


**Session 2: From Puzzle to Experiment – (And The Steps in Between)**
**Date:** 17 January 2012
**Aim of class:** Introduction to experimental design from an empirical point of departure, and discussion about creating experimental designs.
Julie Nielsen will discuss her own experimental design and experiences in Italy and Denmark.
Literature:


*Nielsen, J. H. (Work in progress)”Deliberation? Really? An experiment as to what degree deliberation causes trust”

**Session 3: Giulia Andrighetto’s Session – Norms, Compliance and Punishment**

**Time: 24 January**

Giulia Andrighetto (Institute of Cognitive Science, Rome) will lead this seminar and will explore how and why she used experimental methods to examine norm evolution. In the second hour of the class we will discuss the potential experiments to be conducted by students in the class.

**Literature:**


**Session 4. What Makes a Good Experiment? Causality and Validity**

**Time: 31 January**

**Aim of class:** focus is on the aspects of causality and validity in relation to experimental designs. These aspects include the different meanings of causality and validity as well as the more profound causality assumptions behind experimental approaches. Some theoretical concepts are discussed, including Rubin Causal Model, just like validity is discussed from its various aspects.

**Literature:**


Chapter 2 and chapter 3 (section 3.3 – 3.8) & chapter 7

Session 5: Different Kinds of Experiments: Laboratory Experiments

Date: 7 February

Aim of class: to understand the differences between different kinds of experimental designs, and enable participants to distinguish between the weaknesses and strengths of different research questions and experimental designs.

In this section focus will be on laboratory experiments, including web-experiments and quasi-experiments.

Literature:


Session 6: Different Kinds of Experiments: Field Experiments and Experiments on the Internet

Date: 14 February

Aim of class: this class follows up on the discussion in session 5 by discussing field experiments and the specificities of their designs.

Literature:


*Jeromy Anglim,Lea Waters, “Practical Tips on how to Conduct a Sophisticated Online Psychology Experiment”

**Session 7: Differences between Experiments in Psychology, Economics and Political Sciences**

**Date:** 21 February 2012  
**Aim of class:** to understand that experiments in political sciences share features from the two related disciplines (psychology and economics), yet there are also crucial differences like, for example, the use of deception and assumption about rationality.

**Literature:**  
Chapter 13

Chapter 5


**Session 8 (Part 2): Ethical Considerations in Experiments (Plus, work session on our quazi-experiments)**  
**Time:** 28 February 20  
**Aim of class:** discuss the various aspects of ethical considerations when conducting experiments, including the role of deception, treatment of subjects in the laboratory etc.

**Literature**  

Session 9: Applied Experiments: Tax Norms, Compliance and Cultural Variation
Time: 6 March, 2012
Aim of class: until now, we have focused in experiments from a methodological perspective. In real world, however, experiments should be initiated as a methodology answering an empirical puzzle. This session is about tax compliance and how experiments can help us gain insights into questions about cultural norms and behavior.

Literature:

James Alm, Gary H. McClelland and William D. Schulze “Why do people pay taxes?”  


James Alm, “ Testing behavioral Public Economics Theories in the Laboratory”  

Session 10: Presentations of Experimental Designs (and Results)
Time: 13 March 2012
Aim: in the last session, the participants present their experimental design as well as the results they have generated in the experiments.

Create your own experiment!
Homework is a presentation of the participants on their own experimental design. The students should themselves create an experiment and present them in class, while applying the tools and concepts they have learned.

For further guidance on the design see: