

Academic year 2012/2013

Ph.D. Course in Political Science: Comparative and European Politics

Crash Course Experimental Methods in Political and Social Sciences Syllabus

Prof. Alessandro Innocenti

alessandro.innocenti@unisi.it

<http://www.labsi.org/innocenti/>

Department of Social, Political and Cognitive Sciences

Experimental Economics Laboratory LabSi

University of Siena

Course Overview

The course aims to provide graduate students with a basic introduction to the use of experimental methods in political and social sciences. The course will deal with methodological, theoretical and practical aspects of experimentation. It will assume no prior knowledge of experimental methods.

The course is divided in three parts:

- (1) Introducing experiments as a research method in political and social sciences.
- (2) Understanding the basic methodology behind experimental design.
- (3) Critically analyzing a selection of experimental studies related to political sciences.

Course objectives

The participants will develop an understanding of the main foundations and assumptions of experimental methods in political and social sciences. They will also gain insight into the empirical literature of experiments from political science, economics and neuroscience. Finally, they will be able to critically read experimental designs and conclusions. Students will also be given the opportunity to act as subjects in a laboratory experiment, which will be performed at the start of the course and discussed during the course.

Requirements

Reference to very elementary concepts of Game Theory is made during the course. An introduction for those new to the topic is downloadable at <http://www.labsi.org/innocenti/introgt.pdf>

Preliminary Readings

The following readings provide students with a very basic introductory review of research in Experimental Political Science:

- *Druckman J.N., D.P. Green, J.H. Kuklinski and A. Lupia (2006) “The growth and development of experimental research in political sciences”, *American Political Science Review*, 100, 627-635.
- *Morton R.B. and K.C. Williams (2010) *Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality. From Nature to the Lab*, Cambridge University Press, New York, Chapter 1.

The following book deals with methodological and theoretical aspects of the application of experimental methods in social sciences:

*Friedman, D. and S. Sunder (1994) *Experimental methods. A primer for economists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, chapt. 1-2-3.

Course Content

Part 1 Laboratory Methods

Aim of the class: To provide a basic introduction to experimental methodology both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view.

Outline: Purposes of Experiments (Why?). Experimental Methods (how?). Professional Subjects, Students or What? Experimental Topics. Internal and external validity. Virtual experiments. A laboratory experiment will be performed at the start of the course and discussed during the class

Literature:

*Davis, D.D. and C.A. Holt (1993) *Experimental Economics*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, Chapt. 1-2.

*Friedman, D. and S. Sunder (1994) *Experimental methods. A primer for economists*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Chapt. 1-2

*Friedman, D and A. Cassar (2004) *Economics Lab. An intensive course in experimental economics*, Routledge, London and New York, Chapt. 2-3

*Smith, V. (1994) "Economics in the Laboratory", *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 8, 113-131.

Part 2 Experimental Design

Aim of the class: To learn how to design an experiment and to understand that experiments in political sciences share many features from cognitive and experimental economics.

Outline: Two illustrative experiments. Biases in judgment: the case of confirmation bias. Oxytocin and trusting behavior.

Literature:

*Jones, M. and R. Sugden (2001) "Positive confirmation bias in the acquisition of information", *Theory and Decision*, 50, 59-99.

*Kosfeld, M., M. Heinrichs, P. J. Zak, U. Fischbacher and E. Fehr (2005) "Oxytocin increases trust in humans", *Nature*, 435, 673-676.

*Morton R.B and K.C. Williams (2010) *Experimental Political Science and the Study of Causality. From Nature to the Lab*, Cambridge University Press, New York, Chapt. 13.

Part 3 Applied Experiments

Aim of class: to understand the differences between different kinds of experimental designs by discussing weaknesses and strengths of some experimental papers and the specificities of their designs.

Outline: Informational cascades and overconfident behavior. Voting by ballots and by feet. Travel mode choice and transportation policy.

Literature:

*Innocenti, A., A. Rufa and J. Semmoloni (2010) "Overconfident behavior in informational cascades: An eye-tracking study", *Journal of Neuroscience, Psychology, and Economics*, 3, 74-82.

*Innocenti A. and C. Rapallini (2011) "Voting by Ballots and Feet in the Laboratory", *Giornale degli Economisti e Annali di Economia*, 70, 3-24.

*Innocenti, A., P. Lattarulo and M.G. Paziienza (2013) "Car Stickiness: Heuristics and Biases in Travel Choice", *Transport Policy*, 25, 153-168.
