

Experimental Research in Political Psychology

Professor Thomas E. Nelson
2044 Derby Hall
2-6408; nelson.179@osu.edu
<http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/faculty/tnelson/experimentssyll.htm>

Winter, 2000
Monday, Wednesday, 1:30 – 3:18
66 University Hall

Objectives

This course will endeavor to provide students with: (1) exposure to the diversity of research in politics that uses experimental methods; (2) a solid theoretical background in the scientific and philosophical foundations of modern experimental methods in psychology; and (3) the practical skills and folk wisdoms essential for conducting methodologically sound experiments in political psychology. We will consider basic issues in research design, methodologies both simple and esoteric, and ethical concerns for human subjects research. In addition to standard laboratory experiments, we will explore field, quasi-experimental, and survey/experimental methods. Numerous examples will be drawn from the social psychology and political science literatures.

Student Responsibilities

In the course of one quarter students will design an experiment, collect data, and write a research report. Aside from keeping up with the reading, students' primary responsibility will be the implementation of their experiment. Students will work in groups with common interests. Significant amounts of class time will be devoted to the design of the research project; sincere and energetic group participation is a must. Evaluation will be based on the final research report (65%), class participation (10%), and a midterm examination covering the theoretical material (25%).

Part of your class participation duties will entail serving as a discussion leader for a designated piece of research. On the first class meeting, we will draw up a schedule of discussion leaders. Please submit to the class, one week in advance, a copy of the research you plan to discuss.

Readings

Required Books

Christensen, Larry B. 1997. *Experimental Methodology* (7th Edition). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Kinder, Donald R., & Thomas R. Palfrey. 1993. *Experimental Foundations Of Political Science*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Both are available at the OSU Bookstore

Additional Readings

The required reading also includes a number of journal articles and book excerpts, available as a packet from Cop-Ez, Bricker Hall. Discussion leaders must make their articles available for class distribution by Thursday of the week previous to their assigned week.

Class Format

Most weeks, especially early in the quarter, we will begin with a lecture from yours truly on Monday. Wednesdays will be devoted to class discussion of the readings and research projects. As the quarter goes by we will devote increasing attention to ongoing research projects.

Topics

Week 1: Introduction

We begin with the fundamental epistemological question that inspired the development of experimental methods: How do we know when something “causes” some “effect?” The suggested reading from Christensen reviews the scientific perspective and nonexperimental research methods.

Important note on scheduling: According to University rules, Monday-Wednesday classes will meet Wednesday and Friday of Week 1.

White, P. A. 1990. “Ideas About Causation In Philosophy And Psychology.” *Psychological Bulletin*, 108, 3-18.

Suggested reading: Christensen, chapters 1-2.

Week 2: Inductive and Deductive Models

We consider the philosophical foundations of modern experimental methods. We contrast the ideal of the deductive method with the more realistic inductive model.

Christensen, chapter 3.

Popper, K. R. 1959. Excerpts from *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. London: Hutchinson & Co

Kinder & Palfrey, "On behalf of an experimental political science". In K & P, pp. 1-42.

McGuire, William J. 1983. “A Contextualist Theory Of Knowledge: Its Implications For Innovation And Reform In Psychological Research.” *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 16, 1-47.

Lodge, Milton, Steenbergen, Marco R., & Brau, Shawn. 1995. “The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information And The Dynamics Of Candidate Evaluation.” *American Political Science Review* 89: 309-26.

Week 3: Strengths and Weaknesses of Experiments

Why run experiments? Here we address critical issues such as internal and external validity, random assignment and causal inference, problems of omitted variables, process-oriented research, control of variance, etc.

Christensen, chapters 4, 7, 14.

Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review* 91(3): 567-83.

Weiss, Janet. 1982. "Coping with complexity: An experimental study of public policy decision-making." In K & P, pp. 185-210.

Week 4: Basic Experimental Design

We consider the advantages and disadvantages of numerous research designs. We address topics such as control groups, factorial designs, and panel designs. We address between- and within-group variance.

Christensen, chapters 8, 9.

Rothbart, Myron., & William Hallmark. 1988. "In-Group-Out-Group Differences In The Perceived Efficacy Of Coercion And Conciliation In Resolving Social Conflict." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 248-257.

Herstein, John A. 1981. "Keeping The Voters' Limits In Mind: A Cognitive Process Analysis Of Decision-Making In Voting." In K & P, pp. 129-158.

Week 5: Ethical Experimentation

We touch upon some of the challenging ethical issues that inevitably arise when conducting experiments with human subjects. We address topics such as informed consent, deception, the committee review process, threats to subject well-being, confidentiality, debriefing, and so on.

Christensen, chapter 5.

Milgram, Stanley. 1974. Excerpts from *Obedience To Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper & Row.

Ohio State University Research Foundation, "Guidelines and Procedures for Ethical Experimentation with Human Subjects." <http://www.rf.ohio-state.edu/\restrisks\humanindx.htm>.

Week 6: Manipulations

We consider the problem of artificially creating variance in the independent variable.

Christensen, chapter 6.

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. "Experimental Demonstrations Of The "Not-So-Minimal" Consequences Of Television News Programs." In K & P, pp. 305-312.

Sullivan, J. L., Piereson, J. E., & Marcus, G. E. 1978. "Ideological Constraint In The Mass Public: A Methodological Critique And Some New Findings." In K & P, pp. 79-96.

Week 7: Measures

We focus on measurement of dependent variables and mediating/moderating variables.

Ferejohn, J. A., Forsythe, R., Noll, R. G., & Palfrey, T. R. 1982. "An Experimental Examination Of Auction Mechanisms For Discrete Public Goods." In K & P, pp. 221-244.

Quattrone, G. A., & Tversky, A. 1988. "Contrasting Rational And Psychological Analyses Of Political Choice." In K & P, pp. 159-184.

Week 8: Quasi-Experiments, Field Studies, Survey-Based Experiments

We consider alternatives to the laboratory study.

Christensen, chapter 10.

Schuman, H., & Bobo, L. "Survey-based experiments on White racial attitudes toward residential integration." In K & P, pp. 53-78.

Cover, A. D., & Brumberg, B. S. 1982. "Baby books and ballots: The impact of congressional mail on constituent opinion." In K & P pp. 363-388.

Morduchowicz, Roxana, Catterberg, Edgardo, Niemi, Richard G. 1996. "Teaching political information and democratic values in a new democracy: an Argentine experiment." *Comparative Politics* 28: 465-76.

Bretschneider, Stuart; Straussman, Jeffrey J.; Mullins, Daniel. 1988. "Do Revenue Forecasts Influence Budget Setting? A Small Group Experiment." *Policy Sciences*. 21(4): 305-326.

Week 9: Practical Issues & Progress Reports

A number of practical problems that plague experiments are confronted. These include problems of subject recruitment, random assignment, subject motivation, data management, and so on. Student experiments should be well under way at this point.

Christensen, chapter 12.

Gibson, James L. 1998. "A Sober Second Thought: An Experiment in Persuading Russians to Tolerate." *American Journal of Political Science*, 42(July):819.

Nelson, Thomas E. "The Political Science Department Human Subject Pool: A Handbook for Experimenters and Instructors." Ohio State University. <http://psweb.sbs.ohio-state.edu/faculty/tnelson/ExperHandbook.pdf>.

Week 10: Final Reports

By this time, data collection should be finished, or nearly finished. We will devote this last week to listening to reports from the research groups and addressing problems that they might have. The suggested excerpts from Christensen deal with data analysis and report-writing.

Suggested reading: Christensen, chapters 13, 15.

Critiquing Experiments

Throughout this course we will spend a considerable amount of time evaluating the scientific integrity and theoretical significance of a number of political psychology experiments. Each week we will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of one or more studies. You should prepare to chip in your two cents during every class meeting; during your moment in the sun as designated discussion leader, your contribution should run closer to a half-dollar. Below are listed some questions you should ask of every study, including your own, which will help guide our discussions. As the course moves along, you should think of adding your own questions to this list. During your leader week, you should be prepared not only to offer answers to these questions, but to help conduct your fellow seminar members through a discussion of these issues.

- Is the scientific problem, puzzle, or question the research addresses sufficiently important and intriguing?
- Are the theoretical constructs clearly demarcated, and logically connected to the puzzle?
- Is there a truly testable hypothesis that follows directly from the puzzle?
- Are the empirical variables properly operationalized?
- Is the unit of analysis appropriate to the puzzle?
- Does the research design incorporate the relevant variables without becoming needlessly complex? Are potentially important interactions accounted for?
- Is the experimental manipulation sufficiently strong, without engendering response biases?
- If this is a laboratory study, would it be possible to conduct a field, survey, or quasi-experimental replication?
- If this is a field or quasi-experiment, how is control over extraneous sources of variance accomplished?
- How well does the experimenter isolate the theoretical independent variable from potential confounds?
- Is a manipulation check appropriate? What about the measurement of process variables?
- How well do the design and methodology minimize potential threats to internal validity?
- How well does the researcher address, or at least answer, external validity concerns?
- **Above all, is the research design and methodology suitable for the theoretical question?**

Midterm Paper Assignment
Experimental Research Methods

For this assignment, summarize and critique a published piece of experimental research in political science or political psychology. This cannot be a piece that is currently listed on the syllabus. Look to the criteria sheet for guidance in your critique. Since you can't cover all those points, let your judgment be your guide in selecting the most relevant aspects of the research to cover. Here are a few suggestions for critical points:

- How are the crucial theoretical constructs operationalized?
- What is the experimental design? Use Christensen's terminology. Is this a true experiment, a field experiment, a pseudoexperiment, etc.? Why was that particular design selected? Would another be appropriate?
- What are the major potential threats to internal validity, and how are they handled in the design and/or procedures?
- What are the most likely confounds? How can they be controlled?

Issues of external validity may be relevant, but I caution you against spending too much time on them. I'm looking for about 5 pages, double-spaced, with sensible margins.

Final Paper Assignment

This paper is a report on your experiment. You should cover the theoretical background, major hypotheses, research design and procedure, findings, and implications. Pay particular attention to the following issues:

- operationalization of theoretical concepts and constructs
- conversion of abstract hypothetical relations into a specific research design
- minimization of threats to internal validity
- potential confounds
- external validity issues
- ethical concerns, if any
- measurement validity and reliability
- pragmatic limitations

To cope adequately with these issues, you should give only minimal attention to the development of the theoretical problem. Say only enough to provide appropriate context for the design and procedures. Extensive data analysis is also unnecessary – basic descriptive findings in tabular form are fine. Again, this should be appropriate to the theoretical problem; don't present findings without setting them in context. Use the conclusion/implications section to discuss how you would improve upon and/or extend your design and procedures to address further theoretical issues or cope with particular threats or limitations, assuming you had the time and resources to do so.

You may consult with your research partners in the development of your report, but I want a separate, unique document from each person. Obviously, it is in your interest to avoid too much redundancy with the other papers. 12-14 double-spaced pages (not including title page, tables, or references), due on Thursday, March 16, by 5 p.m. Please number the pages, and do not exceed the page limits. I prefer to receive the papers as email attachments, however a hard copy is also acceptable.

Suggested Additional Readings

- Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1995. *Going Negative: How Attack Ads Shrink And Demobilize The Electorate*. New York: Free Press.
- Bishop, G. F., Oldendick, R. W., Tuchfarber, A. J. 1984. Interest in political campaigns: The influence of question order and electoral context. *Political Behavior*, 6, 159-169.
- Bretschneider, Stuart; Straussman, Jeffrey J.; Mullins, Daniel. 1988. "Do Revenue Forecasts Influence Budget Setting? A Small Group Experiment." *Policy Sciences*. 21(4): 305-326.
- Brown, S. R., & Melamed, L. E. (1990). *Experimental design and analysis*. Newberry Park, CA: Sage.
- Campbell, Donald T., and Julian C. Stanley. 1963. *Experimental And Quasi-Experimental Designs For Research*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Fazio, R. H. 1990. A practical guide to the use of response latency in social psychological research. In C. Hendrick & M. S. Clark (Eds.) *Review of personality and social psychology* (Vol. II, pp. 74-97). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Fishkin, James-S. The televised deliberative poll: an experiment in democracy. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. v. 546 July '96 p. 132-40.
- Gibson, James L. 1998. "A Sober Second Thought: An Experiment in Persuading Russians to Tolerate." *American Journal of Political Science*, 42(July):819.
- Holyoak, Keith-J; Thagard, Paul. The analogical mind. *American Psychologist*. v. 52 Jan. '97 p. 35-44.
- Kuklinski, James H, Sniderman, Paul M, Knight, Kathleen. 1997. "Racial prejudice and attitudes toward affirmative action." *American Journal of Political Science* 41: 402-19.
- Lodge, M., Steenbergen, M. R., & Brau, S. 1995. The responsive voter: Campaign information and the dynamics of candidate evaluation. *American Political Science Review* 89: 309-26.
- Manis, M. (Ed.) 1976. Social psychology and history: A symposium. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, vol. 2.
- McHugo, G. J., Lanzetta, J. T., Sullivan, D. G., Masters, R. D., & Englis, B. G. 1985. Emotional reactions to a political leader's expressive displays. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 49, 1513-1529.
- Rosenau, P. R. 1992. *Post-modernism and the social sciences*. Chapter 5.
- Rothbart, M., & Hallmark, W. 1988. In-group-out-group differences in the perceived efficacy of coercion and conciliation in resolving social conflict. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 55, 248-257.

- Sherif, M., Harvey, O. H., White, B. J., Hood, W. R., & Sherif, C. W. 1961. *Intergroup conflict and cooperation: The Robbers Cave experiment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Book Exchange.
- Sidman, M. 1960. *Tactics Of Scientific Research: Evaluating Experimental Data In Psychology*. New York: Basic Books.
- Simon, H. A. 1992. What is an "explanation" of behavior? *Psychological Science*, 3, 150-161.
- Word, C. O., Zanna, M. P., & Cooper, J. 1974. The nonverbal mediation of self-fulfilling prophecies in interracial interaction. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 10, 109-120.