

INTL 4005 (CRN: 70475 / SPRING 2025)

Social Experimentation

Ryan Powers

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Tu/Thur 2:20 p.m.–3:35 p.m.

Miller Learning Center, Room 0275.

Office hours: On Zoom by appointment (<https://ryanpowers.youcanbook.me/>).

Course Description

This course is an advanced undergraduate-level survey of the use of experiments to study questions of relevance to social science. Students will learn how to formulate a research question, design and execute an experiment to answer that research question, and to do basic analysis of the resulting data. We will review common inferential, logistical, and ethical challenges that arise in the use of experiments in the social sciences. Throughout, we will hone students' ability to identify and evaluate the validity of causal claims "in the wild" and to consider the kind of experiment that would be needed to credibly test those claims.

Course Materials

There are two required textbooks for this course:

- *Social Science Experiments: A Hands-on Introduction* by Donald P. Green. 2022.
- *Experimental Thinking: A Primer on Social Science Experiments* by James N. Druckman. 2022.

Grading and Expectations

Grades

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 10%
- IRB Training: 5%
- Problem Set 1: 10%
- Problem Set 2: 10%
- Problem Set 3: 10%
- Midterm: 25%
- Final project: 30%

Expectations

First, I expect you to come to class. Second, I expect you to read the assigned work closely enough to actively participate in a detailed and critical discussion of the arguments and evidence presented by the authors. Third, I expect you to keep up with the major international news stories of the day. You get access to both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* through your affiliation with University of Georgia. Other great international affairs coverage is available from *The Economist*, *The Financial Times*, and *BBC World News*.

Note that brown M&M's are strictly prohibited from all class meetings. Send me an email by January 16, 2025 explaining why both Van Halen and myself have such particular tastes when it comes to M&M's and you will receive a 5 point bonus on your participation grade (Hint: goo.gl/ThqEAm).

All noise-making electronics should be silenced and, where possible, set to "Do Not Disturb" for the duration of our class meetings.

Assignments

Assignments should be submitted online to the eLearning Commons. Work submitted late without an explanation will be penalized one-half letter grade per day.

- **Attendance and participation.** Come to class and participate in discussion.
- **IRB Training.** Complete online; submit documentation via ELC.
- **Problem sets.** Problem sets will be on ELC. You will complete three over the course of the semester.
- **Midterm exam.** There is one midterm exam. It will be in person and closed book. The exams will be comprised of a number of multiple choice questions and short answer questions. The content will be similar to that of the problem sets.
- **Final project.** For your final project, you will produce an eight-page research design memo that outlines a research question and its importance to society, describes—in detail—plans for an original experiment and outcome measures that would help answer that question, and a description of how you would analyze the resulting data in order answer your research question.

Grading Scale

Your final grade will be calculated on the following scale:

- 94–100: A
- 90–93: A-
- 87–89: B+
- 84–87: B
- 80–83: B-
- 77–79: C+
- 74–77: C
- 70–73: C-
- 67–69: D+
- 64–67: D
- 60–63: D-
- Less than 59: F

Accommodations

In accordance with UGA policy, “[s]tudents with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the instructor or designate during regular office hours or by appointment.” More information about accommodations that are available to students with disabilities is available from the [Disability Resource Center](#).

Academic Integrity and Professional Conduct

I expect you to do your own work and to abide by all university policies on academic integrity and professional conduct. In part, these policies state:

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University’s academic honesty policy, “A Culture of Honesty,” and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in “A Culture of Honesty” found at: <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Course Outline

The UGA Course Syllabus Policy states: “The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviation announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.”

- Week 1
 - Tuesday, January 07, 2025: Introduction and Summary of Expectations
 - Thursday, January 09, 2025: **No Class Meeting – Alternative assignment**
 - * **Due: IRB Training (on ELC).**
- Week 2
 - Tuesday, January 14, 2025: The Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference, Part I
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 2.
 - Thursday, January 16, 2025: The Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference, Part II
- Week 3
 - Tuesday, January 21, 2025: The Vocabulary of Experiments, Part I
 - * Read: Green Ch. 2.
 - Thursday, January 23, 2025: The Vocabulary of Experiments, Part II
 - * **Due: Problem Set 1.**
- Week 4
 - Tuesday, January 28, 2025: Getting started with R and RStudio
 - * Read: Posted on ELC.
 - Thursday, January 30, 2025: Getting started with large language models
 - * Before class: Create an account with the following services: ChatGPT and Claude.
- Week 5
 - Tuesday, February 04, 2025: Hands on With Experiments, Part I
 - * Read: Green Ch. 3.
 - Thursday, February 06, 2025: Hands on With Experiments, Part II
- Week 6
 - Tuesday, February 11, 2025: Lab Experiments
 - * Read: Green Ch. 4, pp. 42–51
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 4, pp. 104–109
 - Thursday, February 13, 2025: Survey Experiments

- * Read: Green Ch. 4, pp. 51–56
- * Read: Druckman Ch 4. pp. 96–104
- * Skim: Mattes and Weeks 2019 (on ELC)
- Week 7
 - Tuesday, February 18, 2025: Field Experiments
 - * Read: Green Ch. 4, pp. 59–62
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 4, pp. 85–96
 - * Skim: Findley, Nielson, and Sharman 2024 (on ELC).
 - Thursday, February 20, 2025: Natural Experiments
 - * Read: Green Ch. 4, pp. 56–59
 - * Skim: Hyde 2007 (on ELC)
- Week 8
 - Tuesday, February 25, 2025: **Midterm**
 - Thursday, February 27, 2025: **No Class Meeting – Alternative assignment**
 - * **Due: Problem Set 2**
- Week 9
 - Tuesday, March 04, 2025: **No Class Meeting – Spring Break**
 - Thursday, March 06, 2025: **No Class Meeting – Spring Break**
- Week 10
 - Tuesday, March 11, 2025: Programming a survey experiment
 - * Create a Qualtrics Account
 - Thursday, March 13, 2025: Ethics
 - * Read: Green Ch. 5.
- Week 11
 - Tuesday, March 18, 2025: Evaluating Experiments, Part I
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 3.
 - Thursday, March 20, 2025: Evaluating Experiments, Part II
- Week 12
 - Tuesday, March 25, 2025: Non-compliance
 - * Read: TBD (on ELC)
 - Thursday, March 27, 2025: Post-treatment bias
 - * Read: TBD (on ELC)

* **Due: Problem Set 3**

- Week 13
 - Tuesday, April 01, 2025: Planning your own experiment, Part I
 - * Read: Green Ch. 6.
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 5, pp 117-144.
 - Thursday, April 03, 2025: Planning your own experiment, Part II
 - * Read: Druckman Ch. 6
- Week 14
 - Tuesday, April 08, 2025: Analyzing Experiments Using R, Part I
 - Thursday, April 10, 2025: Analyzing Experiments Using R, Part II
- Week 15
 - Tuesday, April 15, 2025: Special Topics: LLMs and Synthetic Data
 - Thursday, April 17, 2025: Special Topics: Experiments on Elite Samples
- Week 16
 - Tuesday, April 22, 2025: Final Project Workshop Session
 - Thursday, April 24, 2025: Final Project Workshop Session
- **Final Project Due: Thursday, May 1, 2025**