

INTL 8200 (CRN: 26363) / Spring 2023

# Experiments in International Relations Research

Ryan Powers  
ryan.powers@uga.edu

Thursdays, 12:45 p.m.–3:35 p.m. in Room 115 in the IA Building (202 Herty Drive).

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

## Course Description

This course is a graduate-level field seminar on the use of experimental methods in international relations. Experiments are increasingly popular in international relations because they allow for causally identified tests of important conjectures from international relations theory. We will review the design and analysis of experiments in the lab, field, and in surveys that are designed to shed light on questions of relevance to scholars of international relations. While experiments are powerful tools, they are no panacea—the range of questions that can be addressed in international relations using experiments is necessarily limited by both logistical and ethical concerns. We cannot, for example, randomly assign states to participate in interstate wars or war outcomes in an effort to study how such wars affect the fate of political leaders. As such, we will also spend time addressing the conditions under which experiments are and are not useful to scholars of international relations and discuss how to design experiments that are consistent with the ethical obligations we have as social scientists. In this course, then, you will learn how to consume, critique, and responsibly execute international relations research that relies on experimental methods. As part of this, you will design and produce a pre-analysis plan for an experiment that speaks to a substantive or methodological question of relevance to the international relations literature.

## Course Materials

There is one required text for this course, *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation* by Alan Gerber and Donald Green. While the text is focused on field

experiments, it is the clearest articulation of the analysis and interpretation of data gathered using experimental methods of which I am aware. I have not requested it from the campus bookstore because it is almost always less expensive online. All other readings can be found online or at the library.

## **Grading and Expectations**

### **Grading 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

### **Grade Composition**

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Class attendance and participation: 20%
- Weekly discussion questions: 10%
- Discussion lead: 10%
- Two response papers: 10%
- Research Abstract: 10%
- Research Design and Pre-analysis Plan: 30%
- IRB Training: 5%
- IRB Protocol: 5%

## Attendance and Participation

Your attendance and participation in class discussions is vital to our success this semester. I will take attendance at each class meeting. You must let me know in advance and provide documentation excusing your absence to avoid a grade penalty.

You should come to class having read the assigned work closely enough to actively participate in a detailed and critical discussion of the arguments and evidence presented by the authors. I also expect you to come to class already familiar with the major international news stories of the day. You get access to both *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* as part of your student activities fees. Failing to actively participate in class discussions will result in a participation grade penalty for the day.

The use of electronic devices during our class meetings is not prohibited, but is *strongly* discouraged. 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. Late assignments will not be accepted without documentation of illness or bereavement.

- **Discussion Questions.** You will submit three discussion questions each week. We will use these to help guide our discussion. Open-ended questions relating to how the articles and books speak to one another, critique the logic of arguments, or question the applicability of evidence are preferred. **Due by 6.p.m. the day before class.**
- **Response Papers.** You will write two response essays over the course of the semester in which you critically evaluate one or more of a given week’s assigned readings. A successful response essay will *quickly* summarize the major claims of a given reading, discuss how those claims are evaluated empirically, and then identify several strengths or weaknesses of the argument and/or the empirical evidence used to support that argument. Each essay should be about 1,000 words. They should be uploaded to the eLearning Commons. **Due by 6.p.m. the day before the readings will be discussed in class.**
- **Discussion Lead.** You will lead the class discussion once during the semester. You will be responsible for selecting discussion questions from among those submitted by your colleagues, generating several of your own, and moderating our review and critique of each of the readings. You will sign up for a discussion slot on the first day of class.
- **Research Abstract and Short Literature Review and Presentation.** You will produce a 3,500 word document outlining the research question that you wish to answer with the findings from your experiment. This document should briefly state the research question and then quickly summarize past work on the question, especially that work which employs experiments. You should devote about 1,500 words to three (3) ideas for experiments that might be used to make progress on your research question. The main purpose of this assignment is to get you

thinking about your research topic and potential experimental designs. Your final research design does not necessarily need to address this research question or employ any of the experiment ideas that you put forth. **You will present your research question and outline your potential experiments on March 2.**

- **Experimental Design and Pre-Analysis Plan.** You will design an experiment that addresses a research question in international relations of your choosing. You will layout your research design in a 8,000 word document that includes a statement of the research question, a short summary of existing work on the topic, a list of hypothesis that the experiment allows you to test, sample selection criteria, clear description of and motivation for each of the manipulations, randomization scheme, and a plan for analyzing the resulting data (models you plan to estimate, covariates, sub-samples, etc). **You will present your experimental design and pre-analysis plan on the last day of class.**
- **IRB Training.** You will complete the UGA IRB training that would be required for you to execute the experiment that you planned. **Due February 2.**
- **IRB Protocol.** You will prepare an IRB application for your experiment using the UGA IRB Portal. You will export the application and submit it to me via ELC. If you plan to carryout your experiment, you may submit your IRB application for review, but this is not a requirement for the course. **Due on last day of class.**

### **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 University of Georgia’s 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 requires me to include the following statement: “The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviation announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.”

For the first half of the course, our sessions will be partially devoted to a “mini” methods lecture in which I discuss key concepts covered in the assigned chapter of Gerber and Green. Following that, we will discuss several papers from the peer-reviewed literature that use experiments. The papers will be united by some common methodological or substantive theme. In some cases, the overlap between the methods half of the session and the applied half of the session will be quite significant. In other cases, there may be more of a disconnect. My goal is to give you an overarching conceptual background in experimental design and analysis while also showing you how scholars of international relations have actually used these methods to make progress in our understanding of international politics.

1. Thursday, January 12: Preliminaries
  - Introductions and expectations
2. Thursday, January 19: Experiments in International Relations Research
  - Mini methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 1.
  - Hyde, Susan D. “Experiments In International Relations: Lab, Survey, And Field.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 403–424.
  - Mintz, Alex, Yi Yang, and Rose McDermott. “Experimental Approaches To International Relations.” *International Studies Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (2011): 493–501.
  - Hafner-Burton, Emilie M, Stephan Haggard, David A Lake, and David G Victor. “The Behavioral Revolution And International Relations.” *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (2017): S1–S31.
  - McDermott, Rose. “Experimental Methodology In Political Science.” *Political Analysis* 10, no. 4 (2002): 325–342.
3. Thursday, January 26: Research Ethics and IRB
  - Mini methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 2.
  - Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Appendix A.
  - Phillips, Trisha. “Ethics Of Field Experiments.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 24 (2021): 277–300.
  - Findley, Michael, and Daniel Nielson. “Obligated To Deceive? Aliases, Confederates, And The Common Rule In International Field Experiments.” In *Ethics and Experiments*, 165–184. Routledge, 2015.

- IRB training and portal introduction
4. Thursday, February 2: Survey Experiments I
    - Mini methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 2.
    - Mutz, Diana C. "Population-based Survey Experiments." In *Population-Based Survey Experiments*. Princeton University Press, 2011, Chapter 1
    - Gaines, Brian J, James H Kuklinski, and Paul J Quirk. "The Logic Of The Survey Experiment Reexamined." *Political Analysis* 15, no. 1 (2007): 1–20.
  5. Thursday, February 9: Survey Experiments II
    - Mini methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 3.
    - Tomz, Michael. "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach." *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 821–840.
    - Kertzer, Joshua D., and Ryan Brutger. "Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the Audience Back Into Audience Cost Theory." *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 1 (2016): 234–249.
    - Quek, Kai. "Type II Audience Costs." *The Journal of Politics* 79, no. 4 (2017): 1438–1443
  6. Thursday, February 16: Field and Lab Experiments
    - Mini methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 4.
    - Coppock, Alexander, and Donald P Green. "Assessing The Correspondence Between Experimental Results Obtained in the Lab and Field: A Review of Recent Social Science Research." *Political Science Research and Methods* 3, no. 1 (2015): 113–131.
    - Hyde, Susan D. "The Future Of Field Experiments In International Relations." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 628, no. 1 (2010): 72–84.
    - Findley, Michael G, Daniel L Nielson, and Jason C Sharman. "Using Field Experiments in International Relations: A Randomized Study of Anonymous Incorporation." *International Organization* 67, no. 4 (2013): 657–693.
    - Cuesta, Brandon de la, Helen V Milner, Daniel L Nielson, and Stephen F Knack. "Oil And Aid Revenue Produce Equal Demands For Accountability As Taxes In Ghana And Uganda." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 36 (2019): 17717–17722.
    - Iyengar, Shanto. "Laboratory Experiments In Political Science." *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*, 2011, 73–88.

- Tingley, Dustin H, and Barbara F Walter. “The Effect Of Repeated Play On Reputation Building: An Experimental Approach.” *International Organization* 65, no. 2 (2011): 343–365.
- McDermott, Rose, Jonathan Cowden, and Cheryl Koopman. “Framing, Uncertainty, And Hostile Communications In A Crisis Experiment.” *Political Psychology* 23, no. 1 (2002): 133–149.
- Renshon, Jonathan. “Losing Face And Sinking Costs: Experimental Evidence On The Judgment Of Political And Military Leaders.” *International Organization* 69, no. 3 (2015): 659–695.
- Yoder, Brandon K, and Kyle Haynes. “Signaling Under the Security Dilemma: An Experimental Analysis.” *Journal of conflict resolution* 65, no. 4 (2021): 672–700.

7. Thursday, February 23: Pre-Analysis Plans

- Readings TBD

8. Thursday, March 2: Early Stage Research Design Presentations

9. Thursday, March 9: Natural Experiments

- Dunning, Thad. *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-based Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2012, Chapter 1.
- Sekhon, Jasjeet S, and Rocio Titiunik. “When Natural Experiments Are Neither Natural Nor Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 1 (2012): 35–57.
- Hyde, Susan D. “The Observer Effect In International Politics: Evidence From A Natural Experiment.” *World politics* 60, no. 1 (2007): 37–63.
- Lyall, Jason. “Does Indiscriminate Violence Incite Insurgent Attacks? Evidence From Chechnya.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53, no. 3 (2009): 331–362.
- Pratt, Tyler. “Angling For Influence: Institutional Proliferation In Development Banking.” *International Studies Quarterly* 65, no. 1 (2021): 95–108.

10. Thursday, March 16: Elite and Convenience Samples

- Mini-methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 7.
- Dietrich, Simone, Heidi Hardt, and Haley J Swedlund. “How To Make Elite Experiments Work In International Relations.” *European Journal of International Relations* 27, no. 2 (2021): 596–621.
- Kertzer, Joshua D, and Jonathan Renshon. “Experiments And Surveys On Political Elites.” *Annual Review of Political Science* 25 (2022): 529–550.
- Druckman, James N, and Cindy D Kam. “Students As Experimental Participants.” *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science* 1 (2011): 41–57.

- Safarpour, Alauna, Sarah Sunn Bush, and Jennifer Hadden. "Participation Incentives In A Survey Of International Non-profit Professionals." *Research & Politics* 9, no. 3 (2022).
- Avey, Paul C, Michael C Desch, Eric Parajon, Susan Peterson, Ryan Powers, and Michael J Tierney. "Does Social Science Inform Foreign Policy? Evidence from a Survey of US National Security, Trade, and Development Officials." *International Studies Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (2022).

11. Thursday, March 23: NO CLASS—SPRING BREAK

12. Thursday, March 30: Validity and Background Beliefs

- Mini-methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 11.
- McDermott, Rose. "Internal And External Validity." *Cambridge Handbook Of Experimental Political Science*, 2011, 27–40.
- Brutger, Ryan, Joshua D Kertzer, Jonathan Renshon, Dustin Tingley, and Chagai M Weiss. "Abstraction and Detail in Experimental Design." *American Journal of Political Science*, 2020.
- Dafoe, Allan, Baobao Zhang, and Devin Caughey. "Information Equivalence In Survey Experiments." *Political Analysis* 26, no. 4 (2018): 399–416.
- Hainmueller, Jens, Daniel J Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto. "Causal inference in conjoint analysis: Understanding multidimensional choices via stated preference experiments." *Political analysis* 22, no. 1 (2014): 1–30.

13. Thursday, April 6: Avoiding Problems: Attrition, Attention, and Priming

- Mini-methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapter 7.
- Aronow, Peter M, Jonathon Baron, and Lauren Pinson. "A Note on Dropping Experimental Subjects Who Fail a Manipulation Check." *Political Analysis* 27, no. 4 (2019): 572–589.
- Mummolo, Jonathan, and Erik Peterson. "Demand Effects In Survey Experiments: An Empirical Assessment." *American Political Science Review* 113, no. 2 (2019): 517–529.
- Kane, John V, and Jason Barabas. "No Harm In Checking: Using Factual Manipulation Checks To Assess Attentiveness In Experiments." *American Journal of Political Science* 63, no. 1 (2019): 234–249.
- Clifford, Scott, Geoffrey Sheagley, and Spencer Piston. "Increasing Precision Without Altering Treatment Effects: Repeated Measures Designs In Survey Experiments." *American Political Science Review* 115, no. 3 (2021): 1048–1065.

14. Thursday, April 13: No Class — MPSA Annual Meeting

15. Thursday, April 20: Mechanisms

- Mini-methods lecture: Gerber, Alan S, and Donald P Green. *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation*. WW Norton, 2012, Chapters 9 and 10.
- Coppock, Alexander, Thomas J Leeper, and Kevin J Mullinix. “Generalizability of Heterogeneous Treatment Effect Estimates Across Samples.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 49 (2018): 12441–12446.
- Kam, Cindy D, and Marc J Trussler. “At the nexus of observational and experimental research: Theory, specification, and analysis of experiments with heterogeneous treatment effects.” *Political Behavior* 39, no. 4 (2017): 789–815.
- Bush, Sarah Sunn, and Lauren Prather. “Foreign meddling and mass attitudes toward international economic engagement.” *International Organization* 74, no. 3 (2020): 584–609.
- Chen, Frederick, Jon CW Pevehouse, and Ryan Powers. “Great expectations: the democratic advantage in trade attitudes.” *World Politics*, forthcoming.

16. Thursday, April 27: Final Presentations