

SOCY 490: Experimental Research Practicum

Fall 2020 • MW 2:00–3:15PM • zoom.us/my/longdoan

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OVERVIEW: This course is designed to introduce you to experimental research by learning first hand in the Group Processes Lab. We will survey fundamental issues that arise in the design and execution of experiments. The course will also cover epistemological and methodological debates about causal inference. We end by discussing empirical examples of various techniques for causal inference. Over the course of the semester, my goals for this course are to:

- Develop your skill to link theory and empirical research
- Provide hands-on research experience through working in the Group Processes Lab
- Guide you in formulating or furthering your own research ideas
- Introduce you to some commonly used techniques for causal inference in the social sciences

There are two major outputs in this course. The first is a lab practicum. Most of the practicum will take place outside of class time and provide you with opportunities to conduct research in the lab. The second is a group project proposal. You will use course materials to develop and answer a research question of your own. In the spring, you will carry out this project. In addition, you will be expected to provide commentary and responses to the readings.

REQUIRED TEXTS: Each week, there will be orienting readings that will lead into lecture and discussion. All required readings will be available on at ter.ps/490readings.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: Students are expected to attend class, actively participate in class discussions, carry out duties as part of the research practicum, and work on a research team to design a feasible research project to be carried out in the spring. Readings and assignments for each day should be completed **before** class. Late submissions are not allowed. If exceptional circumstances should arise, you must consult with me at least one class period before a due date so that we can make alternative arrangements. Final grades will be based on the following components:

Student-Led Discussions (20%). Active participation is, of course, required. We will begin each class with student-led discussions of the readings. Each week, you should use the Monday class to write a response memo to the

assigned reading. The response memo should be 1 page, single space in length and critically engage with the content of the reading. I want to know your reactions to the material, what questions you have, what new ideas the material generates for you. Please email these responses to me by the end of class Monday. Your responses will serve as a starting point for our discussions Wednesdays.

Lab Practicum (30%). The bulk of your class grade will be based on a lab practicum. You will each be a research assistant in the Group Processes Lab. The lab will be entirely online this semester. We will train you on running and analyzing online experiments.

Research Proposal (40%). The second major portion of your class grade will be based on a final course paper where you propose a research topic to work on in the spring semester. You will be divided into several research teams to develop an extension of several studies being run in the lab. You should arrange to meet with me about your plans and turn in a one-page summary of the research question and plan for the paper by **September 28**. A working draft of your plans for the design of the study is due **October 19**.

From **October 26** to **November 16**, you will adapt your proposed design into alternative designs based on the technique of causal inference covered. After discussing all of these designs with me, you will present your final proposal the class after Thanksgiving break (see below). A final draft of the research proposal is due **December 18** by **5PM**. All requirements for the course paper should be uploaded to the course ELMS site.

Proposal Presentation (10%). Toward the end of the course, you will be expected to present your proposed project in the style of an academic talk. The presentations should cover your theoretical arguments, potential contributions, and your research design.

COURSE POLICIES:

Academic Integrity & Other Policies: Please review the Code of Academic Integrity at <http://president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf>. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Violations of the Code will result in a course grade of F. I will report these cases to the Office of Student Conduct. All other student policies can be found here: <https://www.ugst.umd.edu/courserelatedpolicies.html>

Accommodations and Student Wellbeing: Students with needs that might impact their ability to complete the requirements for this course in any way should inform us as soon as possible and provide any required documentation.

We will do our best to accommodate these requests. All requests for accommodations should be made by **September 16**.

We are in strange times with unprecedented additional demands on you as first-year grad students. Part of this course is to help your professionalization. Although we will try to carry on this mission to the best of our abilities, it is important for us to be clear from the beginning: your emotional and physical wellbeing is more important than anything in this course. If you have extra demands on your time due to increased caregiving, anxiety, getting sick, or anything else related to the pandemic and cannot meet a particular deadline, it is okay. Communicate with us and we will work with you to accommodate.

Office Hours: I use an online booking system for scheduling office hours. This ensures that everyone is on the same page about meetings and prevents situations where you come when another student is already meeting with me. You can book an appointment at ter.ps/Doan. When booking your meeting, please include a brief summary of the purpose of the meeting. This helps me prepare for our meeting and keeps us on task. Meeting slots are 20 minutes, but feel free to book two consecutive slots if you think it will take us more than 20 minutes to discuss a particular issue. Longer meetings should be scheduled over email as to not impact availability for other students. If my posted timeslots do not work for your schedule, please send me an email to schedule a mutually convenient time.

COURSE OUTLINE: Note that this outline is subject to change based on everyone's interests. I will announce any deviations in class. Readings under each week's topic are to be completed **before** class on Monday. Assignments due each week are due on Wednesday **before** class via email.

Week	Topic/Readings	Assignments Due
8/31	Introduction to the course/ Formulating a research question	
	Abbott, Andrew. "Ideas and Puzzles" Ch. 7 in <i>Methods of Discovery</i> .	
9/7	Research ethics	
	Special section in <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> on the use of deception. 2008. <i>Social Psychology Quarterly</i> 71: 213–27.	
9/14	Logic of explanations	Preliminary research teams
	Hofman, Jake M., Amit Sharma, and Duncan J. Watts. 2017. "Prediction and explanation in social systems." <i>Science</i> 355:486–88.	
9/21	Theory and data	

	Walker, Henry, and Bernard P. Cohen. 1985. "Scope Statements: Imperatives for Evaluating Theory." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 50:288–301.	
9/28	Variables and measurement	Prospectus due
	Baumeister, Roy F., Kathleen D. Vohs, and David C. Funder. "Psychology as the Science of Self-Reports and Finger Movements: Whatever Happened to Actual Behavior?" <i>Perspectives on Psychological Science</i> 2:397–403.	
10/5	External and internal validity	
	Jimenez-Buedo, Maria, and Luis M. Miller. 2010. "Why a trade-off? The relationship between the external and internal validity of experiments." <i>Theoria</i> 25: 301–21.	
10/12	Debates about causality	
	Arjas, Elja. 2001. "Causal analysis and statistics: a social sciences perspective." <i>European Sociological Review</i> 17: 59–64.	
10/19	Experimental vs. observational methods	Preliminary design due
	Imai, Kosuke, et al. 2011. "Unpacking the black box of causality: Learning about causal mechanisms from experimental and observational studies." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 105:765–89.	
10/26	Lab and survey experiments	Lab design exercise
	Willer, Robb, Ko Kuwabara, and Michael W. Macy. 2009. "The false enforcement of unpopular norms." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 115: 451–90.	
11/2	Quasi-, field, and natural experiments	Quasi-, field, or natural design exercise
	Pager, Devah. 2003. "The mark of a criminal record." <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 108: 937–75.	
11/9	Matching and counterfactual analyses	Matching design exercise
	Loehr, Annalise, Long Doan, and Lisa R. Miller. 2015. "The role of selection effects in the contact hypothesis: Results from a US national survey on sexual prejudice." <i>Archives of Sexual Behavior</i> 44: 2111–23.	

	Zucker, Kenneth J. 2015. "Comment on 'The Role of Selection Effects in the Contact Hypothesis: Results from a US National Survey on Sexual Prejudice' by Loehr, Doan, and Miller (2015)." <i>Archives of Sexual Behavior</i> 44:2101.	
11/16	Econometric approaches	Econometric design exercise
	Lizardo, Omar. 2006. "How cultural tastes shape personal networks." <i>American Sociological Review</i> 71: 778–807.	
11/23	• Thanksgiving break • No class •	
11/30	• Proposal presentation •	
12/5	• Wrap Up •	
12/18	• Final Proposal Due by 5PM •	