

EC212 Experimental Economics

Seminar Leader: Israel Waichman

Course Times: Tue, Thu 17:30-19:00

Email: i.waichman@berlin.bard.edu

Course Description

Experimental economics is the application of experimental methods to economic questions. Experiments allow for causal inference. Therefore, they are used in economics to test the descriptiveness of economic models, to study behavior in cases where theory provides ambiguous predictions (or no predictions), and also to ‘testbed’ economic policies. The course aims at introducing experimental economics and its various applications. We will conduct some of the experiments in the classroom, providing first-hand experience of the economic situations that are being thought through. The course consists of three parts: The first part, the methodology of experimental economics, introduces experimental economics. In this part, we discuss the merits (and limits) of experiments, and the main principles of conducting an experiment. The second part, Applications: Influential Experiments in Economics, surveys some of the seminal research in experimental economics (e.g. market experiments, bargaining experiments, biases and heuristics under uncertainty, public good games, etc.). In the third part, students will conduct, analyze, present and write their own small pilot study.

Learning Outcomes

- Knowledge of controlled experiments and their importance to scientific inference
- Ability to deliberate on the merits (and limitations) of experiments in economics
- Capacity to conduct economic experiments
- Capacity to review seminal research in experimental economics: markets experiments, bargaining experiments, prediction markets, public good provision, etc.
- Ability to conduct one’s own economic experiment and present it to an audience

Requirements

Prerequisites

Participants in the seminar should have passed the "Principles of Economics" and "Microeconomics for Economics" courses. It is also highly recommended that they have passed the Statistics course.

Textbooks

Students are not required to purchase a textbook.

The first part of the course is largely influenced by the following textbooks (the relevant part is identical in both books)

- *Experimental Methods: A Primer for Economists* (1994) by Daniel Friedman and Shyam Sunder (Cambridge university press)
- *Economics Lab: An Intensive Course in Experimental Economics* (2004) by Alessandra Cassar and Daniel Friedman (Routledge)

Other relevant reading (journal articles) will be provided during the seminar.

It is mandatory to read one of the following books (these are New York Times bestsellers – not technical textbooks):

- *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2013) by Daniel Kahneman (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)
- *Noise: A Flaw in Human Judgment* (2021) by Daniel Kahneman, Olivier Sibony, and Cass R. Sunstein (Little Brown Spark)
- *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth and Happiness* (2009) by Richard H Thaler and Cass R Sunstein (Penguin Books)
- *Misbehaving: The Making of Behavioral Economics* (2016) by Richard H Thaler (W. W. Norton & Company)
- *The Voltage Effect: How to Make Good Ideas Great and Great Ideas Scale* (2022) by John A. List (Penguin Random House LLC, NY)

It is essential that you will repeat at home the material that we cover in class.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the grade for the seminar.

Use of cell phones

The use of cell phones is not allowed during the classes. Please leave your cell phone in your bag during the classes.

Assessment

Assessment will be based on attendance, preparation for classes, regular and active participation, possible quizzes, presentation of topics from reading material as well as a mid-term (60 minutes) or an equivalent essay and a final empirical work (see below).

Grade breakdown

Seminar participation (including possible quizzes). In addition, each student is expected to give a 5-10 presentation of a topic from the reading material (one of the books provided in the reading list above): 30%

Mid-term exam or an equivalent essay (an essay in pairs): 30%

Final empirical work: Presentation of a pilot study (in pairs) and final paper (20% presentation; 20% final paper).

Final empirical work

As part of the course each pair of students will conduct a pilot economic experiment (or an equivalent survey). The experiment will be designed to answer a well-defined research question. The students will have to analyze the data and present their project in a workshop to be held in the final 2 weeks of the semester (**with a possible 3-hour session in the completion week**). Finally, they will have to submit a short research paper.

Policy on Late Submission of empirical work

Please note the policy from the Student Handbook on the submission of essays: *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four days of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C.*

Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.

Schedule and Course structure

Classes start on Tuesday Aug 30 and run until Thursday Dec 8, with spring break planned for Oct 24 – Oct 30. Completion week is from Dec 12 until Dec 16. **Attendance is mandatory during completion week.**

The schedule provided is provisional in order to allow for flexibility. It is the students' responsibility to keep themselves informed of any changes to the schedule provided here. An up-to-date schedule will be maintained by the course management in our Google classroom system. Lecture slides and problem sets will be posted in Google classroom (password will be given in the first class).

Tentative course structure:

Part I: *The Methodology of Experimental Economics*

In this part we introduce the why and how to use experiments for scientific conduct and the principles of experimental economics.

Part II: *Applications: Influential Experiments Economics Research*

In this part we will study several topics in experimental economics, such as bargaining (including the well-known ultimatum and dictator games), markets and auctions, biases and heuristics, prediction markets and guessing games, labor markets, voluntary provision of public goods and the tragedy of the commons. Possible extensions are experimental finance, gender difference, etc. During the course we will cover (some of) the groundbreaking work of several Nobel prize laureates, among them Reinhard Selten, Vernon Smith, Daniel Kahneman (and Amos Tversky), Richard Thaler, Alvin Roth, and Elinor Ostrom.

Part III: *Research Project*

In this part (which will start parallel Part II) students will work in pairs to conduct a pilot experimental or survey study where they will have to collect their own data to test a specific hypothesis. The students are required to shortly present it in class and also to write a final paper describing their research. We will discuss the details during the course.

Classes missed due to federal holidays will not be rescheduled.

(this version: July 29, 2022)