POLISCI 497-001 / INTLSTD 401-010
Experimental Approaches to the Political Economy of Development
Fall 2017

Prof. Noah Nathan, Department of Political Science
Mondays and Wednesdays, 4pm–5:30pm
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Office Hours: 6733 Haven Hall, Thursdays 4–5pm (see Canvas to sign up; email me to meet at another time)

Course Description
The past two decades have seen a significant emphasis on field experimental research in the study of politics and economic development. Political scientists and economists increasingly directly intervene in the real world, randomizing the implementation of programs and policies in collaboration with governments, NGOs, and international institutions in an attempt to identify the underlying causal relationships explaining key political and economic outcomes in developing countries. This “experimental turn” has offered new answers to some core questions about the political economy of development and created opportunities for new collaborations between academics and the public and private sectors. It has also sparked controversy about both the ethics and scholarly limitations of such research.

The course surveys recent experimental research on the political economy of development. We will examine studies on corruption, electoral accountability, peace-building and ethnic conflict, the political representation of women and the poor, and the economic effects of political institutions. We will also discuss the potential pitfalls of experimental research. Readings focus on Africa, Latin America, and South and Southeast Asia.

Readings
All required readings will be posted on the Canvas webpage for the course. Please let me know if you have any problems accessing the course materials.

Assignments and Grading

- **Group presentation** (15% of final grade) – students will be divided into 7 groups of 3-4. Each group will do extra research on a special topic in the course and give a 15 minute in-class presentation in which they introduce that topic to the rest of the class. The dates for each presentation are indicated by group number below. The topics and extra readings are detailed in a separate document on the Canvas site. Group assignments will be determined during the first full week of class. Note: each group must schedule an appointment at Office Hours for the week before their presentation date to go over their presentation plans with me in person.

- **Short paper on course readings** (20% of final grade) – 6-8 page double-spaced paper based on the assigned course readings and lecture materials. The paper addresses a prompt circulated 10 days in advance of the due date. Paper is due **Wednesday, November 1 by 11:59pm** in the dropbox on Canvas.
• **Final project** – *propose your own randomized evaluation* (30% of final grade; 5% for proposal email; 5% for in-class presentation; 20% for final submission) – each student will develop a proposal for an original impact evaluation on a development-related topic of their choosing. Detailed instructions for the assignment will be circulated later in the semester. The final project will be graded in stages. First, students will submit an annotated bibliography by email by **Monday, November 20, by 11:59pm**. The email will identify your topic and the secondary sources that you will use for background research on that topic. Second, each student will give an in-class presentations on their proposal on **November 29, December 6, or December 11**. Third, the final written proposal – 10-15 pages, double-spaced – is due **Monday, December 18 by 11:59pm** in the dropbox on Canvas.

• **Class participation** (20% of final grade) – each student is expected to attend each class and contribute actively to the discussion. Attendance will be one component of your participation grade. Repeated unexcused absences may result in receiving a 0 for your participation grade. Excused absences require documentation (doctor’s note, etc). In general, you should notify me in advance about an excused absence.

• **Reading quizzes** (15% of final grade) – class discussions and activities will not work if students have not read. To incentivize reading, there will be 8 unannounced reading quizzes, conducted at the beginning (4:10pm) of selected class sessions. These quizzes will take less than 5 minutes and will be very simple if you have done the readings. I will drop each student’s worst score and average together the remaining 7 for the final grade. **There are no make-ups for quizzes.** If a quiz occurs during an excused absence, I will still drop your worst score and average together the remaining quizzes for your grade (i.e., your best 6 quizzes will now be used to compute your grade). Any quiz that occurs during an unexcused absence will be scored as a 0.

**Course Policies**

Please see the final page of the syllabus for the remaining course policies.
Course Schedule

Part I: Introduction

1. First meeting (September 6)

Optional reading:


2. Theories of economic underdevelopment – part 1 (September 11)

Assigned reading:


3. Political theories of economic underdevelopment – part 2 (September 13)

Assigned reading:


Part II: Experiments and development

4. The challenges of causal inference (September 18)

Assigned reading:

1. Gerber and Green, 2012, Field Experiments: Design, Analysis, and Interpretation, WW Norton & Company. Chapter 1 (pgs. 1–5 only; stop at Section 1.2)


5. Why randomize? (September 20)

Assigned reading:


6. **Experiments and policy** (September 25)

Assigned reading:


2. Click through and learn about at least 2 studies each on the “Policy Lessons” tab of [https://www.povertyactionlab.org/](https://www.povertyactionlab.org/) and the “Research” tab of [http://www.poverty-action.org/](http://www.poverty-action.org/). Be prepared to briefly describe the studies you’ve read about in class.

**Part III: Do institutions matter?**

7. **Democracy vs. dictatorship** (September 27)

**Group 1 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


8. **Property rights** (October 2)

**Group 2 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


9. **Long-run effects of institutions** (October 4)

**Group 3 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


**Part IV: Democracy at its best? Limits on electoral accountability**

10. **Information constraints** (October 9)

**Group 4 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


11. **Is more information enough?** (October 11)


2. Lieberman, Posner, and Tsai, 2014, “Does Information Lead to More Active Citizenship? Evidence from an Education Intervention in Rural Kenya,” *World Development*. Pgs. 69–74; 77-81. Be sure to see Figure 3.

**Fall break – no class on Monday, October 16**

12. **Clientelism** (October 18)

**Group 5 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


13. **Cures for clientelism?** (October 23)

**Short paper assignment circulated in class**

Assigned reading:


*Part V: Interlude: ethics and limits of experiments*

**14. The ethics of experimentation** (October 25)

Assigned reading:


**15. How generalizable are experimental results?** (October 30)

Assigned reading:

1. Deaton, 2010, “Instruments, Randomization, and Learning about Development,” *Journal of Economic Literature*. Read only 437 (starting at Section 4) – 442 (stop at 4.2); 447 (Section 5) – 452.

*Part VI: Corruption*

**16. Experimental evidence of corruption** (November 1)

**Short paper is due by 11:59pm** (note: due date for Group 6 is November 4 by 11:59pm)

**Group 6 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


**17. Monitoring corruption** (November 6)

Assigned reading:

18. Corruption in elections (November 8)

Assigned reading:


Part VII: Women’s representation and development

19. Gender quotas (November 13)

**Group 7 in-class presentation**

Assigned reading:


20. Limits to gender-based interventions (November 15)

Assigned reading:


Part VIII: Reducing conflict

21. Experiments on reconciliation (November 20)

Assigned reading:


**Class cancelled (Thanksgiving)** (November 22)

**22. Media interventions to reduce conflict** (November 27)

Assigned reading:


**Part IX: Student Presentations**

23. **Final project presentations (part 1)** (November 29)

24. **Final project presentations (part 2)** (December 4)

25. **Final project presentations (part 3)** (December 6)
Course Policies

- **Late assignments**: Late assignments will be docked 1/3rd of a grade for each 24 hours they are late (e.g., A becomes A−, B+ becomes B, etc.). Extensions are only granted if cleared with me in advance and supported by a compelling reason, for which I may request documentation. Please consult with me if you are unsure of whether you are eligible for an extension. Absent a documented last minute medical or family emergency, I will not respond to requests for extensions submitted less than 48 hours before the due date.

- **Accommodations for disabilities**: If you think you need an accommodation for a disability, please let me know as soon as possible. We will work with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office to help us determine appropriate academic accommodations. Any information you provide to me is private and confidential.

- **Student wellbeing**: University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (734) 764-8312 and https://caps.umich.edu/ during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You may also consult University Health Service (UHS) at (734) 764-8320 and https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.

- **Academic integrity**: So we’re on the record in advance in the small chance that this arises: I have a zero tolerance policy for plagiarism and will immediately report anyone suspected of it to the administration for disciplinary action. You will also automatically fail the course. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s statement on plagiarism.

- **Grade grievances**: If you believe a grade you have received is unfair or in error, you will need to do the following: 1. Provide an explanation to me in writing about why you believe the grade was in error. 2. Schedule an appointment by email to meet with me in person to discuss your complaint; 3. If my response fails to address your claim of unfairness or error, you may petition the department’s Director of Undergraduate Studies at the latest within the first five weeks of classes following the completion of the course. You must convey in writing the basis for the complaint, with specific evidence in support of the argument that the grade either was given in error or was unfairly determined. This formal complaint also should summarize the outcome of the initial inquiry to the course instructor, indicating which aspects are in dispute. Within three weeks of the receipt of the petition, the DUS will determine whether to convene the Undergraduate Affairs Committee, the student, and me for a formal hearing.