

Evidence Based Policies of Economic and Political Development  
GAFL-530-401  
University of Pennsylvania, Fall 2017

Professor Guy Grossman

Time: Mondays 2-4:50p.

Location: David Rittenhouse Laboratory 3N6 (southeast corner of 33rd and Walnut Streets)

Office: Stiteler Hall, room 225

Office hours: Tuesdays 4:00-5:00p

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## OVERVIEW

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This class provides a “hands-on” introduction to the promises and limitations of using Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) to inform policy makers, practitioners and academics of the conditions under which policies and programs likely have a positive effect on economic and political outcomes, in the context of international development.

**This seminar has four building blocks:**

1. The first block is devoted to understanding the “nuts and bolts” of designing and executing field experiments / RCTs, especially in developing countries (how to we define a causal relation? How do we estimate a treatment effect? How do we know whether effects are genuine or simply due to chance?)
2. The second block is devoted to demonstrating how scholars have used RCTs to inform core policy debates (e.g., what are some effective ways to reduce corruption? How can we improve the performance of frontline service providers? How can politicians be made more responsive to their constituents?).
3. The third block involves guest lecturers who will share their experience of designing and executing studies that help support evidence based programming.
4. Finally, students will be developing their own research proposals, designed to address a core policy question, in either a developed country or a developing country setting.

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## FORMAL REQUIREMENTS

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1. **Reading and class discussion (10%):** The Syllabus lists required reading that we go over in class. You are expected to have completed all the required readings before class to the point where you can be called on to critique or defend any reading.
2. **Response note (5x5=25%).** Student are expected to write five responses on applied readings. These response notes should engage the core debates presented in the reading. They should be thought pieces and will be used to help structure class discussions. They

- must be emailed to me by 12pm of the Sunday before class.
3. **Research design (60%).** The core requirement is a research proposal that includes all sections that one might expect in a high-quality research proposal (including intellectual merit, power analysis, planned analysis, budget). A first “full” draft is expected in week 9, and a final draft is expected a week after our last meeting.
  4. **Presentation (5%).** Each student will be expected to give a short (~15-20 minutes) presentation describing their research design (final meeting).

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## COURSE POLICIES

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**Academic Integrity:** Students in this course are expected to comply with Penn’s policy on academic integrity. All students are expected to know, understand, and follow the codes of conduct regarding academic integrity. At the most basic level, this means submitting only original work done by you and acknowledging all sources of information or ideas and attributing them to others as required. This also means you should not cheat, copy, or mislead others about what is your work. Plagiarism and all forms of cheating are considered to be serious academic offenses. I will pursue all violations of academic integrity to the full extent of University policy, including referring all cases to The Office of Student Conduct (OSC). For more information and a helpful guide, please refer to the following [website](#). In addition, please consult Penn’s Code of Student Conduct ([here](#)).

**Access and Diversity:** The University accommodates students with disabilities who have registered with the [Office of Student Disabilities Service](#). Students must register with the Student Disabilities Services (SDS) to be granted special accommodations for any on-going conditions. For more information, please refer to the following [guide](#).

**Religious Accommodation:** The University accommodates students whose religious obligations conflict with attendance, submitting assignments, or completing scheduled tests and examinations. However, you must notify me in the first week of class if you will require any accommodation on these grounds. For more information, please refer to the Penn’s [Policy on Religious Holidays](#).

**Office Hours:** Please come to office hours. Outside of office hours, I will be busy doing other parts of my job (writing scientific papers, supervising graduate students, serving on faculty committees, etc.) – office hours are the time I have set aside to specifically focus on you personally. Even if you don’t have specific questions, the interactions generated during a good office hour discussion should help clear up any confusion you might have on a topic.

**Communication:** For the above reasons, if you write me an email, you shouldn’t expect a response to in less than 24 hours. In addition, please email directly from within Canvas..

**Etiquette:** You are not alone in the seminar, so please be considerate of your fellow students: arrive on time, take notes of what has been discussed, do not leave early unless absolutely necessary, do not browse the net, and do not send text messages or personal emails. Turn off cell phones during lectures.

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## BOOKS

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There is no course reader for this class. All assigned articles are available electronically through the class website on Canvas. There is, however, two required books:

- Rachel Glennerster and Kudzai Takavarasha, *Running Randomized Evaluations: A Practical Guide*, Princeton University Press, 2013.
- Paul Gertler, Sebastian Martinez, Patrick Premand, Laura Rawlings, and Christel Vermeersch *Impact Evaluation in Practice* (2nd edition), World Bank, 2016

I also highly recommend purchasing the following books:

- Donald Green and Alan Gerber, *Field Experiments: Design, Analysis and Interpretation*,” Norton and Company, 2012.
- Thad Dunning, *Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences: A Design-Based Approach*, Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Stephen Morgan and Christopher Winship *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research*,” Cambridge University Press, 2015 (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)

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## MEETINGS

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### SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO EVIDENCE BASED POLICY (9/11)

- *Running Randomized Evaluations*, chapter 1
- *Field Experiments*, chapter 1
- *General application: Getting children into school*

### SESSION 2: CAUSAL INFERENCE (9/18)

- *Running Randomized Evaluations*, chapter 2
- *Field Experiments*, chapter 2
- *Applied: free or subsidized bed-nets to combat malaria*
  - Jessica Cohen and Pascaline Dupas (2010). “Free Distribution or Cost-Sharing? Evidence from a Randomized Malaria Prevention Experiment.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 125 (1):1-45.

### **SESSION 3: HYPOTHESIS TESTING I (9/25)**

- Field experiments, chapter 3
- *Applied: Cash transfers – do we need conditions?*
  - Sarah Baird Craig McIntosh and Berk Özler (2011). “Cash or Condition? Evidence from a Randomized Cash Transfer Program.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 126 (4): 1709-1753
- *Applied: Can we pay communities to preserve the environment?*
  - Jayachandran et al. (2017) “Cash for Carbon: A Randomized Trial of Payments for Ecosystem Services to Reduce Deforestation,” *Science*, 357(6348)

### **SESSION 4: HYPOTHESIS TESTING II (10/2)**

- Running Randomized Evaluations, chapter 3
- *Applied: bottom-up or to-down monitoring to combat corruption?*
  - Benjamin Olken (2007). “Monitoring Corruption: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia.” *Journal of Political Economy*, 115(2): 200-249
- *Applied: can community monitoring improve health services?*
  - Martina Björkman, and Jakob Svensson (2009). "Power to The People: Evidence From A Randomized Field Experiment on Community-Based Monitoring in Uganda." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 124(2): 735-769

### **SESSION 5: STATISTICAL POWER (10/9)**

- Running Randomized Evaluations, chapter 6
- *Applied reading: Community monitoring to improve service delivery?*
  - Abhijit Banerjee, Rukmini Banerji, Esther Duflo, Rachel Glennerster, and Stuti Khemani (2010). “Pitfalls of Participatory Programs: Evidence from a randomized evaluation in education in India.” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*
- *Applied: Can ICTs make community monitoring more effective?*
  - Guy Grossman, Melina Platas and Jonathan Rodden (2017). “Crowdsourcing Accountability: ICT for Service Delivery.”

### **SESSION 6: GUEST LECTURE: DAMON CENTOLA (10/16)**

Applied reading: TBD

### **SESSION 7: GUEST LECTURE: AURELIE OUSS (10/23)**

Applied reading: TBD

### **SESSION 8: GUEST LECTURE: AARON CHALFIN (10/30)**

Applied reading: TBD

### **SESSION 9: GUEST LECTURE: THOMAS FUJIWARA (11/6)**

Applied reading: TBD

## SESSION 10: RANDOMIZATION (10/13)

- *Running Randomized Evaluations*, chapter 4
- *Impact Evaluation in Practice*, chapter 4
- *Applied: the promises and pitfalls of community driven development*
  - M. Humphreys, Raul Sanchez de la Sierra and Peter van der Windt (2017) “Social Engineering in the Tropics”.

## SESSION 11: THREATS TO INFERENCE (11/20)

- *Running Randomized Evaluations*, chapter 7
- *Applied: can information campaigns induce greater incumbent performance?*
  - Guy Grossman and Kristin Michelitch (2017) “Information Dissemination, Competitive Pressure, and Politician Performance between Elections: A Field Experiment in Uganda.”
  - Cesi Cruz, Phillip Keefer and Julien Labonne (2017) “Incumbent Advantage, Voter Information and Vote Buying”

## SESSION 12: NATURAL EXPERIMENTS (11/27)

- *Impact Evaluation in Practice*, chapters 5-8
- *Applied: can community monitoring improve health services?*
  - Claudio Ferraz, and Fred Finan (2008). “Exposing corrupt politicians: The Effect of Brazil’s publicly released audits on electoral outcomes.” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 123(2), 703–745.

## SESSION 13: RESEARCH TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS (12/4)

- Garret Christensen. 2016 “*Manual of Best Practices in Transparent Social Science Research*”
- 2014. Teele, Dawn. “Reflections on the Ethics of Field Experiments”, Chapter 5 in *Field Experiments and Their Critics*, Yale University Press
- Jesse Singal (NYMag)
  - “A Really Important Political Science Study About Gay Marriage Used Faked Data” (5/20/2015)
  - “Michael LaCour Made Up a Teaching Award, Too” (5/27/2016)
  - “The Case of the Amazing Gay-Marriage Data: How a Graduate Student Reluctantly Uncovered a Huge Scientific Fraud” (5/29/2015)
  - “The Strangest Thing About Michael LaCour’s Response to the Academic Fraud Allegations Levelled Against Him” (5/30/2015)
  - “Michael LaCour Probably Fabricated a Document About Research Integrity” (6/1/2015)
  - “It Turns Out a Brief Conversation Really Can Change Minds on LGBT Issues” (4/7/2016)

## SESSION 14: STUDENTS PRESENTATIONS (12/11)