

**Petition to the American Political Science Association
to create an Organized Section on Experimental Research**

25 January 2010

We, the undersigned (please see the attached petition), respectfully petition the American Political Science Association to create an **Organized Section on Experimental Research**. The experimental study of politics has grown rapidly in recent years. Political science, in turn, needs to support scholars conducting experimental research so that they may maximize their scientific contribution to a wide range of unanswered questions and debates.

In the following paragraphs we present the proposed Experimental Research Organized Section's mission, rationale, and purpose. We present a proposed governance structure, to be ratified formally by the Section's membership. We offer a compelling argument for the Section's contribution to the intellectual life of the Association and our discipline. We explain how the Section will achieve its pedagogical mission without further fragmenting the discipline; to the contrary, we believe that the Section will create a new forum where scholars and teachers from many of the traditional political science subfields can come together to advance knowledge.

Mission, Rationale and Purpose of the Experimental Research Section

The mission of the Experimental Research Organized Section of the American Political Science Association is to advance pedagogy, research, and contributions based on randomized or natural experiments.

Background. Recent years have seen a dramatic increase in the number of published articles in political science that use experiments. Perhaps less evident, and arguably more important, experimentalists are exploring topics that would have been unimaginable only a few years ago. Laboratory researchers have studied topics ranging from the effects of media exposure (Iyengar and Kinder 1987) to the conditions under which groups solve collective action problems (Ostrom et al. 1992), and, at times, have identified empirical anomalies that produced new theoretical insights (McKelvey and Palfrey 1992). Some survey experimenters have developed experimental techniques to measure prejudice (Kuklinski et al. 1997) and its effects on support for policies such as welfare or affirmative action (Sniderman and Piazza 1995), while others have explored the ways in which framing, information, and decision cues influence voters' policy preferences and support for public officials (Druckman 2004; Tomz 2007). And although the initial wave of field experiments focused on the effects of campaign communications on turnout and voters' preferences (Eldersveld 1956; Gerber and Green 2000; Wantchekon 2003), researchers increasingly use field experiments to study phenomena as varied as election fraud (Hyde 2009), representation (Butler and Nickerson 2009), counterinsurgency (Lyal 2009), and interpersonal communication (Nickerson 2008). While many of these applications are novel, there is no doubt that experimentation is becoming a core method in political science. In 2009, in acknowledgment of her research one of the discipline's premier experimentalists, Elinor Ostrom, was awarded a Nobel Prize.

In contrast to modes of research that address descriptive or interpretive questions, researchers design experiments to address causal questions. A causal question invites a comparison between two states of the world: one in which some sort of intervention is administered and another in which it is not. The *fundamental problem of causal inference* arises when we cannot simultaneously observe a person or entity in its treated and untreated

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states (Holland 1986). Random assignment overcomes the fundamental problem of causal inference.

Experimental studies can take many forms. It is customary to classify randomized studies according to the settings in which they take place: a *lab experiment* involves an intervention in a setting created and controlled by the researcher; a *field experiment* takes place in a naturally occurring setting; and a *survey experiment* involves an intervention in the course of an opinion survey (which might be conducted in-person, over the phone, or via the web). This classification scheme is not entirely adequate, however, as studies often blend different aspects of lab, field, and survey experiments. For example, some experiments take place in lab-like settings, such as a classroom, but require the completion of a survey that contains the experimental treatments (e.g., the treatments might entail providing individuals with different types of information about an issue).

Rationale. With the rapid growth and development of experimental methods in political science comes a set of terms and concepts that political scientists must know and understand. The Section will be devoted to helping scholars to develop and hone these specialized skills and to providing a forum where research based on these techniques can be shared and discussed. The lack of such a common forum erects barriers to the effective development of these skills and their application to political questions.

Purpose. An APSA Organized Section provides a much needed forum in which members can share research and acquire research skills. The Section will define “Experimental Research” broadly to encompass scholarship advanced by lab, survey or field experimentation spanning the discipline’s subfields including, but not limited to, comparative politics, international relations, public policy, American politics, political behavior, etc. The Section will create and sustain a place for the mastery of the methodological skills appropriate to conducting experiment-based research. This level of visibility, in turn, will spread the interest and energy political scientists can bring to important research questions, produce more and better research and teaching, and stimulate the training of new generations of scholars.

Although many other Sections take an interest in experimental applications and experimental analysis, the Section on Experimental Research will focus directly on the concerns specific to experimenters.

Proposed governance structure

We propose a governance structure and dues similar to those of most Organized Sections. For the purpose of Section creation and initial organization, we would propose the following governance structure, function, and activities. These recommendations are a starting point for the membership, and we regard all of them as provisional, subject to subsequent ratification by Section members upon establishment of the Section.

The section shall be governed by an Executive Council composed of the following officers:

- President (1-year term)

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- President-elect and Program Chair (1-year term)
- Secretary (2-year term)
- Treasurer (2-year term)
- Three additional At-large Council Members

In the first year of the Section's existence, the President shall act as Program Chair for the purpose of organizing the following year's Program.

In the first year of the Section's existence, the entire Executive Council will be elected simultaneously, with one (1) At-large Council Member serving a 1-year term, and the remaining two Council Members serving 2-year terms, to initiate a pattern of staggered and overlapping Council terms. Thereafter, all At-large Council members shall be elected for 2-year terms.

The President, in consultation with the Executive Council, shall also appoint a Newsletter Editor who will serve a minimum 2-year term.

Voting on Officers and all other matters subject to the membership's vote shall take place annually, at the Section Business Meeting held during the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

Standing Committees (appointed by the President in consultation with the Executive Council):

- Program (Chaired by President-elect)
- Nominations
- Award Committee to Select the Best Paper on or using Experimental Research presented at the prior year's APSA Meeting
- Award Committee to Select the Best Book on or using Experimental Research
- Award Committee to Select the Best Dissertation using experimental methods

Award Committees will make the first awards at the Section's second Business Meeting, after the Section has been in operation for a year. Awards in the Section's early years may be for the honor only, as the Section accumulates sufficient funds in its treasury to enable it to attach cash honoraria to the awards.

Journal adoption. An important aspect of the Section's governance, especially with regard to its dues structure, may be its relationship with a quarterly journal of scholarship. The Section will consider further the possibility of journal adoption upon its inception.

Dues. The Section, upon the ratification of the membership, will establish the following two-tiered dues structure.

Student members: \$ 5.00
Regular members: \$10.00

The Executive Council, upon review of Section's financial health and consideration of plans for future activities, may propose dues increases or other changes to the dues structure to the

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membership prior to the Annual Business Meeting. The membership shall vote on such proposed changes in the Annual Business Meeting.

Distinctness from but constructive interaction with other organized sections, and contribution to the intellectual growth of the larger community

The Association's *Section Handbook* says that...

Sections were formed to help advance the goals of the Association, particularly its objective to encourage the study of Political Science. They provide an opportunity for groups of APSA members who share a common interest in a particular subfield of the discipline to organize meetings and coordinate communications under Association auspices. Secondly, Sections provide our membership with outlets for research and opportunities for scholarship. In addition, they receive logistical support from the national office in collecting dues and maintaining membership lists (https://www.apsanet.org/content_4634.cfm, site last visited for this application on 29 January 2008).

The specialized nature of experimental political science necessitates the acquisition of additional tools and perspectives.

Thus, while Section members will come from every subfield in political science, as the petitioners here already demonstrate, the Section itself will provide a uniquely welcoming environment for the acquisition of additional analytical skills, as well as the presentation of experimental research. It will be a forum for discourse and exchange on topics related to political science research and teaching. The Section will be especially valuable to graduate students and junior faculty members interested in the area and in connecting with other experimental researchers. It will be what the APSA says Organized Sections are: a building block.

An Experimental Research Section contributes to the discipline's common epistemology

Section members can and will maintain their other subfield and section interests and identities; however, the Section will provide them with a forum in which to interact and hone analytical skills that employ experimental methods.

We see this commonality and yet distinctness as the great strength of the Section. The Section does not duplicate the work of any current section, but can enhance inquiry in partnership with all of them.

The attached petition testifies to APSA members' desire for an Organized Section on Experimental Research.

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We attach a list containing the names, e-mail addresses, and affiliations of current APSA members. Each of these members supports the creation of the Experimental Research Section.

The petition clearly demonstrates the breadth of support for such a Section. Petition signatories are scholars, teachers, and practitioners. Scholars in every subfield of political science have signed the petition. We are united by our abiding desire to apply experimental tools and insights of political science to pressing questions.

We respectfully ask our Association colleagues to enable us to begin this new endeavor by approving our application and allowing us to establish our first meeting of the Organized Section for Experimental Research at the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Washington, DC

Attachment: Excel spreadsheet containing petitioners' electronic signatures