

Behavioral Field Experiments

Université de Bordeaux

May 2024*

Dr. Angelino C. G. Viceisza (pronounced: Vee-Say-Za)
Full Professor of Economics, Spelman College
Research Associate, National Bureau of Economic Research
Invited Researcher, J-PAL at MIT

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Phyllis Wallace Visiting Professor, MIT Sloan, 2023-24

aviceisz@spelman.edu
<https://www.angelinoviceisza.com>

1 Course overview

Experimental methods have become a standard component of the economist's toolkit. This course will seek to provide a birds-eye view of how to conduct "behavioral field experiments", which I use as a collective term for lab-in-the-field experiments (LFEs) and natural field experiments, also known by some as randomized controlled trials (RCTs). The course is a patchwork of topics in behavioral economics, behavioral game theory, development economics, experimental economics, and field experiments. It does not constitute a substitute for a full-length course in any of these areas. This syllabus is tentative, as deviations may become necessary.

2 Course location: To be determined

3 Course schedule

Friday, May 17: The basics

10:00 – 11:00	Terminology, definitions, and taxonomy of field experiments
11:00 – 12:00	Identifying research questions and the role of theory
13:30 – 14:30	Internal and external validity
14:30 – 16:00	Office hours

*Monday, May 20 is a Holiday and the university will be closed.

Tuesday, May 21: Lab-in-the-field experiments

- 10:00 – 11:00 Examples
- 11:00 – 12:00 Design principles
- 13:30 – 14:30 Implementation considerations
- 14:30 – 16:00 Office hours

Wednesday, May 22: Randomized controlled trials

- 10:00 – 11:00 Examples
- 11:00 – 12:00 Design principles
- 13:30 – 14:30 Implementation considerations
- 14:30 – 16:00 Office hours

Thursday, May 23: Extensions

- 10:00 – 11:00 Pre-registrations versus pre-analysis plans
- 11:00 – 12:00 Ethics and Institutional Review Boards
- 13:30 – 14:30 Other issues and additional discussion
- 14:30 – 16:00 Office hours

4 Research proposal

Students can submit a research proposal of **four pages maximum**, organized by:

1. Research question (1-2 sentences)
2. Motivation: Why should we care? (4-5 sentences)
3. Intellectual merit: Contribution to related literature (4-5 sentences)
4. Study design, specifically:
 - (a) Experimental design and internal validity: Treatments and randomization (e.g., unit)
 - (b) Data: Outcome(s), controls, and data source (e.g., surveys or administrative)
 - (c) Sampling: Sample size (power calculations, multiple hypothesis) and recruitment
 - (d) Empirical strategy: Main regression equation and other specifications (e.g., mechanisms)
 - (e) External validity considerations
 - (f) Other issues, e.g., implementation partners, timeline, and budget
5. Conclusions/next steps, e.g., fundraising or dissemination goals and pain points for feedback
6. References.

The proposal must be a portable document format (PDF) file that is formatted as follows:

1. Font: Times New Roman, 11 point
2. Line spacing: Single
3. Margins: 1 inch all around
4. Length: No longer than four pages, excluding references.

Other issues:

1. **Due date: Wednesday, May 29 at 11:59 PM ET.**
2. Submit to aviceisz@spelman.edu with subject line “Bordeaux Field Experiments Proposal”.
3. Group work allowed if you think that would be beneficial.

5 References (in alphabetical order)

The readings, pre-registrations, and/or pre-analysis plans below will serve as examples in this course. They skew heavily towards my own work because I can illustrate their “ins” and “outs” by means of anecdotes that do not appear in the papers. This reading list is thus not representative of the “behavioral field experiments” literature in general. I will point to other references throughout the course, specifically when giving feedback on the research proposals.

1. Aflagah, K., Bernard, T., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2022. “Cheap Talk and Coordination in the Lab and in the Field: Collective Commercialization in Senegal.” *Journal of Development Economics* 154 (10275).
2. Andrews, I., Gentzkow, M. and J. M. Shapiro. 2020. “On the Informativeness of Descriptive Statistics for Structural Estimates.” *Econometrica* 88 (6), 2231–2258.
3. Andrews, I., Kitagawa, T., and A. McCloskey. 2023. “Inference on Winners.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (forthcoming).
4. Apperson, J., Blankson, A. N., Guillory, J., Jackson, F., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2023. “Metacognitive Awareness and Academic Performance: Evidence from Randomized Controlled Trials.” AEA RCT Registry. May 25. <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.4840-1.1>.
5. Avis, E., Ferraz, C., and F. Finan. 2018. “Do Government Audits Reduce Corruption? Estimating the Impacts of Exposing Corrupt Politicians.” *Journal of Political Economy* 126 (5), 1912–1964.
6. Blanco, L. and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2023. “Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Retirement Outreach among Low-to-Middle Income Workers.” AEA RCT Registry. May 24. <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.10819-2.0>.
7. Castillo, M., Petrie, R., Torero, M., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2014. “Lost in the Mail: A Field Experiment on Crime.” *Economic Inquiry* 52 (1): 285–3033.
8. Charness, G. and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2016. “Comprehension and Risk Elicitation in the Field: Evidence from Rural Senegal.” *Review of Behavioral Economics* 3 (2), 145–171.

9. Duflo, E., R. Glennerster, and M. Kremer. 2007. "Using Randomization in Development Economics Research: A Toolkit." In *Handbook of Development Economics*, ed. T. P. Schultz and J. Strauss. Amsterdam: Elsevier Science. Download freely from NBER or J-PAL website.
10. Harrison, Glenn W., and John A. List. 2004. "Field Experiments." *Journal of Economic Literature* 42 (4), 1009–1055.
11. Hill, R. V., Maruyama, E., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2012. "Breaking the Norm: An Empirical Investigation into the Unraveling of Good Behavior." *Journal of Development Economics* 99 (1), 150–162.
12. Hill, R. V. and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2012. "A Field Experiment on the Impact of Weather Shocks and Insurance on Risky Investment." *Experimental Economics* 15 (2), 341–371.
13. Nakasone, E., Torero, M., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2020. "Neuroeconomics for Development: Eye-tracking to Understand Migrant Remittances." AEA RCT Registry. September 08. <https://doi.org/10.1257/rct.6322-1.0>.
14. Sanger, C., Qaim, M., Torero, M., and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2014. "Contract Farming and Smallholder Incentives to Produce High Quality: Experimental Evidence from the Vietnamese Dairy Sector." *Agricultural Economics* 44 (3), 297–3082.
15. Torero, M. and A. C. G. Viceisza. 2015. "To Remit, or Not to Remit: That Is the Question. A Remittance Field Experiment." *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 112: 221–236.
16. Viceisza, A. C. G. 2012. *Treating the Field as a Lab: A Basic Guide to Conducting Economics Experiments for Policymaking*. Food Security in Practice Technical Guide 7, Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute. Download freely from www.angelinoviceisza.com/papers.
17. Viceisza, A. C. G. 2016. "Creating a Lab in the Field: Economics Experiments for Policy-making." *Journal of Economic Surveys* 30, 835–854.