

A helpful guide to receiving clearance from the human subjects committee for economic experiments.

Mark Dean 17th December 2005

1. Read the UCAIHS tutorial available on the web at:

<http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihhs/tutorial/>

Pass the online certification exam attached to the tutorial

2. Fill in the application form available on the web at:

<http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihhs/forms/application.doc>

Use the following guidelines to fill in the form:

- When one describes an experiment to the Human Subject's committee it is important that we not use technical language or jargon ridden language. As they request we should use language that is understandable to 9th and 10th graders.
- Page 1: You are NOT applying for exempt status
- Page 4: Purpose of study. Below is an example of a description used in a previous experiment. Use this to pitch your own description:
- *This study is designed to test predictions about the effect of different voting rules on how people vote (i.e. does a vote represent a voter's true preferences about candidate or issue). For this study, we must first control how much subjects like each candidate. We do this by making candidates indistinguishable from one another, apart from the fact that subjects will be paid different amounts of money depending on which candidate wins , We make these amounts known to each subject at the start of the experiment. Subjects, who are aware of the amounts of money involved, are divided into four groups, and each group votes under a different voting rule, so that the effect of each rule can be studied under the same preferences. While all the voting procedures used can be effected by voters acting in a strategic manner, some voting rules are less likely to be effected by this than others.Strategic analysis of voting systems is new to the experimental literature. This research*

project offers the opportunity for new results and a new perspective on the question of how people vote."

- Page 5: Subject recruitment and selection part 2. Below are sample answers for an accepted study

a. How will investigators identify potential subjects (how will they know whom to recruit)?

In recruiting subjects for all experiments performed at the Center for Experimental Social Science (CESS), investigators use a student recruitment program called e-recruit which has been previously reviewed by the UCAIHS and found acceptable for recruitment.

b. Where and how will potential subjects be informed of the opportunity to participate? *Include copies of recruitment letters, flyers, or advertisements, and/or a copy of the oral and written statements to be used at the time of recruitment of subjects.*

This program works as follows: at the beginning of the school year we send out a blanket e-mail (See: "Solicitation letter") to the entire FAS undergraduate population through the Dean's office asking students to register if they would like the opportunity to be informed about the availability of experiments as well as when they are scheduled.

c. How will subjects be able to let the investigator know they wish to participate?

If the student would like to receive future e-mails they register at our web site whose URL is on the e-mail sent to them (They can click and be sent to the sign-up page). In this registration, they are only asked for their e-mail address and their gender (the request for gender is built into the software, but it is not used as a criteria by CESS investigators). Potential subjects are informed both at the initial solicitation and at registration that they must be 18 years of age or more in order to participate (See: "Sign Up form").

Once the experiment is scheduled in the lab, a specific solicitation for that experiment will be sent by e-mail to all who have registered (See: "Recruitment material").

Slots in the experiments will be filled on a first-come first-served basis. The only exclusion criteria will be to filter out subjects who have done a specific experiment before so that subjects do not participate in the same experiment more than once.

- The above refers to 'solicitation letter', 'sign up form' and 'recruitment material'. These are available on the web at:

<http://cess.nyu.edu/doc/>

The solicitation letter and sign up form are standard to all experiments, but the recruitment material must be altered to fit your criteria. The things that you need to change are highlighted in red.

- Page 5: Statement to subjects. The following is an example of an acceptable statement to subjects:

"A written statement (See: "Statement to subjects") will be given to all the potential participants who come into the lab to participate in the experiment at their scheduled date and time before they are given the written information

about the experiment to read. In the statement is asked to participants to sign the Consent Form and reiterates that participation is voluntary.”

The ‘‘statement to subject is also available on the web at:

<http://cess.nyu.edu/doc/>

Again, the red sections must be altered to fit your experiment

- Page 5: Harm or benefit to subjects: The following is an example of an acceptable statement:

“There are no known risks of participation beyond the risks of everyday life. Subjects receive information and make decisions at individual computer workstations. The workstation cubicles provide an element of privacy for the participant that prevents social embarrassment. They are paid in private so no public comparison between how well they have done can be made. There are no direct benefits to participation.

There are no impacts of non-participation. The decision of “not to participate” will not affect neither the availability of services to which a potential subject is entitled nor students’ grades or academic standing.”

- Page 6: Procedure to be followed: The following is an example of an acceptable statement:

“The subjects will be asked to come to the Center for Experimental Social Science (C.E.S.S.) laboratory at One Washington Place, NY, New York 10003 at a particular date and time. They will be given written information about the experiment. After the information is read, the subjects will be asked to sign a written consent form if they want to participate. Subjects will be told that participation is voluntary. Subjects may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time. Non-participation will not affect students’ grades or academic standing. Subjects may choose not to answer any questions that they prefer not to.

Once enough subjects to run the experiment have given their consent, they are given written instructions (See: “INSTRUCTIONS”) and a code number, which is used to keep track of data produced in the experiment. They are assigned to a separate cubicle, each furnished with a pc and a desk, so that

the subjects could not see anyone except the experimenter, nor could they been seen by anyone except the experimenter. After the subjects have read the instructions, the instructions will then be read aloud by the investigator. Subjects are allowed to ask questions by raising their hands and speaking to the experimenter in private. Subjects are not allowed to communicate with one another throughout the session, except via the decisions they entered on their terminal.

Then the experiment will begin and it is expected that the experiment will involve a number of rounds.

Each subject is given a certain preference profile over four alternatives. Each group has to decide one alternative to implement. Each subject is asked to cast a vote for one alternative; the alternative that is voted by most subjects is implemented. Subjects' decisions are entered on their computer, and once the period is over, they are told the number of points they have obtained in that period. If the most preferred alternative is implemented, the subject gets 7 experimental points. If the second preferred alternative is implemented, the subject gets 5 points; if the third preferred alternative is implemented, the subject gets 3 points, and if the least preferred alternative is implemented, the subject gets 1 points.

The experiment then proceeds to the next period which is identical to the previous one. Once the experiment is completed, the points they have accumulated are then summed up and the total is converted in earned payoff at a rate of 1 point=\$0.20.

The variations across experiments involve changing the number of votes each subject can cast (one or more than one) and the method used to count them in order to determine the alternative to be implemented.

Subjects are paid for their participation and will typically earn an average of \$20 (with a guaranteed minimum of \$8) depending on the particular

experiment and the decisions they make. The experiment is expected to be one hour long.”

Note that you will have to submit a copy of your instructions with the application

- Page 6: Confidentiality. The following is an example of an acceptable statement:

“Participation is completely confidential. The confidentiality of the research records and identity will be strictly maintained. Identifying information appears only on consent forms which will be locked in a secure office for three years after the completion of the study and will then be destroyed. To preserve the anonymity of the data, each person is assigned a random code number that will be used to keep track of data produced by the experiment. No records are kept that would allow subjects’ names or identities to be matched with the data codes. Results of the study in any presentation or publication will include only group results, and no identifying information will ever be used. All data generated is the responsibility of the individual investigator and will be stored on his office computer or on the CESS file server. Only the individual investigator and the faculty sponsor will have access to data.”

- Page 7 : Informed consent. Below is an example of an acceptable statement:
The recruited subjects will be asked to come to the Center for Experimental Social Science (C.E.S.S.) laboratory at One Washington Place, NY, New York 10003 at a particular date and time. They will be given written information about the experiment. After the information is read, the subjects are asked to sign a written consent form if they want to participate (the CONSENT FORM is attached).

A typical consent form is available on the web at:

<http://cess.nyu.edu/doc/>

Note that there is a different form depending on whether you are faculty or a graduate student. You will also have to adapt the consent form to your own particular experiment

3. Submit the application according to the instructions available here:

<http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs/apply/submit/>

Make sure that you have submitted:

- The application form
 - The recruitment material
 - The sign up sheet
 - The solicitation letter
 - The statement to subjects
 - The consent form
 - Your instructions
4. Pray.
 5. If you have any problems using these instructions, or if your application gets rejected, please inform me at mrd254@nyu.edu, so that I can keep these up to date.