



Guidelines for the Use of the Experimental Economics Laboratory

The Experimental Economics Laboratory is located at the Old Physics building. This document outlines certain procedures that must be followed in booking the laboratory and recruiting subjects which are essential for the smooth operation of the laboratory.

The laboratory is managed by the Laboratory Steering Group (LSG). The members of the group are assisted by the Laboratory Manager. The role of the Laboratory Manager is to ensure the smooth operation of the laboratory, carry out the tasks discussed in these guidelines and in the Lab Manager's job description, as well as to guarantee that the present guidelines are followed by all users of the laboratory.

1. General

1. All researchers using the laboratory agree to abide to the principles widely accepted by experimental economists (see Friedman and Sunder, 1994). Deviations from these principles jeopardize the credibility of *all* experimental data and as such will not be permitted. Any matters arising will be dealt by the LSG.
2. All researchers using the volunteer database agree to protect the reputation of the laboratory to its subjects. This implies amongst others that experiments should start on time and finish on time. Advertised experiments for which participants have been invited should not be cancelled nor should the advertised time/venue be changed. To prevent this from happening researchers should take all possible care (e.g. run pilots) prior to requesting from the Lab Manager to recruit subjects.
3. Interested parties are informed that if students of the university are to be used as subjects, it is a standard requirement that Ethics Approval must be

obtained *prior* to running any experiments. The Ethics Approval must be shown to the Laboratory Manager. The Laboratory Manager will not permit the conduct of experiments which have not obtained an Ethics Approval.

4. The term 'partners' below refers to individuals working for the Department of Treasury and Finance and the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria.

2. Booking the laboratory

Academic members of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne and partners

A. Experimental Research

1. Researchers wishing to conduct experiments will be able to schedule experiments by placing a request directly to the Laboratory Manager via email. The latter will place a booking in the booking chart.
2. Users **MUST** book the lab for experiments, and recruit subjects using the laboratory subject management system. Users should do this through the Laboratory Manager who has access to the software. Normally, a week's notice is requested, in order to facilitate scheduling and to recruit subjects. Experiments can be booked at shorter notice if the lab is available, but this is not encouraged and adequate subject recruitment cannot be guaranteed. The Laboratory Manager's working days and hours can be found on the laboratory's website (<http://www.economics-experiments.unimelb.edu.au/home.html>); the Laboratory Manager should not be approached outside these hours (the Laboratory Manager is not expected to answer emails on days when s/he is not working).
3. Users **MAY** book the lab for other purposes (for example testing software) if they want to guarantee access. This should be done through the Laboratory Manager who will register the booking on the on-line laboratory diary.
4. If the laboratory is not reserved, then normally it will be available for software testing on a first-come first-served basis usually for a period up to two hours. For periods longer than two hours users are requested to make a booking through the Laboratory Manager. If the assistance of the Laboratory Manager is required, then a formal booking must be made following the procedures described in 2.A.1 and 2.A.2. It is highly recommended that users contact the Laboratory Manager to confirm availability (on his/her working days) or to one of the members of the LSG

on other days (normal working hours only); otherwise you may arrive and find the lab in use.

5. Block booking of the lab, that is, booking the lab for more than 2 days in a given week or the equivalent of 16 hours, is discouraged. The 16 hours include time for programming and software testing.
6. In periods of high demand (such as the end of term), a researcher cannot book the lab for more than 1.5 days. That is, the maximum number of hours is limited to 12 hours per week including programming and testing time.
7. Requests for more than 16 (or 12) hours in a single week will be considered only on exceptional occasions and only one week prior to the (first) requested date. In the case that other researchers have not placed a request for the same period then the block booking will be considered. Prior to confirming the booking, the Laboratory Manager should contact by email the members of the LSG. If a response is not received within 24 hours, then this will be taken to mean that the LSG member approves of the booking. Unanimity is necessary to allow bookings for more than 16 (12) hours per week.
8. Use of the laboratory outside the Laboratory Manager's working hours is permitted to academics and partners who have a booking and access to the laboratory. In those cases, the Laboratory Manager should not be expected to be present in the laboratory.
9. Researchers who have booked the lab will be responsible for keeping the lab clean during the time slot they have booked.
10. If researchers plan to use software that does not exist in the lab, they must notify the Laboratory Manager and ensure that the software is installed in the computers in the lab before inviting subjects to participate in an experiment.

B. Non-Experimental Research

11. The use of the lab for non-experimental research (for example, simulations) is welcome.
12. Non-experimental research will ideally be conducted off-peak time. Off-peak time is during weekends, on weekdays after 6pm, or during non-semester time.
13. The lab can be booked for non-experimental research at peak times at most a week in advance and only if the lab is not booked for experiments.

Other interested parties

14. Individuals outside the department and non-partners interested in using the laboratory will need to send a proposal to the Lab Manager a month before the time for which the laboratory is requested. The Lab Manager must then forward the proposal to all members of the steering group. Approval of the proposal by one member suffices unless there is a disagreement between members of the LSG. The member of the LSG approving the proposal is responsible for ensuring that the proposal is in accordance to the guidelines. This procedure, as well the timely submission of the proposal, are necessary to ensure that there are no conflicting interests (such as similar experiments being run by members of the Department and a limited subject pool) and that the proposed project abides by the experimental economics principles as stated in Friedman and Sunder (1994) and these guidelines.
15. The proposal must outline the purpose of the study and details about the project. In specific, the proposal must state clearly the average (expected) hourly payment for participants (which must be similar to the one used by the researchers of the university – currently \$30), and how subjects will be recruited (see also below).
16. Interested parties must follow any guidelines given by the LSG with respect to the use of the lab and handling subjects. This is essential for ensuring the good reputation of experimenters within the University premises and vital for academic research. For example, experiments using deception or employing methods not common for experimental research will need explicit approval by the LSG.
17. At the beginning of each experiment the experimenter must clearly state that s/he is not a member of the Department of Economics or the E²MU team.

3. Recruiting subjects

Academic members of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne and partners

1. The experimenter must notify at least a week in advance the Laboratory Manager about how many individuals are required for each session booked.
2. Once an experiment has been advertised to students, changes in the date, time or duration of the experiment must be avoided at all costs. Researchers are strongly encouraged to test the software code and other procedures before asking the Lab Manager to announce an experiment and invite subjects.

3. Academics working in the Department of Economics or partners wishing to deviate from the commonly used principles for conducting experiments in The University of Melbourne will have to make individual arrangements for the recruitment of subjects. When possible, this will mean the creation of a special type of experiments within the E²MU Database. Individuals signing up must not have registered for other subtypes of experiments. It is the responsibility of the interested party to ensure that there is a sufficient number of subjects in the sub-database. The sub-database will be controlled by the Laboratory Manager who will invite subjects.

Other interested parties

4. Interested parties are responsible for recruiting subjects. Due to important methodological reasons, the use of the E²MU Database is restricted to experimental economists within the department or affiliated partners.

5. Software programming

Academic members of the Department of Economics, University of Melbourne

1. If the Laboratory Manager's assistance is required to design the software code for an experiment a request needs to be made via email. Normally, one month's notice is requested, but extra time might be necessary if the experiment is complicated or if demand is high. The evaluation of whether an experiment is complicated to be programmed is made by the Laboratory Manager, and in the case of a disagreement, by all members of the LSG. The Laboratory Manager's working days and hours can be found on the laboratory's website (<http://www.economics-experiments.unimelb.edu.au/home.html>); the Laboratory Manager should not be approached outside these hours (the Laboratory Manager is not expected to answer emails on days when s/he is not working).
2. Individuals making requests for software programming are expected to provide drawings of the decision screens. The drawings will be then discussed with the Laboratory Manager until a final decision is reached.
3. Individuals making requests for software programming are expected to provide details about other elements of the experiment such as actions permitted and how payoffs are determined.
4. Once the Laboratory Manager has developed the software code, non-trivial changes in the software which are not related to (a) the functionality of the software or (b) errors made by the Lab Manager may be treated as new requests in periods of high demand. The evaluation of whether a requested change is non-trivial is made by the Laboratory Manager, and in the case of a disagreement, by all members of the LSG.

Other interested parties and partners

5. Other interested parties, students and partners are expected to provide their own software code. If the proposed project is jointly done with an academic at the University of Melbourne, then requests for software design can be made. In that case, the academic is responsible for the project and should be the person contacting the Laboratory Manager.

5. Complaints and Violations

1. Complaints regarding the use and operation of the laboratory should be sent via email to the Lab Manager.
2. Complaints regarding the Lab Manager should be sent via email to all members of the LSG.
3. In case of a violation of the guidelines, the Lab Manager is expected to raise the issue with the responsible academic or the interested party. If the problem is not resolved then the Lab Manager is obliged to inform all members of the LSG in written form.
4. The LSG has the right to restrict access to the laboratory to any party (academic or not) that systematically violate the guidelines thus undermining the reputation of the laboratory

6. Pricing

1. There is no charge for using the laboratory or for having experimental software programmed for academic members of the Department of Economics at The University of Melbourne.
2. The price for booking the laboratory is \$470/day for other members of the Faculty of Economics and Commerce and partners, and \$570/day for anyone else. These figures reflect the current opportunity cost of using the laboratory and investments made in the laboratory by different parties.
3. Any cancellation of bookings is free provided that invitations have not been sent out to subjects. If a user has requested invitations to be sent to subjects, then the academic should pay \$15 to each invited subject. Students need not be paid \$15 if the cancellation is due to a system problem or factors for which the user is not responsible. In that case, the user is expected to pay a show-up fee no less than \$5.

For any unclarified matters, please contact one of the members of the LSG.

The members of Laboratory Steering Group

Assoc. Prof. Nisvan Erkal

Dr. Guy Mayraz

Dr. Tom Wilkening

These guidelines have been agreed to by the Head of the Department of Economics

Prof. Nilss Olekalns

Melbourne, 18 May 2009

References

Friedman, D., and S. Sunder (1994) [*Experimental Methods: A Primer for Economists*](#), Cambridge University Press.

Revisions

01/08/2014 Updated LSG membership and URL