

Berkeley Experimental Social Science Laboratory (Xlab)

Data Resources @Berkeley

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What is the Xlab?

The Xlab is an inter-disciplinary research center engaged in (laboratory) experimental work in the social sciences.

Xlab was established to change the traditional cost-benefit calculus for experimental researchers by reducing the costs this type of research:

- physical space and equipment
- subject recruitment, filtering and payment distribution
- facilitation of IRB clearance
- pilot grants for subject payments

Who makes Xlab possible?

Founded in 2004, the Xlab was established with a grant from the NSF and the Vice Chancellor for Research.

The Xlab is supported by the Dean of Haas, the College of L&S, the California Management Review, HP, and Yahoo.

The Xlab team includes:

- Bob Barde (Manager)
- Miho Tanaka (Administrator)
- Rowilma del Castillo (Technology Support)

Outline

- Human subjects
 - CITI training, CPHS protocol, IRB review
- Funding
 - Xlab, Yahoo, others
- Administrative support
 - scheduling, recruitment, payment
- Technology support
 - hardware, software, consultation
- Initiatives
 - Xmobile, PayCard, on-line surveys, BCRN

Experimenter guidelines

- I. Graduate students need a faculty sponsor. Where appropriate, the Xlab director may serve as your faculty sponsor.

- II. All experimenters need IRB approval for your research. You should consult with the Xlab administrator about the appropriate way to obtain this approval.

- III. After obtaining approval and testing your software, you can view our calendar through the Xlab website for available openings to schedule your experiment.

Human subjects

Step I

Complete the CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) online course in the protection of human research subjects.

The CITI program is used by about 1000 participating institutions from around the world. About 750,000 researchers have completed a CITI course.

UCB students engaged in human subjects research must complete either the biomedical or social-behavioral sequence of educational modules (and pass the quizzes).

Step II

Submit application to CPHS protocol for approval. Ensure that the protocol is in compliance with the Xlab Master Protocol.

The Xlab website provides specific guidance on how to prepare the CPHS application and access to the forms required completing a CPHS application.

Your protocol application will be sent to the Director of the Xlab for review and approval (as the designated CPHS member).

IRB review

The CPHS (Committee for Protection of Human Subjects) serves as the IRB (Institutional Review Board). The IRB must review any research that involves human subjects.

The purpose is to ensure that the rights and welfare of human subjects are protected throughout their participation in the research

- minimizing risks
- selecting subjects equitably
- obtaining informed consent
- ensuring subject privacy and confidentiality

Types of IRB review:

- full board review at a convened meeting at which a valid quorum of IRB members is present.
- expedited review by the CPHS Chair or designated voting member(s) rather than by the entire IRB.

Federal rules permit expedited review for certain kinds of research involving no more than minimal risk and for minor changes in approved research.

Deception

Deceptive research requires a full board review (more than “minimal risk”). The use of deceptive techniques must be justified.

Deception typically involves providing misinformation to subjects. Withholding information may or may not be considered deception.

If a study involves deception, CPHS requires debriefing the subjects and a post-study re-consent as part of debriefing process.

Informed consent

Consent forms must be clearly written and understandable to subjects. They may not include language that appears to release the investigator from liability for negligence.

Essential information includes:

- purpose of the research
- all foreseeable risks/discomforts (psychological /social)
- length of time
- contact information
- subject's right to withdraw

Grants

Xlab pilot grants of up to \$2,000 are available for subject payments. Extramural funding is available from Yahoo! Research.

Decisions are made by the Xlab director. When approved, the researcher will receive up to \$1,000 that must be used within three months of receiving CPHS approval.

To be considered for a follow-up fund award, the researcher is required to provide a report of the findings from the initial award.

Administrative support

Before the experiment

The Xlab maintains a database of over 5,000 subjects (students and staff) who are willing to participate in experiments. Subjects can be filtered by several characteristics.

Researchers may reserve the Xlab up to 15-hours per month (including set up and experiment time). A 10 business-day lead time is required.

The Xlab calendar is available online. Submit your experiment schedule request form to Xlab Administrator. Your experiment will be added to the Xlab calendar.

During the experiment

Prior to an experiment, subject information is entered into a financial database. Only the Xlab staff signups subjects and processes payouts.

Using checks drawn against the Xlab checking account, Xlab staff pays subjects as they leave the experiment. Financial and personal information is available only to Xlab staff.

Tech support

The Xlab offers technology support throughout the entire research cycle. Assistance includes, but is not limited to:

- Session design, including both software selection and implementation of details.
- Program testing (required!), refinement, and (time allowing) software debugging and original code creation.

z-Tree (Zurich Toolbox for Readymade Economic Experiments) is the main software for experimental economics.

Concluding remarks

The Xlab is a shared resource! We do not charge fees for use of the Xlab facilities and staff.

Late cancellations, incomplete IRB protocols, and so on impose serious costs on other investigators.

Demonstrated lack of concern for the research plans of other investigators may be grounds for denial of privileges.