Empirical Legal Research
UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA LEVIN COLLEGE OF LAW
SPRING 2025 – LAW 6930

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Office Hours: Tues/Thur 3:00-4:00 and by appointment

MEETING TIME: Monday & Wednesday 1:15-2:40

LOCATION: HOL 382

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES:

This class teaches basic empirical legal methods. Students will have the opportunity to apply fundamental insights from economics, statistics, and data science to legal questions. The class will give students hands on experience with prediction and inference. No previous experience with statistics or computer programming is required (though obviously helpful).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:
By the end of the semester, students will be able to:
- Conduct a statistical analysis to produce descriptive and summary statistics on an empirical legal topic.
  *Assessed through problem sets and a final exam.
- Calculate correlation statistics using different modeling techniques.
  *Assessed through problem sets and a final exam.
- Develop and execute an empirical strategy to make causal inferences about an empirical legal topic.
  *Assessed through problem sets and a final exam.
- Evaluate the quality of empirical legal research.
  *Assessed through problem sets, visiting lectures from empirical scholars, and class discussion.
- Identify an interesting empirical legal research question, research the relevant scholarship, and draft a plausible research design to explore that question.
  *Assessed through a research proposal.

REQUIRED READING MATERIALS:
ADAM CHILTON & KYLE ROZEMA, TRIAL BY NUMBERS: A LAWYER'S GUIDE TO STATISTICAL EVIDENCE (2024)

COURSE EXPECTATIONS AND GRADING EVALUATION:

Students will be evaluated based upon class participation (10%), problem sets (25%), response papers (10%), their replication+ assignment (20%), and the final exam (35%).

Class Participation: This class will require you to come prepared to work and to engage with some challenging material. The main thing is to keep trying and to keep a positive attitude. Please be supportive of your colleagues and helpful but be careful not to be too helpful. People need to learn on their own. Also, we will be using computers regularly, but that is not an invitation to check email, social media, news, etc.

Problem Sets: I will assign several problem sets throughout the semester to give you a chance to practice and to develop your empirical skills. These should not be too taxing, and we will go over many of them in class.

Response Papers: I am hoping to bring several guest speakers to class to talk about their own research using these tools. Students will be expected to write short (2-3 single-spaced pages) about the research presented. Response papers are due at the beginning of class the day the speaker presents.

Replication Assignment: Each student will choose a published article to replicate. The student will be responsible for selecting the article, locating the replication data, replicating the analysis in the article, and then adding a twist (bring new data, a new statistical technique, etc). We will try to schedule a couple of days for students to present their findings.

Final Exam: The final exam will be comprehensive. Students will have full computer access.

CLASS ATTENDANCE POLICY:
Attendance in class is required by both the ABA and the Law School. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting. Students are allowed three absences during the course of the semester. Students are responsible for ensuring that they are not recorded as absent if they come in late. A student who fails to meet the attendance requirement will be dropped from the course. The law school's policy on attendance can be found here.

COMPLIANCE WITH UF HONOR CODE:
Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF Law Honor Code located here.

Note on AI tools (Chat GPT, etc.). In my view, generative AI tools are going to become like spellcheckers. I have no objection to you using such tools to help with your paper, but you should understand the limitations of these technologies. They may be very helpful to you to get started and to help structure paragraphs or larger sections, but if you leave the actual analysis up to the machine, you should not expect to do well on the final paper.

INFORMATION ON UF LAW GRADING POLICIES:
The Levin College of Law's mean and mandatory distributions are posted on the College's website and this class adheres to that posted grading policy. The following chart describes the specific letter grade/grade point equivalent in place:

Letter Grade	Point Equivalent	Letter Grade	Point Equivalent
A (Excellent)	4.0	C (Satisfactory)	2.0
A-	3.67	C-	1.67
B+	3.33	D+	1.33
B	3.0	D (Poor)	1.0
B-	2.67	D-	0.67
C+	2.33	E (Failure)	0.0

The law school grading policy is available here.

OBSERVANCE OF RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS:

UF Law respects students' observance of religious holidays.
- Students, upon prior notification to their instructors, shall be excused from class or other scheduled academic activity to observe a religious holy day of their faith.
- Students shall be permitted a reasonable amount of time to make up the material or activities covered in their absence.
- Students shall not be penalized due to absence from class or other scheduled academic activity because of religious observances.

EXAM DELAYS AND ACCOMMODATIONS:
The law school policy on exam delays and accommodations can be found here.

STATEMENT RELATED TO ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must first register with the Disability Resource Center (https://disability.ufl.edu/). Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter, which must be presented to the Assistant Dean for Student Affairs (Assistant Dean Brian Mitchell). Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester. Students may access information about various resources on the UF Law Student Resources Canvas page, available at https://ufl.instructure.com/courses/427635.

MENTAL HEALTH
The law school has collected various resources to help students pursue various forms of wellness. I would like to focus attention on the mental health portion of the page:

- The University of Florida operates a Counseling and Wellness Center that provides services and information regarding mental health. Visit their website for more information.
- The University of Florida's Disability Resource Center's website can connect you with resources if you need special accommodations or services.
- UF's U Matter, We Care program offers health & wellness programs as well as programs for students in distress.
- LawLifeline –Law Lifeline is an online mental health resource designed specifically for law students.
- Lawyers With Depression – Lawyers With Depression is a website that offers information on dealing with depression.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Toolkit for Law School Students and Those Who Care About Them – This toolkit from the American Bar Association provides substance abuse and mental health information and resources tailored for law students.

STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS
Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and may complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students here.

RECORDINGS OF CLASS
Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a

criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor and Student Conduct Code.

ABA OUT-OF-CLASS HOURS REQUIREMENTS: ABA Standard 310 requires that students devote 120 minutes to out-of-class preparation for every "classroom hour" of in-class instruction. Each weekly class is approximately 3 hours in length, requiring at least **6 hours of preparation**.

COURSE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

This syllabus is offered as a guide to the direction of the course. Our pace will depend in part on the level of interest and the level of difficulty of each section and is subject to change. We will follow the sequence below, but guest speakers and problem set reviews will be interspersed throughout the semester.

1. Class Overview and Intro to R (no readings)
2. Chapters 1-3. Read pp 1-32. (PS1 distributed)
3. Chapter 3: pp. 32- 42
4. Jaya Ramji-Nogales, Andrew Schoenholtz, & Philip Schrag, *Refugee Roulette: Disparities in Asylum Adjudication*, 60 STAN. L. REV. 295 (2007-2008) [read pp. 295-96, 299-349, 372-89]
5. Chapter 4, pp. 43-55 (PS2 distributed)
6. Chapter 4, pp. 55-59; Field Experiments Reading (Canvas)
7. Chapter 5, pp. 60-79 (PS3 distributed)
8. Chapter 5, pp. 79-103
9. Chapter 7, pp. 132-142
10. Chapter 7, pp. 142-151 (PS4 distributed)
11. de Figueiredo, *Throw Away the Key or Throw Away the Jail?* (Canvas/Instructure) [Skip Diff-in-Diff discussions/results]
12. Chapter 6, pp. 104-120 (PS5 distributed)
13. Chapter 6, pp. 120-131
14. Chapter 8, pp. 152-165
15. Chapter 8, pp. 165-180
    Green and Winik, Using Random Judge Assignment to Estimate the Effects of Incarceration and Probation on Recidivism Among Drug Offenders (Canvas)
16. "Humphreys et al., Fishing, Commitment, and Communication (Canvas) [Skip sections 3, 4, and 5.3] and Andrew Gelman and Eric Loken, *The Statistical Crisis in Science*