PROJECT ABSTRACT
DOCTORAL STUDENT RESEARCH
SCHOLARSHIP

Do not exceed 1500 characters. Please use the narrative form.

Applicant's Name: Simon Heuberger

Title of Project: Improving Treatment Randomization in Online Survey Experiments: An Analysis of the Power of Moral Frames

My dissertation will make vital contributions in the fields of American Politics and Quantitative Methods: (1) It improves treatment randomization in online survey experiments; (2) it uncovers the source of framing effects in public opinion surveys.

(1) Survey experiments are increasingly conducted online. Most of these experiments are designed with Qualtrics. This can be hugely problematic for small samples, as Qualtrics does not offer a sophisticated method of randomization. I will build a software tool that makes this possible. The tool feeds an advanced randomization method called sequential blocking into the Qualtrics computational environment. This enables researchers to field methodologically sound small-sample online survey experiments.

(2) I will employ my method in an online survey experiment on the source of frame strength. Previous literature has shown that framing affects individuals' opinions. We nonetheless know very little about the particular factors that make a frame elicit large effects. Applying theoretical moralization claims to framing research, I will design a survey that investigates whether moral frames elicit larger framing effects than pragmatic frames.

This survey will be fielded twice: Once with Qualtrics' basic randomization, and once using sequential blocking. I will demonstrate the randomization improvements produced by my method by comparing the balance achieved in the two otherwise identical surveys. I will then analyze the experimental results on moral frames from the sequentially blocked survey. This will shed much needed light on the relevance of moral arguments in influencing how people form their opinion. My dissertation thus makes far-reaching contributions to experimental survey methodology and to research on a central component of human behavior.