

Guidelines for using the experimental laboratory at VCEE

November 2018

Terms and conditions for usage of laboratory facilities at the Vienna Center for Experimental Economics (VCEE), University of Vienna

Organization and Aim of the VCEE

The Vienna Center for Experimental Economics (VCEE) operates a state-of-the-art laboratory dedicated to experimental research in economics and the social sciences. The VCEE laboratory also serves teaching purposes as a second priority.

The VCEE is a sub-unit of the Faculty of Business, Economics and Statistics at the University of Vienna. Therefore, priority is given to “internal” users, i.e. users from within the faculty. However, external researchers, i.e. expert experimentalists from outside our faculty, outside our University and outside Austria, are welcome to apply for using the laboratory facilities of the VCEE. It is VCEE policy to facilitate experimental research by external users provided the personnel situation and the laboratory usage by internal researchers permits it.

As a rule, all researchers are supervised by VCEE personnel during all stages of the preparation and completion of experiments. All users must comply with the guidelines below.

Experiments at the VCEE are run in English or German, i.e. all (oral and written) instructions should be given in English or German.

VCEE personnel will do their best to prepare and perform the experiments according to the best practice in experimental economics and the instructions provided by the researcher. That being said, the VCEE does not accept any liability for the consequences of “failed” experiments, in particular any possible financial or academic consequences this may entail. Individual sessions that “fail” are treated differently, see the details below in step 5.

In general, the laboratory is not made available for commercial purposes.

The Procedure

Read these guidelines carefully before submitting an application. Contact the manager of the VCEE (vcee@univie.ac.at) in case you have any questions about the requirements and procedures at the VCEE. The following table provides a quick guide to the entire process:

Summary of Steps

Step	Comments
1. Application	Fill out here: http://goo.gl/qx7LS
2. Preliminary approval	
3. Detailed preparation and testing	All documents submitted at least 2 weeks before 1st session, complete test carried out in lab.
4. Scheduling of sessions	Must be done at least 1 week before 1st session.
5. Running the experiment	
6. Refunding	We send you an invoice for payment.
7. Publication of results	We include a link to your paper on our website.

Step 1: Application

Fill in the application form (<http://goo.gl/qx7LS>). The following pieces of information are required:

1. a list of researchers involved in the project,
2. a contact email address,
3. a title for the experiment,
4. a broad description of the experiment (including type and purpose of the experiment),
5. the number of participants required,
6. language to be used in the experiment (English or German),
7. maximum duration of a session (including time to seat and pay participants),
8. a cost estimate (see step 6 below), and
9. the funding source.
10. Do you plan to use deception?
11. Do you plan on asking for personal data during the experiment?

The application form provides more details concerning many of these items, as well as the opportunity to fill in additional, optional information.

Note that sessions that exceed their maximum session duration may be ended early and/or have subject earnings increased at the discretion of VCEE staff, and the VCEE reserves the right to cancel future sessions of experiments which exceed their maximum session duration and/or pay participants less than the minimum hourly rate. For this reason, applicants are encouraged to be conservative in their estimates. Additionally, it may be helpful to first run a pilot session to help you calibrate session duration and subject earnings.

Step 2: Preliminary approval

Applications are evaluated with respect to whether they comply with the common best practice standards in experimental economics. These are: to not deceive subjects in any way, to provide appropriate incentives for participants, and to not violate rules of ethical scientific conduct. The director of the VCEE and the managers jointly decide whether an application meets these demands. If not, the applicant is asked to provide further documentation. If the application is deemed acceptable and the personnel and planning situation at the VCEE allow, the application receives preliminary approval and moves to step 3.

CONSENT FORMS AND ETHICS APPROVAL

For standard economic laboratory experiments at VCEE, the University of Vienna does not require participants to sign an “informed consent form” and no further approval by an ethics committee or “institutional review board” is needed. These exemptions do not apply to non-standard experiments (e.g. when physical characteristics of participants like heartbeat or hormone levels are measured). External researchers are themselves responsible for obtaining any approval required by their home institution (e.g. University) or funding agency (e.g. National Science Foundation).

Step 3: Detailed preparation and testing

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Details of the experiment must be provided to the manager of the VCEE at least 2 weeks before the first session can be run. The required materials include:

1. a complete description of the design of each treatment,
2. a detailed script for the experiment (for the lab assistants - explaining what to do and say when),
3. instructions (written or on-screen for participants), and
4. programs.

Note that the approval in step 2 is preliminary. Should any doubt arise about whether the experiment meets the best practice standards during the phase of detailed preparation, the preliminary approval is revoked and the applicant is asked to make appropriate modifications and submit a revised application (step 1). Once all required documents have been received, testing is conducted.

SOFTWARE

We support experiments using **zTree**, **oTree** and **Qualtrics**. We also offer a server for hosting oTree programs.

Note that both oTree and zTree are citeware. Full details of the contracts can be found on the respective websites.

TESTING

The programs and the script must be tested in full scale (i.e. with the full number of clients) and

in the actual sequence before we can schedule the sessions. Testing can be done by VCEE lab assistants or it can be done by the researcher with some in-house assistance **at the VCEE lab (without subjects)**. Once a successful test is completed, the sessions may be scheduled.

Please send us an email (vcee@univie.ac.at) to schedule the testing and sessions.

Step 4: Scheduling the sessions

We coordinate the scheduling of the sessions with the wishes of the researchers, as detailed in the application in step 1. Once the schedule is decided, the VCEE initiates subject recruiting. Sessions may be cancelled at the request of the researcher up to 48 hours before they are scheduled to take place.

SUBJECT RECRUITMENT

The VCEE recruits subjects from our database using the ORSEE system. Subjects are student volunteers from all fields and various academic institutions in Vienna. Participants can be selected based on a number of criteria (e.g. participation in previous experiments, field of study). ORSEE is citeware, which means that by using it you agree to its license contract, namely to cite the software in any publications you derive from experiments run using the ORSEE recruitment system. Full details of the contract is available here: <http://goo.gl/jf1wb>.

Step 5: Running the experiment

RUNNING THE SESSIONS

As a rule, VCEE personnel take care of running the sessions. If you can, it is a good idea for the researchers to be present in person at least during the first session. Later sessions may be run exclusively by VCEE personnel.

Experiments are usually run by two VCEE assistants or one VCEE assistant and a researcher.

FAILED SESSIONS

In the event that a session is not carried out according to the script provided by the researcher (e.g. due to assistant error), the following rule shall apply. If overhead costs DO apply to the experiment (see below), the VCEE shall bear the costs of the session. If overhead costs DO NOT apply to the experiment, the costs of the session shall be charged to the experiment.

This implies that researchers who do not pay overhead costs should take extra care to guarantee the success of their sessions, either by attending their sessions in person and/or taking extra care in the preparation of lab assistant instructions.

PARTICIPANT PAYMENTS

As a rule, participants are paid their earnings in cash in Euros immediately following the end of the experiment. Participants sign a standard receipt before leaving the lab. These receipts are stored electronically for bookkeeping purposes.

As a rule, participants are paid according to their decisions. The experimenter needs to calibrate the payments in the experiment such that the average payment to participants is at least 15

Euros per hour.

The experiment should be designed or calibrated such that no subject earns less than, say, 5 Euros per hour unless they make completely unreasonable decisions in any parts of the experiment.

We do not require the researchers to have a show-up fee for subjects who actively participate in the experiment (but they are free to implement one if they want to). A show-up fee of 10 Euros is paid to subjects who show up on time but cannot participate due to restrictions (e.g., specific group size or extras).

DATA STORAGE

A copy of all files (e.g. script, instructions, data) is stored on our servers. The payment data is stored separately from the behavioral data. All behavioral data is stored anonymously. Researchers are advised to make personal copies of the data immediately after the experiment.

If you are planning to elicit personal data during the experiment (that includes email addresses or banking details) please make sure that you are following the DSGVO and contact the lab manager (vcee@univie.ac.at).

Step 6: Refunding

As a rule, VCEE pre-finances the payments to participants and lab personnel for smaller experiments (< 10 000 €) and sends a bill for reimbursement to the researcher after the last session. For larger experiments, in which we expect to have costs of 10 000 € or more, we might ask for an up-front payment of a part of the estimated costs.

Reimbursement has to be made by bank transfer. The bill will list the following items:

COSTS FOR ALL USERS

1. payment to subjects according to the signed receipts (average at least 15 Euros per hours),
2. cost for assistants (15.5 Euro per person hour), and
3. material costs (e.g. disproportionate amount of copies, batteries etc.).

ADDITIONAL COSTS FOR EXTERNAL USERS ONLY

4. supervision and planning by the lab manager (50 Euros per hour), plus
5. an overhead of 20% (on points 1-4)

Affiliates of the VCEE may be exempted from overhead (please indicate when submitting the application in step 1). The numbers given above are estimates. The specific terms are agreed as part of the approval in step 2.

TAXES

In accordance with University regulations, we do not deduct personal or other (e.g. VAT) taxes when paying participants – they are themselves responsible for reporting their incomes to the tax authorities. If external researchers have any special request concerning taxation in their

home country, it is advisable to clear the issue in step 1.

ORIGINAL SUBJECT RECEIPTS

Original subject receipts are not provided for privacy reasons.

Step 7: Publication of results

External researchers using our laboratory are requested to add the following statement in the acknowledgements of the paper: “We thank the Vienna Center of Experimental Economics (VCEE), University of Vienna, for allowing us to run our experiment in their laboratory.”

Acknowledgements for use of ORSEE and the experimental software (e.g. zTree, oTree) needs to be added as well.

General Advice

1. Seek advice: Applicants are advised to get feedback on their experimental design from other (experienced) experimental researchers (e.g. by presenting in an internal seminar) before submitting the application.
2. Get involved: Steps 3 to 5 require detailed planning and active involvement of the researchers can help to avoid lapses.
3. Earlier is better: The VCEE tries to accommodate the diverse needs of all researchers. Two weeks is the absolute minimum time required for preparation and planning. The VCEE may not be able to accommodate all requests within this time due to capacity constraints.

Further information (e.g. on the technical specification of the lab) can be obtained on the VCEE homepage or from the lab managers.