Political Science 501, Baumgartner
Short paper topics/discussion points
Week 5: Experiments and Quasi-experimental designs

Readings: Nachmias, Ch. 5, 6, Campbell and Stanley. Read the first 6 pages of C&S first; then read the Nachmias chapters; then read C&S start to finish. Pay most attention to the explanation of the threats, and get a general feel for each of the designs they explain. The later part of the book will be a useful resource later on. No need to memorize that part.

Note that the threats to validity that C&S describe are *generic* threats that may affect *any* research project. There are *additional* threats to validity specific to any particular theoretical question. C&S simply catalogue a range of issues that one should be aware of. There are also issues specific to any particular study.

Paper topics:

Using C&S as a guide, specifically their list of threats to validity, choose a piece of literature from another class, from your previous readings, or from your incipient term paper project. Discuss a potential threat to validity that may affect this study. Show how the author has dealt with the issue, or note how they have ignored it. Discuss how they could have done better. What would be a design that would allow for this issue to be controlled? Has this been done? Is it feasible? Be specific in showing how a given threat to validity was a serious problem; how the author handled it; and how it could have been done differently.

Discussion topics: Be prepared to explain each of the following, as well as designs that help control for them:

Note that many of these phrases have ordinary-language meanings but here they are used in a particular way and it is important that you understand the jargon.

Generic threats to internal validity
History
Maturation
Testing
Instrumentation
Statistical Regression, aka regression toward the mean
Selection effects
Mortality
Selection-interaction effects of various kinds

Generic threats to external validity
Interactive or reactive effect of testing (different from testing effect, above)
Interactive or reactive effect of the experimental setting (different from above)
Interactions: selection and experimental variable
Multi-treatment interference (does this ever happen?)

Also make sure you understand Campbell and Stanley's notation for explaining a research design.