

2020 Priorities for ESA

by Dan Friedman
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The approach of 2020 seems a good time to reconsider priorities. The following list reflects my own perspective, informed by recent conversations with many ESA members. Let me emphasize that the ‘encouragements’ listed below are intended as mild nudges, not as commands from on high.

Priority 1. In my view, the first priority for ESA over the next few years is to more tightly integrate experimental economics with growing fields in economics and other social science disciplines.

ESA founders did not see experimental economics as just another field off on its own, but rather as a toolkit that could accelerate progress in many social science fields. Our founders were especially effective in integrating lab experiments with economic theory. That integration has served us well intellectually, and for many years it boosted publications in top economics journals.

More recently, editorship of top journals, and intellectual leadership across most fields of economics, has passed to a new generation less steeped in theory, and more concerned with causal inference from existing data. Controlled experiments, lab as well as field, are naturally complementary with such concerns, but that fact is not appreciated by many mainstream economists or (truth be told) by some experimental economists.

Actions. To pursue that first priority, I encourage:

- a. young ESA members to seek opportunities to work with colleagues in growing fields. For example, if you have a colleague using regression discontinuities to identify the effect of policy X on outcome Y, and conjecturing whether the underlying mechanism is M or N, then suggest to her some complementary experiments that (on small scale, in a controlled environment) systematically vary X while observing Y when either or both of M and N is shut down.
- b. midcareer ESA members to look for opportunities to organize small focused workshops jointly with rising researchers in growing fields. For example, a workshop with I/O economists studying internet pricing might be timely. Likewise, experiments in the lab or online would complement big data exercises. ESA may be able to subsidize such workshops.
- c. senior ESA members to seek opportunities to publish high profile survey articles, retrospective and prospective, that highlight complementarities between experiments and growing fields in economics and social sciences (and engineering). Possible examples include the emergence of online experiments, or of experiments in developing countries, and how these connect with more traditional fields.

- d. Alessandra Cassar chairs the new Outreach Committee which, among other things, will coordinate joint activities with sister organizations and facilitate small joint workshops. Please contact her if you have ideas on how better to integrate experimental economics with other social science fields.

Priority 2 is to try to increase ESA members' opportunities to publish in academic journals, especially "Top 5" Econ journals. This has become increasingly important, as more departments have focused on Top 5 publications as the main criterion for tenure.

Actions. Better integration (Priority 1) clearly will help, but additional actions are possible. I especially encourage ESA members

- a. whenever possible, to spell out in your papers why some of your results should interest non-ESA social scientists.
- b. as a referee, to mention to the editorial team why an experiment (not necessarily the one under review) on the given topic is potentially of interest to a wider readership. There seems to be a greater need now than ten years ago to educate editorial teams.
- c. as conference organizers, consider inviting econ journal editors to be panelists or plenary speakers at ESA conferences, to expose them to exciting new work, and to elicit their opinions on what sort of experimental work would best appeal to their readership.
- d. for your new findings of interest to non-ESA social scientists, submit items to the soon-to-be-announced monthly ESA newsletter.
- e. Ernesto Reuben is chair of the new Data Committee. If the opportunity arises, please help the DC investigate hypotheses on what drives trends in publishing articles reporting lab and field experiments.
- f. Lionel Page is chair of the new Replicability task force, which will advise ESA members on best practices regarding preregistration and other ways to increase replicability. Please contact him if you want to contribute to the conversation over the next few months.

Priority 3 is to increase ESA membership and diversity. Items 1 and 2 will help. Beyond this, we will try to keep down costs for grad students attending ESA conferences, and consider offering poster sessions on pre-registered ideas for experiments, with prizes. We will try to use our ASSA sessions and reception to draw in curious outsiders, and will propose joint sessions with other organizations represented at the annual ASSA meetings. We hope to build membership especially in Latin America and Africa, and in underserved parts of Asia. Finally, we shall increase support for ESA's ongoing mentorship program promoting gender diversity and, if possible, expand the program to increase geographic/ethnic diversity.

Actions.

- a. The conference guidelines now reflect this priority.
- b. The Conference Committee now has a budget to help support this priority. Please contact the chair, Marie Claire Villeval, if you want to share thoughts on this matter.
- c. Please contact Yan Chen, ESA Mentor-in-chief, if you want to share your thoughts on the mentorship program.