Introduction to Survey Research

PS544/SOC544/JOURN544/URB R PL 544

Spring 2012

Professor Contact Information

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Overview/course goals

This course hopes to give you an introduction and overview to how surveys are used in various ways in modern day politics, business, marketing, and journalism. You will learn how surveys are designed, conducted, and analyzed, and will practice creating, evaluating, critiquing, and analyzing surveys yourself. This will be a very skills-based class, which will require additional work on your part, but will result in marketable skills for a variety of careers if you do the work.

At the end of this course, you should be a more critical consumer of polls, in addition to possessing the skills necessary for designing and executing a survey of your own.

Topics covered include causal inference, the scientific method, the purpose of survey research, survey sampling and approaches to non-response, survey design, methods of survey data collection, acquisition of secondary data, issues in question wording, psychology of survey response, analysis of survey data, ethical issues in survey research, and description of survey data in meaningful ways.

As I am a political scientist by training, much of the examples I use will have a political focus, though I have endeavored to include material from across the social sciences throughout the course. All of the material seeks to provide you with marketable skills, and the class will be taught with an eye toward real-world applicability.

Required readings

There is one required text for this course, listed below. It is available from the University Book Store and other local bookstores, as well as Amazon.com and other online retailers.


Additional readings will be emailed throughout the semester. All assigned readings are required and should be read BEFORE class or section meets on that topic.
**Assignments and Grading**

Grading in this course will be based on three main components – weekly exercises, a final project, and section participation.

Weekly exercises will consist of calculations, critiques, or discussions of issues related to surveys and survey analysis. You will have 10 weekly assignments, each of which are due on a Monday, as indicated in the syllabus (the semester is 15 weeks long, so you do not have an assignment every week). Assignments will be distributed one week before they are due. You must complete all 10 assignments throughout the semester.

You do not have permission to collaborate on the weekly exercises or on the final project. They are to be entirely your own work. Therefore there should never be a reason for two exercises to resemble each other and no possibility that such resemblance comes from “working together.” Just don’t do it. (See the academic integrity section below for further details.)

The final project is your chance to show us everything you have learned in this class, and apply it to a topic of your choice. In the final project, you will be responsible for posing a research question, explaining it in detail, choosing appropriate data to test your question, explaining, critiquing, and defending the measures you employ for testing your question, analyzing the data, explaining the results, and suggesting conclusions and implications which can be drawn from the results you obtain. The resulting report, along with appropriate tables and graphs, is due at the scheduled time of the final for this class: Monday, May 14th at 12pm. This is an intensive project that will be completed in stages throughout the semester. Notably, a prospectus is due February 29th and initial analysis is due April 18th. More information on the project will be offered in the first weeks of the semester.

Finally, you are expected to attend both lecture and section. Section will be conducted as a lab, and many of the skills you are tested over in the weekly assignments will be learned and/or practiced in your section time. It is thus very important for your grade in this class and the overall knowledge you hope to gain from this course that you attend section every week.

Grades will be assigned as follows:

- 10 weekly assignments: 50 points (5 points each)
- Final project: 30 points
- Prospectus: 5 points
- Analysis: 5 points
- Section participation: 10 points

**Late assignment policy:** Work is due at the times noted in the schedule below and/or within each assignment. Extensions will be provided only in the case of illness or other serious personal circumstances, and only if I am contacted in advance. Late assignments will be penalized one full grade for each day past the deadline, and not accepted after one week. In all cases, the decision to award extensions or to provide a makeup assignment is at my discretion.

I have tried to schedule exams/papers to avoid conflicts with religious holidays. If, despite my efforts, it should happen that a due date for an assignment conflicts with your observance of a religious holiday, please let me know during the first two weeks of the semester so we can work on an accommodation.


**Academic integrity**

It should go without saying that you are expected to conduct yourself honorably in this class. This means treating yourself and others with respect. Please do not disrupt the class (do not read the paper, keep your cellphone on – including texting, listen to your MP3 player, clean out your backpack, update your Facebook page, etc.), and respect the views of others at all times. If you fail to adhere to these policies you may be asked to leave the classroom.

This is your only warning with regard to academic misconduct. I take this matter very seriously and will use available technology to ensure that everyone is generating original work throughout the semester. I will pursue academic misconduct charges against anyone who violates the University policy.

The University’s policy and description of academic misconduct is fully described at this webpage: [http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html](http://students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html)

Highlights of this policy are below –
“UW-Madison students have the right to expect that they and other students will be graded fairly, and they have the rights of due process should they be accused of misconduct. They also have an obligation to conduct their academic work according to university standards. Therefore, it is important that they:

- become familiar with the rules of academic misconduct;
- ask their instructors if they are unsure whether something is acceptable (for example, how to use sources in a paper or whether to work with another student on an assignment);
- let instructors know if they think they see incidents of misconduct; and
- be aware that helping someone else cheat is a violation of the rules.

For complete discussion of the rules regarding academic integrity, see Student Assistance and Judicial Affairs (SAJA), or contact the on-call dean in SAJA, 608-263-5700, Room 75 Bascom Hall.”

If you have any questions about the policy, please ask. I sincerely hope this is the only time I have to think about this topic.

**Inclusion**

People with disabilities will be fully included in this course. Please inform the professor in the first two weeks of class if you need any special accommodations in the curriculum, instruction, or assessments of this course to enable you to participate fully. Confidentiality of the shared information will be strictly maintained. Certain accommodations may require the assistance of the McBurney Disability Office on campus. The McBurney Disability Resource Center can be reached at (608) 263-2741 or via email at mcburney@odos.wisc.edu.
Schedule

Readings indicated below are from the required text by Fowler. Other readings will be emailed out throughout the semester. All dates are subject to change throughout the semester.

Week 1: Introduction

Reading: Chapter 1

- Jan 23 - Introduction
- Jan 25 – What good are surveys?

Week 2 – Sampling Inference

Reading: Chapter 3

- Jan 30 – Sampling inference
- Feb 1 – Nonresponse

Week 3 – Sample Design

Reading: Chapter 4

- Feb 6 – Choosing a sample
  - Assignment: Critique a poll
- Feb 8 – Guest Lecture: Sarah Niebler: Weighting data

Week 4 – Secondary Data Acquisition

Reading: Chapter 5

- Feb 13 – Guest lecture: DISC librarian: Acquiring data through UW
  - Assignment: Calculations related to samples
- Feb 15 – Understanding your data

Week 5 – Methods of Data Collection

Reading: Chapter 8

- Feb 20 – Guest Lecture: Melanie Manion: Comparative sampling
  - Assignment: Descriptive Statistics
- Feb 22 – Methods of data collection: pros and cons

Week 6 – Psychology of Survey Response: Question Wording

Reading: Chapters 6-7

- Feb 27 – Guest Lecture: John Stevenson: UW Survey Center
  - Assignment: Critique a poll
- Feb 29 – Question wording
  - Prospectus for final project due

Week 7 – Psychology of Survey Response: Question Order and Other Issues

- Mar 5 – Question order and priming
  - Assignment: Critique a poll
• Mar 7 – Other issues in survey response

Week 8 – Dealing with data

• Mar 12 – Recoding data
  o  Assignment: Coding open-ended questions
• Mar 14 – Scales and indices

Week 9 – Basic Analysis of Polls

  Reading: Chapters 9-10

• Mar 19 – Basic analysis of polls
  o  Assignment: Testing a scale
• Mar 21 – Guest lecture: Dave Wilcox: Surveys in Advertising and Marketing

Week 10 – Using Polls in the World

• Mar 26 – Guest lecture: Pam Jahnke: Surveys in Agriculture
  o  Assignment: Basic analysis
• Mar 28 – Guest lecture: Matt Walsh: Surveys in Medicine and Epidemiology

***SPRING BREAK***

Week 11 – Using Polls in Politics

• Apr 9 – Guest lecture: Charles Franklin: Polling in Wisconsin
• Apr 11 – Using polls in politics

Week 12 – Ethics in Polling

  Reading: Chapter 11

• Apr 16 – Do no harm: Institutional Review Boards and Ethics in survey research
  o  Assignment: IRB certification
• Apr 18 – Implications of polls
  o  Basic analysis due for final project

Week 13 – Explaining Polls

• Apr 23 – Guest lecture: Jim Ohls: Surveys to Inform Policy Making
  o  Assignment: Critique a poll
• Apr 25 – Writing about polls/Displaying survey data

Week 14 – The Future of Surveys

• Apr 30 – New formats and innovations
• May 2 – Sentiment analysis and other non-survey polls

Week 15 – Review and Catch-up

• May 7 – Catch-up and last questions on final projects
• May 9 – Conclusions

FINAL PROJECT DUE: 12pm (noon) Monday May 14th