Introduction to Survey Research

PS 544, SOC 544, JOURN 544, URB R PL 544

Spring 2014

Lecturer
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This course will provide 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. Throughout the course, you 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. At the end of this course, you should be able to critically assess polls and surveys used by the government, media, and other research institutions, in addition to being able to design and execute surveys of your own.

This course will be of interest to any student interested in a better understanding of social surveys, from political polling to social surveys. While many examples will be drawn from political science research, the skills developed in this course can be applied to many different fields of research.

Topics covered include causal inference, the scientific method, the purpose of survey research, survey sampling and dealing with non-response, survey design, methods of survey data collection, 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.

Required Readings
You are required to use ONE of the following two books.


The Fowler book provides a basic introduction and includes all of the required information for the course. The Groves et al. book provides a much deeper and more comprehensive coverage of the same material. If you are interested in pursuing survey research in the future, I recommend the Groves et al. book, given that it provides the most detail.

The Fowler book is available at the book store and both books are available at various online retailers.

Additional readings may be emailed out throughout the course of the semester. You should be familiar with the material in the assigned readings BEFORE class or section on the 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 short “weekly assignments,” each of which are due one week after they are assigned and will either include some calculations, an activity related to the skills discussed in class or a short written response (max 2 pages). Some assignments will require some math, which will be covered in lecture. You must complete all assignments throughout the semester.

Weekly assignments should be completed individually unless stated otherwise. 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 and will be completed in small groups (2-3). In the final project, you will be responsible for posing a research question, explaining it in detail, designing a sample and questionnaire 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: **Thursday, May 15th at 7pm.** This is an intensive project that will be completed in stages throughout the semester. Notably, there will be the following due dates:

- **February 13, 2014** Research question (.5-1 page)
February 27, 2014 Population and sampling strategy (1-2 pages)

March 18, 2014 Mode and Questionnaire (1.5-2 pages+questionnaire)

April 17, 2014 Initial Data Results (2-5 pages)

Last Week of Class Group Presentation

May 15, 2014, 7pm Final Project Due (10-15 pages)

Part of your grade for the final project (10% of the Final Project grade) will depend on a peer review, where members of your group will evaluate your participation and contribution to the group project. **If you do not participate in the group project, you will receive an F for the project portion of your grade.** More information on the project including the requirements for each stage and grading expectations will be provided 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weekly assignments</strong></td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final project total</strong></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population and Sample</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mode and Questionnaire</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial Results</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Product</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Review</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section participation</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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**

You are expected to treat both yourself and your classmates with respect throughout this course. 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 regarding academic misconduct. I take the issue of plagiarism 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

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.

**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.
Lecture Topics

1. Introduction
2. What is a survey (Chapter 1)
3. Sample Inference and error (Chapter 3)
4. Sample Design (Chapter 3)
5. Weighting data
6. Non-Response (Chapter 4)
7. Acquiring secondary data
8. Understanding your data
9. Methods of data collection (Chapter 5)
10. UW Survey Center
11. Question Wording (Chapter 6)
12. Question order and priming (Chapter 7)
13. Other issues in survey response (Chapter 8)
14. Ethics and IRBs (Chapter 11)
15. Recording Data (Chapter 9)
16. Scales and indices
17. Surveys in non-democratic settings
18. Basic analysis of polls (Chapter 10)
19. Using polls in politics
20. Implications of polls
21. Surveys and public policy
22. Writing about polls, displaying survey data (Chapter 12)
23. New formats and innovations
24. Sentiment analysis and other non-survey polls
25. Final Project Presentations
26. Conclusions