

Practicum in Survey Research
Sociology 2112
Fall 2008
Professor: Leah K. VanWey

Course Goals:

Social survey research, together with econometric analysis of survey data, is a staple of sociological and other social science research. High quality social survey data are valuable to the researcher and to the larger community of social scientists. They are intellectual products as much as are published articles. Yet the design and implementation of social surveys are often learned “on-the-job,” leading to costly shortcomings in data that prevent them from allowing a researcher to answer her or his questions of interest. The goal of this course is to prepare you to design and implement a complex social survey. By the end of the semester, you should be able to participate in the design and management of such an endeavor, while recognizing that a single semester cannot provide you with deep understanding of all aspects of social surveys and that collaborative research will always lead to a better survey.

Course Description:

This graduate level course covers the steps involved in social survey research, from site selection and questionnaire design all the way through data dissemination. It assumes a basic level of familiarity with social science research methods, particularly the logic of causal inference. We will discuss the linkage between research questions, site selection, and questionnaire design. We will also discuss in detail many of the practical considerations involved in fielding a survey, including balancing available funds and personnel with ideal sampling strategies and balancing the focus on a particular research topic with the responsibility to collect enough general information to make data useful to a variety of users.

Throughout the semester, we will be using as an example of a complex social survey an actual draft survey to be fielded in the summer of 2009 to study the dynamic relationships between household demographic and economic change, and land use / land cover change in the Brazilian Amazon. The course will therefore focus on the conduct of in-person surveys and does not cover telephone or internet surveys as are often used in the United States. The Amazonian survey is the second wave of data collection in and around the city of Santarém in the Brazilian Amazon. The first wave of data was collected in 2003 and covers all households living on a stratified random sample of rural properties. Data were collected both to be of general interest to social and economic demographers and to answer specific research questions about the relationships between household demography, land use / land cover, and household economic activities.

Grading:

Students will complete a series of eight assignments over the course of the semester, each assignment worth 8% of the semester grade. These assignments will lead to a final paper (worth the remaining 36% of the semester grade) proposing a survey design and questions (a subset of all questions that would be asked in a complete survey) to answer a specific research question of their choosing. The assignments will involve both work on the Amazonian survey and work leading up to the student’s final paper. They will involve writing and editing of survey questions and field procedures, and writing of the research design justifying the choice of survey sites and the use of particular measurement strategies in the survey.

Readings:

Readings will be taken from a general text on survey design (Groves et al. 2004, a useful reference but we will cover only four chapters from it in class so purchase is not necessary), specialized books about aspects of survey design and implementation, as well as from a collection of peer reviewed journal articles, chapters, and working papers. Students are expected to have read all assigned readings prior to coming to class. Books will be available for purchase in the Brown bookstore and other readings (including some chapters from books) will be made available online. Books (which we will read all of) are:

- Axinn, William G. and Lisa D. Pearce. 2006. *Mixed Method Data Collection Strategies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bradburn, Norman M., Seymour Sudman, and Brian Wansink. 2004. *Asking Questions: The Definitive Guide to Questionnaire Design*. New York: Wiley.
- Ragin, Charles C. 1987. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Additional readings are:

- Brown University IRB Forms (policies and procedures online at <http://research.brown.edu/policies/hrpo.php>)
- Fox, Jefferson, R. R. Rindfuss, S. J. Walsh, and V. Mishra. 2003. *People and the Environment: Approaches to Linking Households and Community Surveys to Remote Sensing and GIS*. Boston, Dordrecht, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers. Chapters 1, 4, and 5.
- Groves, Robert M., Floyd J. Fowler Jr., Mick P. Couper, James M. Lepkowski, Eleanor Singer, and Roger Tourangeau. 2004. *Survey Methodology*. New York: Wiley. Chapters 3, 4, 9, 10.
- Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research. 2005. *Guide to Social Science Data Preparation and Archiving: Best Practice Throughout the Data Life Cycle*. Available online at: <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/access/dataprep.pdf>
- Kish, Leslie. 1995 [1965]. *Survey Sampling*. New York: Wiley. Chapter 3.
- Lindstrom, David P. "Analyzing the Effectiveness of a Non-Verbal Response Card: Evidence from Ethiopia." Paper presented at the 2008 Population Association of America meetings.
- Moran and VanWey grant application (NIH grant # HD35811-08)
- National Research Council. 2007. *Putting People on the Map*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press. Chapter 1.
- Presser, Stanley. 1994. Presidential Address: Informed Consent and Confidentiality in Survey Research. *Public Opinion Quarterly* v58: 446-459.
- Survey instruments used in Santarém in 2003
- The American Association for Public Opinion Research. 2008. *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys*. Available online at: http://www.aapor.org/uploads/Standard_Definitions_04_08_Final.pdf
- VanWey, Leah K. and Kara B. Cebulko. 2007. "Intergenerational Coresidence among Small Farmers in Brazilian Amazônia." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 69: 1257-1270.
- VanWey, Leah K., Ronald R. Rindfuss, Myron P. Gutmann, Barbara Entwisle, and Deborah Balk. 2005. "Confidentiality and Spatially Explicit Data: Concerns and Challenges." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 102(43): 15337-15342.

Course Outline:

September 4

Overview of course material; the place of survey research in social science research; the rights and responsibilities of researchers before, during and after fielding a survey

September 11

Choosing field sites: balancing scientific considerations with practical considerations

Readings: Kish (1995 [1965]) chapter 3; Ragin 1987

Due: Research question for proposed survey

September 18

Choosing respondents: sample design within scientific and practical constraints

Readings: Groves et al. 2004 chapters 3-4

September 25

The place of non-quantitative methods in survey research

Readings: Axinn and Pearce 2006

Due: Site selection and sample design for proposed survey

October 2

Protecting your human subjects: the IRB process, getting ready to go to the field, administering the questionnaire, storing and disseminating the data

Readings: Brown IRB forms and instructions; Lindstrom 2008; NRC 2007, Chapter 1; Presser 1994; VanWey et al. 2005

Due: Proposed non-quantitative methods in proposed survey

October 9

Overview of my survey: research questions, characteristics of respondents, characteristics of the site

Readings: Moran and VanWey grant proposal; VanWey and Cebulko 2007; survey instruments from 2003

Due: Specific concerns about protecting subjects in proposed survey

October 16

Writing your survey 1: broad organization

Readings: begin Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink 2004

Due: Proposed selection of respondents for Santarém survey

October 23

Writing your survey 2: writing questions

Readings: finish Bradburn, Sudman and Wansink 2004

Due: Proposed topics and organization for Santarém survey

October 30

Writing your survey 3: the place of ancillary data, verifying the ability to link across forms and respondents (and with other sources of data)

Readings: Fox et al. 2003 chapters 1, 4, and 5

Due: New questions for Santarém survey

November 6

Choosing interviewers and supervisors; planning the administrative structure of the fieldwork; training materials

Readings: Groves et al. 2004 chapter 9

Due: Outline of proposed survey(s); draft questions for key variables in research question

November 13

Quality control

Readings: AAPOR Standard Definitions (2008 edition)

November 20

Data Entry

Readings: Groves et al. 2004 chapter 10

Due: Specific problems with non-response in proposed survey (and proposed mitigating strategies)

November 27 – Thanksgiving

December 4

Preparing data for archiving and dissemination

Readings: ICPSR Guide to Social Science Data Preparation and Archiving

December 11

Wrap-up day

Due: Final paper including all elements of proposed survey