INF 391F: Survey Research Methods
(Advanced Topics in Research Methods, Methodologies, and Design)

Spring 2014
Room UTA 1.504 | Monday 3-6pm

Instructor: Lecia Barker
Lecia@ischool.utexas.edu
512-232-8364

Office: UTA 5.451
Office Hours: By appointment – email me and we’ll set up a time

TA: Sarah Buchanan
sarahab@utexas.edu

Best way to contact us: email

Rationale and Overview

In social research, surveys are one of the most common ways of finding out about people’s behaviors and opinions. Surveys employ questionnaires that ask respondents to choose standardized responses to questions or statements. The resulting data is treated like numbers and analyzed using statistical techniques. Surveys can be used for population studies and are also the basis of experimental studies in which opinions and behaviors are compared across groups. Surveys can be inexpensive, flexible, used to make generalizations about large groups of people, and because they ask standardized questions, very reliable. On the other hand, surveys are based on self-report, fail to take into account context, and hide behind a veneer of objectivity. Survey standardization causes researchers and evaluators to miss important differences among respondents. The results of survey-based studies influence a wide range of non-trivial decisions, including public and organizational policy, health care decisions, program development, and technology design. Users of survey methods, whether researchers or consumers, should have a deep understanding of “best practices” in survey design, administration, analysis, and reporting as well as a critical view toward what we can really know based on survey results.

This course will include both practical and theoretical topics, taking a studio approach to studying survey research methods.

Practical Topics will include: when to use surveys versus other methods, how to design effective and efficient survey “instruments,” how to choose and maximize a sample, media and methods for survey implementation, use of skip logic to adapt the survey experience to groups of respondents, data and project management, scale development and testing, descriptive and inferential data analysis, estimating population parameters from a sample, and issues of non-response.

Theoretical and advanced topics will include: calling into question what is really being measured (recall v. opinion), special measurement approaches (e.g., anchoring vignettes), issues of wording, such as positive v. negative and the forbid/allow asymmetry, quantitative feminist research, and issues with cross-cultural samples.

Not having studied statistics is not a dealbreaker for student preparation. While it is preferable for students to have taken introductory statistics, it is assumed that there will be a wide range of experience and that students can learn from each other. If there are topics you would like to be sure we cover in the course and you don’t see them in the course schedule below, please let me know.
Course Objectives

Through participation in the knowledge creation process, students will develop and/or increase their competency with techniques for designing, administering, analyzing, and reporting on a survey. Student ability will develop by means of hands-on experiences with a real and publishable research project.

Students will gain understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of survey research, such that they increase their ability to appreciate and assess the quality, validity, and credibility of their own and others' survey research based on how it was conducted and philosophical contradictions.

Required Text and Readings


Readings: as listed on the course schedule and referenced in the reading list on page 5. Found on Blackboard in Course Documents > Readings

Resources: recommended for various tasks; Found in Blackboard in Course Documents > Resources

Format and Procedures

Class will be taught using an active, studio based learning approach, not an information transfer approach (i.e., not lecture). Active learning means that learning occurs through one’s own engagement and interaction with materials, fellow students, and the instructor. A studio approach to learning research design assumes that students are full participants in an authentic research experience, receive opportunities and resources to learn the techniques for accomplishing research goals, and give and receive guidance to/from the professor and fellow students.

In INF391F, students are expected to closely read assigned materials and to prepare any homework before class. In class, students will discuss concepts, solve problems, explore cases, and apply concepts in collaboration with each other and the instructor. Individually and in groups, students will engage in data collection and analytical methods, primarily as members of a research team.

Formal Assignments

**Human Subjects Certification:** All students must submit a copy of their certificate showing they have completed the UT IRB training BY JANUARY 17, 11:59 pm. Instructions are in Blackboard announcement.

**Research Project:** This assignment is the centerpiece of the course and all practical topics are structured around it. It is intended to give you hands-on experience with planning and conducting a survey study. It will be conducted throughout the term and will provide a realistic example for some of the concepts covered in the course so that if called upon, you will have experience using them. Students will work on the five components of the project individually and combine efforts as part of a team. Throughout the term, students will write up sections of a report or article in preparation for a final product. The assignment has five components: 1) *Developing Survey Content.* You will review and categorize interview and observation notes related to a research question and a research audience for which Dr. Barker has IRB approval to study; qualitative analysis of interview data will lead to hypotheses, additional questions, refinements, and the development of survey questions. You will review relevant literature to understand what work has already been done and how this study addresses gaps in understanding. 2) *Developing a Sample.* Unfortunately, we probably will have to use a snowball sample. 3) *Designing and Administering a Survey.* You will use “best practices” to design a survey that preemptively reduces survey mortality. The survey will be administered online, using Dr. Barker’s SurveyMonkey account. You will use “best practices” to administer the survey you develop, preemptively working to increase sample size. 4) *Analyzing Survey Data Using Statistics.* You will prepare the data, plan its analysis, and analyze the data by exploring descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. 5) *Reporting the Study.* You will combine the write-ups of sections of the study using one of two (general) formats: a formal report or a journal article.
Grade Components

Grades will be based on the following:

- Participation in Class Discussions and Activities (25%)
  - Discuss concepts with other students and professor
  - Collaborate with and support your fellow students and the professor in learning
  - Practice competencies to prepare for research project component work in class

- Research Project (75%)
  - Individual pre-class preparation of project components
  - Submission of write-ups demonstrating understanding and competence of processes and results, on schedule
  - Final product

Tentative Course Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date/Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments Due</th>
<th>Class Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January 13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Introduction to the course, to each other, and to survey research Project overview and decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 17</td>
<td></td>
<td>Human Subjects and Financial Conflict of Interest Certificates</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(no class)</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 20</td>
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<tr>
<td>No class: MLK Day</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 27</td>
<td>Burke &amp; Christensen Taylor-Powell &amp; Renner Fowler 1, 2 Friedrich, et al.</td>
<td>DUE: Bulleted list: compromises and pitfalls related to class project</td>
<td>Exploring qualitative data: practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using qualitative data to develop survey items Survey research overview Research project assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Fowler 3, 4, 13</td>
<td>DUE: Categorized qualitative data</td>
<td>Discuss data categories</td>
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<td>Developing a sample Planning to avoid error</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 10</td>
<td>Dillman 1 Sánchez-Fernández, et al. Singer &amp; Ye Fowler 7</td>
<td>DUE: Preliminary literature review DUE: Description of sample, sampling method</td>
<td>Discuss + make decisions of what goes in the &quot;survey map&quot; based on qualitative data and lit review findings</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lecia: Possible jury duty Designing for response incentives Piloting</td>
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<tr>
<td>February 17</td>
<td>Dillman 2, 3 Fowler 6 Yan, et al.</td>
<td>DUE: Survey contents proposal DUE: Piloting plan</td>
<td>Decide what goes in final survey</td>
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<td>Writing good questions Constructing the survey</td>
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<tr>
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| February 24 | Fowler 7  
  Zaller & Feldman  
  Jackson  
  Barabas | DUE: Near-final draft of survey |  |
| March 3 | Fowler 5  
  Manfreda, et al.  
  Heerwegh | DUE: Piloted Final Survey  
  DUE: Results of pilot  
  DUE: Plan for survey administration | Planning for launch |
| March 10 | Holleman  
  Krumpal 2012  
  Krumpal 2013 | DUE: Write-up 1 | Launch! |
| March 17 | | DUE: Write-up 2 |  |
| March 24 | Fowler 9, 11  
  Oldendick | DUE: Codebook |  |
| April 7 | Fowler 10  
  Mohler, et al.  
  Trochim | DUE: Sorted, cleaned data  
  DUE: Plan for managing missing data | Do statistics in class |
| April 14 | Stapleton  
  Imai & Yamamoto  
  Trochim | DUE: Plan for inferential tests, scales | Discuss choices |
| April 21 | | DUE: Write-up 3 | Do statistics in class |
| April 28 | Various resources | DUE: Draft of results section (findings, implications) | Discuss results and implications |
| May 2 | (no class) | DUE: Final product |  |
Readings on Blackboard


**Course Policies: Please Read!**

**Classroom Policies**

Electronic devices may not be used for anything other than displaying the reading or taking notes during class, except in emergency. That means your phone, smart phone, tablet, computer, smartwatch, etc. must be turned to silent mode during class. Turning off devices: this is intended to be a collaborative learning environment, where students learn from each other. Others owe it to you to be paying attention and being critical/thoughtful at all times, and you owe them the same. Anyone emailing or social networking during class will be asked to leave.

This is not a lecture course. Learning will come from reading and discussion. Students are expected to read everything, including assignments and instructions, before class. Students are expected to prepare assignments in advance of class in a professional manner.

**University Electronic Mail Notification Policy: Check your Email**

Students are expected to check e-mail on a frequent and regular basis in order to stay current with University-related communications, recognizing that certain communications may be time-critical. All students should become familiar with the University's official e-mail student notification policy. It is the student's responsibility to keep the University informed as to changes in his or her e-mail address. It is recommended that e-mail be checked daily, but at a minimum, twice per week. The complete text of this policy and instructions for updating your e-mail address are available at [http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html](http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.html).

**Academic Integrity**

This course will depend on collaborative learning, shown in decades of research to increase student learning and feeling of belonging to an academic community. *Collaborative learning and writing is not collusion*. It is assumed that students will produce original work in collaboration and not submit someone else’s work as if it were their own original work. Some students may be confused by what is mean by “original work.” Please review the definition of plagiarism here: [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_plagiarism.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acadint_plagiarism.php)

Here are some key highlights:

“Using *verbatim* material (e.g., exact words) without proper attribution (or credit) constitutes the most blatant form of plagiarism. However, other types of material can be plagiarized as well, such as *ideas* drawn from an original source or even its *structure* (e.g., sentence construction or line of argument).”

“[Plagiarism] this occurs if you represent as your own work any material that was obtained from another source, regardless how or where you acquired it.”
“Plagiarism can be committed intentionally or unintentionally.”

“By merely changing a few words or rearranging several words or sentences, you are not paraphrasing. Making minor revisions to borrowed text amounts to plagiarism.”

Here is a tutorial: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/index.html

Here is the University of Texas’ Statement on Academic Integrity:

Each student in this course is expected to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Any work submitted by a student in this course for academic credit will be the student's own work. You are encouraged to study together and to discuss information and concepts covered in lecture and the sections with other students. You can give "consulting" help to or receive "consulting" help from such students. However, this permissible cooperation should never involve one student having possession of a copy of all or part of work done by someone else, in the form of an e mail, an e mail attachment file, a diskette, or a hard copy. Should copying occur, both the student who copied work from another student and the student who gave material to be copied will both automatically receive a zero for the assignment. Penalty for violation of this Code can also be extended to include failure of the course and University disciplinary action. During examinations, you must do your own work. Talking or discussion is not permitted during the examinations, nor may you compare papers, copy from others, or collaborate in any way. Any collaborative behavior during the examinations will result in failure of the exam, and may lead to failure of the course and University disciplinary action.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require special accommodations need to get a letter that documents the disability from the Services for Students with Disabilities area of the Office of the Dean of Students (471-6259 voice or 471-4641 TTY for users who are deaf or hard of hearing). This letter should be presented to the instructor in each course at the beginning of the semester and accommodations needed should be discussed at that time. Five business days before an exam the student should remind the instructor of any testing accommodations that will be needed. See website below for more information: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/providing.php

This Course Uses Blackboard

This course uses Blackboard, a Web-based course management system in which a password-protected site is created for each course. Student enrollments in each course are updated each evening. Blackboard can be used to distribute course materials, to communicate and collaborate online, to post grades, to submit assignments, and to take online quizzes and surveys. You will be responsible for checking the Blackboard course site regularly for class work and announcements. As with all computer systems, there are occasional scheduled downtimes as well as unanticipated disruptions. Notification of these disruptions will be posted on the Blackboard login page. Scheduled downtimes are not an excuse for late work. However, if there is an unscheduled downtime for a significant period of time, I will make an adjustment if it occurs close to the due date. Blackboard is available at http://courses.utexas.edu. Support is provided by the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400 Monday through Friday 8 am to 6 pm, so plan accordingly.