Data Collection Methods
SRAM/SOCI 818
Fall 2014
Tuesday, 1:00-3:45 pm
Oldfather Hall 204

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Office Hours: Wednesday 9:30-10:30 or by appointment

Prerequisites: Graduate student standing and instructor permission.

Required Texts:


Overview:
Survey researchers now have available to them more ways of collecting data than ever before, but not all methods are appropriate for every survey. The appropriateness of any data collection method depends heavily on the larger goals of the data collection effort being undertaken. In some cases a mail survey is most appropriate while in others using this mode is impossible. Sometimes one survey mode will do the job just fine, but in others multiple modes must be used. Our primary concern in this course is with how we decide which data collection method is best for a given survey project. This requires an understanding of the cost and error properties of each mode and the practicalities of surveying in each mode. We will focus primarily (but not only) on in-person, telephone, paper, and Internet surveys as well as mixed- or multiple-mode surveys. Through our studies of these survey modes, we will be familiarized with the science of survey methodology, including foundational studies and current areas of inquiry.

Our secondary concern in this course is in understanding the practical aspects of conducting in-person, telephone, mail, and Internet surveys. To get the best understanding of how surveys are conducted in each mode requires some practical, hands-on experiences. This course requires flexibility from students as obtaining these hands-on experiences depends on working around the schedules of others and will likely mean meeting outside of the regular time and location in which the course is scheduled.

Objectives:
This course is intended to fulfill a number of objectives, some of them central to the course topic and others central to the more broad process of becoming a good survey methodologist. With respect to the course topic, at the end of this course students should be able to:
1. Demonstrate an understanding of the various sources of survey error, how they relate to one another, and how they relate to survey costs.

2. Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the major modes of data collection with respect to survey error and survey costs.

3. Draw on the skills in the previous two objectives to make informed and scientifically based recommendations about which data collection method to use given the goals of a survey project.

4. Be familiar with the general procedures for collecting data by each survey mode.

5. Identify the major scientific contributors to mode and data collection knowledge and be able to describe their contributions.

6. Identify gaps in our current knowledge of data collection methods (i.e., areas in need of additional research and/or theory) and suggest ways to address them (i.e., research designs).

Students should also be able to do the following tasks, which are required of all survey methodologists, regardless of specialty, type of job, or employer:

1. Communicate intelligently about survey methodology issues using the terminology that has been established in the field.

2. Write in an appropriately scientific style. This includes being able to use in-text citations and provide references, apply proper formatting, express and draw on other people’s ideas without plagiarizing, and build focused and purposeful literature reviews.

3. Identify and locate appropriate sources of information about survey methodology. This includes using electronic data bases, the web, and the good old fashioned library.

**Format of the Course:**

This course will consist of a combination of lectures, readings, discussion of readings, and hands-on activities. Students are expected to have read all of the required readings before each class and to be ready to discuss them during class. We will also actively use Blackboard throughout the course. You can access Blackboard at [http://blackboard.unl.edu](http://blackboard.unl.edu).
Assignments, Grading, and Attendance:

30% Exams
There will be a mid-term and final exam in this course. The exams will be primarily essay with a mix of short and long-answer question formats. Both exams will be comprehensive.

15% Discussion Posts:
1. Throughout the semester you are required to submit at least 12 discussion posts pertaining to course readings and/or hands-on activities (to be discussed below). While you can submit more than 2 posts per week, only two will count toward fulfilling this requirement. This means that you will need to submit discussion posts on at least 6 weeks. Discussion posts are to be submitted to the “Discussion Board” on Blackboard by Sunday before class to give your classmates time to review and respond to the posts before class. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the content posted on Blackboard.

The content of the posts is flexible provided it is pertinent to course content AND is academically oriented. As some examples, you can ask questions to clarify readings, identify strengths or weaknesses of arguments, pose your own methodological arguments relevant to a topic, or suggest ways you might test a particular methodological theory or concept.

2. Throughout the semester you are required to respond via the Blackboard discussion board to 6 of the discussion posts that are posted by your classmates. You can respond as often as you desire, but only one response per week will count toward fulfilling this requirement. The content of your replies is flexible and will be guided by the type of questions/comments that are posted, but they should be methodologically informed replies (i.e., use proper concepts, terminology, and even citations where appropriate). Replies are to be submitted to the discussion board by 6:00 am Tuesday morning to allow class members to review them before class in order to be prepared for in-class discussion.

3. Each post or reply you make will be graded as follows:
   3 – Excellent: On-topic, uses course theory/concepts, backed up by literature that is properly cited, well stated, insightful, thoughtful.
   2 – Good
   1 – Poor: Somewhat off topic, poorly stated, fails to integrate course theory/concepts or literature, lacking thoughtfulness, appears to be a last ditch effort to make the deadline.
   0 – Unacceptable posts and/or replies such as those that are entirely off topic, personal, or offensive or those containing plagiarism. A score of zero will also be applied for any missing posts or replies at the end of the semester.

Additional Details:
   a. If you post extra discussion points or replies in a week, those with the highest grade will be counted.
b. If you have more than the required number of posts or replies at the end of the semester (i.e., you did extra weeks), your grade will be made up of those with the highest point values.

c. If you would like to post something to the board that you do not necessarily want graded (a personal anecdote or quick and witty reply), just mention that it shouldn’t be graded in the post. Also, please make sure any such posts are appropriate for the setting.

d. The objective of the discussion posts and replies is to promote healthy discussion and debate about the methodological ideas we will be discussing in this course. As such, good cyber-manners are required. Please keep your posts focused on the methodological issues at hand (or at least related to class) and deliver your message in a respectful way. Inappropriate posts will be removed by the instructor and will result in a grade of zero. Repeat offenses will result in a zero for the discussion posts for the entire semester.

15% Hands-On Activities:
There will be several hands-on activities throughout the semester. These may take place in class, at separate meeting times, or as homework assignments. I will make every effort to give you as much warning as possible about any activities that will take place outside of our regularly scheduled meeting time. However, these activities require us to work around other people’s (and in some cases organization’s) schedules so some flexibility on your part is required. Excused absences from these activities will be very rare and will come at the cost of an alternative assignment to be formulated at the instructor’s discretion.

Your grade for the hands-on activities will consist of two parts, participation and a short report. More details about the short reports will be provided, but in general, they should apply concepts and theories from the assigned readings and other course content to the hands-on activity.

20% Term Paper:
A course term paper will be due by 5:00 pm Friday, December 10th. The term paper is expected to be 15 to 30 pages, double spaced, plus references (APA or ASA style). The term paper should either be an empirical piece including data analysis or a project proposal with a research question, literature review, and proposed methodology for answering the research question. The final paper will be graded on both substance and quality of scientific writing. More information about the term paper will be provided at a later date.

10% Presentation:
Class periods will be set aside for student presentations of their term papers. More details about the requirements for the presentation will be provided as the semester progresses, but you should expect to prepare and deliver a conference-like presentation about your
term paper followed by a short question and answer period. A copy of your presentation must be handed in the day you present.

10% Attendance & Participation

Attendance is required. Reasonable reasons for absence will be accepted (e.g., family emergency, illness, etc.). Except in the case of unforeseen events, all absences must be arranged with the instructor ahead of time.

For participation, you are expected to read all assigned material prior to class and be ready to discuss it during class. You are also expected to be familiar with the week’s discussion posts and replies and ready to discuss them in class. Your participation is your way to demonstrate that you are prepared for class. If participation wanes, the instructor will find other ways to “measure” your preparedness.

Most assignments will be handed in through Blackboard. When handing assignments in through Blackboard, please upload the original Word file; do not copy and paste the content directly into Blackboard. Also, please start file names with your last name (e.g., Smyth-Assignment1.doc).

Late assignments:

Late assignments will be penalized 10 percentage points per day (counting weekend days and holidays) except in cases where arrangements have been made with the instructor at least one week in advance or in cases of reasonable unforeseen events (i.e., family emergency, illness, etc.). Late discussion posts or replies will not be graded or counted.

Grading Scale:

Your final grade in the course will be based on the following scale: A+ 98-100; A 94-97; A- 90-93; B+ 87-89; B 83-86; B- 80-82; C+ 77-79; C 73-76; C- 70-72; D+ 67-69; D 63-66; D- 60-62; F ≤ 59.

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus and course schedule as deemed appropriate for educational purposes. All such changes will be announced in class.

Accommodations for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or 472-0053 TTY, http://www.unl.edu/ssd/home.
Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating or plagiarizing may result in failing the course and referral to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. Students should immediately become familiar with UNL’s policies regarding cheating and plagiarism. See the following website for helpful information:
http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/integrity#plagiarism
Course Calendar

August 26: Course Introduction, Survey Methodology History & Major Developments.

September 2: Sources of Error & Survey Modes

September 9: Standardized vs. Conversational Interviewing and Interviewer Effects
**September 16: In-Person Surveys & Within Household Respondent Selection**


**September 23: Telephone Surveys**


September 30: Paper Self-Administered Surveys


October 7: Web Surveys


October 14: Exam 1

October 21: Fall Semester Break
October 28: Mixed-Mode Surveys


Household Panel Benefit from Assignment to postal Response as an Alternative to
Internet-Only?” Public Opinion Quarterly. 72(5):962-984.

“Using the Internet to Survey Small Towns and Communities: Limitations and

Mode Surveys.” Public Opinion Quarterly. 75(2):249-269.

Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcomes for Surveys. Lenexa, Kansas: AAPOR.
(www.aapor.org) PAGE 39

November 4: Responsive or Adaptive Design

Surveys: Tools for Actively Controlling Survey Errors and Costs.” Journal of the Royal

Design, Demographic Data Collection, and Models of Demographic Behavior.”
Demography. 48:1127-1149.

Schouten, Barry, Melania Calinescu, and Annemieke Luiten. 2013. “Optimizing Quality of

Paradata-Driven Responsive Design: Illustrations from the 2006-2010 National Survey of
Family Growth. Pp. 123-144 in Kreuter (Ed) Improving Surveys with Paradata: Analytic
November 11: Diary, Calendar, and Longitudinal Survey Methods


November 18: Business Surveys


November 25: Comparative Survey Research


December 2: Student Presentations

December 9: Student Presentations and Wrap Up

December 10: Final Paper Due by 5:00 pm

December 19 (Friday): Final Exam 7:30-9:30 am