Designing and implementing a survey is a challenge for the novice or the experienced surveyor alike; it can be a frustrating experience even when things go as planned. While there is no substitute for hands-on experience, Don Dillman's new book Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method reduces some of the frustration and uncertainty that goes with survey craft. The book comes along at a time when telephone surveys are experiencing difficulties associated with call waiting and populations that are saturated with surveys. In addition, new technologies such as the Internet and optical scan devices have opened up new opportunities for researchers. He notes that the reason for the book is to update his earlier version, The Total Design Method (1978), which relied on a set of universal principles for surveying that were designed to increase response rate and data quality. The major difference between the two is the recent edition's attention to specific surveying circumstance or what Dillman refers to as tailored design.

The tailored method, Dillman writes, is designed to "create respondent trust, perceptions of increased rewards and reduced costs for being a respondent that take into account features of the survey situation, and that have as their goal the overall reduction of survey error" (4). The elements of the survey situation that Dillman is trying to take into account are populations, sponsorship and survey content. The general idea that weaves the book together is that there are general principles of design and implementation which can be used anywhere, but are refined according to the survey situation. This involves attention to elements such as what different populations see as a cost or reward and what the best mode of surveying might be. For example, the importance of tailoring is illustrated when Dillman looks at government surveys in Chapter 9, and surveying organizations in Chapter 10 each with their unique problems.

Dillman is quite explicit about social exchange, the theoretical perspective that guides the book's principles. According to Dillman, social exchange theory, as it applies to surveys, involves the triangle of costs, rewards and trust (14). These elements must be balanced so that respondents feel like they are getting something in return for their time, that their time will not cost them too much and that they will be rewarded in the future (14-21). According to Dillman, following exchange principles will garner higher response and better quality data. On the other hand, the reader is never told about alternative perspectives that might guide survey participation like those of cognitive approaches where rational choice by respondents is not the main issue (Couper and Groves, 1996).

Undoubtedly the most important, and arguably the most time consuming, aspect of a survey is the construction of survey questions. Even with the best response rate, the most poorly constructed questions can render a survey's results useless. In Chapter 2, Dillman takes a thorough look at how to construct questions properly. This is a crucial, but regularly overlooked, area of surveying where too many people slap questions together and mail them to their sample with little regard for what the question asks nor how they are asking it. Here, he hits on everything from closed-ended questions (43-50) to the all too common double-barreled question (73). These issues are important for anyone trying to build a basic knowledge of surveying techniques. While keeping response rate and quality in mind, Dillman examines issues related to questionnaire design such as question placement skip patterns in Chapter 3. He also devotes a section to another important and overlooked topic – pretesting – and two means (cognitive and retrospective) by which to mount a meaningful pretest (142-143).

Unfortunately, the chapter is more about implementation of question design features than developing questions that tap one's particular concept. Therefore there is little attention to the process of conceptualization and operationalization of concepts and their transformation into questionnaire items. Rather Dillman's principles are respondent-driven with the utmost concern for what respondents will see as making sense instead of concerns about validity and whether a researcher is measuring what they are measuring. For these elements the reader is going to have to go to a book like Gerry Rose's (1983) Deciphering Sociological Research.

Internet surveying, as the book's title suggests, is obviously a selling point for the book and Dillman offers a chapter to it. One of the most important issues raised by Dillman is that web-surveyors must pay attention to who they are surveying and not to crafting the most technically elaborate web questionnaire. As in other chapters he helps would-be surveyors along by outlining some useful principles for web surveying like "Use graphical symbols or words that convey a sense of where the respondent is in the completion process, but avoid those that require significant increases in computer resources"(397). As Dillman (149) states earlier in his book, survey implementation is perhaps the most crucial element in achieving high response rates. However, there is relatively little on Internet survey implementation at a time when response rates tend to be much lower than for mail surveys and researchers are struggling to find the right combination to achieve the highest data quality and response rate. Moreover, despite the fact that Dillman suggests the tailoring method, little is learned from the Internet chapter regarding tailoring of regular implementation strategies to web surveying. This, even though regular elements of implementation like personalization, type and number of contacts, and sponsorship are severely challenged, if not restricted, when using the Internet as a survey mode.

Tailored Design is filled with easy to follow helpful information outlined in a series of principles. More importantly, the concept of tailoring, because of its attention to the heterogeneity of respondents and survey modes, should be part of any surveyor's repertoire. In general, the first several chapters of the book, including a description of tailoring, question and questionnaire construction and survey implementation, are enough to warrant having this book either as a step-by-step guide or quick reference. However, those looking for a book on Internet survey techniques will be disappointed.


Shane Dixon was manager of the recently completed Grand River Transit Survey. He has interests in web survey methodology.
The opening of the Southwestern Ontario Research Data Centre is the main event occurring since the Fall 2001 Newsletter. As explained in more detail below, the official opening was held on Friday December 7th, 2001, and the centre became fully operational in mid-January 2002. Activity continues on the Survey Research Centre side, however, with surveys under way and some distinguished speakers coming to campus in late Fall and over the Winter Term. The Speakers and Seminars section of this term’s Newsletter describes these.

JG & MT

Southwestern Ontario Research Data Centre (SWORDC) News

Opening activities began on the afternoon of December 6th with a presentation by Mary Thompson (SRC Co-Director) on SUDAAN software. Events for December 7th started at 1:30pm with a presentation by John Goyder (SWORDC Co-Director) and Pat Newcombe-Welch (the Statistics Canada Analyst for the SWORDC) for prospective users. Gustave Goldmann, the National Research Data Centres Program Manager at Statistics Canada, was on hand to answer questions. An open house at the SWORDC site in PAS 2228 began at 2:30pm with speeches and ribbon cutting at 3:00pm, Keith Warriner (the other SWORDC Co-Director) presiding.

Among the VIP’s present from the University of Waterloo were David Johnston, President of the University, Paul Guild, Vice-President for Research and Bob Kerton, Dean of Arts. Wilfrid Laurier University was represented by Bruce Arai, the University of Guelph by Bo Wandschneider, Brock University by Mohammed Dore and the University of Western Ontario by David Bellhouse.
SWORDC and SPIDA

For the past two years, the SSHRC has funded Data Training Schools (DTS) at selected universities across Canada. Such schools run over a short period during the Spring Term, in an intensive, all-day format. For this year’s competition, SWORDC participated as a co-applicant with the Institute for Social Research at York University. It was recently announced by SSHRC that this application for a Summer Program in Data Analysis (or SPIDA) to be held at York this June had been funded. Graduate students and faculty members interested in improving their skills in analysis of longitudinal and multilevel data will find that SPIDA offers a flexible package of instructional opportunities. There are seven one or two day courses. For more than fifteen years, the York ISR has offered short summer courses on statistical methods for the social sciences, and a rich resource has accumulated.

Key dates: Deadline for applications, April 5th, 2002.
Courses start on June 7th (a two-day course on SAS) and end on June 20th.
Residence accommodation is available in Vanier College on the York campus. For further details, log onto the SPIDA website www.yorku.ca/spida.

SWORDC Conference

A one-day conference devoted to reports on recently completed, on-going, and proposal-stage research projects at the SWORDC will take place at the University of Guelph on Friday April 26th 2002. People who would like to participate in a session devoted to presenting ideas for proposals for projects in the RDC should contact John Goyder [jgoyder@uwaterloo.ca].
The conference requires no fees and no registration. For the most up-to-date details, consult the SWORDC website, “Seminars” page.

Speakers and Seminar Series

Held in Fall 2001

Room PAS 2030 was packed on Thursday, October 18th, when an audience from a variety of academic units assembled to hear a talk by David Northrup, Associate Director at York University’s Institute for Social Research. The talk was entitled “To Tell the Truth: The Problem of the Self Report in Survey Research” and David’s presentation reviewed a rich body of evidence from studies in which reports by respondents on surveys have been checked against administrative records. For example, it is a consistent pattern that for 14% of survey respondents who report that they have a public library card, a cross-check with the library shows no such name on file! Both the speaker and participants from the audience attempted to dissect such patterns in terms of respondent’s need to present self in a socially desirable way on the one hand and simpler factors such as lapsed cards on the other.
David noted that rapport with interviewer on a telephone survey has a complex relationship with erroneous reporting. Paradoxically, good rapport is crucial to enlisting participation on the survey in the first place, but in some cases reporting bias is especially high in the high rapport interactions.

On December 6th, Mary Thompson (Statistics and Actuarial Science, and SRC Co-Director) presented a talk entitled “An Introduction to Statistical Analysis with SUDAAN.” This was an instructional seminar jointly sponsored by the SRC and the Southwestern Ontario Research Data Centre (SWORDC), and formed part of the opening ceremonies for the SWORDC (see SWORDC news above). SUDAAN is a statistical software package which accommodates many of the types of model appropriate for longitudinal data sets of complex sampling design. The SWORDC has acquired version 8.0.0 for standalone PC, along with the manual of some 850 pages! Using twin overhead projectors, one for syntax and output and the other for statistical background, Mary led the audience through the various capabilities of SUDAAN, and explained some of the underlying statistical models and assumptions involved. A very complete set of notes from the talk was provided and these are available from the SRC website [www.src.uwaterloo.ca].

Winter 2002 Events

Cathy Cotton, from the Income Statistics Division of Statistics Canada, visited Waterloo on February 1st 2002, and gave a talk on “The Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics: What Is It? Can it Answer My Research Questions?” In co-operation with the SRC and SWORDC, the visit was arranged by the (UW) Department of Statistics and Actuarial Science, where Cathy Cotton did her graduate work. The talk covered many aspects of the SLID, including panel design, response rates, linkage with income tax returns, and question topics. Cathy has
made her PowerPoint presentation from the talk available, and this is a valuable resource for anyone wishing to explore the research possibilities offered by this data set. Visit the SWORDC website (“Training” page) to see these.

It was a busy day for Cathy, as following the SLID talk she presented a brown bag lunch seminar on “Low Income Measurement in Canada”, jointly sponsored with the Women in Mathematics Committee.

“Telephone Sample Design” was the topic of the talk of 14th February, by Jim Lepkowski, Senior Research Scientist at the Institute for Social Research and Associate Professor in the Department of Biostatistics at the University of Michigan. Jim Lepkowski directs the Summer Institute for Survey Research at Michigan ISR, as well as the newly created graduate program in survey methodology. Again sponsored jointly by Statistics and Actuarial Science and the SRC, the talk was well pitched to the interests both of statisticians and of social scientists. The presentation began with some data on non-telephone–using households. Although a small proportion of modern populations, such households can radically differ from those that do have phones. The unlisted telephone number is also far from a random event, hence the considerable effort institutions such as the Michigan ISR have put into examining the properties of different designs for drawing telephone-survey samples.

Jim Lepkowski, February 14th, 2002.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, April 16th, Susanne Santi will give a presentation on results from questions about smoking and the Waterloo smoking by-law posed in the year 2000 Kitchener-Waterloo Metropolitan Area Study. Jointly sponsored with CBRPE. Begins at 3:30pm, in the Clarica Auditorium, LH 1621.

Friday, April 26th, SWORDC conference at University of Guelph (see SWORDC news, above).

Plans for the Next Kitchener-Waterloo Metropolitan Area Survey (KW MAS)

In 1998 and 2000, the SRC collected omnibus or multi-purpose surveys of the local area. The ‘98 study was by mailed questionnaire, the 2000 edition by personal interview. Some tentative enquiries about running questions in the next KW MAS have come in, and we are in the process of forming plans. The year 2002 or 2003 KW MAS would most likely be collected by telephone (RDD). Researchers (both faculty, graduate students, and area researchers outside the three local universities) interested in buying space on the next area survey should contact John Goyder [jgoyder@watarts.uwaterloo.ca] or Mary Thompson [methomps@icarus.uwaterloo.ca].

Recently Completed and Current SRC Projects

Survey of nutrition, spring and summer 2001. RDD interviews with residents of Peel Region. For Mamdouh Shubair, Health Studies.

Graduate Exit Survey [consulting capacity]. Surveys by mail of recent post-graduate degree recipients at Waterloo.


Co-operative Education and Career Services Survey (consulting capacity).