Announcements

The SRC has recently said a very fond farewell to manager Fiona Heath. Fiona has returned to school to complete a Master’s degree and pursue her career as a minister. She has been instrumental to the success of the SRC and will be greatly missed. We send her our heartfelt thanks for 7 great years!

We welcome Kathleen McSpurren to her new position of Senior Manager. Kathleen will be taking on Fiona’s administrative and financial duties in addition to project management responsibilities. Kathleen has been with the centre for over three years as a project manager, which has enabled her to move smoothly into her new role. Congratulations Kathleen!

We also welcome Sharon McConnell as our new Project Manager. This position will take on both web surveys and some of our on-going projects. Sharon comes to us with 12 years of survey research experience in both public and private sectors. She holds a Master of Science degree in Applied Statistics from the University of Guelph.

Mary Thompson retired this fall after 40 years with the Statistics and Actuarial Science Department. Mary is a leader and innovator in her field and her expertise is world renowned. Fall 2009 was busy with numerous lunches celebrating her achievements. We are fortunate that she will continue on with the Survey Research Centre for the rest of the 2009-10 school year.

The SRC is participating in a Career Services presentation with the Council of American Survey Research Organizations (CASRO). Please see the enclosed flyer for more information and help us promote the event by announcing it to anyone who may be interested!

Congratulations!

We extend congratulations to Dr. Geoffrey Fong (Psychology), Dr. David Hammond (Health Studies and Gerontology) and Dr. Mary Thompson, (Co-director of the SRC), who recently received the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) Award for Top Canadian Achievements in Health Research. They won one of eight inaugural awards for their outstanding work with the International Tobacco Control Policy Evaluation Project.

Additionally, we are very proud to announce that Dr. John Goyder (Co-director of the SRC) has recently been elected President of the Canadian Sociological Association. The CSA publishes the Canadian Sociological Review.

The staff at the SRC also extends a hearty congratulations to the newly formed PROPEL Centre for Population Health Impact. We look forward to continuing our collaborations with the new centre.

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SRC website: http://www.src.uwaterloo.ca
SWORDC website: http://tdr.tug-libraries.on.ca/SWORDCSITE/SHome.html
Studies in the Field

This has been an exciting year at the SRC as we move into new modes of data collection. From street intercepts to travel diaries, we continue to develop our expertise in primary data collection. Our web survey software, Sensus Web, is proving to be versatile: it has been invaluable for various data entry projects. Below are just some of the projects the SRC has been a part of over the last year.

NEWPATH

NEWPATH (Neighbourhood Environments in Waterloo Region: Patterns of Transportation and Health) is a groundbreaking collaboration between the Region of Waterloo, the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta, and the University of Waterloo. It looks at the impact of city design on health, diet and the environment. Recruited households in Waterloo Region complete travel and food diaries over a two day period, complete a questionnaire about neighbourhood preferences, and record shopping habits. A sub-set of participants are sent also accelerometers to measure activity levels over the two days. Over 2,000 households will participate.

C-EnterNet

The SRC won a contract with the Public Health Agency of Canada to conduct a control population survey as part of a pilot project monitoring enteric illness in Waterloo Region. This year long study examines risk factors and behaviours associated with enteric illness, comparing the ill and general population. This new research design is intended to be applied nationally.

Ontario Lottery Gambling

On behalf of the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre, the SRC is conducting follow-up surveys with users of slot machines at Ontario casinos, as part of an experimental education research model.

Woodstock

Last year, SRC collected data by phone and face to face interviews (using palm pilots) for a survey by Psychology Ph.D. student Ryan Kennedy. Kennedy is conducting pre and post interviews researching the impact of an outdoor smoking ban put into place in September 2008 by the city of Woodstock. This is the first outdoor smoking ban in Canada. The SRC conducted the one-year post interviews in August 2009.

The University of Waterloo Survey Research Centre offers:

- A full range of survey services from design to data analysis
- First consultation meeting free of charge
- A professional CATI call centre for telephone surveys
- Expertise in web and mail surveys, telephone and personal interviews
- A high standard of research and strict adherence to protocols
Co-Director John Goyder and Call Centre Supervisor Lindsey Webster attended the American Association for Public Opinion Research annual conference in May, 2009.

Below, John discusses his experience at AAPOR conferences in an article excerpted with permission from the October 2009 issue (N. 104) of Bulletin de Méthodologie Sociologique (BMS). BMS is the journal for Research Committee 33 of the International Sociological Association (Research Committee on Logic and Methodology).

AAPOR 2009 CONFERENCE: “PUBLIC CHOICES IN CHANGING TIMES”

By Nick Moon (GfK NOP, UK) and John Goyder (Dept. of Sociology, Univ. of Waterloo)

Each spring, the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) holds its annual conference. It’s a wonderful intellectual experience. Attendees return home from the AAPOR Conference with a feeling of being, at least for the moment, on top of all the best US research on social science methodology currently under way or just completed. Many of the AAPOR papers subsequently appear in journals such as Public Opinion Quarterly.

AAPOR is a little distinct from some other academic conferences for the diversity of its participants. People come not only from universities but also, in large proportions each year, from the commercial social research sector. Government and other non-profit agencies are also highly visible, especially people from “The Bureau” which outsiders discover stands for the United States Census Bureau. The Bureau is always a strong presence at AAPOR, but was especially so at the 2009 sixty-fourth Conference held on 14-17 May in Hollywood Florida, just north of Miami.

The AAPOR Conference admittedly is US-centric, both in attendance and research focus. Only 8% of the attendees were from outside the US. It is, after all, the American Association. . . . But its large number of attendees, along with the sheer scale of the survey research business in the US, gives this conference worldwide significance.
For the last couple of AAPOR conferences, the hottest ticket has been for the sessions on the problems caused by the growth of cell-phone only households, and both sessions and audiences seem to have grown at a similar pace to these awkward households, with hotel staff frantically rushing from less popular sessions in Anaheim in 2007 to meet the insatiable demand in cell-phone sessions. This May, there was still plenty of discussion of cell-phone-only incidence reaching a critical level, with the count in the US now exceeding 20%. One consequence is that now the methodological levees protecting random digit dialing (RDD) surveys are in serious danger of being fatally breeched, with the discussions moving on from containing the cell-only problem by post-stratification weighting (for example, of young males, likely to be cell-only) to giving serious attention to alternatives to RDD.

This new direction was stated the most dramatically by Paul Donato, the Executive Vice President and Chief Research Officer of the Nielson Company, in the Thursday night Plenary Session on “The Role of Traditional Survey Research in a World of Electronic Measurement and Changing Information Needs”. He said Nielson has abandoned RDD surveying over the past year in favour of data mining of the Internet and new modes of survey data collection. This provoked gasps in some quarters, and some spirited debate afterwards, but Paul remained unbowed by the attacks on his heresy and – especially in the world of commercial rather than social research – there is no doubt we will be hearing a lot more in the future about this kind of work.

Panels (meaning people who are signed up, usually in consideration of a material incentive, to participate in some minimum number of surveys each year) have become increasingly mainstream within AAPOR ranks. They too have started to feature more intensively at the conference. Panels seem to offer both an answer to declining RDD response rates and a way to survey the general public over the Internet. However, the great continuing criticism of them is that most are self-selecting and cannot properly be compared with probability samples. Illustrative of the work being done was Yeager and Krosnick’s paper: “Does weighting improve the accuracy of data from non-probability Internet survey panels of people who volunteer to do surveys for money?” This question will undoubtedly be asked again at the AAPOR Conference in Chicago in 2010.

The AAPOR conference is not all studious attendance at sessions and there are several well-attended social activities. There is a golf tournament, a trip to a baseball game, a pub crawl and the

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Delegates</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td><strong>Foreign (combining all three affiliations):</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
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<td>2.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>725</td>
<td>100%</td>
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I was thrilled to have the opportunity to attend the AAPOR conference “Public Choices in Changing Times” in May 2009. Our manager, Kathleen McSpurren, had wonderful things to say about her experience when she attended the conference in New Orleans in 2008 and I couldn’t wait to have a chance to experience it for myself. This year the conference was held in Hollywood, Florida and upon arrival at our sunny destination I was taken aback by the grandeur of the venue. The Westin Diplomat resort and spa is luxurious to say the least. It is located right on the ocean and has an infinity pool, 4 ballrooms and five star dining. Upon checking in I went on a tour of the hotel and easily spotted the other AAPOR conference attendees wearing name tags and carrying their blue AAPOR tote bags. The first seminar was not scheduled until the following morning which gave me time to take a walk on the beach and plan the seminar courses that I would take over the next four exciting days.
The seminars ran four times a day and covered a variety of topics including mode choice, bias and non-response, election poll methodological issues and cell phone coverage to name only a few. There were always at least seven to choose from in each time slot, which meant that the biggest challenge was choosing which one to attend. As a call center supervisor I was most interested in attending seminars on interviewer effects and reducing non-response.

One presentation from researchers at the Universities of Michigan and Maryland discussed the hypothesis that highly productive interviewers collect better quality data. The researchers measured interviewer performance based on number of completed interviews, number of initial refusals and then by cooperation rates. Surprisingly, the researchers found that there is no evidence of an association between interviewer performance and measurement error bias. Another study from researchers at Northwestern University assumed that interviewers who collect high quality data establish good rapport and vice-versa. They found in fact that there was no significant difference in the quality of data collected based on rapport. An American study from researchers at Illinois-Chicago set out to ask the question “how does race influence a respondent’s decision to participate?” The researchers found that a respondent is more likely to participate in a survey if they share the same race as the interviewer. I found it very interesting that respondents can pick up on the race of an interviewer in a telephone survey and that race would affect participation but that interviewer productivity and rapport does not seem to affect the quality of data collected.

I also attended seminars on mode choice and the use of incentives. Researchers from Mathematica Policy Research found that there is some evidence that respondents who are offered more than one mode of completing a survey were twice as likely to participate. The SRC will be introducing a mixed mode version of our telephone interviewing software, WinCATI, which supports both telephone and web based interviewing in March of 2010. We will be able to test this premise with the hopes that offering respondents two modes will have an effect on response rates. An interesting finding in a study on the use of incentives was that a pre-paid incentive combined with a post payment has a small but positive effect on response rates. What’s also interesting is that sending a $2 incentive in advance compared to a $5 incentive made no significant difference in participation. This would not be possible in Canada, given that $2 would be a coin and cannot be mailed.

As it was my first time attending the conference, I took advantage of the networking activities for new members. I participated in a Speed Networking session that was a variation on speed dating, as well as the new member reception. I also had the pleasure of meeting Michel Durocher and Randa Bell from ASDE Survey Sampler Inc. from Gatineau Quebec. ASDE provides the majority of our sample that we use and have always done a fantastic job for us. I would never have had the opportunity to meet these colleagues had it not been for the AAPOR conference.

Attending the AAPOR conference is an invaluable experience for anyone with a career in social research. It was humbling to be surrounded by people from all over North American that I have so much in common with professionally and who share an interest in our field. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity that the Survey Research Centre has given me and would jump at the opportunity to experience it all again.
In our last newsletter we described our experience with hand-held data collection devices, offering a snapshot of the SRC’s forays beyond the typical data collection processes. In this newsletter, we share our experience with another new (to us) method of collecting data. An important component of the NEWPATH study (described above in the on-going projects section) has been the use of accelerometers, also called activity meters (pictured above). In order to supplement the data from self-administered travel diaries, participants were asked to wear these devices for the two days they recorded their travel information. The device is threaded with an elastic band and worn around the waist, either under or over clothing. The meter can measure the duration of activity in minutes and hours, as well as the intensity of motion, distinguishing between sedentary activities versus more active movement. Accelerometers are often used by researchers and clinicians to objectively measure physical activity and compare this with subjectively recorded data. For this study the SRC has relied on accelerometers manufactured by the American company ActiGraph. Three different models were used: AM7164, GT1M, and GT3X. Each model represents improvements in technology and translates to a greater number of features available for the researcher.

Accelerometers offer a secondary measure of the respondent’s travel and activity over the two travel days of the study period. It is often the case that there is random data on the device resulting from the accelerometer being picked up and moved rather than being worn – this data must be discerned from the actual motion of the participant. In order to offset this random data, respondents were asked to complete a log indicating the amount of time that they wore the device as well as any time throughout the day when they might have removed the device, for example, when taking a shower. When logs were not returned, or were incomplete, it could be difficult to determine the difference between the device actually being worn and random data. Statistical analysis of the activity meter data can distinguish between the two using activity intensity and total duration cut-offs.

We encountered other problems with respondent behavior as well. Some respondents wore the devices for only part of the day, sometimes as little as one hour. Using these devices also required a significant amount of persistence on behalf of the researcher in order to ensure the return of devices from respondents. We found that it was not uncommon for respondents to discard the device if they chose not to participate in the study (these devices cost approximately $350 USD). Additionally, respondents often chose not to call the courier service to pick up the device from their home, despite
the fact that there was no cost to them to do so. Retrieving the devices took a significant amount of
time and effort; we added two shifts per week in which staff drove to participants’ houses to pick up
the devices. In some cases, accelerometers were still outstanding 14 weeks after the respondent
completed their travel days. While we were able to retain the vast majority of our devices, researchers
can expect to lose between 5% and 10% of the devices that are sent out to members of the public.

Beyond the issues with the participant’s compliance are the technical requirements of the
activity monitors themselves. The devices need frequent firmware updates – if the firmware has not
been updated, the data may be corrupted. It is possible to regain this data in its original form so that it
may be meaningfully interpreted; however, this requires assistance from ActiGraph’s technical support
if researchers are not familiar with how the data is recorded. Managing accelerometers can require a
significant amount of time. In fact, managing and keeping track of all of the accelerometers used in the
NEWPATH study necessitated the creation of a half-time position. For the NEWPATH study we used
over 250 accelerometers, which must be managed individually, and may require repair that can cost
anywhere from $50 to $100 USD per device after the one-year warranty has expired. Replacement of
lost devices is a significant cost as well.

The quality of data obtained from our surveys is as good as can be expected when dealing with
self-administered instruments, but cannot necessarily provide us with all of the information that we
need. By adding the data collected using the accelerometers, we are able to gather a more thorough
and accurate depiction of our respondents’ activity levels. Despite some shortcomings, accelerometers
provide useful data for researchers and clinicians that may otherwise be unattainable and have been a
central component to the success of the NEWPATH study.