SRC Web Systems

The SRC has recently purchased Sensus Web, Version 4.2, from Sawtooth Technologies to serve our web survey needs. This system provides sophisticated programming, controlled access to the survey for respondents as well as access by the researcher to results, quota controls, and e-mail tracking; it also has the capacity to handle large questionnaires. Sensus Web is compatible with the SRC CATI call centre system. Surveys may be offered on the web with a telephone follow-up or vice versa. Data will be compatible.

The SRC has entered into partnership with the Information Systems and Technologies Department on campus (IST) in order to provide full web survey services to the university. IST will continue to provide free service to any staff, student or faculty members willing to program their own web surveys. A researcher can download all the necessary files to install and run Sensus Web from a computer on campus. IST staff will provide any necessary tutorials.

For people who have no time, or require a more complex questionnaire, the SRC can provide services, ranging from overall project consultation to specific needs such as creating a questionnaire, email contact of participants, managing the survey in the field, and analysis and reporting of results.

For more information please contact Kathleen McSpurren, Special Projects Manager, at ext 35071.

Our Terrific Interviewers

By Lindsey Skromeda, Call Centre Supervisor

The Survey Research Centre has a fantastic staff and we would like to take this time to thank all the telephone interviewers for their hard work and commitment. Sadly, some of our long time interviewers are graduating this year and we are going to miss them.
We would especially like to recognize Alexandra Denton, whose skill and dedication has been an invaluable asset to our team. Alexandra was hired in May 2005 as a telephone interviewer. She has been a model employee and a top interviewer for others to look up to. She will be best known for her work on the Smoker’s Help line survey which resulted in her promotion to assistant supervisor. Alexandra graduated in April 2007 with a degree in Applied Health Science.

Also graduating this term are Robyn Joffe, Omeir Khan and Matt Bryane. We would like to thank them for their outstanding contribution and we wish them all the best in their future endeavors.

Photo: Alexandra Denton

Current Research at the Survey Research Centre

Our web survey work is continuing to grow. We had two surveys in the field last year, and this year we have four currently in field with more anticipated.

1. Alumni survey – St Jerome’s College
2. Smoking in Long Term Care Facilities – Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
3. Induced Lactation Questionnaire – Lenore Goldfarb, Canadian Breastfeeding Foundation
4. Student Volunteering Survey – John Goyder, Sociology, Maureen Drysdale, St. Jerome’s Psychology

The telephones have been in constant use at the SRC over the past term. We expanded to nine stations in the winter term and can now provide almost 400 calling hours in peak time each week. Our focus continues to be on high quality academic research, as well as support for the university administration survey needs.

Smoker’s Helpline Evaluation
This on-going survey for the Centre for Behavioural Research and Program Evaluation evaluates the utility of smoker’s helplines across Canada for callers who are trying to quit smoking. This model evaluation tool also provides measurable quit rates for use in a variety of smoking cessation research.

Ontario Tobacco Control Survey
This is a significant longitudinal survey of Ontario residents who are recent smokers. Begun in July 2005, this project will continue until December 2009. Over 7,500 recent smokers will be tracked every six months to note changes in smoking behaviours. Five thousand non-smokers are also surveyed as a comparison group. This study is led by a team of researchers from the University of Waterloo and the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit.

Youth Smoking Survey – Parents
On behalf of the Population Health Research Group, we are surveying parents of children who, through their school, are participating in the national Youth Smoking Survey. We expect to reach over 10,000 parents by the end of this survey in July.

We are always looking to support researchers in any field. We can provide consultation services, data analysis, and data entry as well as data collection by phone, web or face to face. For more information, please contact Fiona Heath, SRC Manager at ext 35071.
Graduate Student Opportunities at the SRC

The SRC is looking for graduate students for part time short term contracts in the areas of project management and data analysis for the summer and fall terms.

The SRC often receives requests to do data analysis for both academic and external clients. This may include cleaning data, creating new variables as needed for analysis, running frequencies and cross tabulations as well as more advanced statistical manipulation.

Data analysis skills include experience in complex analysis, expertise in SAS and/or SPSS, awareness of academic research expectations, ability to work independently in a timely fashion.

As the SRC continues to grow, we need help managing short term projects that come through our door. These include telephone, web, and mail surveys. Project managers administer the fieldwork – keeping track of the sampling frame, response rates, dispositions, respondent comments – and communicate results and issues to clients.

Project management skills include knowledge of survey methodology, excellent organizational skills, an eye for detail, ability to work with a variety of people, and comfort with independent work.

We are looking for graduate students from a variety of disciplines. If you are interested in short term job opportunities, please contact Fiona Heath at fjheath@math.uwaterloo.ca with your resume and a short statement of interest. We will contact suitable candidates as work becomes available.

The L-Shaped Survey

By John Goyder

In designing a survey, decisions have to be made about the number of cases needed and the response rate required. These factors, the quantity of cases and the quality of the response rate, are usually competing objectives to be balanced. For example, for the same budget it might be possible to collect 500 cases on a telephone survey with 5 callbacks and a 40% response rate or, by doubling the number of callbacks to up to 10 at each non-contacted household, 450 cases with 50% response rate. If the higher response rate enhanced the validity of results, or even the perception of validity in the eyes of academic reviewers, the trade-off might be worthwhile.

That would be an “I-shaped” survey, understanding the height of the “I” to represent the percentage of cases drawn for the fieldwork, and the width as symbolizing the response percentage. If the response rate is 100%, the I looks like a square. In an L-shaped survey, some percentage of the cases receive extra attention, an approach sometimes termed “double-sampling”, whether from premium fieldwork techniques such as an enhanced callback plan, “conversion attempts” on refusals, incentive payments, a re-mailing of a questionnaire shortened over the original one or any of the other techniques to be found in the literature on survey methodology. Any experiment in increasing response rate on a survey, in which one part of the initial sample draw is defined as the control cell while another is given enhanced treatment, is an L-shaped survey if the enhancement works. An experiment with many embedded experiments all producing slightly different response rates admittedly gets into a more complex shape than an L. Kephart and Bressler, pages 123-132 in the 1958 Public Opinion Quarterly (hereafter POQ), is an early example of the jagged L survey. L-shaped surveys have thus been used for a long time, but adopting this metaphor of I and L-shaped surveys generalizes the L notion into a normal strategy for survey research.

The time may come when every survey of high quality has some L-shape to it. With response rates falling to unprecedently low levels, consistently below 50% on many kinds of survey, the strategy of giving a sub-set of the cases in the initial sample enhanced fieldwork attention gains appeal. It is a way of optimizing the trade-off between quantity and quality of data and builds information into a survey as to whether the nonresponse is ignorable or non-
ignorable, the issue examined by Keeter et al. in their year 2000 article “Consequences of reducing nonresponse in a large national telephone survey” (*POQ* 64:125-148). Indeed, variations in fieldwork input (the base of the L) becomes a variable of potential use in analysis. In the 2005 Kitchener-Waterloo Metropolitan Area Survey, for example, we used a “thick L” design in which 50% of sampled cases received a pre-paid $5 incentive while the rest did not. Response rate was 59.5% for the first cell against just 40.5% for the second (returns divided by sample draw less wrong address/deceased). On an agree-disagree question about the statement “opinion polls do no harm,” 23.8% of the lower response/no incentive cell disagreed, taking a negative view toward polls, compared to just 14.4% of the higher response/ with incentive cell (p<.02). Of course, it is not known whether the more tolerant view comes from the higher response rate or the presence of the financial incentive. Intuition would say that the incentive created good will, helping both response rate and favourable views of polls.

The L-shape metaphor suggests as well a possible interface with more qualitative approaches. When the response rate on a survey is low and nonresponse bias is suspected it may be wise to extend the base of the L along a very narrow band by selecting a small portion of the nonrespondents for a qualitative treatment such as depth interviews or a focus group.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>The I-shaped Survey:</th>
<th>The L-shaped Survey:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/150" alt="Diagram" /></td>
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<td>% response</td>
<td>fieldwork</td>
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**SRC Courses**

The SRC runs two interdisciplinary courses on survey research for graduate students: STAT 890 “bookends” the survey process, examining how samples for surveys are selected and then delving into some of the techniques and software available for analysis of surveys. The course gives an excellent understanding of how samples for Statistics Canada surveys are designed. SOC 697 handles the middle of the survey process, looking at how to word and structure survey questions and how to conduct survey fieldwork. STAT 890 will next be offered in Spring 2008 term; SOC 697 is currently under way (Spring 2007) with students from Health Studies and Gerontology, Geography, Statistics and Actuarial Science, and Sociology.