SRC: New Space, New Systems, New Rates

Call Centre Expansion

The Survey Research Centre has had a busy summer moving into larger quarters and upgrading the call centre computer network. We have 8 call stations with room to expand when needed.

Tucked away in our new sixth floor corner space we continue to develop and improve our operations. The addition of windows in our new space, which provides beautiful natural light, is welcomed by all the staff at the Survey Research Centre. Currently staffing twelve student interviewers (and an anticipated 25-35 new hires for the new year), we are in the midst of two on-going studies, and are looking to begin two more studies in the winter term.

At long last we have received our new server, running Windows Server 2003. The new machine (Dual P4 3.0Ghz, 2GB RAM, 2 75GB HD) is a long awaited and much anticipated replacement for our outdated NT4 server. This new system will provide better security and back-up options in order to maintain the integrity of all collected data.

With the server improvements, we are also upgrading our CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) software and scripting language. The upgrade to Sawtooth WinCATI v4.2 and Sensus v4.2 will allow us to increase interviewer and supervisor efficiency and productivity, as well as increase the quality of the data that is collected on a day-to-day basis. The software offers improved monitoring and rating options and the potential for automated dialing for the interviewers. Along with the upgrades, the SRC is looking into web based survey software to offer expanded services within the lab.

Megan Martin, at work interviewing in MC 6001
If you happen to be walking by the SRC (MC 6001) and are curious, please feel free to come in and ask any questions- our door is open to you.

Jeremy Meissner, Call Centre Supervisor, ext. 6689

Lower Rates!

The past few months have seen many changes in the operations of the Survey Research Centre, with larger quarters, upgraded CATI system, and re-organized staffing. Jeremy Meissner, our call centre supervisor, is now a full time staff member with the SRC. Previously, his position had been supported by the Population Health Research Group. Call centre interviewers, also previously under PHR, are now casual staff with the SRC. With these changes came an internal review of our station hour charges.

Station hour charges are the direct costs of telephone survey fieldwork. Many call centres charge by completed case, estimating how long it will take to complete a case and working out costs from there. As we find ourselves typically doing surveys with complex methodology, including recruited participants, follow-up surveys, multiple questionnaires and quotas for particular population sub-sets, it is often impossible to accurately estimate a cost per case. Academic research standards typically require more rigorous protocols.

The Survey Research Centre charges instead for each station hour used to complete the fieldwork.

Now that the SRC has taken over all costs for the call centre, we have been able to reduce our station hour charge.

Station hour charges include:
- long distance costs (rates set by the university)
- computer maintenance (rate set by MFCF)
- software licensing fees
- interviewer and supervisor costs
- administration charge.

Our administration charge goes towards overhead, reserve funds and general staffing.

Previous standard rate: $39.44 per station hour

Standard rate for 2006: $37.57 per station hour

A random digit dialing of the general population, with a 12 minute survey would typically complete 3 interviews per station hour. Additional charges would include sample purchase, programming, academic research support, project management and training. Overall costs may be as low as $15 per completed interview. We only charge for actual station hours used.

Fiona Heath, SRC Manager, ext. 5071

New Friends

The Survey Research Centre now shares office space with the Transdisciplinary Tobacco Use Research Centre (TTURC), which administers the International Tobacco Control project. Christian Boudreau, (Ph.D., Waterloo) has returned to the Statistics and Actuarial Science department as Research Assistant Professor and Associate Director of the TTURC Data Management Core. His position is shared with the Population Health Research Group.

The Survey Research Centre has had turnover on the board this year. The 2005-06 Board of Directors consists of John Goyder (co-director), Mary Thompson (co-director), Paul McDonald (Applied Health Sciences), David Matthews (Chair – Statistics and Actuarial Science), Laura Johnson (Environmental Studies), Susan Sykes (Office of Research Ethics), Norberto Pantoja-Galicia (graduate student) and Joanna Jacobs (graduate student).
Southwestern Ontario Research Data Centre (SWORDC) News

Branch RDC Approved for Laurentian University

Statistics Canada has approved a Branch Research Data Centre at Laurentian University. Output will be sent electronically, with encryption, to Waterloo for disclosure analysis, and then returned to the researcher in Sudbury. This will be one of six Branch RDC’s, the others being at the University of Victoria (connected to UBC), and Laval, Sherbrooke, McGill, and Université de Quebec à Montreal, all connected to Université de Montréal. Further news on this in the next issue.

Data Day/ Mini Conference at University of Guelph

The annual Mini Conference for Spring 2005 was this year combined with a Data Day in which presentations were made on the entire spectrum of access to Statistics Canada data, both public files and master files. Speakers were: Michelle Edwards (UG Library-DRC), John Goyder (Co-Director, SWORDC), Susan Johnson (WLU Economics, and WLU representative on SWORDC Management Committee), Paula Brauer (Family Relations and Applied Nutrition, UG), Hsiao d’Ailly (Renison College, UW).

Data Day at University of Waterloo

On September 30th, a Data Day was held at UW. Speakers were Shabirah Rahman (UW Library), Michelle Edwards (UG Library), Brian Cozzarin (SWORDC Co-Director), Christine Neill (graduate student, WLU), Martin Cooke (UW faculty member, Sociology/Health Studies and Gerontology), Sarah Viehbeck (HS & G graduate student).

SRC and SWORDC Speakers and Seminars

Recently Held

David Binder (retired from Statistics Canada) shown in photo to the right, presented a talk on “Why Take a Design-Based Approach to Modeling Data from Complex Surveys?” The talk took place on September 16th 2005.
SRC Academic Research Support

The SRC offers a full range of survey services from design consultation to fieldwork to data analysis. We can help professors and graduate students conduct high quality, cost-efficient primary research. Initial consultations are free of charge.

We can conduct the survey for you at reasonable rates, using our CATI programming and calling system. To reduce costs, you can book our call stations and use your own students to make the calls using an access database or paper questionnaires.

We now offer full web survey services, from programming to managing the dataset, or we can help you create and manage your own survey. We also provide data entry services at reasonable charges.

We have a mandate to provide survey research services and education. Let us know what you need!

Projects in the Field

Smoker’s Helpline Evaluation (SHL) Study
Since 2003, we have been conducting the fieldwork for this on-going evaluation by the Centre for Behavioural Research and Program Evaluation. To date we have contacted over 5,800 first time callers to Smoker Helplines across Canada in order to gauge their satisfaction with the service as well as monitor quit rates. The SHL Evaluation recently began a new study of SHL callers who were originally referred by their doctor, dentist, or pharmacist. Currently, the evaluation is only in Prince Edward Island, but will extend to the rest of Canada in the new year.

Ontario Tobacco Survey
In July of this year we began Wave 1 of this 5 year longitudinal project. Every six months we survey 500 non-smokers and 750 smokers, and re-contact previous respondents. This survey research is for the Ontario Tobacco Research Unit at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and focuses on changes in smoking behaviours over time. By the end of the fieldwork we will have conducted over 15,000 interviews.

Kitchener-Waterloo Metropolitan Area Survey
At the time of writing, the 2005 edition was under way. The mode of contact, as in several of the past years, is mailed questionnaire. This year’s study is directed by Barry McClinchey from the Department of Sociology. A number of tri-university area faculty members, graduate students, and representatives from local government are involved. They are: Serge Desmarais, University of Guelph; Steve Brown, Wilfrid Laurier University; John Goyder, University of Waterloo; Dan Currie, Engineering and Planning, City of Waterloo; Irene O’Toole, Recreation, City of Waterloo; Noreen Steinacher, Social Services, Region of Waterloo; Tom Reitz, Curator, Doon Heritage Crossroads, Region of Waterloo; Barry Mcclinchey, University of Waterloo; Anna Marie Cipirani, University of Waterloo; Joanna Jacob, University of Waterloo; Trudy Moul, Wilfrid Laurier University; Kathleen McSpurren, Wilfrid Laurier University.

SRC website: http://www.src.uwaterloo.ca/
SWORDC website: http://tdr.tug-libraries.on.ca/SWORDCSITE/SHome.html
On September 22nd, Jane Gentleman from the US National Centre for Health Statistics visited Waterloo and gave a presentation on the Joint Canada-United States Survey of Health.

Photo opposite: Jane Gentleman

**Book Review**


Reviewed by Luc Boyer
Ph.D. Program, Department of Sociology, University of Waterloo

Books dedicated to the pursuit of better understanding the impact of nonresponse on survey outcomes are not legion in survey research. Stoop’s book is a well-researched and an empirically solid addition to this endeavour.

Throughout the book, Stoop addresses six central questions: 1) Why are high nonresponse rates a reason for concern? 2) Who are less likely to respond, either because they are more difficult to contact or because they are more reluctant to cooperate? 3) How can response rates be enhanced? 4) How to study nonresponse? 5) Do enhanced response rates improve the accuracy of survey outcomes? 6) How to combat nonresponse error and allocate funds effectively? These are broad yet perennial questions to nonresponse error research. The author addresses these through an analysis of extraordinary fieldwork strategies deployed on final nonrespondents.

The book is divided in two distinct sections. The first, chapters 1 through 5, is an extensive literature review that informs the reader of what is already known about nonresponse error. The chapters fully explore the various dimensions of nonresponse error such as contactability, reluctance, and refusals. Theories and models of response behaviour are also discussed. Unfortunately the critique of the literature remains squarely within well-trodden theoretical grooves. The reader will not find any new theoretical pathways that might expand our understanding as to why people refuse to respond. The ability to understand nonresponse behaviour rests, to some extent, on the expansion of our theoretical vocabulary; this omission in the literature review was a missed opportunity. The author chose instead the methodological route; she makes a compelling case for the testing of already known models.

The second section, chapters 6 through 10, presents a thorough analysis of nonresponse behaviour of the Dutch Amenities and Services Utilization Survey conducted in 1999 (AVO). Chapter 6 is a detailed account of the fieldwork procedures. From flowers to gifts, the author vividly describes how a battalion of the best fieldworkers were harnessed to hunt down refusals using all means necessary. The “pull out all
the stops” (p. 147) fieldwork design bears its fruits in Chapter 9 where the author analyzes at length any differences found from a follow-up survey of terminal nonrespondents and the AVO survey. Chapters 7 and 8 explore nonresponse patterns and nonresponse errors due to hard-to-contact and reluctant to cooperate nonrespondents. Both chapters conclude with an instructive discussion on measurement issues inherent to nonresponse error data collection. The issue of contact form management and its impact on fieldwork and the issues of constructing valid indicators for reluctance to cooperate are both well discussed.

The conversion of a doctoral thesis into a book form presents some difficulties. The dense and highly technical format calls forth an equally technical, if not solely academic, audience. To fully appreciate this book, one must already be quite familiar with survey research and nonresponse error. Tables and graphs are not meant for the uninitiated. Nevertheless, students of survey research will appreciate the non-partisan rendition of the current literature of survey nonresponse. Chapter 6, “going into the field”, offers a rare behind-the-scene look at the practical realities of fieldwork.

The conclusions reached by the author will not surprise those already familiar with the recent literature on nonresponse error. A studious reading of the book will be rewarded, in the last chapter, with the author’s most important point: the understanding of nonresponse error lies in the details. Here the author reinforces the point that monies would be better spent in providing accurate paradata on terminal nonrespondents than devoting all resources towards the hunt for the last respondent. It is precisely in showing how to study nonresponse that the author makes her most important contribution.

**SRC Courses**

![Image of SRC Course Participants]

**SOC 697, Spring 2005**

**STAT 890, Spring 2005**

Both these interdisciplinary courses will be offered in Spring 2006. See the SRC website [www.src.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.src.uwaterloo.ca) for details.