Announcements

The Survey Research Centre has recently joined forces with two international call centres to host the International Tobacco Control Survey online. We are very happy to be working with such an outstanding group of researchers on a project that will affect so many lives around the world! Please see the Studies in the Field section of this newsletter for information about this groundbreaking study.

Many people on campus have no doubt noticed the new Math building – M3 – that is currently under construction behind the General Services Complex. We are very excited to have the opportunity to move into the new building with the rest of the Statistics and Actuarial Science department. The building is scheduled to be completed in the spring of 2011 and we are looking forward to a great new space! The new call centre is custom designed for our unique needs, and also provides us with more room for expansion in the future.

We are very pleased to congratulate our co-director Professor Mary Thompson on her latest award. Mary is the 2010 recipient of the Elizabeth L. Scott award, which is given biannually to an individual who has worked to advance the careers of women in academia. This description is certainly very accurate of Mary and we are very proud of her!

The Survey Research Centre will be hosting a lunch-hour workshop on Tuesday November 23rd titled Research Methodology and Survey Design. The workshop will be held in MC room 5158 from 12pm – 1pm. If you are interested in attending, please RSVP to uwsrc@math.uwaterloo.ca

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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

**C-EnterNet**
From August 2009 to August 2010 the Survey Research Centre conducted surveys for the Public Health Agency of Canada. The questionnaire was designed to evaluate gastrointestinal health issues in Waterloo Region by looking at day-to-day activities and what people eat. People in all age groups, including children, were randomly recruited over the phone and in total over 1200 surveys were completed.

**Best Practices in Problem Gambling Research 2**
The SRC is very excited to be working once again with Dr. Rob Williams of the University of Lethbridge on his study to determine the best way to measure the prevalence of problem gambling. The first version of this project was conducted over the phone and door-to-door in 2007. This latest iteration will take place on the phone and online with residents of Ontario. This study will provide an excellent opportunity to evaluate the quality of data from online panels, which will be the sample used for the web portion of the study.

**Teaching Excellence Council – Teaching Assistant Assessment**
The SRC is pleased to be working with the Teaching Excellence Council and the Office of the Vice President Academic on an online project to investigate TA assignment and training procedures in each department. Having staff members fill out this survey is the first step to providing consistent campus-wide support for grad students and ensuring that they receive the training they need. We would like to take this chance to encourage anyone who received an invitation to the survey to fill it out at their earliest convenience!

**International Tobacco Control Policy Survey**
The Survey Research Centre is responsible for the online portion of the ITC Four Country Re-contact Survey this year. This wave is part of a unique study being conducted in many countries all around the world in order to evaluate tobacco policies on a national level, and to determine the effectiveness of these policies. The ITC Four Country Survey includes respondents from Canada, the U.S., Australia and the United Kingdom. Respondents are surveyed once a year and are asked questions about their smoking behaviour, the effects of new policies and their thoughts on introducing further policies. We are very proud to be working with, amongst others, Drs. Geoff Fong, Mary Thompson, and David Hammond, who, as a team, were recently awarded the CIHR-CMAJ Top Canadian Achievements in Health Research award (announced in our previous newsletter).

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**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
In May 2010 the SRC sent our newest staff member, Sharon McConnell, to Chicago to attend the 65th annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). Below Sharon relates her experience with the conference and the city of Chicago itself. Thanks to the Statistics and Actuarial Science Department for supporting SRC attendance at this annual conference!

**Chicago: My Kind of Town**

*By Sharon McConnell*

I was very excited to be the SRC delegate to attend the 65th annual AAPOR conference in Chicago. As I arrived on May 10th at the height of the NHL playoffs (which the Chicago Blackhawks eventually won), the city was buzzing with excitement. My excitement had more to do with experiencing ‘firsts’ such as being in Chicago for the first time, being a first time attendee at the AAPOR Conference, attending the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations (AASRO) annual meeting for the first time, as well as having a few days of leisure time to explore the Windy City.

The Conference was held at the Chicago Marriott Downtown, conveniently located on the Magnificent Mile and fronting onto North Michigan Avenue. The luxury and modernism of the location was obvious from the moment I set foot in the lobby. The hotel boasts 90,000 sq. ft of meeting space, including 57 meeting rooms and a Grand Ballroom that served as the location for meals and networking events. It also offers three restaurants/bars, including a Starbucks which was conveniently located on route to conference sessions, as well as a health club and indoor pool.

The theme of the 65th AAPOR Conference was ‘Opportunity through Diversity’. Concurrent sessions ran four times a day over the four day conference and covered a variety of topics including challenges of using cell phone numbers in Random Digit Dialling (RDD) surveys, challenges of multi-mode data collection and implications of offering respondents a survey mode choice, improving questionnaire design, addressing non-response bias, and improving response through incentives. Each concurrent session offered 7 or 8 different topics to attend, which meant the biggest personal challenge was choosing wisely.

Given the SRC’s recent implementation of Mixed Mode software, one of my choices was to attend some sessions addressing multi-mode research. Research conducted by both the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Washington State University showed that offering respondents a choice of survey mode (e.g., mail survey versus on-line survey) did not improve overall response rate. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln research indicated no improvement in overall response rate from those offered ‘web only’ as the response mode to those offered web followed by mail, or mail followed by web. Response rate was affected more by the strategy used to solicit response, such as offering a cash incentive. The research conducted by Washington State explored the effect of offering a choice between mail and web response among Washington State undergraduate students who were initially invited to complete a survey via mail contact. The research showed that offering a web only response option produced the lowest response rate, followed by a choice of response mode. Offering a mail only response mode produced the highest response rate. The research also revealed that the negative effects of having a choice and offering web-only surveys can be overcome through combining mail contact, with offering token financial incentives, and strategically timed email contact to support web response.

As a project manager, another area of interest to me was questionnaire design. The effects of question order, positioning of survey instructions, and the impact of interactive voice response systems were only a few of the topics explored. Presenters from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research explored the impact of positioning of a Self-Rated Health (SRH) question. More Spanish speaking respondents reported poor/fair health when the SRH question was positioned before a series of
chronic condition questions compared to when the SRH question was positioned following the series of chronic condition questions. This same effect was not found among English speaking respondents. Research conducted by RTI International showed that among English speaking respondents, the positioning of skip instructions on a self-complete survey affected the ability to follow the skip patterns, and resulted in more missing data. Specifically, when skip instructions are placed at the top of a column or at the top of a page, there tends to be more item non-response. Another research team from RTI International explored the effect of interactive voice response (IVR) on estimates of tobacco use among youth. Typically telephone surveys yield lower estimates of tobacco use among youth, compared to school-based self-administered surveys. However, use of IVR has been shown to increase youth reports of smoking, compared to interviewer administered CATI surveys. The RTI International research explored the impact on reported youth smoking of an IVR that resembled an older female voice (i.e. old enough to represent a mother’s voice) versus one that resembled a teenaged female voice. The research indicated that the type of female IVR had no impact on estimates of tobacco use among youth.

On day two of the conference, I attended the AASRO annual meeting. The SRC is a member of AASRO and as such, sends a delegate to the AASRO annual meeting. The main agenda items for this meeting were to:
- review the 6 strategic goals set out by AASRO and discuss the progress that has been made on each goal in the last year
- Raise awareness among AASRO members of the impending closure of the UC Berkeley Survey Research Center, discuss the circumstances that have led to this outcome, and determine if AASRO involvement would help prevent the closure from happening
- Explore ways that AASRO could help make survey organizations stronger. For example, developing contract templates and/or offering awards for innovations in project management.

In terms of my personal exploration of the city, I was able to experience a few of the tourist sites that Chicago has to offer. Visiting the Shedd aquarium was a great chance to see a Chicago landmark while being entertained by the many different animals there. A must see for anyone who can’t resist beluga whales and penguins. A trip to Millennium Park allows visitors to take in some amazing architecture, monumental sculpture and landscape design. The Crown fountain, two 50 foot towers with faces projected on them is especially entertaining. Anyone interested in architecture will also enjoy the tour of the building that served as Frank Lloyd Wright’s home and studio for more than 20 years. Taking a few extra days getting to know Chicago was a great decision and something I would definitely recommend.
Mixed Mode, Mixed Reviews

By Lindsey Webster

In our last newsletter we described our experience with the use of activity meters as a way of collecting data for the NEWPATH project. This year we have added yet another technology for data capture. In March of 2010, the SRC purchased the Mixed Mode add-on for our WinCATI 4.2 application. Our previous version of WinCATI was designed for telephone surveys only, while we have a separate system called Sensus Web for on-line questionnaires. The Mixed Mode program is the integration of telephone and web interviewing in one system. It allows us to conduct studies that are pure telephone, pure web, or a combination of the two.

With this new system, the sample, respondent data and other record settings are transferable between web and phone. Similarly, all protocols (e.g. quotas and dispositions) are applied to the survey in both modes. One important benefit of the Mixed Mode system is its ability to allow for a much larger number of sample fields (containing respondent data) than when using Sensus web for online interviewing. Our newest web project, ITC, is a longitudinal international study with a lengthy questionnaire. This is the first year that the survey is available to all respondents online in addition to being offered over the telephone. The survey functions longitudinally by reading the previous years’ responses into the questionnaire. The number of fields being used was far more than could be supported using Sensus Web alone, but the Mixed Mode software has given the SRC the capability to host the ITC survey online.

Mixed-mode studies can increase respondent cooperation rates, especially among hard to reach respondents. For respondents who choose to be interviewed on-line, Mixed Mode does have some excellent notification features. It lets us automatically send email invitations, reminders, and thank you messages to respondents. In the case of a respondent who fails to complete an on-line survey, the record is directed back to telephone interviewers who can then contact the respondent by phone. Another benefit is that the online data tools and statistics show CATI (computer assisted telephone interview) and CAWI (computer assisted web interview) results combined and there is one database, making data cleaning and dataset creation hassle-free and much less time consuming. We had high hopes for the reporting features of combined results in Mixed Mode, but unfortunately they were not always consistent.

Another potential benefit of using Mixed Mode is that the questionnaire is programmed in a shared-language, Sensus, which we already have experience using for programming our online surveys. We had also experimented using Sensus as the programming language for telephone surveys but we discovered that these surveys were slow to load in the CATI system. We were hoping that surveys in Mixed Mode would run faster. Unfortunately this was not the case; we found that even a simple survey programmed in Sensus ran slowly in Mixed Mode. Additionally, Mixed Mode interviews are said to be able to switch between modes any number of times and in any order. We discovered that Mixed Mode is limited in those call dispositions (coded call outcomes) which can automatically move the respondent from one mode to another. There is only one disposition that you can use to transfer to web automatically from the phone.

There are definitely some good things to say about Mixed Mode but also some areas where it could be improved. Version 5 promises to address some these issues and we are anxiously waiting for its launch.
Census Long Form Changes and Research at the SRC
By Kathleen McSpurren and Megan Martin

There has been much discussion in the media, among academics and local governments, and in the public, about the implications of changes to the Census long form in 2011. Our directors and staff have also had many discussions, and so we decided that to share some of the ways that we’ve used the long form data in the past, which will explain some of the issues that we may encounter without this data in the future.

Census information plays an important role in planning surveys, particularly in designing sampling frames. We use the numbers provided by the Census, both long form and short form, to design a targeted sample, when we may be surveying a certain group of people or a specific area. In the context of probability sampling, we use the counts to allocate a stratified sample to ensure that we are achieving a representative survey. One recent study, the NEWPATH project, required us to calculate target sample sizes for strata defined by household size, income and walkability, using Census data by postal code in Waterloo Region, to ensure a good representation of different types of households in the study.

Beyond sampling, we also use Census data once the survey is complete in order to create weights for our data, as well as to compare specific questions in our findings with the distribution in the general population (eg. The average income for our survey respondents should match the average income in the area that we are surveying). The absence of a rigorous implementation of the Census Long Form could deprive researchers of accurate measures of population data for the many applications in survey research.

Studying Web Panels from the Inside
By Megan Martin

This fall the SRC is working once again with Dr. Rob Williams on his Best Practices in Problem Gambling Research study. An added dimension of this survey is the inclusion of sample from a web panel – a group of people who have already agreed to participate in surveys online. Using a web panel means that we are able to create a sample based on attributes of people registered in the panel. In this case, we would create a sample that is representative of Ontario’s general population by age, gender and smoking status.

In order to further our understanding of how these panels work, one SRC staff member registered for two popular web panels and filled out the accompanying profile surveys. These questionnaires are quite in-depth, asking questions on a variety of topics ranging from standard demographics to education and employment, and use of technology. Based on the information collected, it is clear why these panels have become so attractive as a source of responses for market research. However, the quality of data, and the methods of recruitment and retention have been questioned by academic researchers. By joining the panels, we plan to investigate these processes from the inside. In our next newsletter, we’ll share some results of our analysis of the types, quality and frequency of surveys that our staff member completes. Stay tuned!