Announcements

We are very pleased to invite you to attend our Open House on Thursday March 1st. Please drop by M3 2102 any time between 1:00-4:00pm, or join us for an official presentation and ribbon cutting at 1:30 p.m. Refreshments will be served. If you are able to attend, please RSVP to m2martin@uwaterloo.ca.

We are very pleased to announce the appointment of our Interim Director, Dr. Matthias Schonlau. We look forward to working with Matthias with great anticipation. Matthias Schonlau, Ph.D., has joined the faculty as a professor in Statistics. He previously spent 11 years at the RAND Corporation in the U.S.A, and had appointments at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin and the German Institute for Economic Analysis (DIW) amongst others. Dr. Schonlau’s research interests include survey and web survey methodology. At the University of Waterloo he is part of the International Tobacco Control Project (ITC) and he is also working on the analysis of open-ended questions.

Call for research partners: We will be conducting another wave of the Waterloo Region Area Survey this spring. If you are interested in participating, please contact Kathleen McSpurren (kmcsppurr@uwaterloo.ca or extension 38415).

Earlier this year, the Survey Research Centre bid a very fond farewell to our long-standing co-director and co-founder John Goyder, as he retired from the University of Waterloo. John’s guidance over the years has been incredibly valuable, and we wish to thank him for his contribution to our work, and to our reputation.

A conference celebrating Mary Thompson’s career achievements was held from October 27th to 29th, 2011 at the University of Waterloo. The conference, titled Foundations and Frontiers: A Conference Celebrating the Contributions of Mary Thompson to the Statistical Sciences included sessions on a variety of topics presented by high caliber speakers. The first four speakers discussed different areas related to survey research, which was very relevant and beneficial for the SRC staff.

Our senior manager, Kathleen McSpurren, presented a paper at the American Association of Public Opinion Researchers (AAPOR) conference in Phoenix, Arizona in May, 2011. The paper, titled “Effects of Differential Incentives on Responses in Four Countries for a Web-based Follow up Survey: ITC Four-Country Wave 8 Recontact Survey,” focused on data from the International Tobacco Control project that we have been involved with over the past two years. The SRC is grateful to ITC for encouraging this partnership.

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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

Best Practices in Problem Gambling 3
The Survey Research Centre is delighted to once again be working with renowned researcher Dr. Robert Williams on his problem gambling prevalence survey, which will be back at the SRC this spring. This survey continues to provide insight into the best ways to measure the prevalence of problem gambling in any population. This wave of the survey will sample from web panels, with a focus on online gambling.

Legalized Online Gambling Survey
Our second gambling survey this year will ask questions about online gambling in Ontario and the Maritimes. The SRC is very excited to be working with Tara Elton-Marshall and Scott Leatherdale from the PROPEL Centre for Population Health Impact. The survey will be administered to randomly recruited participants and will be conducted at two points in time – first wave will be Spring 2012 and the second wave will be one year later.

Sexual Minority-focused Sports Group Involvement Survey
uWaterloo researcher Steven Mock’s web survey focuses on the recreation and leisure experiences of sexual minority groups in Ontario. Respondents are recruited from a variety of seasonal sports and are asked to participate in one baseline survey and one additional follow-up survey.

OLG II
The Survey Research Centre is very pleased to be working with UW’s Gambling Research Lab for a second time, on a survey of OLG slot machine players. Respondents are recruited for a two-phase study – the first in Ontario casinos and the second when they complete a telephone survey 30 days later.

We are very excited to show off our new space in M3. We have a beautiful new call centre with 18 calling stations, and a great new meeting room with full monitoring capabilities.

Join us on March 1st to celebrate our Open House!
Top 10 Unexpected Research Costs
By Sharon McConnell

Thanks to Dr. Paul McDonald for this idea!

The SRC is a cost recovery agency and charges for the survey research services provided. From time to time, SRC cost estimates are met with surprise in terms of the amount quoted for the cost of a research project, particularly in the case of on-line research. Cost estimates take into consideration a number of factors, and quotes are dependent upon the level of complexity needed to accomplish the research objectives. In survey research, the expression “the devil is in the details” certainly applies – all details matter. Most researchers have in mind the broad research goals, but not all the specific steps and protocols to reach those goals. This article provides a list of 10 factors or details that contribute to the cost of data collection for research projects.

No. 10: Ethics review applications

Submitting a research study for ethics review is a key component of the research process and provides credibility for any survey that is administered among the general population. The SRC will complete and submit applications for ethics review to the University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics when necessary. Having a finely tuned questionnaire, with all the relevant contact documents completed is the most time-consuming aspect of submitting an application. The subsequent feedback and revision process adds to the time needed.

No. 9: The quality of sample lists

The SRC allocates time for cleaning and management of research sample. This involves examining the sample to remove duplicate records and/or records with insufficient contact information, as well as following up with clients or sample suppliers and performing ‘look-ups’ to correct any inaccurate contact information.

No. 8: The amount of sample records available versus the number of completed surveys needed

Survey response rates continue to decline. Response rates for telephone work can range from 20%, to 50%, depending on the population of interest, while typical response rates for on-line studies are anywhere from 10% to 60%. What this means is that if 100 completed on-line surveys are needed for a project, then somewhere between 160 to 1,000 people need to be invited to complete the survey. Sample size requirements may be even larger for hard-to-reach populations, or poor quality sample lists.

No. 7: Survey revisions

Finalizing the survey tool prior to starting survey programming and data collection is the best practice approach and the most cost-effective process for any research project. Taking the time to structure a well-worded survey will pay off in the long run. Re-programming a survey to incorporate revisions is time consuming and costly.

No. 6: Survey formatting

The format of questions is a key component to creating a useful data collection tool, particularly for a self-administered survey (e.g. an on-line or paper survey that is provided to the respondent to complete on their own). The SRC allocates time for properly formatting the survey tool. In terms of on-line surveys, the SRC also spends time to ensure the survey format is consistent across most commonly used web browsers.
No. 5: Testing the survey tool

Properly testing any programmed survey tool is a best practice approach to ensure accurate survey administration. The SRC allocates time for thorough testing of all telephone and on-line surveys – the more complex a survey is, the more time is needed to adequately test routing and computations.

No. 4: Survey length

The length of a survey tool impacts the cost of research projects in a number of ways. The longer the survey tool, the more time required for programming and testing. A longer survey usually results in a lower likelihood that people will participate, requiring more time for data collection and more persistent follow up protocols.

No. 3: Monitoring the data collection process

During data collection, the SRC will conduct on-going survey completion monitoring to ensure that the best quality data is captured. This includes providing regular progress updates to clients and identification and resolution of any technical problems. Studies with longer data collection periods have more time allocated to project management and study administration.

No. 2: Managing respondent technical problems

In self-administered surveys, the researcher has far less control of the respondent’s behaviour. Despite instructions in letters, or providing step by step protocols on a web page, some respondents will not follow directions. With web surveys, this can lead to technical glitches. Additionally, network or software problems can occur. When respondents experience technical problems, they need to be resolved in a timely manner in order to maintain respondent engagement and survey completion. Resolution of respondent technical problems for on-line surveys in particular can involve a great deal of back and forth communication to determine the specific problem and to provide an adequate solution.

No. 1: Data cleaning

SRC best practices include documenting all data issues during data collection, for example, errors made in collecting responses, or changes in respondents’ answers after a response has been recorded. Following completion of data collection, all data issues are properly reviewed and the data is ‘cleaned’ so that the client is provided with a final data file of the highest quality.

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
Voxco – The Answer To Our Software Needs
By Lindsey Webster

In our last newsletter we described the issues with Mixed Mode add-on that we purchased for our WinCATI 4.2 application. We were hopeful that the added features of the system – such as the interchangeability of protocols, sample fields, and combined data sets between telephone and web modes, and the programs email notifications - would make it the ideal solution for the Survey Research Centre. Unfortunately, since the upgrade, the WinCati software has become unreliable. Collected data have gone missing and the vendor support has at times been unable to explain issues and provide adequate solutions. Data collection is our main function at the SRC and we therefore decided to explore other software options.

In May of 2011 the SRC hired a co-op student majoring in Computer Science to help us research and test software alternatives. Many of the top data-collection software packages were compared to find the best software solution that meets the requirements of our research centre. Our requirements included complex sample management, sophisticated supervisory and questionnaire design capabilities, and affordability. Reliable and effective software support was also a primary consideration. Ideally, the new software package would integrate phone and web surveys in a truly “mixed mode” environment. After the evaluation of online information, discussions with software company representatives and live software demonstrations, the Voxco software package stood out as the best solution to meet the needs of the SRC.

Our next step was to reach out to other AASRO (Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations) members to discuss which software packages were being used by other organizations. We found that Sawtooth’s product (WinCATI) is the most commonly used package among AASRO members. The feedback provided by other research organizations aligned with our experience with the software and support.

Voxco is the second most common software package used by AASRO members. The feedback that we received was generally favourable and Voxco was praised for having helpful and responsive technical support, comprehensive training, excellent features and a product that was user-friendly.

A detailed report summarizing our findings on all six software packages, the opinions of other AASRO members, and our resulting recommendation was presented to the SRC’s Board on October 13, 2011. With their support we purchased the Voxco software package in December of 2011.

SRC staff and programmers participated in four days of training to learn the software in early January 2012. Testing has been ongoing since the installation and our first telephone project using Voxco will launch the middle of February, 2012. We are very excited to utilize Voxco’s software and explore all of its features. We are confident that it will fulfill our software needs, enabling us to work more efficiently with minimal technical problems and providing our clients with high quality data and comprehensive reports.
Web Panel Participation
By Megan Martin

In our last newsletter, we promised to provide insider feedback about participating in online survey research panels. Below is a table comparing survey activity and rewards for two well known web panel companies.

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<th>Ipsos I-Say</th>
<th>Global Test Market</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Country of Company</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey invitations received*</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys screened out of</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total points accumulated</td>
<td>6725</td>
<td>1255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of points</td>
<td>1000 points redeemed for $10 incentive</td>
<td>1000 points redeemed for a cheque - approximately $52.00</td>
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| Rewards available        | • Gift cards to online stores like Amazon and iTunes  
                          | • Donations to groups like Doctors Without Borders, Trees for Future and Ronald McDonald Children’s Charities  
                          | • American Express or PayPal cards  
                          | • Cash or cheque | • Cheque |

*as of January 9, 2012

Topics vary with both panels – anything from beer to snack foods to body wash to environmental concerns is a potential survey topic. The questionnaires usually take less than 20 minutes, and generally are quite easy to answer. Many of the surveys require you to listen to or watch commercials, so audio and video capabilities are necessary.

The monetary benefit of participating in these panels really isn’t representative of the amount of time spent completing surveys – the payments amount to around $.03/minute. These incentives are merely a thank you for participation and an encouragement to continue. Though the surveys can be very interesting, it is pretty clear that it’s difficult to make your fortune participating in web panels.

The SRC provides a full range of survey services from consultation on survey design to fieldwork to data analysis. Please contact us for details.