

## Surveys, Polls and Public Policy

WWS 510

Fall 2004

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The aim of the course is to improve students' abilities to understand and critically evaluate surveys and public opinion polls, particularly those used to influence public policy. The course begins with an overview of contrasting perspectives on the role of public opinion in democratic governance. From here we look at the evolution of public opinion polling in the U.S. and other countries. We also examine procedures used for designing representative samples and conducting surveys by telephone, mail and the Internet. The class will visit a major polling operation to get a firsthand look at how they actually work. Students will have the option to (1) write a critical evaluation of a survey or set of surveys related to a particular issue, or (2) design and pretest a survey on a topic that is of interest to them.

### Requirements

1. The course will be run as a seminar that includes a midterm examination (25% of course grade) and a final examination (35%). Each student will write a critical review paper or design a survey on a topic of interest to them and conduct pretest interviews (30%). Students will also be graded on their participation in the regular seminars (10%).

### Required Text

Salant, Priscilla and Don A. Dillman. *How To Conduct Your Own Survey*. New York: John Wiley & Sons. 1994. 90. **Practical Sampling**. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

### Optional Texts

Dillman, Don A. 2000. **Mail and Internet Surveys: The Tailored Design Method**. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

**Readings:** Readings other than main texts will be on reserve at the Donald Stokes Library or on the Internet. Note that all back issues of *Public Opinion Quarterly* from 1937-1999 are available at [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

### Schedule

1. **Introduction and Overview**  
Objectives of the course; the course schedule, readings, student projects.
2. **Public Opinion and Democracy**  
Contrasting views on the role of public opinion in shaping public policy

*Readings:*

Weissberg, Robert. "Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls." *Policy Analysis* No. 402. May 29, 2001.  
<http://www.cato.org/pubs/pas/pa402.pdf>

Warren, Kenneth F. 2001. *In Defense of Public Opinion Polling*. Cambridge: Westview Press. Pp. 45-80.

### 3. Public Opinion and Democracy (2)

#### Readings:

- Herbst, Susan. 2002. "How State-Level Policy Managers 'Read' Public Opinion." Pp. 171-183 in *Navigating Public Opinion*. Jeff Manza, Fay Lomax Cook and Benjamin I. Page (eds.). Oxford University Press.
- Shapiro, Lawrence Y. and Lawrence R. Jacobs. 2002. "Public Opinion, Foreign Policy and Democracy: How Presidents Use Public Opinion." Pp. 184-200 in *Navigating Public Opinion*.

### 4. The Evolution of Survey Research

#### Readings:

- Converse, Jean M. 1987. *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press. Pp. 11-53, 131-161.
- Current Population Survey, "Short History of the CPS." (<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/bhistory.htm>)

### 5. Fundamentals of Questionnaire Design

#### Readings:

- Salant and Dillman, pp. 77-100.

### 6. Measurement Issues

Measurement by fiat; scales and indices

#### Readings:

- Babbie, Earl. 1990. *Survey Research Methods*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing. Pp. 147-173.
- Cicourel, Aaron V. 1964. *Method and Measurement in Sociology*. New York: Free Press. Pp. 1-38.

### 7. Understanding and Measuring Opinions

Response inconsistency; ideology and identity; the don't know option; measuring intensity

- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origin of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 6-52
- Moore, David W. 1997. "Split Sample Experiments: Affirmative Action vs. Special Preferences." *The Gallup Poll Monthly*, December 1997, pp. 25-27.

#### Optional:

- Sudman, Seymour and Norman M. Bradburn. 1982. *Asking Questions: A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. Pp. 1-87, 119-147, 207-228.

### 8. Measuring Race and Ethnicity

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#### Readings:

- Current Population Survey Supplements. Race and Ethnicity: History. (<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/racethn/1995/shistory.htm>).
- Skerry, Peter. 2000. *Counting on the Census?: Race, Group Identity, and the Evasion of Politics*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press. Pp. 1-8, 43-79.
- American Anthropological Association, Response to OMB Directive 15: Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting. (<http://www.aaanet.org/gvt/ombdraft.htm>).

#### Optional:

- Marín, Gerardo and VB Marín. 1991. *Research with Hispanic Populations*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage. Pp. 1-65.
- McKay, Ruth B. et al. 1996. "Translating Survey Questions: Lessons Learned." Pp. 93-104 in *Advances in Survey Research*. MT Braverman and JK Slater (eds.).

### 9. The Psychology of Survey Response

#### Readings:

- Tourangeau, Roger, Lance J. Rips and Kenneth Rasinski. 2000. *The Psychology of Survey Response*. Cambridge: University Press. Pp. 1-61.

### 10. Introduction to Sampling

Probability sampling; Dangers of nonprobability sampling; Obtaining and building sample frames; Determining sample size; Simple random samples

#### Readings:

- Salant and Dillman, Pp. 53-74.

## 11. Complex Sampling and Weighting

Stratified sampling; Multi-stage samples; Cluster samples; Design effects; Weighting.

### Readings:

Henry, Gary T. 1990. *Practical Sampling*. Pp. 60-128.

Current Population Survey, Basic Monthly Survey: Sampling (<http://www.bls.census.gov/cps/bsampdes.htm>)

## 12. Telephone Surveys

### Readings:

Salant and Dillman, pp. 33-51.

Lavrakas, Paul J. 1993. *Telephone Survey Methods*. Newbury Park: Sage. Pp. 27-58, 98-145.

Piekarski, Linda, Gwen Kaplan, and Jessica Prestegaard. "Telephony and Telephone Sampling: The Dynamics of Change." Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research St Petersburg, FL, May 15, 1999. <http://www.worldopinion.com/latenews.taf?f=d&news=3966>

Groves, R.M. 1990. "Theories and Methods of Telephone Surveys." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 16: 221-240.

Conrad, Frederick G. and Michael F. Schober. 2000. "Clarifying Question Meaning in a Household Telephone Survey" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64:1-28.

Van Natta, Jr., Don. Nov. 21, 1999. "Polling's Dirty Little Secret: No Response." *New York Times*.

Keeter, Scott, et al. 2000. "Consequences of Reducing Nonresponse in a National Telephone Survey." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64:125-148.

## 13. Mail Surveys

The Total Design Method (TDM)

### Readings:

Dillman, pp. 79-139, 149-193.

Brennan M. and J. Hoek. 1992. "The Behavior of Respondents, Nonrespondents, and Refusers across Mail Surveys." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 56:4:530-5.

Dillman, pp. 352-433.

Church A.H. 1993. "Estimating the Effect of Incentives on Mail Survey Response Rates: A Meta-Analysis" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57:1:62-79.

## 14. Internet and Web-based Surveys

### Readings:

Couper. Mick, Michael Traugott, and Mark Lamias. 2001. "Web Survey Design and Administration". *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65:230-253.

The Harris Poll Online (<http://www.harrispollonline.com/>).

## 15. In person Interviewing

### Readings:

Gorden, Raymond L. 1980. *Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques, and Tactics*. Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press. Pp. 125-143.

Aquilino W.S. 1993. "Effects of Spouse Presence during the Interview on Survey Responses Concerning Marriage" *Public Opinion Quarterly* 57(3):358-76.

Aquilino W.S. 1994. "Interview Mode Effects in Surveys of Drug and Alcohol Use: A Field Experiment." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 58:2:210-40.

## 16. Coding and Data Reduction

### Readings:

Salant and Dillman, pp. 175-200.

Montgomery A.C. Crittenden K.S. 1977. "Improving Coding Reliability for Open-Ended Questions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 41:2:235-43.

Braverman, Marc T. 1996. "Sources of Survey Error: Implications for Evaluation Studies." Pp. 17-28 in *Advances in Survey Research*. MT Braverman and JK Slater (eds.).

## 17. Presenting the Results

Presenting and describing tables and multivariate models; Calculating and reporting response rates.

### Readings:

Salant and Dillman, pp. 201-214.

Babbie, Pp. 327-335.

### Optional:

“Institutional and Political Factors in Social Experimentation.” 1974. Pp. 228-243 in *Social Experimentation: A Method for Planning and Evaluating Social Intervention*. Edited by H. Riecken and R. Boruch. New York: Academic Press.

American Association for Public Opinion Research. May 1998. Standard Definitions.

([http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey\\_methods/standards\\_and\\_best\\_practices/standard\\_definitions](http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/standard_definitions))

## 18. Pre-election Polls

### Readings:

Weiner, Marc. 2003 (forthcoming). “Pre-election Polls.” *Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*.

Konner, Joan. 2003. “The Case For Caution: This System Is Dangerously Flawed.”. *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 67:5-18.

Frankovic, Kathleen A. 2003. “News Organizations' Responses To The Mistakes Of Election 2000: Why They Will Continue To Project Elections.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 67:19-31.

## 19. Research Ethics

Protecting respondent confidentiality; Disclosure; Institutional oversight.

### Readings:

Seiber, Joel. 1992. *Planning Ethically Responsible Research. A Guide for Student and Internal Review Boards*. Newbury Park: Sage. Pp. 1-63, 111-123.

American Association for Public Opinion Research. “Best Practices for Survey and Public Opinion Research.” (<http://www.aapor.org/ethics/best.html>).

Cohen, Patricia. April 8, 2000. “Oops, Sorry: Seems That My Pie Chart Is Half-Baked.” *New York Times*. P. B7.

Chase, Alston. “Harvard and the Making of the Unabomber.” *The Atlantic Monthly* Vol. 285, no. 6, June 2000, p. 41-65. (<http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/06/chase.htm>).

## 20. The Politics of Census-taking

### Readings:

Anderson, Margo J. 1990. *The American Census: A Social History*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Pp. 1-31, 213-240.

Skerry, Peter. 2000. Pp. 121-177.

## 21. Conducting Surveys in Other Countries

### Readings:

Basañez, Miguel. 2002. “Public Opinion Research in Mexico.”

Tianjian Shi, “Survey Research in China,” in Michael X. Delli Carpini, Leoni Huddy, and Robert Y. Shapiro, eds., *Research in Micropolitics*, vol. 5, New Directions in Political Psychology (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1996).

John W. Hall. 1998. “Procedures For Sampling In Villages That Are Consistent With Probability Sampling.” Princeton: Mathematica Policy Research.”

World Values Survey. <http://wvs.isr.umich.edu/index.html>

Warren, Kenneth F. 2001. *In Defense of Public Opinion Polling*. Cambridge: Westview Press. Pp. 255-283.