Soc 752: Measurement and Questionnaires for Survey Research

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COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course provides an introduction to the conceptual issues raised by conducting measurement using self-reports in surveys, an overview of the literature that addresses theoretical and practical problems in questionnaire design, and practice in developing, reviewing, and writing standardized questions and questionnaires. Particular attention is paid to recent work that draws on cognitive psychology to inform designing standardized instruments. The course is structured around the stages of instrument development: developmental interviewing, question writing, question testing, pretesting, and questionnaire formatting. Issues involved in telephone interviews and computer-assisted interviews will be considered at several points, but the course focuses on face-to-face interviews conducted with paper instruments. The material covered in this course is relevant for standardized measurement in many social research contexts in addition to surveys, such as laboratory experiments.

This course is pre-statistical in the sense that it considers issues that are dealt with before statistical analysis of data begins and in the sense that course assignments require no statistical analysis. The course provides conceptual and practical tools to use in planning and executing your own research.

Lectures assume that you have completed the assigned readings before the lecture, and lectures do not systematically summarize the readings. The schedule of readings given here is fixed, regardless of how much the lectures appear to deviate from the schedule.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND REQUIREMENTS: Course grades are based on 6 assignments. The assignments provide an opportunity to work on a single problem through most stages of questionnaire design. For the final project you revise the assignments and prepare a final, complete, instrument. The reports required with the assignments must be written in a professional style and typed, and all instrument (questionnaire) drafts must be typed.

Six Assignments. You choose to work on a topic that I assign--or select one of your own--and the assignments lead you through the steps of developing a complete, though limited, instrument on that topic. I will hand out the instructions for all the assignments during the first week of class. Each assignment requires drafting a small portion of an instrument, testing it in two interviews, revising it, and writing a brief report. In the last assignment you put the pieces of the questionnaire together into a complete instrument, pretest it, and write a final report. You must complete all six assignments.

Human Subjects. This course involves exercises in which you develop a standardized
instrument. As part of those exercises, you try out your instrument in approximately 2 interviews in each of several assignments. You must realize several things:

- You may conduct these interviews as part of the course without obtaining a separate approval for your research project from the IRB, as long as you do not plan to disseminate the results of that research. If you plan to do so, you must notify me and, under the direction of the faculty advisor for that research, obtain IRB approval **before** beginning the interviews.
- Regardless of whether you are conducting these interviews only as part of this course or to obtain knowledge that you will disseminate, you must complete the tutorial at: [http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/humansubs/training/UWHSTraining.html](http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/humansubs/training/UWHSTraining.html).
- You must send me an email confirming that you have completed this tutorial by 31 January.
- You must obtain informed consent (see below) from everyone you interview and protect their anonymity. No information that would identify the person you interviewed should be attached to their answers.

**Informed Consent.** The following is an excerpt from the University’s Human Subjects website ([http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/humansubs/sbs/sbs-guidelines.html#consent](http://www.rsp.wisc.edu/humansubs/sbs/sbs-guidelines.html#consent)):

> All research approved by the IRB must obtain informed consent from subjects through a process that includes either the use of a written consent form or an alternative oral procedure. In all cases, the following eight elements of consent must be included in the written consent forms or as part of oral consent procedure:

1. A statement that the study involves research that includes an explanation of the purpose(s) of the research, the expected duration of the subject’s participation, and a description of the research procedures (e.g. interview, observation, survey research).

2. A description of any reasonably foreseeable risks or discomforts for the subjects. Risks should be explained to subjects in language they can understand and be related to everyday life.

3. A description of any benefits to the subject and/or to others that may reasonably be expected from the research.

4. Disclosure of alternative procedures, as appropriate.

5. A statement describing the extent, if any, to which the confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained.

6. For research involving more than minimal risk, a statement whether compensation is available if injury occurs and, if it is, what it consists of and from whom further information may be obtained.
7. An explanation of whom to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research and research subject’s rights. The IRB requires that the name and phone number of the responsible faculty member as well as an IRB office phone number be included for these purposes. In addition, if the project involves student research, the name and phone number of the student's advisor/mentor also be included.

8. A statement that research participation is voluntary and the subject may withdraw from participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled. If the subject is a patient or client receiving medical, psychological, counseling or other treatment services, there should be a statement that withdrawal will not jeopardize or affect any treatment or services the subject is currently receiving or may receive in the future. If the subject is a prisoner, there should be a statement that participation or nonparticipation in the research will have no effect on the subject's current or future status in the prison. If a survey instrument or interview questions are used and some questions deal with sensitive issues (including but not limited to, illegal behavior, mental status, sexuality or sexual abuse, drug or alcohol use) the subjects should be told they may refuse to answer individual questions.

**General Instructions.** Follow guidelines to be distribute d separately. Be sure to keep your assignments and project if you think you will want to ask me for a letter of recommendation later based on your work in this course.

**Grading.** I deduct a letter grade for each day an assignment is late. I drop the lowest grade from the first 5 assignments, and the 4 best grades each contribute 20% to the final grade. The final assignment contributes 20% to the final grade.

**Auditors.** Students auditing or sitting in on the class must present discussion questions and complete a portion of assignment 1 (if doing own topic) and the instrument portion of assignments 2 through 5. Auditors need not write the reports or complete the final assignment. I will review these assignments, but not comment on them systematically or grade them.

**Criteria for Evaluation.** In evaluating class assignments I consider how well the work applies relevant concepts and findings presented in lectures and readings. The reports should explicitly refer to relevant results from the readings and show that you have read and understand the material; I consider how well you deploy the readings when I grade the reports. In grading the instruments, I also consider the practicality, comprehensiveness, and creativity of the solution to the problem presented in the assignments. Finally, I take into account how well you present your solution--whether the presentation is organized, clear, and professional.

**Class Participation.** For every class, beginning in the second week, I will assign several students to prepare discussion questions based on articles from the syllabus. This is a required assignment, but will not be formally graded. If your grade for the class as a whole is "borderline," I take contributions to class discussion into account in assigning the final grade. The number of articles each student will be responsible for depends on how many register for the class.
No incompletes. All assignments must be completed on time.

READINGS: Readings average 80-100 pages each week.

Required books. Copies of books with large portions assigned are on reserve at Helen C. White and are for sale at Canterbury Books (315 W. Gorham at State St.; 258-9911; email: books@madisoncanterbury.com; Mon-Sat 9 a.m.-9 p.m., Sunn 11 a.m. - 6 p.m. Some of the books are also on reserve in the Social Science Reading Room (SSRR) on the 8th floor of Social Science building.

NOTE: Canterbury receipts may be saved and cashed in (they are transferrable) for a night in their “inn,” so keep your receipts. If you don’t want yours, I can collect them to turn into the department to use to house visitors to the department. Or, if I get enough for one night, I’ll pick a student in the class at random to receive them.

Required book selections and articles. Articles and chapters from other books are marked * in the course outline. A coursepack with these materials is for sale in the Social Science Copy Center on the 6th floor. A copy of the coursepack is on reserve in the SSRR.

The Social Science Reading Room is on the 8th floor of the Social Science building. Take the rear elevator.

NOTE: All articles and overheads on reserve in the SSRR are my personal copies. Please do not write on them. As a courtesy to your colleagues, if you need to keep an article for more than 1 day, please make a copy of it.

Required Books


Stone, Arthur A., Jaylan S. Turkkan, Christine A. Bachrach, Jared B. Jobe, Howard S.


**Additional Sources**

The following additional sources may be useful. Most are on reserve at Helen C. White.


Lyberg, Lars, Paul Biemer, Martin Collins, Edith de Leeuw, Cathryn Dippo, Norbert Schwarz,


**Schedule of Assignments.**

- **Week 3** Assignment 1 Analysis of Survey Concepts
- **Week 5** Assignment 2 Developmental Interviews
- **Week 8** Assignment 3 Questions about Events and Behaviors
- Spring recess between weeks 8 and 9, week of 17 March
- **Week 11** Assignment 4 Questions about Subjective Things
- **Week 13** Assignment 5 Testing and Revision
- **12 May, 10 a.m.** Final Project Complete Instrument and Report

*Turn in assignments during class or at CDE office, 4412 Social Science.*
**Topics and Readings**

The course outline lists required readings. Readings in the coursepack are marked *. I use the following abbreviations:

- **ASR** American Sociological Review
- **JASA** Journal of the American Statistical Association
- **JOS** Journal of Official Statistics
- **JMR** Journal of Marketing Research
- **POQ** Public Opinion Quarterly
- **SMR** Sociological Methods and Research
- **SM** Sociological Methodology

**Weeks 1-- Course Introduction and Measurement in Surveys**


**Weeks 2 and 3 – Question Development**

**The Response Process**


**Developmental Interviewing**

Weeks 4 to 7 -- Questions about Events and Behaviors

Questions about Events and Behaviors: Cognition and Memory


Questions about Events and Behaviors: Errors


**Questions about Events and Behaviors: Threatening Questions**


**Questions about Events and Behaviors: Voting**

Questions about Events and Behaviors: Writing Other Questions


Design and Format of an Instrument


Weeks 8 to 11 – Questions about Subjective Things

Cognitive Processes


Questions about Subjective Things: Choices and Ratings


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**Acquiescence**


**Questions about Subjective Things: Writing Questions**


**Week 12 -- Question Testing**


**Week 13 -- Other Topics**

**Social Characteristics: Race and Ethnicity**


**Social Characteristics: Household Composition**


**Social Characteristics: Income**

New York: John Wiley & Sons.


Social Characteristics: Other


Design and Format of an Instrument


Week 14 -- Interviewing and Mode of Interview


**Week 15 -- Ethical Issues**


