SurvMeth 988.206 Writing Questions for Surveys

Summer Institute
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MTWR
8-12:30 CDT
9-1:30 EDT

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This short course distills research about survey questions to principles that can be applied to write survey questions that are clear and obtain reliable answers. Sessions combine lecture with group exercises and discussion. The lecture provides guidelines for writing and revising survey questions and illustrates how to revise troubled questions. Sessions consider both questions about events and behaviors and questions about subjective phenomena (such as attitudes, evaluations, and internal states).

OTHER RELEVANT CLASSES: This Course complements SURVMETH988.223, Introduction to Questionnaire Design; 988.222 Intermediate Questionnaire Design

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
- Introduce a structural analysis of parts of a survey question
- Introduce cognitive interviewing as a method for testing survey questions
- Describe guidelines for diagnosing problems in survey questions and writing new survey questions
- Focus on the structure and wording of survey questions, whether for interviewer-administered or self-administered instruments
- Provide an opportunity to apply the guidelines and principles during in-class exercises
- Focus on improving individual questions and sets of questions.
- Summarize research that underlies key decisions in writing survey questions.

READINGS BEFORE CLASS:
Reading these two articles before the class will help you get the most from this short course.


OTHER EXERCISES: Exercises and discussion in class complement the lecture. There will be a brief assignment to be completed before the class and others to be completed overnight during the class. These exercises are designed to help you integrate the course material.

READINGS: Students are asked to do the readings. Completing the readings will greatly enhance what you learn from the course.

COURSE CREDIT: 1 credit is available for students who have paid tuition. If you are taking the course for credit, contact the Summer Institute and the instructor in advance. Those taking the course for credit are required to do the readings, and they must complete a substantial assignment 1 week after the end of the course.

COMMUNICATION: Always begin subject line of email with “Summer Institute Student,” or I might not find your message.
COURSE WEBSITE: The course website will be on CANVAS which can be accessed through (https://umich.instructure.com/courses/36226/), once the website is opened. Most readings will be available there.

INSTRUCTOR: Schaeffer is Sewell Bascom Professor of Sociology, Emerita, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. At the University of Wisconsin, she also served as Interim Associate Vice Chancellor for Research in the Social Sciences and Faculty Director of the UW Survey Center. She served as President of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) from 2019-2020. Her website is here: https://sociology.wisc.edu/staff/schaeffer-nora-cate-2/

Readings

Most readings are available in Canvas. A few must be obtained using a web link because of restrictions from the publisher.

Some useful resources for instrument design can be found here: https://sociology.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/466/2019/12/QuexResourcesForStudents_V21.pdf

Key Classic and Current Sources for Later Exploration


Course Outline

*Priority readings are marked with * -- I know that you don’t have time for everything in a week - but try to read these articles!

Day 1
Lecture:  Fundamentals
Readings: Overview, read Schaeffer & Presser 2003 and Schaeffer & Dykema 2020 if you did not read in advance


Day 2
Readings: Overview (continued), Questions about Events and Behaviors


Day 3
Readings: Overview (continued - spreading these out!)


Day 4
Lecture:  Events and Behaviors, Questions about Subjective Things
Readings: Questions about Subjective Things