Social Science Survey Methodology Training: Understanding the Past and Assessing the Present to Shape Our Future

Scott Fricker
(Office of Survey Methods Research, Bureau of Labor Statistics)

Matt Jans
(California Health Interview Survey, UCLA Center for Health Policy Research)

Mikelyn Meyers
(Center for Survey Measurement, U.S. Census Bureau)
Overview

- What is social science survey methodology?
- What are the strengths of current training and what gaps do we see?
- Our “ideal” program of study
- Conclusions and future training directions
Social Science Survey Methodology

Survey Methodology
- Study of systematic and random errors in survey measurement and estimation
- Focus on error reduction and adjustment
- Interdisciplinary, applied/solution-focused

Social Science Survey Methodologists
- Identify with and apply principles/methods from behavioral and social science disciplines
- Study social interactions and psychological processes to improve survey data collection and data quality
Social Science Survey Methodology, cont.

- Informed by social science concepts
  - Social exchange theory (sociology)
  - Satisficing (economics/cognitive psychology)
  - Judgment heuristics (psychology)
  - Visibility/affordance (HCI)
  - Semantics/pragmatics (psycholinguistics)

- Survey methodology theories and frameworks
  - TSE
  - Response process models
  - Leverage-salience theory
Methods:

- Trained in methods used in survey practice AND in methods to evaluate those methods
- Qualitative methods
  - Participant observation, ethnology, conversation analysis
- Quantitative methods
  - Experimental design and analysis, psychometric analysis
Current Social Science Survey Methodology Training

- An applied field with an academic orientation
  - Training at the graduate level (MS, Ph.D.) or professional development contexts
    - University-based programs: JPSM, MPSM, SRAM, UCONN, UIC
    - Professional conferences, short-courses, seminars

- What existing programs do well
  - Strong foundations in survey methodology and applied statistics
  - Increasing focus on hybrid training
  - Access to educators who are practitioners and researchers
Training Gaps - 1

- Full survey life-cycle experience
  - Effective methodologists are knowledgeable about entire survey life-cycle (from concept development and testing through sampling, collection, estimation, dissemination)
  - Practical experience enriches theoretical training
  - Familiarity with activities, culture and constraints at each stage
  - Design seminars, practica, internships important!
Training Gaps - 2 & 3

- Multilingual/multicultural survey research
  - Only SRAM has a regular course on this topic
  - Large and growing population can’t be interviewed in English
  - Other cultural factors affect sampling and measurement

- Qualitative research methods
  - Quantitative methods dominate most survey programs
  - Yet there are rich, well-developed qualitative methods that complement quantitative techniques
  - More emphasis on mixed-method approaches
**Training Gaps - 4 & 5**

- The balance of social and statistical science
  - One can have a productive social science survey methods career with no/little statistical training
  - But the modern social science survey methodologist needs to have firm grounding in statistical methods and experimental design
  - Focus should be on applied uses of statistics (especially at the MA/MS level) and on basic research (Ph.D.)

- Cross-pollination from other disciplines
  - Active incorporation of contemporary theories and findings are needed to keep SSSM training paradigm current
Our Ideal Program

- The usual suspects (data collection, questionnaire design, cognitive/social aspects of measurement, statistical training)
- Courses on qualitative methods and UX (3 credits)
- Disciplinary specialization course (3 credits)
- Application and practicum courses (6 credits)
- Summer Internship
- Capstone project/thesis
Social science survey methodologists bring a unique perspective

Our field is fairly cohesive, if small and in its infancy

More interdisciplinary training will keep field in synch with contemporary science

Need to keep attuned to societal, technological, and communication changes that affect survey practice
Contact Information

Scott Fricker
fricker.scott@bls.gov

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