**Using Surveys to Motivate Student Research**

February 5, 2010

Presentation prepared for the Cornell Center for Teaching Excellence, Teaching with Technology Series

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**Contents:**

# GOVT 3212

**Public Opinion and Representation**
**Spring Semester 2009**

# Research Paper Assignment

**Proposal Due:** Thursday, February 26 (at the start of class)
**Research Paper Due:** Thursday, April 30 (at the start of class)

One of the major requirements for this course is that you write a research paper of about 10–15 pages that reports on original empirical research. For this paper, you must collect your own public opinion data, analyze the data, and report on the findings.

You must use one of the following approaches to collect your public opinion data: in–depth interviews, focus groups, a structured survey, or media content analysis. You may conduct research on any topic in political life you choose.

Your paper should include five sections:

1. Introduction: Present your research question, the motivation for researching this question, and a concise summary of the subsequent sections.

2. Literature Review: Discuss the existing literature which relates to your research question and why this literature does not sufficiently answer your research question.

3. Theory or Hypothesis: Present your answer to the research question.

4. Analysis: Discuss the methods you used to collect the public opinion data, and why they were appropriate for exploring your research question. This section should also discuss the results of your analysis. This section will be the heart of your paper; the majority of your paper should be devoted to making sense of your results in a meaningful way.

5. Conclusion: Briefly summarize your findings and then discuss the broader implications of your results. The conclusion should also discuss any limitations of the paper and avenues for future research.

The type of data that you collect will depend upon your research question. If you are interested in the frames used by the media in covering the war in Iraq, then a content analysis would be most appropriate. If you are interested in what students think about a particular policy or issue, then a survey might be the most appropriate. If you want to

probe how different groups think about a particular topic, then in–depth interviews or focus groups might be best.

The amount of data you collect will also depend on your question and method. For in–depth interviewing, you must interview at least ten people. For focus groups, you must conduct at least two groups, with a total of at least ten participants each. For content analysis of newspaper or electronic media, your sample must include at least 50 items (e.g., 50 articles). A structured survey should include at least 50 respondents. Of course, in most cases, exceeding these minimum requirements will be desirable.

## Protection of Human Subjects Involved in Research

It is vitally important to follow the letter and spirit of the regulations governing the protection of human subjects. I will lecture in class on these rules and their rationale. In addition, I will distribute a copy of *The Belmont Report*, which summarizes the ethical principals underlying this sort of research.

The most important implications for your projects are that you:

- May *not* interview people on a "sensitive" topic, such as sexuality, drug use, or the like.

- Must collect your data anonymously, which means that you do not record the respondents' names or other identifying information.

- Must inform respondents that they may refuse to participate, may discontinue participation at any time, and may skip individual questions that they do not wish to answer.

- Must obtain verbal or written consent from respondents that they understand this and that they agree to participate.

- May *not* interview people with a diminished capacity to offer their consent. *This includes minors: all your research respondents must be at least 18 years old.*

If you have any questions about these procedures, please see me, and/or visit the website of the Cornell Committee on Human Subjects at:
`http://www.osp.cornell.edu/Compliance/UCHS/Guidance.htm`

*Note that this assignment is covered by an overall application to the UCHS; you do **not** need to fill out an application with UCHS.*

## The Paper Proposal (Due Thursday, February 26)

The paper proposal, of approximately 2 pages, should be organized according to the following sections:

- **Research question**

- The **motivation** for researching this topic

- Detailed description of the **research design**. For example:

  - If you plan on doing a content analysis, what media sources will you examine and what specifically will you code for?
  - If you are planning to do structured interviews, focus groups, or surveys, how many people will you be talking with, how will you recruit them, and what kind of questions will you ask?
  - What type of analysis might you do once you have collected the data?
  - It should be clear from the research design how you will be able to answer your research question with the data you collect.

- Estimated **time line** for when you will complete each aspect of the project

- Preliminary **bibliography**.

- **Human Subjects Statement:** Indicate that you have attended the in–class lecture on the protection of human subjects, that you have read and understood *The Belmont Report*, and that you intend to comply with the guidelines and regulations related to the protection of human subjects.

**Your research paper topics must be approved. You *may not* begin collecting any data until your proposal has been approved.**

## Final Paper (Due April 30)

Papers should be about 10–15 pages long and should include a separate title page and a separate reference section. Papers must be double–spaced and pages should be numbered. Your name should *only* appear on the title page.

# GOVT 3212
## Methodology Books on Reserve in Uris Library

**OF GENERAL UTILITY**

Wolcott, Harry F. *Writing up qualitative research* Newbury Park, Calif. : Sage Publications, c1990.
>    This may help you think about how to report your findings

**STRUCTURED SURVEYS**

*The Sage Survey Kit*
>    Volume 1: The Survey Handbook
>    Volume 2: How to Answer Survey Questions
>    Volume 3: How to Conduct Self-Administered and Mail Surveys
>    Volume 4: How to Conduct Interviews by Telephone and in Person
>    Volume 5:  How To Design Surveys
>    Volume 8: How to Analyze Survey Data
>    Volume 9: How to Report on Surveys.

>    These volumes are part of a comprehensive kit on designing, conducting, analyzing, and reporting on survey research.  Much of the material may be more detailed or technical than you need; nevertheless these are a useful resource.

Converse, Jean M. *Survey questions: handcrafting the standardized questionnaire.* Beverly Hills : Sage Publications, c1986.

>    A useful, short book on designing survey questions and questionnaires.

You may also want to search the Roper Center website (http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/) for examples of previously used survey questions. (Go to Data Access / iPOLL Dataset / logon; or use the link on blackboard)

**FOCUS GROUPS**

The Sage Focus Group Kit

>    Volume 1. The Focus Group Guidebook   David L. Morgan
>    Volume 2. Planning Focus Groups   David L. Morgan
>    Volume 3. Developing Questions For Focus Groups   Richard A. Krueger
>    Volume 4. Moderating Focus Groups   Richard A. Krueger
>    Volume 6. Analyzing & Reporting Focus Group Results   Richard A. Krueger

>    Again, this is a wealth of information, and a very helpful resource.

**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING**

Seidman, Irving. *Interviewing as qualitative research: a guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* New York : Teachers College Press, c1998. 2nd ed.

Wengraf, Tom. *Qualitative research interviewing: biographic narrative and semi-structured methods* Thousand Oaks, Calif. : SAGE, 2001.

 (Also, the Jennifer Hochschild reading from the syllabus.)

**CONTENT ANALYSIS**

Krippendorff, Klaus. *Content analysis: an introduction to its methodology.* Beverly Hills : Sage Publications, c1980.

Weber, Robert Philip. *Basic content analysis* Newbury Park, Calif. : Sage Publications, c1990. 2nd ed.
      (Also available online at http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/ebooks.cgi?bookid=24692 or via the link on blackboard)

Riffe, Daniel et al. *Analyzing media messages: using quantitative content analysis in research* Mahwah, NJ: L. Erlbaum, 1998.
      (Also available online at http://campusgw.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/ebooks.cgi?bookid=19411 or via the link on blackboard)

**Resources on Survey Research and Polling**

*An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis* by Herbert F. Weisberg, Jon A Kronsick, and Bruce d. Bowen (Sage 1996) offers an excellent introduction to surveys. I have used this in my undergraduate courses.

Below, I have listed links to in-line resources regarding surveys.

American Association for Public Opinion Research: Frequently Asked Questions about Polls and Surveys

http://www.aapor.org/Poll_andamp_Survey_FAQs/1927.htm

Poynter's News University: Understanding and Interpreting Polls. This is a 3 hour on-line course designed to provide journalists with the information they need about polls.

http://www.newsu.org/courses/understanding-and-interpreting-polls

This links to the document, "What is a Survey?", first published by the American Statistical Association.

http://www.whatisasurvey.info/

This is a website for a course offered by Dr. Ruth A. Palmquist of the University of Texas. The website includes relevant information about surveys as well as numerous links to informational on surveys and examples of survey research.

http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~palmquis/courses/survey.html