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Getting Started with Research Surveys

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Creating Research Surveys

Debbie Ginsberg

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Research Survey Timeline

Surveys often take a long time to prepare. Be sure to allow as much time as possible for each stage.

1. Plan – establish the foundation for the survey
2. Draft – create the initial questions and add them to your survey tool
3. Test – ensure the questions and tool work as expected
4. Edit – revise the survey as needed
5. Distribute – respondents answer the questions
6. Analyze – determine the meaning of the results
7. Write up – present the results to a wider community

If you plan to submit your survey to the IRB, this can add many weeks to your timeline.

Important Survey Considerations – Planning the Survey

Establish responsibility

Who will handle each part of the timeline?

Establish the audience for the survey & find respondents

Who will take the survey?

- Known group
- Students
- Focus groups
- Random sample – can be compiled using survey panels or Mechanical Turk

Determine the method the survey will use

Will the survey be distributed in:

- Print
- Online
- In person
- By phone

What technologies are available to your respondents? Will the technology used skew the results?

Determine the timing of the survey

Will time of day or time of year affect the results of the survey? When are your respondents most likely to respond to the survey?

Writing Survey Questions

What kinds of questions will you ask?

- Objective v. subjective questions
- Open v. closed questions

Question Types

What format will your data take?

- Text entry – Can collect more information, but might be skipped; hard to normalize
- Multiple choice – Easier to analyze, but results may not reflect all available options
- Matrix (table) – Concise, but may be confusing to answer
- Other types

How will the language used in the questions affect the results? Questions work best when they are:

- Comprehensible- Respondent understands the question
- Comfortable – Respondent has few qualms about answering the question
- Consistent-- Wording and terminology are the same throughout the survey
- Retrievable – Respondents can remember the information needed to answer

Survey Tools

Online Tools for Surveys

- SurveyMonkey – Professional accounts are \$300; free accounts available
- Qualtrics – Chicago-Kent has access to a limited number of accounts; free accounts available
- Google Forms – useful for very basic research surveys; free with a Google account

Tools for analyzing data

- Basic: Excel
- Advanced: Stata, SPSS, SAS

Resources

Online Survey Design Guide, University of Maryland, http://lap.umd.edu/survey_design/index.html.

Brendan O'Connor, "Comparison of data analysis packages: R, Matlab, SciPy, Excel, SAS, SPSS, Stata," available at <http://brenocon.com/blog/2009/02/comparison-of-data-analysis-packages-r-matlab-scipy-excel-sas-spss-stata/> (Feb. 23, 2009 with a July 2009 update).

Find more resources I compiled at <http://pear.ly/SEy9>.