Web Survey Methodology and Online Panels with practical survey programming

SURV 656
2 credits/4 ECTS
Winter 2018/2019

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Short Course Description
The course introduces the students to the fundamental concepts of web surveys and online panels. The course is organized in three main sections which follow the way a proper web survey is organized: pre-fielding, fielding, and post fielding.

Course and Learning Objectives
By the end of the course, students will...

- know if a web survey is appropriate for the target population of a research project
- be able to manage the entire process of collecting data via a web survey
- have the mental tools to design a questionnaire to be fielded online
- have a better understanding on online panels and how to use them
- know where to find answers to questions related to web surveys and online data collection
- learn what aspects of web surveys still deserve more research
- learn how to program a web survey

The last two weeks of the course are reserved for the students to program and field (to the other students) a web survey using a web survey platform. The student can use either SurveyMonkey or Qualtrics who kindly provided free licenses for the entire two months of the class. As an alternative LimeSurvey pro is also available as their pro version allows to collect 25 survey completes per month.
Prerequisites
SURV 400 Fundamentals of Surveys and Data Science or
SURV 623 Data Collection Methods or
Permission from instructor due to demonstrated knowledge of total survey error

Class Structure and Course Concept
This is an online course using a flipped classroom design. It covers the same material and content as an on-site course but runs differently. In this course, you are responsible for watching video-recorded lectures and reading the required literature for each unit and then “attending” mandatory weekly one-hour online meetings where students have the chance to discuss the materials from a unit with the instructor. Just like in an on-site course, homework will be assigned and graded and there will be a final exam at the end of the course.

Although this is an online course where students have more freedom in when they engage with the course materials, students are expected to spend the same amount of time overall on all activities in the course – including preparatory activities (readings, studying), in-class-activities (watching videos, participating in online meetings), and follow-up activities (working on assignments and exams) – as in an on-site course. As a rule of thumb, for each credit offered by a course, students can expect to spend one hour per week on in-class activities and three hours per week on out-of-class activities over the span of a full 12-week term. This is a 2-credit course that runs for 8 weeks. Hence, the total average workload is about 12 hours per week.

The last two weeks of classes are self-taught (no video lectures) as the student will need to program and field a web survey using a web survey software as explained above. Given the extensive and up to date help centers of both survey platforms, there will be no video classes on how to use such platforms. Instructors will be available for questions over email in case the student could not find an answer in the help centers. Students are also encouraged to discuss online survey programming issues among themselves as it has been found very beneficial in past experiences.

Mandatory Weekly Online Meetings
Friday 8:00 AM EST/2:00 PM CET starting January 18, 2019

Meetings will be held online through Zoom for the first 6 weeks of classes. Follow the link to the meeting sessions on the course website on https://www.elms.umd.edu/. If video participation via Internet is not possible, arrangements can be made for students to dial in and join the meetings via telephone.
In preparation for the weekly online meetings, students are expected to watch the lecture videos and read the assigned literature before the start of the meeting. In addition, students are encouraged to post questions about the materials covered in the videos and readings of the week in the forum before the meetings (deadline for posting questions is two days before the online meetings, on each Wednesday).

Students have the opportunity to use the Zoom meeting room set up for this course to connect with peers outside the scheduled weekly online meetings (e.g., for study groups). Students are encouraged to post the times that they will be using the room to the course website forum to avoid scheduling conflicts. Students are not required to use Zoom and can of course use other online meeting platforms such as Google Hangouts or Skype.

**Grading**
Grading will be based on:
- 6 homework assignments (worth 60%)
- Participation in the weekly online meetings (10% of grade): engagement in discussions during the meetings and submission of questions via forum/email
- Final Exam (10% short research project + 20% web survey programming)

Each assignment will be due three days after the corresponding online meeting (deadline is on each Monday starting with the 21st of January, 5:30 PM EST/11:30 PM CET). Exact dates are indicated in the syllabus and on the Canvas page. Extensions will be granted sparingly and are at the instructor's discretion.

**Technical Equipment Needs**
The learning experience in this course will mainly rely on the online interaction between students and the instructor during the weekly online meetings. Therefore, we encourage all students in this course to use a web camera and a headset. Decent quality headsets and webcams are available for less than $20 each. We ask students to refrain from using built-in webcams and speakers on their desktops or laptops. We know from our experience in previous online courses that this will reduce the quality of video and audio transmission and therefore will decrease the overall learning experience for all students in the course. In addition, we suggest that students use a wired connection (LAN), if available, when connecting to the online meetings. Wireless connections (WLAN or WIFI) are usually less stable and might be dropped.

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1 Each student can obtain a maximum of 3 points each week for participation (one point for submitting questions, one point for attendance and one point for active participation/engagement). The student will receive the full score if he or she obtains a total of at least 6 points after the 4 weeks.
It is also a good idea to disconnect other devices from your WIFI router during the class such as tablets and other smartphones, to increase speed. Finally, pausing syncing of Dropbox, Google backup and Sync, or Microsoft OneDrive also helps. Believe or not, restarting the router is another way to increase the speed of your connection. You can always perform a speed test to test your connection using, for example, www.speedtest.net. Many internet services provide a higher download speed, than upload speed. In order to ask questions, you will need to have an upload speed of at least 3-4 MegaBits.

Long Course Description
Web surveys appeared soon after the web was launched, at the beginning of the 1990s, and today they are the prevailing mode of survey data collection. With them, it has become very easy to create a survey, almost as simple as writing and sending an email. Correspondingly, sometimes it appears that basic computer literacy is not only the necessary, but also the sufficient skill for conducting a web survey.

However, conducting web surveys raises numerous practical and conceptual questions: Is a web survey suitable for my research problem? How do I recruit respondents from the general population? Can I generalize the obtained results if survey participants come from online social media? How many people can I expect to answer my survey? Which strategy will assure enough cooperation? How much time can a web questionnaire take? Should respondents be forced to answer every question? How do I select the right web survey software? How do I adapt to respondents answering from a smartphone?

There are hundreds of questions like these and competent responses require the understanding of many issues, from changing technologies to various methodological specifics. Very often, there are no simple answers. Common sense alone is not enough for many of these situations.

This course presents a dedicated treatment of web survey methodology, bringing evidence-based and comprehensive insight into all aspects of the web survey process” (Callegaro, Lozar-Manfreda & Vehovar, 2015, p. XI).

By carefully reviewing all the evidence-based research for the three steps to manage a web survey (pre-fielding, fielding, and post-fielding), the students will learn how to run a web survey from the research idea to the final steps of data collection. To give students practical skills that they can apply right after the class, a web survey programming exercise will be part of the final grade. Thanks to the cooperation of SurveyMonkey, Qualtrics and LimeSurvey, the students will be able to program a medium to complex survey using one of two survey platform leaders in the industry.

It is also impossible to talk about web surveys without talking about online panels, online communities, and online pools of respondents. For this reasons, two classes will be dedicated to the latest findings about online panels, their usage and
popularity, their strengths and limitations, and how the industry is handling online panels and sample sources.

**Practical web survey programming**

The students are expected to program a medium to complex survey using either Qualtrics, SurveyMonkey, or LimeSurvey. Please choose one platform and email Vlad Achimescu so he can provide you for a temporarily 2 months login to the full version of the software thanks to generosity of Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey. For LimeSurvey you can sign up for a free Pro version of the tool with the only limitation that you won’t be able to send your survey to more than 25 people per month.

More details of the survey programming exercise are included at the end of the document

What is important is to choose a survey platform already the first week of class so everything that is being taught can be “translated” into the survey platform of your choice.

**Readings**

**Primary readings will be from the following volumes:**

Link to [Sage book page](https://www.sagepub.com/).  

Link to [Wiley book page](https://www.wiley.com/).  

Additional required and recommended readings will be made available on the course website: [https://www.elms.umd.edu](https://www.elms.umd.edu)

**Academic Conduct**

Clear definitions of the forms of academic misconduct, including cheating and plagiarism, as well as information about disciplinary sanctions for academic misconduct may be found at  

[https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf](https://www.president.umd.edu/sites/president.umd.edu/files/documents/policies/III-100A.pdf) (University of Maryland) and
Knowledge of these rules is the responsibility of the student and ignorance of them does not excuse misconduct. The student is expected to be familiar with these guidelines before submitting any written work or taking any exams in this course. Lack of familiarity with these rules in no way constitutes an excuse for acts of misconduct. Charges of plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct will be dealt with very seriously and may result in oral or written reprimands, a lower or failing grade on the assignment, a lower or failing grade for the course, suspension, and/or, in some cases, expulsion from the university.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities
In order to receive services, students at the University of Maryland must contact the Disability Support Services (DSS) office to register in person for services. Please call the office to set up an appointment to register with a DSS counselor. Contact the DSS office at 301.314.7682; http://www.counseling.umd.edu/DSS/.

Students at the University of Mannheim should contact the Commissioner and Counsellor for Disabled Students and Students with Chronic Illnesses at http://www.uni-mannheim.de/studienbueros/english/counselling/disabled_persons_and_persons_with_chronic_illnesses/.

Course Evaluation
In an effort to improve the learning experience for students in our online courses, students will be invited to participate in an online course evaluation at the end of the course (in addition to the standard university evaluation survey). Participation is entirely voluntary and highly appreciated.

Class Schedule
Canvas pages for each week, containing video lectures, slides, materials and assignments will be released one week before each video lecture, on Friday.

Assignments are due three days after each online meeting (on Monday). Questions should be posted on the Forum two days before each online meeting (on Wednesday).

*Please note that assignments and dates are subject to change. Information (e.g., articles and assignments) posted to the course website supersedes the information noted here.*
Unit 1. Web surveys, mode and sampling

Learning targets
By the end of this unit, you will know...

- Advantages and limitations of web surveys
- Applications of web surveys
- Mode elaboration
- Mixed modes surveys with a web component
- Sampling for web surveys
- List samples
- Intercept web surveys

Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): released on Friday, January 11, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, January 16, 2019

Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):
- Friday, January 18, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

Assignment 1:
- Released: Friday, January 11, 2019
- Due: Monday, January 21, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Readings:

Required readings:

From textbook:
Chapter 1: Survey Research and Web Surveys
Chapter 2.1: Mode elaboration
Chapter 2.2: Sampling

Additional required readings:


Recommended readings (not mandatory):


Unit 2: Online panels and convenience samples of internet users

**Learning targets**
By the end of this unit, you will know...
- How online panels came about
- How online panels are built
- Probability vs. non-probability online panels
- Panel maintenance and type of studies possible for online panels
- Convenience samples of internet users to complete surveys

**Readings:**

**Required readings:**


**Recommended readings (not mandatory):**


Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): released on Friday, January 18, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, January 23, 2019
Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):
- Friday, January 25, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

Assignment 2:
- Released: Friday, January 18, 2019
- Due: Monday, January 28, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Unit 3. Questionnaires for web surveys and paradata

Learning targets
By the end of this unit, you will know...
- How to think about writing a questionnaire
- The importance of graphics in web surveys
- Computerization of a questionnaire
- Handling Don’t Know and Prefer not to answer
- How to test web questionnaires
- Manage a list sample for web surveys
- The kind of paradata you can collect in a web survey

Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): released on Friday, January 25, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, January 30, 2019

Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):
- Friday, February 1st, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

Assignment 3:
- Released: Friday, January 25, 2019
- Due: Monday, February 4, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Readings:

Required readings

From Sage textbook:
Chapter 2.3: Questionnaire preparation
Chapter 2.4: Technical preparation

Additional required readings:


**Recommended readings (not mandatory):**


**Unit 4: Nonresponse and web surveys management**

**Learning targets**

By the end of this unit, you will know...

- Theories of nonresponse
- Leverage-saliency theory
- Indirect control on nonresponse
- Direct control on nonresponse
- Managing a web survey project
- Fielding a web survey project

**Video lecture (Mario Callegaro):** released on Friday, February 1st, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, February 6, 2019

**Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):**

- Friday, February 8, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

**Assignment 4:**

- Released: Friday, February 1st, 2019
- Due: Monday, February 11, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

**Readings:**
Required readings:

From Sage textbook:
- Chapter 2.5: Nonresponse strategy
- Chapter 2.6: General management
- Chapter 6.2: Web surveys within the project management framework
- Chapter 3: Fielding

From Wiley textbook
- Chapter 2: Reducing People's Reluctance to Respond to Surveys.

Additional required readings:


Unit 5 Postfielding & device effects

Learning targets
By the end of this unit, you will know...
- Preparing the data to be analyzed
- Exporting and archiving web survey datasets
- Multiple devices and device effects
- How to optimize a web survey in order to be taken from multiple devices
- Survey apps and the future of web surveys

Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): released on Friday, February 8, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, February 13, 2019

Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):
- Friday, February 15, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

Assignment 5:
- Released: Friday, February 8, 2019
- Due: Monday, February 18, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Readings:

Required readings:

From Sage textbook:
Chapter 4: Post fielding
Chapter 5.1: Smartphones, tablets and other devices

Additional required readings:


Recommended readings (not mandatory):


Unit 6: Data quality of online panels

Learning targets
By the end of this unit, you will know...
- How to judge the quality of online panels samples
- Setting up an online panel study quality experiment
- Interpret online panel comparison studies experiment

Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): released on Friday, February 15, 2019

Questions can be posted in the online forum until Wednesday, February 20, 2019

Online meeting (Mario Callegaro):
- Friday, February 22, 2019, 8 AM EST/2 PM CET

Assignment 6:
- Released: Friday, February 15, 2019
- Due: Monday, February 25, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Readings:

Required readings:


**Recommended readings (not mandatory):**

**Unit 7 & 8: Web survey programming exercise**

**No online meetings for unit 7 and 8.**

**Learning targets**
- Understand the different component of a web survey software
- Program a medium to complex web survey
- Add paradata to the web survey script
- Launch the programmed survey to the students taking part of the class
- Learn how to look at survey quality reports from the tool used to program the survey

**Video lecture (Mario Callegaro): Friday, February 22, 2019**

**Subjects of the video lecture:**
- Web survey software
- Key concepts on how to program a web survey

**Required readings**

- From Sage textbook:
  Chapter 5.3 Web survey software

- From Wiley textbook:
  Chapter 9: Web questionnaires and implementation.
  Please also read the supplementary material of Chapter 9 on the student companion website [here](#).
Additional required readings


Recommended readings (not mandatory):


Online survey software help centers

https://help.surveymonkey.com/

https://www.qualtrics.com/support/survey-platform/getting-started/survey-platform-overview/


Final Exam

- Short research project + web survey programming
- Released: Friday, February 1st, 2019
- Both due: Friday, March 8, 2019, 5:30 pm (EST)/11:30 pm CET

Note: Student access to the course website will be revoked two weeks after the final exam.