Empirical Methods II - Survey Methods
(API203 MB)
Spring 2026
Tuesday/Thursday class: 10:30-11:45AM, WEX436
Friday section: 12-1:15PM, WEX436

Course Description

Surveys and polls provide much of the data we use to understand the world around us. If fact, much of the data we use – including statistics about people, schools, health, crime, and other things we commonly think of as "facts" or "data" – are created, at least in part, using surveys. More broadly, surveys are a tool used in a wide variety of academic and professional fields to create original data and answer questions that otherwise couldn't be answered, using methods ranging from descriptive analysis to the latest tools of causal inference.

This course is a 6-week module that follows on API-202M, allowing students to further specialize in a particular area of evidence for policy making. This module is designed to teach students the skills necessary to create, use, and interpret survey data. Students will also learn the steps necessary to create and conduct an original survey to answer questions. We will focus on the steps that researchers and pollsters need to go through to develop a survey, and students will learn about the different sources of error that can be introduced during the process of designing, analyzing, and interpreting polls and other types of surveys.

Teaching Team

Professor
Daniel Schneider
Email: dschneider@hks.harvard.edu
Office Hours: Tuesdays 12PM – 1:20PM, HKS Rubenstein 404
Sign-up: https://calendly.com/dschneider-hks/office_hours

Teaching Fellow
Charlotte O'Herron
Email: charlotteoherron@fas.harvard.edu
Office hours: Fridays, 10:00 AM – 11:45 AM, OFER O-310
Sign-up: https://calendly.com/charlotteoherron/charlotte-o-herron-office-hours

Faculty Assistant
Emma Green
Email: emma_green@hks.harvard.edu
Please email Emma regarding logistical questions about enrollment or the course website

Required Readings

All of the readings will be posted on the course Canvas site. The readings are drawn from articles, reports, and books. I know that you may not associate required readings with "stats" courses. I've tried to keep the readings to a very reasonable minimum, but please know that having reading in a course on survey methods is absolutely standard.

Graded Work

In addition to completing the reading each week, there are three other requirements for the course: (1) being a constructive participant in discussion, (2) a series of assignments, and (3) a proposal.

Attendance and Participation

To participate productively, you must be present. Attendance at every class meeting is required and expected for the full length of the class. We will take attendance at the start of each class by marking off names of students who are present. If you are ill (or otherwise unable to attend class due to an extenuating circumstance), your absence will be excused if reported in advance to us by emailing Charlotte O'Herron. Students who must be absent for more than two class sessions should inform the MPP Program Director, who will notify the appropriate faculty members. Students absent from class for more than two weeks (4 class sessions) without prior approval from the Program Director will not receive credit for this course and a grade of withdrawn (WD) will be given.

Another part of being present is not being distracted by electronic devices (as I tell myself <u>all</u> the time!). I know how hard this is. While you may certainly use a laptop in class to take notes and check course materials, please do your best not to be distracted by email, other work, or the temptations of the internet. Same for phones.

Our class-time will be most productive and interesting if you make time to do the readings before coming to class. Depending on the session, these readings will provide methodological detail or applied examples that I will draw on in my lectures. We will also devote class time to discussion and to exercises that will help us to integrate, critique, and extend this material. I ask that you engage with one-another seriously and respectfully.

While participation and presence are important elements of the course, I certainly understand that the circumstances of our own lives and of events in the world may at times make attendance and focus difficult. Please just be in touch with us so we can work together to figure things out if you encounter such challenges.

Assignments

There will be four assignments due over the course of the semester. Each assignment is described in detail at the end of the syllabus. While each is a discrete assignment, they are designed to build on each other, fostering learning in two areas:

Area 1: Surveys and You! (Assignment #1 and Final)

Surveys can be deployed to investigate a wide range of topics and problems, from support for candidates to inequalities in economic resources to the effects of public policy on families. In this sequence of assignments, you will have the opportunity to think through how you could advance what we know about a core interest of your own through novel survey data collection. Here, you will write

survey questions that tap into a topic of interest to you (Assignment #1) and then have the chance to return to those questions to develop a proposal for a survey-based PAE for the final.

Area 2: Leveraging Survey Experiments (Assignments #2, #3, and #4)
A central theme of the course is that surveys are a data collection method rather than a method of analysis. Indeed, data collected via surveys lends itself to all kinds of different analyses. One of the most powerful is the analysis of experimental data. In this sequence of assignments, you will work as part of a group to design (Assignment #2) and refine (Assignment #3) a survey experiment. We will then field your experiment on a course-sponsored survey, and you will then analyze and write-up the results of your question (Assignment #4).

Final
You will write a 4 or 5-page proposal (not including the instrument) in preparation for your **PAE**. Using a real or hypothetical partner organization or client, propose and justify the use of a survey to inform your project and include a fully formatted copy of a survey that you would field as part of this project.

Each of these required elements of the course, their due date(s), and their contribution to your final grade are summed up in the table below.

REQUIRED WORK	DUE DATE	% OF GRADE
Participation	Tues Mar 3 – Thurs Apr 16	20%
Assignment #1: Question writing – individual	Fri Mar 13, 8 PM ET	10%
Assignment #2: Design of experiment – group	Fri Mar 27, 8 PM ET	10%
Assignment #3: Revision of experiment – group	Fri April 3, 8 PM ET	15%
Assignment #4: Analysis of experiment – group	Mon April 20, 8 PM ET	20%
Final: PAE proposal– individual	Tues May 12, 5 PM ET	25%

Class Format
We will meet together twice a week for 75 minutes each time. These meetings will be used for a mix of interactive lecture, small- and full-group discussion, student presentations, and visits by outside guests. Our TF will also hold a section on Fridays. This section is not required, but it is designed to provide you with some of the practical tools that you'll need to complete the assignments – like how to access and use Qualtrics, a refresher on data analysis in R and Excel, etc.

Course Policies

Accommodation
Harvard Kennedy School is committed to the full inclusion of students with disabilities, including learning, mental health, physical, chronic illness, temporary injury, and others. The School provides a range of options to remove course barriers, including accommodations, to students with documented disabilities on an individual, case-by-case basis. Students who have, or think they may have a disability, should contact **Melissa Wojciechowski St. John** for a confidential consultation to request or inquire about accommodations. Melissa is the Senior Director of Student Services – and serves as the local disability coordinator – in the HKS Office of Student Services. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, we recommend that you contact her as soon as possible.

Late Work
There are several written assignments for this course. Many of them are timed to coincide with class meetings and/or are scaffolded and so turning these assignments in on time and not falling behind will be critical to your success in the course.

Grading Policy
If you wish to contest a grade, please first outline in writing (1) what assignment you are contesting, (2) the grade you received on the assignment, and (3) the reason(s) why you believe the grade you received is unfair. I will consider your appeal and may decide to re-grade your assignment. Please note, a re-grade likely involves closer scrutiny of the work and so may result in an increase or a decrease in your grade. The grade appeals process should be initiated within seven days of receiving the grade in question.

Academic Honesty
The HKS Honor Code lays out a clear set of expectations and principles for academic integrity. I expect that you will adhere to these principles in your conduct in the course. You may not copy specific text or ideas from others, whether from fellow students, from authors of our readings, or from authors of material you find on the internet, without specific attribution. To do otherwise is to plagiarize. You may of course discuss the class content and readings with your fellow students and are expected to work together on the group-based assignments (assignments #2 and #3). For these group-based assignments, while you will collaborate to produce a single product that is the same for each group member, each individual group member should still submit the product on Canvas.

Use of AI
The goals of this course are to orient you to survey research and equip you with the tools and experiences to evaluate and conduct such research yourself. Generative artificial intelligence (GAI) tools such as ChatGPT have the potential to increase your ability to realize these goals, but also to rob you of the opportunity to develop skills that you will rely on well after you graduate. In general, it is acceptable to use AI for finding information and for solidifying knowledge of the course content. It is also acceptable to use AI to help with questions related to coding. However, it is not acceptable to use AI to produce "answers" to the assignments or first drafts of such that you then rephrase. Generative AI can also produce false or misleading information. You are ultimately responsible for the accuracy of any work you submit. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. We draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course.

Communication Norms
All students are required to have email delivery for Canvas announcements enabled. Students should direct any questions, concerns, or problems about the course website and its content— including any difficulties accessing the reading— to Emma Green.

We very much encourage you to sign-up for office hours. Office hours are a good time to just introduce yourself, to talk about ideas that you find particularly engaging or difficult, or to discuss problems that you may be having in the course. I will have office hours on Tuesdays from 12:00 PM to 1:20 PM and Charlotte O'Herron will have office hours on Fridays from 10:00 AM – 11:45 AM.

Email to the instructor and TF should not be used for substantive questions about the reading or course materials. Please ask such questions in class or sign-up for office hours. We will endeavor to respond to other email messages within 24 hours, though may be slower over the weekend and break.

Course Outline and Weekly Readings

Week 1

Mar 3 (Tues) Class #1: Introduction to the course.

Reading:
Groves, Robert. 2011. "Three Eras of Survey Research." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75(5): 861-871.

Mar 5 (Thurs) Class #2: Constructs, Variables, Reliability, and Validity

Reading:
Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2002.n"Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546.

Mar 6 (Fri) Section: No section this week

Week 2

Mar 10 (Tues) Class #3: Types of Questions; Questionnaire Design

Reading:
Schaeffer, Nora Cate and Jennifer Dykema. 2020. "Recent Advances in the Science of Asking Questions." *Annual Review of Sociology* 46:37-60.

Mar 12 (Thurs) Class #4: Developing Good Questions and Cognitive Testing

Reading:
Beatty, Paul and Gordon Willies. 2007. "Research Synthesis: The Practice of Cognitive Interviewing." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71(2): 287-311.

Mar 13 (Fri) Section: Survey Questions & Constructs

March 13 (Fri) Assignment: Assignment #1 due by 8 PM ET

Spring Break!

Mar 17 (Tues): No Class

Mar 19 (Thurs): No Class

Mar 20 (Fri): No Section

Mar 20 (Fri): No assignment

Week 3

Mar 24 (Tues) Class #5: Survey Experiments

Reading: Please read at least one of the following examples of a survey experiment:

Bublitz, Elisabeth. 2022. "Misperceptions of Income Distributions: Cross-Country Evidence from a Randomized Survey Experiment." *Socio-Economic Review* 20(2): 435-462.

Sarah Thebaud, Sabino Kornich, and Leah Ruppanner. 2021. "Good Housekeeping, Great Expectations: Gender and Housework Norms." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50(3): 1186-1214.

Yount, Kathryn, Nafisa Halim, Signey Ruth Schuler, and Sara Head. 2013. "A Survey Experiment of Women's Attitudes About Intimate Partner Violence Against Women in Rural Bangladesh." *Demography* 50(1): 333-357.

Mar 26 (Thurs) Class #6: The Science of Asking: Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality, and Nativity.

In-class Panel Discussion TBD

Readings TBD

Mar 27 (Fri) Section: "Programming" Surveys in Qualtrics

Mar 27 (Fri) Assignment: Assignment #2 (survey experiment) due by 8 PM ET

Week 4

Mar 31 (Tues) Class #7: Types of survey data

Reading:
Smeeding, Tim. 2018. "The PSID in Research and Policy." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 680(1)

April 2 (Thurs) Class #8: The logic of sampling

Reading:
Groves, Robert, et al. 2009. *Survey Methodology*. "Chapter 4: Sample Design and Sampling Error." John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NJ.

April 3 (Fri) Section: Workshopping Your Experiments

April 3 (Fri) Assignment: Assignment #3 (revised survey experiment) due by 8 PM ET

Week 5

Apr 7 (Tues) Class #9: Methods of Survey Data Collection

Reading:
Schneider, Daniel and Kristen Harknett. 2022. "What's to Like? Facebook as a Tool for Survey Data Collection." *Sociological Methods & Research* 51(1): 108-140.

Apr 9 (Thurs) Class #10: Bias

Reading:
Cornesse, Carina, et al. 2020. "A Review of Conceptual Approaches and Empirical Evidence on Probability and Nonprobability Sample Survey Research." *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology* 8(1): 4-36.

April 10 (Fri) Section: Analyzing Survey Data in R and Excel

April 10 (Fri) Assignment: None

Week 6

Apr 14 (Tues) Class #11: Analyzing Survey Data

Reading: Please read at least one of the examples of the analysis of survey data

Altintas, Ervim and Oriel Sullivan. 2016. "Fifty years of change updated: Cross-national gender convergence in housework." *Demographic Research* 35: 455-470

Monk, Ellis, Jerry Kaufman, and Yadira Montoya. 2021. "Skin Tone and Perceived Discrimination: Health and Aging Beyond the Binary in NSHAP 2015." *The Journals of Gerentology Series B* 76(3): S313-S321.

Harknett, Kristen, Daniel Schneider, and Veronique Irwin. 2021. "Improving health and economic security by reducing work schedule uncertainty." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118(42).

Apr 16 (Thurs) Class #12: Survey Data in Action

In-class Panel Discussion, panelists TBD

Reading: pick one of the following pieces by the three panelists

TBD

April 17 (Fri) Section: Last minute questions about Assignment #4!

April 20 (Mon) Assignment: Assignment #4 (survey experiment analysis) due by 8 PM ET

Final

May 12 (Tues) 5PM: Survey-based PAE Proposal

Assignments

Assignment #1: Writing Good and Bad Survey Questions (10%) (individual)
This assignment is designed to give you practice writing survey questions. The assignment has three parts.

Part 1: Introduce your topic and question and tell us why we should care about it. Tell us the unit of analysis for the data you will collect. Define the construct(s) that you are interested in measuring. Specify the dimensions and indicators that you hope to capture.

Part 2: Write at least five good survey questions to measure the construct(s) (good according to the criteria discussed in class). Be sure to use a variety of question types. For each question, tell us what level of measurement data the question will produce. Format these questions exactly as you would want them to appear in a self-administered survey.

Part 3: Write at least five bad survey questions (according to the criteria discussed in class). Be sure to vary what is bad about the questions. For each question, tell us what is bad about the question design. Format these questions exactly as you would want them to appear in a self-administered survey.

Please produce a single document (~2 pages single spaced) that contains your formatted questions as well as the required text.

Assignment #2: Design a Survey Experiment (10%) (group)
This assignment asks you to conceptualize and then design a survey experiment that could be fielded to a national sample of American adults. To conduct this work, you will collaborate with a small group of students from 203MB (to be assigned by the instructor/TF). The memo portion should be 1-2 pages single spaced, plus additional pages for the survey items.

In your memo, please first tell us the animating idea of your survey experiment. What idea will your experiment test? Tell us the key axis of variation for your study (i.e., what will vary across your treatment/control conditions) and how it will be captured in a way that is convincing, but practical and suited to the survey form. Tell us what your outcome indicators will be and the broader constructs they capture. Discuss the construct validity of your axis of variation and any other key constructs (such as your outcome).

Next, write down your proposed survey experiment. It might be a list experiment or a vignette, or a prime, or a conjoint. Be sure to effectively convey the experimental condition(s) and control. Your experiment should consist of just one survey question that has different variations to be randomized. You may include up to two additional questions that are non-experimental (these can be additional outcome variables or possible moderators). Discuss broadly how you will assess the effects of the treatment on respondents and how you will use the non-experimental questions.

Please note that conjoint experiments require some technical know-how to implement and analyze. These experiments have a lot of potential, but we recommend meeting with the teaching team before proposing one.

For this group based-assignment, only one group member needs to submit this product on Canvas.

Assignment #3: Refine Your Survey Experiment (15%) (group)
This follow-up to Assignment #2 asks you to refine and program your survey experiment. To refine it, you will draw on two sources of feedback.

- First, you will get prompt feedback on your draft from the teaching team – by Monday March 31st (following submission on Friday March 28th). Please consider this feedback carefully and consider revising your survey accordingly. In your group memo, please briefly summarize how you understood our feedback and how you revised it (or if you did not, why not) in response.
- Second, each member of the group should conduct a short "cognitive interview," along the lines discussed in class on Thursday, March 13th. Each member of the group should write-up a brief (~1 page single spaced) memo explaining who you interviewed (How do you know them? What identities of theirs may be relevant?), how you conducted the interview, and what you learned – both actionable and not. The group should then discuss what can be learned collectively for your experiment from these interviews. In your group memo, please summarize the interviews and what you learned from them, and how you revised your experiment (or if you did not, why not) in response.

The final question should then be programed in Qualtrics. You should test the question in Qualtrics to ensure it functions as intended. The final submission should include:

1. A group memo (~2 pages single spaced). Begin this memo with a brief re-statement of your latest research question. Then include your summary of and response to our feedback on Assignment #2 and your summary of and response to the take-aways from the set of cognitive interviews.
2. An appendix that contains each of your individual cognitive interview reports. Group members' individual reports should each be ~1 page single spaced.
   A Qualtrics survey that contains your programmed question that is shared with the instructors on Qualtrics. Important implementation below:
   a. Please **title your survey**: Survey_Group[X]_[Topic]. Ensure your survey in Qualtrics is programmed exactly as you want participants to see and experience it. Test your survey using the "preview" feature, including checks that the wording is right, randomization is working, and questions are appearing in the right order.
   b. Put all of your questions into **a single block** (this block will be copied over into a larger survey). If you really need a second block, that's fine.
   c. When your survey is done, please share it with the teaching teams as **collaborators by** selecting tools -> collaborate -> type in my email charlotteoherron@fas.harvard.edu and submit, then dschneider@hks.harvard.edu

For this group based-assignment, only one group member needs to submit this product on Canvas.

Assignment #4: Analyze the Experimental Data (20%) (group)
The course instructors will run your experimental question (as revised for Assignment #3) the week of April 7th. The resulting data will be made available to you on Friday, April 11th.

For this assignment, you will work as a group to analyze the results of your experiment. This analysis may be conducted with whatever software you choose – such as R, Stata, Excel. But, whatever software you use, you must be clear and precise on the methods that you use to analyze these data. You will achieve this by carefully annotating the code (in the case of R, Stata, or similar) or your

spreadsheet (in the case of Excel) that you use to import and clean the data, construct your variables, analyze the experiment, and produce your results.

You will also write a memo (~3 pages single spaced) containing the following

- **Introduction:** Summarize what your experiment was testing for/trying to understand, your method (e.g., vignette, conjoint, etc.), axes of variation (e.g., we varied the race and education of the person in the vignette), and your hypotheses.
- **Data cleaning and analysis plan:** Explain what you did to prepare your data for analysis and justify any discretionary choices that you made for data cleaning (e.g., dropping inattentive respondents) and variable coding/re-coding. Explain what analyses you ran (e.g., We ran three regression models. Model 1 contained…)
- **Data analysis & results:** Clearly describe your results. Accompany this with **at least one "exhibit" (table or figure)** that includes what you view as your main results. You should describe and interpret this in your memo.
- **Conclusion:** Put your results into a broader context. How do your findings align with or diverge from expectations? If your findings diverge from your expectations, why do you think you may have gotten the results you did? What do we learn from your experiment?
- *Appendix (optional):* any additional exhibits you want to include

For this group based-assignment, only one group member needs to submit this product on Canvas.

Final (25%)
Write a 4 or 5-page proposal (not including the instrument) in preparation for your **PAE**. Using a real or hypothetical partner organization or client, propose and justify the use of a survey to inform your project. A successful proposal will include three sections:

1. Motivation: (a) set up the problem and describe the client, (b) identify a question/puzzle/problem, (c) articulate why a survey could help solve that problem.
2. Survey Plan: (a) define the target population, (b) identify and describe the sampling frame, (c) describe the sampling approach, (d) discuss the plan in terms of validity and bias.
3. Survey Items: describe the key constructs you seek to measure and describe how you operationalized them.

Finally, include a draft of the survey – approximately 10-15 items laid out in the form that you would use to administer the survey and following the guidance for good survey question wording and design.