Introduction

The goals of this course are to enhance the students’ understanding and knowledge of applied survey methodology and to develop their competencies working as a member of a team through a series of case studies in survey methodology. Students will be challenged to apply theoretical concepts to real-world issues.

The specific objectives of the course are:

- to introduce aspects of survey methodology used in public and private organizations
- to improve understanding of methods used in actual practice
- to demonstrate how theoretical principles are applied in actual research settings
- to develop the skill of interpreting technical articles and summarizing the contents intelligibly for those less knowledgeable
- to develop problem solving and analytical skills
- to improve interpersonal and team working skills
- to develop and improve communication skills

Three clients representing survey programs sponsored by government or other organizations will be invited to describe specific challenges related to one or more of their surveys. This may include: purposes and objectives of the survey, rationale for its design, challenges faced in conducting the various phases of the survey, solutions already considered, and key issues where input from the class is requested.

Organization of the Course

Students in the course will be organized into groups of at least three. Each group will be a consulting team that will work together to study the relevant research literature in the area, invent novel solutions to design problems, and then construct ways to evaluate alternative solutions. Documentation of each case will be the assigned class readings. For
each case, a client will present various aspects of the survey that are relevant to the issues to be addressed by the students. Real world problems encountered in the surveys will be presented as problems requiring solutions. The student teams will develop proposals for addressing the problems, citing the literature as appropriate to support the viability of their proposals. Students will also present their proposals orally and will be graded for the thoroughness of their approach and likelihood that the approach will succeed in solving the problems. The external speakers will be invited back to class for the oral presentations and encouraged to ask questions about each proposal.

This is a three-credit course and will meet up to 2 hours and 45 minutes for each class meeting. The course will essentially devote five weeks to each client’s problem:

First week  Presentation of the problem by the client; questions from the consulting teams; organizational discussions among team members
Second week  Unstructured work by consulting team; further email or phone consultation with instructor or client as needed
Third week  Unstructured work by consulting team; further email or phone consultation with instructor or client as needed
Fourth week  Presentation of solutions to client; feedback from the client
Fifth week  Feedback to each team from the instructor

The instructor will attend each in-class session to hear the client problems, to observe the give-and-take of the class, and to evaluate student performance. Note that feedback from the instructor will be provided directly to each team via e-mail, not during class sessions. This feedback will provide each team’s members with a general sense of how well they addressed the first problem and any ways they might improve their approach to subsequent problems.

Evaluation of Performance in the Course

Grades will be determined by the following three factors and weighted by the percentage indicated in parentheses:

• your team grades on the three case studies (60%)
• teams ratings of your contributions to each case study (30%)
• class attendance and participation (10%)

For each case or problem, the team grade will be based upon a combination of grades on the oral report (50%) and the written report (50%). Grades for each assignment will be a combination of three scores: (1) the team grade assigned to the written proposal by the instructor, (2) the team grade assigned to the oral presentation by the instructor, and (3) the average rating assigned to each student by her/his fellow team members. The team
grades on the written proposal and oral presentation assigned will be based upon the
team’s understanding of the problem, the approach taken, the other approaches that were
considered and rejected, and the expected results and benefits of the work. In addition,
each team member will be asked to provide a grade or rating for each other team member
based on the contributions to the team’s work on the problem. The following five-point
scale will be used:

1 = Contributions exceeded every other group member's contributions
2 = Contributions were greater than the average of the team members
3 = Contributions were similar to other team members
4 = Contributions were below the average of the team members
5 = Little or no contributions were made to the team

As an example, if a team receives an A on the proposal and presentation but a student’s
team members provide an average rating of 4 or 5 regarding her/his contributions, the
student could receive a grade for the assignment lower than an A. Likewise, a student’s
grade could be higher than the team grade on the proposal and presentation based upon
how her/his team members rate the student’s contributions. This grading system is
designed to encourage each student to contribute fully to her/his team’s work.

Course Schedule

January 22  Introduction to the Course and
Consulting Discussion
January 29  Client 1 Presentation
February 5  (no class) Team meetings
February 12  (no class) Team meetings
February 19  Presentations to Client 1
February 26  Client 2 Presentation
March 5  (no class) Team meetings
March 12  (no class) Optional team meetings
(UNC Spring Break)
March 19  (no class) Optional team meetings
(UMd Spring Break)
March 26  Presentations to Client 2
April 2  (no class)
April 9  Client 3 presentation
April 16  (no class) Team meetings
April 23  (no class) Team meetings
April 30  Presentations to Client 3