1. Introduction

This is a two-semester course required of all PhD students. All PhD students are welcome to participate in the class, whether or not they are taking the class for credit.

The class has been designed to help prepare PhD students for their scientific career as survey methodologists. Such a career is successful to the extent that the following tasks are done thoroughly, creatively, and quickly:

a. identification of key research findings in a subfield;
   Whether we should spend time doing this as part of the seminar will depend on an assessment of skills in quick assembly of research findings.

b. synthesis of results and identification of gaps and unanswered questions;
   This is a skill that we need to exercise repeatedly, teaching ourselves to read each research product increasingly carefully, probing for weaknesses.

c. invention/elaboration of a theoretical framework to address the gaps;
   This is a key skill that we will exercise repeatedly.

d. proposal for a research project to test key hypotheses relating to the gaps
   This is a skill that we will exercise through repeated assignments.

You have chosen a career where your success will be judged by your rate of discovery and invention of new theory and practices in surveys. This class should make you better able to recognize promising avenues of research as well as unproductive paths.

At this point in your studies and for the purposes of this class much of the learning will come from critique and interchange about research ideas, not through lectures or directed action by the faculty members involved.

2. Some of Our Beliefs About Survey Methodology

Survey methodology is the study of an information-gathering and knowledge generation device called a ‘survey.’ Since the products of surveys are statistics, quantification is inherent in all of survey methodology. Although qualitative methods are key tools to understand some of the human behaviors involved in surveys, the understanding has value to surveys only when links to the statistical error properties of surveys are made. The scientific progress of the field has been retarded by an artificial separation of
statistical and nonstatistical aspects of surveys. Your generation of PhD’s must destroy this separation, for the field to advance. (This means that you must be broader than the faculty who teach you.) The faculty can point out gaps they see, but only through cross-disciplinary collaborations are they successful in filling the gaps. Your collaborations should occur within your own mind.

Based on this logic, the PhD seminar will fly over the terrain of the total survey error paradigm, looking for weakness in the literature on two fronts:

a. joint influences on multiple error sources or influences that reduce one error source while increasing another;

b. statistical error properties of survey statistics that have uncharted behavioral underpinnings.

This won’t be easy, but these are two areas that will be ripe for important new dissertation work. If you find them, you can make important discoveries.

3. How the Course Will Proceed

There will be one overriding rule guiding our behavior in the class—we’re searching for insight, understanding, and pushing the edges of the field. This will require us to have a free and open exchange of insights, some of which will be contradictory. If we do not surface disagreements and opposing perspectives in the class, then we aren’t succeeding. Above all, this means that you as students need to feel free to disagree with faculty members and probe their arguments.

We will spend the first few classes getting a sense of each other, then we specify readings and assignments for the term and issue a revised syllabus.

4. The Role of First-Year Students and Second-Year Students

First- and second-year students enroll in the course but their duties are distinct. Both sets read the literatures assigned, critique the research, and search for gaps in the literature. The second-year students go on to suggest research projects to fill the gaps and develop proposals to describe the research. The first-year students critique drafts of those proposals and learn how to make constructive comments on research plans.

Tentative Class Schedule

September 6
Discussion of format of research proposals sent to students in advance.

One open area for research investigations concerns the measurement error impacts of interviewers on survey data. The literature consists of early work on the development of rapport and the social interactional aspects of interviewing, the discovery of impacts of observable attributes of interviewers on survey responses, the impact of structured versus conversational interviewing styles, and the measurement of the variable measurement errors associated with interviewers. The literatures have not been coordinated and there may be missed opportunities of combining approaches.
Overview of interviewer effects

Models of Interviewer Variance

Studies in Interviewer Behavior and interviewer-respondent interaction
Kahn and Cannell, Dynamics of Interviewing, New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Studies of Fixed or Observable Properties of Interviewers

September 13
Discussion of scientific interests of students.
Discussion of assigned readings.
Come prepared to identify gaps in the literature.

September 20
Continued discussion of readings.

September 27
Prepare half-page descriptions of three research ideas you are interested in pursuing within the topic. Send your ideas to the entire class by Monday, September 25.

The class on the 27th will help you elaborate the proposal.

October 4
Choice of 1 idea. Present an outline of the miniproposal for the one idea on October 2.

October 11
Your first written miniproposal will be due on Tuesday, October 9. This proposal will be at most 3 pages, 12 pitch font, 1” margins. It should follow the model sections of an NIH or NSF grant proposal. Send the proposal via email to everyone involved in the class.

The class will critique the proposals and find ways to improve them.

October 18
Final draft of miniproposal. Send via email to all involved in the class by October 16. The class will critique the proposals and presentations.

Future weeks will depend on class interests