

GOV 1010: Survey Research Methods

Writing a Research Proposal

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How to Write a Research Proposal

- Simple Introduction to Research Question
- Question must be addressable in proposed project
- Brief background
- Statement of Importance
- Hypotheses
 - Have logical reasons
 - Address Issue
- Population
 - Reasonable for hypothesis and research question
 - If limitations, must be stated

Survey Proposal

I. Overview.

Please give a brief summary of the purpose of the research, in non-technical language. Provide 3-5 sentences describing your general area of interest, your hypotheses, and how you plan to operationalize and test these hypotheses.

II About the Sample

Give details of procedures that relate to subjects' participation. Provide 1-2 sentences for each bullet

- What is your inferential population?
- Who is your target population?
- Please describe characteristics of the target population for this study:
- What sample frame do you intend to use?
- How will you draw a sample from the population?

III. Field protocols.

Provide a short description of the field protocols and methods you intend to implement for your survey. Provide 1-2 sentences for each bullet.

- What mode or modes will you use to conduct the survey?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of this approach?
- How will respondents be identified and contacted?
- What incentives or inducements, if any, will be offered to respondents.
- How will information be gathered from subjects? How many surveys will you conduct /
- send out?

IV. Discussion of Survey:

Please provide a short description of the survey questionnaire that you would like to develop.

- What concepts do you intend to measure in your survey?
- How will you measure these concepts in your survey?
- How will these items help you to answer the research questions you are interested in?
- What other information will you need to collect in your survey?
- What demographic information will you collect?
- How long will the survey take respondents to complete? How will you explain the research to subjects? Please include the two or three sentences that you will either include (or perhaps say) at the beginning of your survey explaining the survey and who you are to the respondent.

V. Ethical Considerations:

Please provide a short discussion of the ethical considerations involved in conducting this project:

- Are respondents all capable of providing informed consent?
- Will you ask any questions about behavior which might be illegal, or ask about anything that might embarrass the respondent if it were revealed?
- Are subjects deliberately deceived in any way? If so, what is the nature of the deception? Is it likely to be significant to subjects? Is there any other way to conduct the research that would not involve deception, and, if so, why have you not chosen that alternative?
- How are confidentiality and/or anonymity assured? At what stage are identifiers removed from the data? If identifiers must be retained, please explain why.
- Will research data (*written or otherwise recorded*) be destroyed at the end of the study? If not, where and in what format and for how long will they be stored?

Human Subjects Considerations

Ethical Issues in Survey Research....

- Subjects can sometimes be harmed by surveys
- Research findings sometimes cause harm to people
- Surveys often don't provide direct benefit to subjects
- Researcher interests and subject interests are sometimes at odds
- Researchers sometimes do not treat all subjects equally
- Scientific integrity and professional success are sometimes at odds

Most Typical Respondent Risks

- Respondents tell researchers things that might cause harm if disclosed
- Confidentiality is intentionally violated
- Confidentiality is unintentionally violated

Other Respondent Risks

- Respondent is distressed by something in survey
- Survey setting exposes respondent to danger or harm
- Respondent feels coerced (even if not)
- Survey participation is misunderstood

Risks to Researchers

- Harm or physical violence
- Legal or civil liability
- Reputational and occupational harm
- Administrative penalties

Regulatory Issues:

- 45 cfr 46 (Applies in institutional settings)
- OMB (Federal statistics)
- FDA
- HIPPA; FERPA; etc.
- Professional standards (AAPOR / CASRO)
- Other laws (CAN-SPAM, etc.)

Protection of Respondents

- Legal Basis
 - Federal Laws
 - Administrative Rules
 - Civil restrictions currently very rare
- Practical Basis
 - Universities have rules
 - Federal Projects have rules
 - Most NGO's/non-profits have rules
- Details of Rules
 - Outlined by Federal regulations
 - Implemented by organizations
 - Institutional Review Boards
 - Always check the protocols at your institution

Protection of Respondents

- At Harvard
 - Most research with human subjects required review
 - Faculty researchers are primary point-of-contact with IRB
 - Double check with your advisor or instructor about IRB protocols for research you do at Harvard
 - Many surveys are available for “expedited” review

Most surveys are research.....

- Determinations of “not research” vary from IRB to IRB
- At Harvard, IRB makes this determination
- Examples of survey that may not be research:
 - Evaluation / Employee / Customer / Client surveys
 - Administrative surveys
 - Surveys conducted as classroom activities
 - Pilot surveys / Cognitive tests
- *But always check with the IRB if you are in doubt*

Protection of Respondents

- This course:
 - Instructor has received protocol according to specific criteria
 - Student proposals will have to detail how their projects meet protocols
 - Instructor has final say
 - If you want to deviate from these rules, you must contact the instructor ASAP

Basic Rules for GOV 1010 Surveys

- Informed Consent Obtained
- Non-vulnerable populations
 - Adults
 - No power relationship between you and them
 - Prisoners, crime victims, etc. require review
- Non-sensitive questions
 - Answers can not harm respondent if revealed
 - Nothing illegal
 - Nothing embarrassing
 - Etc.
- No deception allowed

Vulnerable Populations

- Key populations:
 - Prisoners
 - Children
 - People with cognitive or mental disabilities
- Important settings that can create a vulnerable population
 - Teacher / student
 - Patient / hospital
 - Employer / Employee
 - Benefits Provider / Benefit Recipients
 - Wealth / Poverty

Key Points about Consent

- Both an ethical obligation and a regulation
- Respondents must understand:
 - Who you are
 - Why you are studying them
 - What they are about to do
 - What you will do with their data
 - Risks
- Respondents must be free to say “no” without any penalty or harm

Basic Rules for GOV 1010 Surveys

- All data is treated confidentially
 - Includes things you remember but don't record
 - ALL answers are treated confidentially
 - Never reported in a way that could identify the respondent
- Data recorded anonymously
 - If this is impossible, contact instructor for protocol guidance
- Data kept secure with limited access
- Data destroyed at end of semester