

Descriptive Title: Data Driven: Designing and Preparing Data for an Applied Sociological Statistics Class

Specific Aims:

I will develop a one credit course on Applied Sociological Statistics to accompany our existing Sociological Statistics course (SOC 372). This new course is intended to enhance our students' ability to utilize datasets and analyze data. In particular, the new course will allow the students to develop competence in the use of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Designing this course will require that I undertake two tasks. First of all, I will design the course through careful selection of the appropriate text book, writing the syllabus, and planning assignments. More importantly, with the new academic building, the Sociology Department will have new resources for teaching and research. This fall, we will have a new data lab and the college will become a member of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. I will explore and incorporate these new resources into my course.

Method:

In order to design the new course, I plan to research related course syllabi and textbooks on the use of SPSS with a special emphasis on sociology and social science datasets. A course such as this will require that the students receive hands-on experience in the use of SPSS and interpreting data. Consequently, lab assignments will be a central component of this course.

The data provided by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research will be vital for this course. The Roper Center is an archive of social survey and public opinion research. By becoming a member of the Roper Center, Saint Mary's College will be providing our faculty and students access to a wealth of opinion and social surveys. The majority of lab assignments will be based on data contained within the Roper Center data bank. In order to prepare the lab assignments for this course, I will need to examine the social surveys contained within the Roper Center data bank. The Roper Center data bank contains many representative opinion polls as well as some social scientific surveys such as the General Social Survey (GSS). While I am familiar with the GSS, there are many other surveys contained within the databank with which I have little experience.

These surveys will provide the data for most of the lab assignments in the class. Given that this is an introductory course, I believe that I will need to create subsets of selected surveys in which I select key questions or cases that illustrate a particular lesson. I will need to research the licensing requirements of the Roper Center, but ideally, I would like to place the subsets on Blackboard for student use. If licensing does not allow this, I will need time to consider alternative ways to construct the lab assignments.

Finally, the Sociology Department will acquire a data lab in the new academic building. I will need to explore the ways in which this data lab may be incorporated in the Applied Sociological Statistics course. The new data lab promises to allow innovative teaching in this area through facilitating collaborative work on data.

Significance:

This course is very important for both the Sociology Department and Saint Mary's College. A lab course in Applied Sociological Statistics will make Saint Mary's students distinctive. The course will be central to developing our students' skills as quantitative researchers. The ability to conduct quantitative research and to use SPSS is sought by both employers and graduate schools. In addition, this course will provide the students with the statistical and computer competence necessary to complete a quantitative Sociology Comprehensive Project. Finally, hands on experience with data will enhance students' understanding of the empirical nature of sociological knowledge.

This project is also important for developing my own teaching. It is important to note that the Applied Sociological Statistics course will cover new material. While the new course will be related to the existing Sociological Statistics course, Applied Sociological Statistics requires the students to develop practical skills in working with data, such as solving the problems of missing data, coding and recoding data, as well as running and interpreting computer output. These are distinct skills that will require me to develop new lessons and assignments.

As the college is acquiring new resources to enhance the teaching of social science to our students, it is vital that we in the social sciences explore how to best utilize these resources from the beginning. As the instructor of Sociological Statistics and our new Applied Sociological Statistics course, I am well suited to begin the process of incorporating the data provided by the Roper Center into my courses. In addition, my knowledge of the Roper Center databank will allow me to advise my colleagues and students as to its potential uses. For example, I believe that there is much potential for

incorporating the data into other Sociology classes. Additionally, I will be able to advise Sociology students on using the Roper Center databank for Senior Comprehensives.

Previous Work:

I am currently the instructor for SOC 372 Sociological Statistics. I also have extensive experience in quantitative research. For example, I previously worked as a survey technician at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan. In particular, I contributed to the Pension Provider Survey. I also worked as an interviewer and inputted data at the Center for Public Service at Central Michigan University. I have also conducted quantitative research for my dissertation and have contributed to a project utilizing the Health and Retirement Survey.