

## **Practicum # 1**

### **Sociology 525**

The editor of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer has asked for proposals to conduct a “final” election survey that it plans to report to its readership on Monday, prior to Tuesday’s general election, to be held November 7, 2006. In the past, this newspaper has relied on telephone surveys, as have most other newspapers in the United States. Typically, 800–1,200 households are polled in a 3-4 day period prior to the Sunday before Election Day.

The contractor for 2004 must provide results of its poll, including estimates of the percent of Washington voters who will vote for each state and congressional representative, governor, and all state-elected officials. This also includes Supreme Court justices and the superintendent of public instruction, plus any initiatives or referenda that appear on that year’s ballot. In addition, several demographic questions (age, education, party preference, income, gender) will be asked to help interpret the data. The final data set must arrive at the Post-Intelligencer offices by 1:00 P.M. Sunday November 4<sup>th</sup>.

The P-I has received three proposals with similar budget estimates. Which one would you recommend be accepted and why?

#### **Proposal 1**

A telephone poll, 10-12 minutes long, conducted by the Gallup Organization, using a random-digit sample of households in the state in which likely voters are identified and interviewed. Calls will be made from Wednesday, November 1<sup>st</sup> through the night of Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>. A minimum of 800 completed interviews will be obtained, with an expected response rate of 45%.

#### **Proposal 2**

A mail survey of all voters registered in Washington State as of October 1<sup>st</sup>. One letter and a questionnaire will be mailed to a statewide random sample of all registered voters on Wednesday, October 18th, with a cut-off date for returned questionnaires of Saturday, November 4<sup>th</sup>. The contractor expects to obtain a minimum of 1,600 completions, for an expected response rate of approximately 20%.

#### **Proposal 3**

An Internet survey will be conducted by Harris-Interactive. They maintain a panel of several million volunteers with e-mail addresses who have indicated their willingness to complete questionnaires. About 100,000 members of that panel live in Washington State. In the week prior to the election, a sample of this panel will be asked to respond, with one e-mail reminder being sent. They will obtain a minimum of 3,000 completions, or an expected response rate of about 30%.

Your assignment is to recommend which of these proposals the Post-Intelligencer should accept and why.

Your written recommendation is to be turned in at the beginning of class next Tuesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>. If you wish' your assignment may be submitted by e-mail. If you submit by e-mail, I will hit reply simply to indicate I have received it.

Your recommendation should include answers to these four questions:

1. Which of these three proposals do you recommend that the P-I accept?

- Proposal 1—Telephone
- Proposal 2—Mail
- Proposal 3—Internet

2. For what reasons did you select your answer?

3. Which of these three proposals do you believe is least adequate?

- Proposal 1—Telephone
- Proposal 2—Mail
- Proposal 3—Internet

4. For what reasons do you believe this proposal is least adequate?

I leave the question of length up to you, but I expect one could post a convincing answer in about 5-7 double-spaced pages. Please don't use single spacing (it's harder for me to make comments).

Here are some thoughts to keep in mind: This is an individual assignment, and not a group assignment. In addition, you are writing to the editorial board of the Post-Intelligencer. The objective is to convince them that they should follow your recommendation. This may call for a somewhat different style of writing than some of you are used to doing for university classes.

I have already provided you with a lot of information that is relevant to doing this assignment. You are also on your own to seek out additional information relevant to providing an answer. I am giving you this kind of initial assignment because it illustrates what the practicum is about. It involves more than regurgitating information from an assignment; it involves deciding what information is relevant and what is not, and building arguments for why one should or should not take a particular action to solve a survey design problem. It also involves communicating information to someone who is about to make a decision that may be based on what you recommend that they do.

I am looking forward to reading your recommendations. See you next Tuesday!