What is wrong with this question?

How would you rate the quality and difficulty of this course?

A. Supremely awesome
B. Very awesome
C. Awesome
D. Terrible
SIR Events: Mid-February

Career Roundtable: Language skills and NGOs

- “Working Abroad: Language Skills and Humanitarian Assistance NGOs”
- Tiffany Gray, Partnerships & Analysis Officer, Mercy Corps
- Wednesday, February 13th, VKC 300 1pm – 2pm (rsvp grayc@usc.edu; limited seats)
End of February Events

- Inaugural “BURNING ISSUES” PANEL: **IRAN: Options for US Policy**
- This fun, lively, policy-centered debate will happen in SOSB40 on February 19th from 3:30-5pm
- Jerrold Green, President, Pacific Council
- Najm Meshkati, USC Professor, nuclear safety expert
- Hashem Pesarian, USC Professor, Distinguished Chair in Economics
Two Helpful Points for the Homework

• Unit of analysis: The level of social life at which a research question is focused, e.g. the individual, the school, the village
  • The unit of analysis in the theory and the measures should match

• Three broad types of validity:
  • Measurement validity
  • Internal validity (AKA causal validity)
  • External validity (AKA generalizability)

• Don’t just dive into the book looking for a specific answer. Take the time to read Chapter 4 and get the big picture.
Sections

- If an optional section were offered on Tuesday mornings, how often would you attend?
  - A. Every week
  - B. Most weeks
  - C. About every other week
  - D. Right before exams
  - E. Never
Ecological and Reductionist fallacy

• Ecological fallacy/reductionist fallacy: This can occur when the unit of analysis in the question and the unit of analysis in the measure don’t match.

• Ecological fallacy: Inferences about individual-processes drawn from group level data.
  • If you find that sabotage in factories is more common in factories with a higher proportion of unskilled workers, you would fall victim to the ecological fallacy if you infer that unskilled workers are more likely to commit sabotage.
Ecological and Reductionist fallacies

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- **Ecological fallacy**: Inferences about individual-processes drawn from group level data.
  - If you find that sabotage in factories is more common in factories with a higher proportion of unskilled workers, you would fall victim to the ecological fallacy if you infer that unskilled workers are more likely to commit sabotage.

- **Reductionist fallacy**: Inferences about group processes drawn from individual level data.
  - Example: Assuming that because an individual is poor, he/she lives in a poor neighborhood.
Ecological and Reductionist fallacies

• I have data on a particular USC fraternity and find that it throws frequent parties at which members consume alcohol. I know that one of my students is a member of this fraternity and I infer that he parties and consumes alcohol regularly. This inference is:
  • A. Valid
  • B. Ecological fallacy
  • C. Reductionist fallacy
Ecological and Reductionist fallacies

• I have data on a random sample of USC students, and I find that, on average, students in my sample attend class 75% of the time. Based on this data, I infer that the average class at USC is attended by 75% of its students. This inference is:
  • A. Valid
  • B. Ecological fallacy
  • C. Reductionist fallacy
Reliability

- A measure is reliable if the measure yields consistent values when the level of the phenomenon being measured is not changing.
  - Ex: Crime, wealth

- Test-retest reliability (intrarater reliability, intraobserver reliability)
- Alternate-Forms reliability
- Inter-rater (inter-observer) reliability
Any questions about the homework?
Gathering your own data

- Asking questions
- Making direct observations
  - Examples: Attending hearings on treaty ratification; Election observers
- Making unobtrusive observations
  - Spying
  - Observing behavior indirectly
  - Archives, physical traces of activity
  - In IR, we rely a lot on journalists and historians
- Triangulation -- use of multiple measures
  - Related to: mixed-method research
Questions vs. Direct Observations

• Asking questions
  • Individuals have lots of knowledge about their own actions and experiences
  • But humans are biased, forgetful, and have their own motives

• Making observations
  • May affect the behavior we’re studying
  • More costly/Less feasible than indirect observation
    • Limits the number of cases we can observe
Asking Questions: Closed ended vs. open ended

- Close ended questions require respondents to select between answers you provide: multiple choice, points on a scale, etc.
  - Amenable to quantitative analysis
  - Easy to interpret
  - Relatively quick: no long-winded responses

- You have to know the possible answers in advance
- Less potential to learn surprising information
- Doesn’t allow respondent to express themselves
Asking Questions: Closed ended vs. open ended

• Open ended questions allow respondents to come up with their own answer.
  
  • Benefits:
    • Allow for detailed responses
    • Allow you to learn new information
    • Allows respondent to express themselves

• Drawbacks
  • Answers can be long, or off topic
  • Difficult to quantify responses
  • Difficult to compare answers across respondents
Rules of Thumb for Asking Good Questions

• Simplicity, clarity, brevity
  • No double-barreled questions
    • How was the music and lighting for your meal tonight?
      • Excellent, Good, Bad, Terrible

• Avoid “loaded” words or phrases

• Avoid questions that have a “right” answer

• Would you believe that bottled water can be more expensive than oil?
More Rules of Thumb for Asking Good Questions

• Avoid “loaded” words or phrases
  • Do you believe in a woman’s right to choose regarding abortion?

• Avoid questions that have a “right” answer

• Beware memory-intensive and computationally-intensive questions
  • When asking about the past, always specify a timeframe

• Would you believe that bottled water can be more expensive than oil?
Rules of Thumb for Asking Good Questions

• The reliability of answers depends on all respondents understanding the question the same way.

• The validity of answers depends on all respondents understanding the question the same way the researcher does.

• Simplicity, clarity, brevity
  • Be specific and define your terms
  • No double-barreled questions
  • Beware memory-intensive questions

• How was the music and lighting for your meal tonight?

• Have you witnessed a crime in the past week?
Asking Questions: Closed ended vs. open ended

• Open ended questions allow respondents to come up with their own answer.
  • Benefits:
    • Allow for detailed responses
    • Allow you to learn new information
    • Allows respondent to express themselves

• Drawbacks
  • Answers can be long, or off topic
  • Difficult to quantify responses
  • Difficult to compare answers across respondents
Don’t ask people what they can’t/shouldn’t answer

• If you ask someone a question they don’t know or that doesn’t apply to them:
  • They’ll just make it up.
  • And they’ll be annoyed with you.
Don’t ask people what they can’t/shouldn’t answer

• Concept: Support for Rick Perry’s candidacy
  • How likely are you to vote for Rick Perry in the Republican Primary in 2012?

• Step back. Can we refine that concept?
  • Support from whom? What type of support?
  • Support by donating? Support by volunteering? Support by voting?

• What type of validity are we concerned with here?
Filtering Questions

• Are you planning to vote in the Republican primary?
  • If yes, proceed to question 2

• Open vs. Closed Ended:
  • Who are you planning to vote for?
    • Do we list the candidates or not?

• Side Note: If you don’t know who you’re asking, you don’t know what the answer means.
  • This is why surveys contain demographic questions
Providing Good Answer Choices

• Must be **exhaustive** and **mutually exclusive**
  • Order should be logical
  • Phrasing should be neutral

A. Very Happy
B. Happy
C. Very Unhappy
D. Unhappy
E. Neither Happy nor Unhappy
Providing Good Answer Choices (2)

• Must be **exhaustive** and **mutually exclusive**
  • Order should be logical
  • Phrasing should be neutral

A. Very Happy
B. Happy
E. Neither Happy nor Unhappy
D. Unhappy
C. Very Unhappy
Providing Good Answer Choices (3)

• Likert scales should be balanced
  A. Very Happy
  B. Happy
  E. Neither Happy nor Unhappy
  D. Unhappy
  C. Very Unhappy
  A. Extremely Happy
  B. Very Happy
  E. Happy
  D. Not Happy

• To give the neutral option or not

• Should you make “I don’t know” an option?
Framing Effects: It's more than just one question

- Framing effects are all the other cues that researchers provide respondents (intentionally or not) that affect the way they answer questions.
  - Remember: The respondent is always trying to find the “right” answer.

- For in-person interviews:
  - Who is the enumerator? What are they wearing? What accent do they have? Where is the interview taking place?

- In written surveys: What questions has the interviewee already been asked?
  - How have they been “primed?”