

Survey Research Center

Small Shop with Large Capabilities

- More than 100 research projects in less than 2 years
- State-of-the-art computer scannable survey technology for mail or in-person
- 14 Telephone Stations with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI)
- Personal Interviewing using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing (CAPI) technology
- Web surveys
- Focus Groups, Cognitive Interviewing, Project & Survey Design

From 0 to 100 in Two Years flat

The Survey Research Center (SRC), a unit of the Social Science Research Institute, serves as a focal point for Penn State faculty in a variety of disciplines who have an interest in conducting survey research. From its inauguration in the fall of 2001 through fiscal year 2002-03, the SRC facilitated more than 100 research projects for Penn State faculty and administrators. Of these projects, 42 were

completed, 26 were ongoing, and 24 awaited funding; only 11 were inactive or did not receive funding.



Marion Place: SRC Project Offices

These projects came from a variety of colleges, departments and centers including the Africana Research Center, Agriculture, Biobehavioral Health, Communications, Education, Food Services, Forestry, Geography, Health and Human Services, Hotel and Restaurant Management, Human Development and Family Studies, Kinesiology, the Library, Linguistics, the School of Nursing, Nutrition, the Prevention Research Center, Psychology, the Schreyer Institute, etc.

CONTENTS

Statistical Snapshots	2
Research Penetrating the Nation	3
Research Impacting Pennsylvania	3
Cooperation Beyond Penn State	3
Methodologies & Technologies	4
Workshops & Courses	4
Contacts & Acknowledgements	4

The Survey Research Center at Penn State was founded to enhance social science research at Penn State. To help meet this goal we began with three central missions. The first was to put together a center that could conduct all types of surveys for Penn State researchers with state-of-the-art methods and procedures in a cost effective manner. By the end of our second year, we had gone a long way towards meeting this goal, as is attested to in the rest of this report.

Our second mission was to provide training in survey research methods to the Penn State community. We have

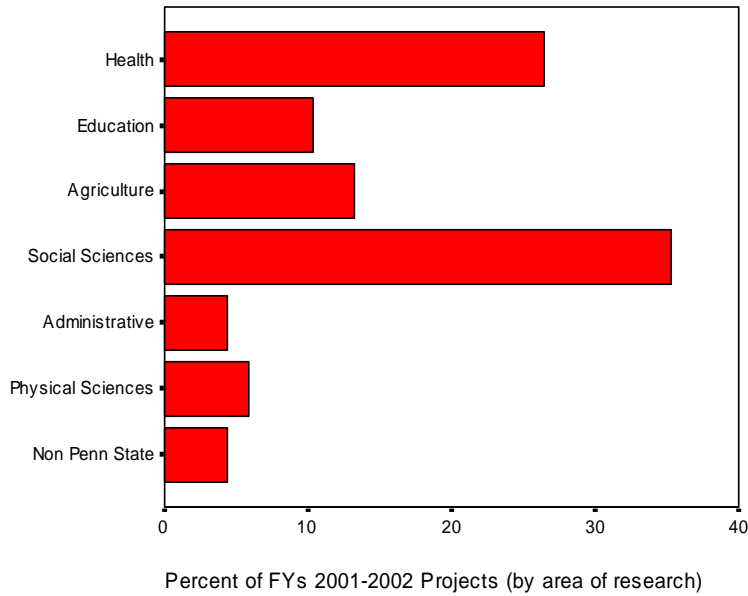
also made progress towards fulfilling this mission but still have a long way to go to get to where we want to be. For example, we are currently exploring ways the SRC can facilitate Penn State graduate students obtaining specialized training and certification in survey research methods.

Our third mission is to serve as a catalyst to bring together researchers interested in survey methodology and provide mechanisms to promote and initiate research initiatives on survey methods. While there was less effort put into this third mission in the first two years, we believe that Penn State is well positioned to

become a leading center for methodological studies of survey methodology, and more our of resources will be directed towards this mission in years three and four.



David R. Johnson
Director



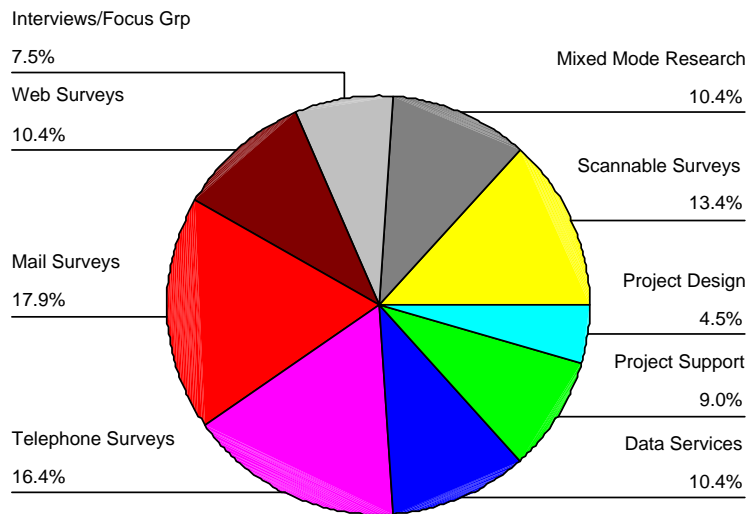
Interdisciplinary Capabilities

The SRC carries out survey research projects for many departments and centers at Penn State. While social science researchers are the largest single block using SRC services, they are by no means the majority of the SRC's clients. Survey research centers at other universities tend to pull a large share of their clients from extra-university sources, while 95% of SRC's projects were initiated by Penn State researchers.

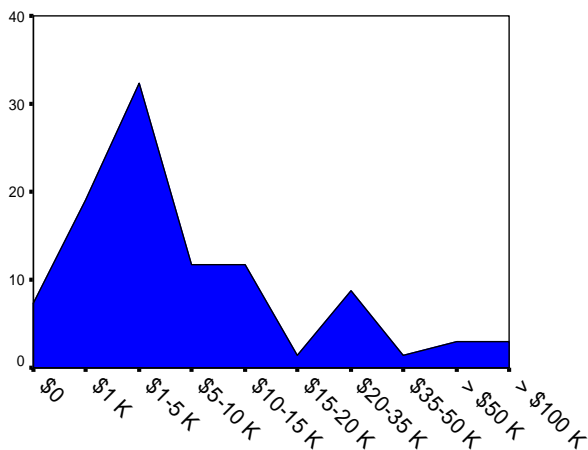
Most Health and Economic data used by the government to make policy decisions come from survey research.

Multi-Mode Capabilities

One of the strengths of the SRC is its technical and methodological capabilities. Of the projects underway in 2001-2003, no one single mode of research predominated. Diversity of method and mode is a unique quality of Penn State's SRC. Other comparable university centers across the country tend to specialize in only one or two modes of data collection, while the SRC provides researchers with the full range of state-of-the-art methodologies. These include everything from web surveys to focus groups to computer assisted personal interviews (CAPI) and telephone interviews (CATI).



FYs 2001-2002 Projects (by mode of research)



Percent of FYs 2001-2002 Projects (by budget amount)

Small Shop – Big Capabilities

The SRC is considered a 'small shop' in survey jargon. This size makes it possible to customize projects to meet the needs of academic researchers rather than conducting mass research for corporate clients.

For any survey research center to be viable, it must have a good balance between large and small projects. Large projects enable the SRC to provide a stable base of operation so that the SRC is available for all-sized projects. Projects range in size and scope from on-campus web surveys to state-wide personal interviewing to national telephone interviews. The majority of the SRC's projects are in the smaller project range.

Ongoing Research to Penetrate the Nation

Not every part of America is the same. A health solution acceptable to urban senior citizens may be unacceptable to those living in rural areas.

The SRC is currently conducting research that penetrates into the impact rural life has on the nutrition and health attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of senior citizens. This research also studies rural seniors' perceptions of available resources that offer nutrition and health information. The purpose is to identify

problems or barriers senior citizens face when trying to obtain nutrition and health information.

To develop an effective survey instrument, the SRC conducted a literature review, carried out a focus group at a senior center, consulted numerous nutrition faculty members for expert review, tested reliability through a test-retest phase, and conducted cognitive interviews. The use of cognitive interviewing to pretest survey

questionnaires assures that questions are understood by the respondents in the same way as was intended by the researchers.

The survey is being piloted in 3 rural Pennsylvania and Virginia counties, as both a self-administered mail survey and telephone survey. Final revisions and improvements will be made based on the results of the pilot for a wider study.



Research to Impact the Commonwealth

Food Stamp Nutrition Education study. Pennsylvania food pantries can obtain federal funds to support their work, *as long as nutrition education accompanies food distribution.* Nutrition education newsletters have become the most frequently-used method to accomplish this educational requirement due to their portability and ability to contain practical tips such as recipes.

Penn State researchers, Alison Harmon, Brian Grim and Judy Gromis, studied whether newsletters are in fact useful in changing nutrition behavior.

The results of eight focus group interviews conducted by the SRC throughout Pennsylvania with food pantry clients showed that nutrition newsletters can be effective in

helping readers make healthy food choices consistent with sound dietary advice.

An important finding is captured by a quote from a participant: "I know why, just tell me how!" People know that they should eat right. They seek practical tips, such as recipes, that make healthy eating tasty and affordable.



- Focus Group participant on what a good nutrition newsletter should contain

PROSPER – Ongoing Cooperative Research

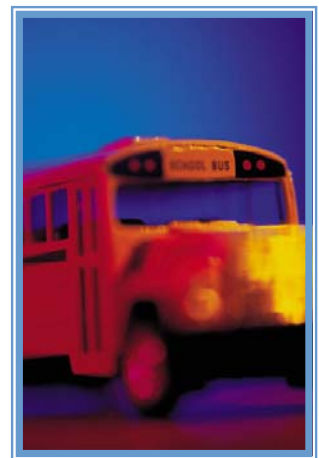
PROSPER. Penn State and Iowa State University are collaborating to develop community partnerships that strengthen families and help young people avoid substance abuse and behavioral problems. The PROmoting School/community-university Partnerships to Enhance Resilience (PROSPER) project is a five-year project that will involve about 6,000 youth in

14 communities throughout Pennsylvania.

In cooperation with the research being done in Iowa, the Survey Research Center conducts the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) data collection for this longitudinal project. The Center's project preparation responsibilities include editing the survey instrument, program-

ming the survey into Ci3 Survey Software, hiring field interviewers in 4 different geographic areas of Pennsylvania, preparing all training materials, conducting two-day training sessions, and collecting the data.

Professor Mark Greenberg of Penn State's Prevention Research Center coordinates this effort with Iowa State.



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Contacts

The Survey Research Center provides state-of-the-art and cost-effective survey research services to Penn State faculty and administrative units. The Survey Research Center operates on a fee-for-service basis. Project cost estimates are gladly provided upon request. For more information, contact:

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Workshops & Courses

In addition to an advanced sociology graduate course on survey methodology offered by the SRC's Director, the Survey Research Center offers workshops and other training opportunities for the Penn State research community. Topics include questionnaire design, focus groups, etc. Online versions of workshops are at the SRC's website:

<http://www.ssri.psu.edu/survey/educ.htm>

Multi-Mode Methodologies & Cutting Edge Technologies

Self-Administered & Mail Surveys. The SRC provides cost effective mailing and survey receiving services. TELEform® software is used to create scannable self-administered and mail surveys. This versatile software allows the freedom to custom design surveys while providing reliable data collection. Following data collection, responses are quickly scanned and imaged, expediting the data entry process.

Focus Groups. Focus group data collection services provided by the SRC include: question route design, moderation, note-taking, voice and/or video recording, transcription services, and reporting.

Multi-Mode. A combination of methods is often used to reach various populations and increase response rates. The SRC help researchers identify the appropriate method(s).

Face-to-Face Interview Surveys. The SRC provides field project management, utilizing various research data-gathering techniques for collecting data (e.g., CAPI-Computer Assisted Personal Interviews, paper & pencil scannable surveys for assisted self-administration, cognitive interviewing, etc.). The SRC has a network of trained interviewers throughout Pennsylvania.

Telephone Surveys. SRC telephone interviewers use Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (WinCATI®) to guide them through complex interview schedules. Quality control is facilitated by audio-visual monitoring and interview verification.

Internet & Web Surveys. Resources at the SRC, including secure servers and experienced programmers, offer quality web-based data collection. The SRC uses software such as Perseus® to create surveys that can be administered via email or the Internet.



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