

New survey clinic fills university need



Survey design clinic members (back row) Dr. Don Dillman and James McCall and (front row) Lindsey Beltz, Sarah Morton, Mandy Clayson, and Yikang Bai.

The Social and Economic Sciences Research Center (SESRC) has conducted surveys for University sponsors, state agencies, and organizations throughout the United States for more than 40 years. During this time thousands of surveys have been implemented by telephone, mail, and the Internet. Sociology graduate students benefited from the SESRC by gaining survey design skills from formal classroom instruction and applying those skills in the SESRC's data collection laboratories.

The creation of a new Survey Design Clinic at the SESRC takes this long history of collaboration a step further. Lena Le, SESRC Director, and Lisa McIntyre, chair of the sociology department, created the clinic to provide no-cost assistance to students,

faculty, and staff who were undertaking survey research.

In addition to university service, the other goal of the clinic was to provide advanced survey design learning experiences for graduate students.

In many respects the clinic experience is like a medical student internship, where students try to understand patient needs and translate textbook learning into ways of diagnosing and solving problems,” said Don Dillman, who co- led the effort to implement the clinic with Le.

The survey design clinic opened its doors in the Spring 2016 semester—and included five graduate students: Lindsey Betz, Mandy Clayson, Sarah Morton, Yikang Bi, and James McCall. Each student held office hours twice a week—and invited anyone from the university community to drop-in with questions related to survey methods.



Dr. Dillman’s recent book “Internet, Phone, Web, and Mixed-Mode Surveys: The

Tailored Design Method, 4th edition” provided guidance for solving a host of survey design problems—from sampling and writing questions to getting high response rates. WSU Sociology and SESRC alums Jolene Smyth (associate professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska) and Leah Melani Christian (Research Director at Nielsen) co-authored the book.

SESRC Director Lena Le (left) chats with survey clinic consultants Sarah Morton and James McCall.

“One of the results of combining classroom and clinic instruction is that our graduates will be better equipped to provide practical help to students and colleagues in the future,” Dillman said.

Overall, each student logged more than 70 hours of consulting during the semester. The clinic worked on 16 different full-scale surveys, ranging from faculty research to undergraduate class projects.

The most common questions posed by clients focused on how to construct

questionnaires.

“The thing the most people struggled with were questions like: ‘Are the questions clear? How is the structure of my survey? Does it make sense?’” said McCall.

The survey clients included students and faculty from a wide array of departments, including the College of Arts and Sciences, Civil and Environmental Engineering, Neuroscience, and Veterinary Medicine.

“The people that came in were from diverse areas...so it took me doing some homework to then get to a place to give them advice,” said Clayson.

In addition to providing a service for the WSU community, the student consultants also came away with valuable hands-on experience.



Graduate students Lindsey Beltz and Yikang Bai, survey design clinic consultants.

“That’s really valuable.”

The survey clinic reopened for business on August 29 in 143 Wilson-Short Hall. Walk-ins are welcome. Clinic hours are posted here. Email requests can be sent to SESRC.SurveyClinic@wsu.edu

“I whole-heartedly believe that learning something is one thing, but putting into practice is a whole other beast. You learn a lot more that way,” McCall said.

“I was able to move my knowledge from a book, that I could pull off a shelf as a resource, to actually in my head. I could pull from my own brain really quickly, instead of just having to reference a book. It became a working knowledge,” Clayson said.

