TRAINING STUDENTS TO GATHER DATA: THE STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Students are often used by academics to gather data for research projects to the benefit of both students and faculty researchers. This paper outlines the specific advantages of this practice and provides guidelines useful in training students to gather data. The guidelines were developed by merging the very limited extant research in data collection training with results of a survey of students who had participated in a large-scale mall-intercept study. The results not only contribute to the research literature on data collection, but should also encourage researchers to engage in further study of data collection and effects.

INTRODUCTION

Students have been used to collect data for academic research purposes by a number of researchers over the years (e.g., Bearden 2001; Belk 1985; Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Mick 1996; Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948). The involvement of students in the research process presents a number of advantages to both researcher and students, if the process is effectively managed. For example, students gain a greater understanding of the research process and obtain skills and experiences suitable for noting on a resume while the researchers gain access to a broad, potentially diverse sample at relatively low cost or effort. Despite the acceptance of the practice of using students as data collectors, surprisingly little research exists in any literature base about training field interviewers/data collectors other than a few how-to books, marketing research textbooks and some relatively dated articles.

For example, three articles addressing the interviewer/data collector and their training appeared in the *Journal of Marketing* in the mid 1900s but are mostly normative or prescriptive rather than empirical in nature. The first article is an American Marketing Association committee report that provided guidelines for selecting, training, and supervising field interviewers (Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948). A later article similarly addressed qualifications of good field interviewers; explaining how to find them, the training they need and how to supervise them (Clarkson 1949). Later, in a note on the subject, Morgan (1951) described the importance of matching the field interviewer with the targeted respondents, a contention advocated by others with regard to ethnicity (i.e., Hernandez and Kaufman 1990; Jackson et al. 2004). Despite Clarkson's 1949 plea that not enough attention had been allocated to the selection, training and supervision of research interviewers, little has changed as indicated by Sampson (1996) who singled out "training and supervising interviewers" as one of three areas in qualitative research needing "a good deal of work."

Further research on student interviewers and data collectors regarding issues ranging from student recruitment to training to effects on study results is highly warranted primarily for two reasons. First, the win-win potential for using students in research may lead to an increased use of students in research; yet, information about effective and appropriate training is limited. Second, any data collectors or interviewers, including students, may negatively impact the research results; as Clarkson (1949, p. 323) states, "a research operation is only as strong as its interviewers." Most research textbooks and researchers agree and note that nonsampling error may arise from interviewers and generally suggest training as the remedy for minimizing interviewer error (i.e., Cannell, Oksenberg, and Converse 1977; Churchill and Iacobucci 2005).

The primary purpose of this paper is to initiate research into the use of students as face-to-face interview data collectors in faculty research by identifying training issues most relevant to students charged with collecting data from study respondents. This objective was accomplished by gathering the opinions about pre-study preparation and training from a group of students who had recently participated in a large-scale mall-intercept face-to-face data collection study. The results, while exploratory, should provide useful guidelines for training student face-to-face interviewers in the future. Just as important, we hope this research will initiate more studies in this under-researched area of students as data collectors in faculty research, especially with regard to effectiveness, effects and ethics. The paper begins with a discussion of advantages and disadvantages of using students as data collectors, and reviews the limited literature about data collector/interviewer issues. The results of the student

opinions about interviewer training are then presented and the implications are discussed.

BACKGROUND

In general, a number of advantages and disadvantages of involving students in academic research accrue to both students and faculty researchers as summarized in Table 1. Students benefit from their participation in research activities superficially by getting extra or regular course credit associated with the activity. More importantly, however, the hands-on involvement in the research should make the research process more meaningful to students, thus enhancing learning about the research (Chapdelaine and Chapman 1999). The hands-on experience should further enhance learning by stimulating interest in the course for which the research was conducted (Evans, Rintala, Guthrie, and Raines 1981). When the study purpose benefits the community or not-for-profit organizations, students may also derive a sense of satisfaction from participating in a project that benefits others, as Evans et al. (1981) note. Involvement in research has implications for students beyond their college life. Having participated in data collection and respondent interviewing, students should develop a greater awareness of the difficulties associated with data collection needed to better evaluate research results. The research activities also provide students with an exposure to research as a career option and provide them with experiences and skills desired by some employers or graduate schools.

Students may see some disadvantages in their involvement in faculty research, however. The research involvement may require a considerable expenditure in time, effort and even money to fulfill the research participation requirements. Students may resent these expenditures as being above and beyond their expectations of the course. An example comes from the well-publicized Scott Peterson murder trial where a criminal justice professor at a university was hired to conduct a survey of area and state residents' pre-trial attitudes toward Mr. Peterson's guilt. The professor involved students in the telephone survey phase of the research as a requirement of the course. After the study results were submitted to the judge considering a change of venue motion, some students in the course confessed to falsifying the results, in part, because they resented having to spend their own time and money to conduct the research (Ryan 2004).

Similarly, some students may consider the awarding of course or extra credit of data collection/interviewing as unethical. Students could feel obligated to participate because of the need for course credit while at the same time feel they are "being used" and held captive to the interests of faculty looking to fulfill their own research agenda. Finally, some personality characteristics of a student researcher may present a disadvantage in data collection/interviewing. Especially shy students or those who have difficulty in unfamiliar situations or with people may have difficulty in approaching strangers to invite study participations or elicit answers.

The most apparent benefits of using students to collect data for faculty research include the low cost, convenient access to data collectors who in turn can readily access a potentially diverse sample, although generally within the geographic area of the study. Involving students in research also provides faculty with experiential, real-world exercises to enhance learning. The primary disadvantages to faculty of using students to gather data include factors that affect data quality – student characteristics may not "match" those of the sample (i.e., Hernandez and Kaufman 1990; Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948), and student cheating, dishonesty or error that may result from little relevance of the study and study results to students. As Reed, Parker, and Vitriol (1948, p. 366) noted, "Experience has shown that most undergraduates do not make satisfactory interviewers . . . because their attitude is not a mature one." They further add that "When a person is being questioned by an interviewer of college age, the tendency is to take the whole procedure too lightly on the part of both the respondent and the interviewer."

Again, there is surprisingly little research other than experience-based anecdotal information on training data collectors (i.e., Clarkson 1949; Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948), despite the widespread view that interviewers may influence study results and "that adequate training of qualitative research interviewers is absolutely essential" (Sampson 1996, p. 338). The few studies found that empirically tested training effects include a study by Billiet and Loosveldt (1988) that found differences in results of some study variables based on level of training. For example, more highly trained interviewers tended to generate more complete responses and applied the instructions more precisely than did less trained interviewers. In other cases, no significant differences based on training level were found leading the researchers to relate training effects to question structure. Cannell, Oksenberg, and Converse (1977) report results of their study designed to examine effects of the specific interviewing techniques: giving instructions, feedback and encouraging commitment, on report quality. Other than improving interviewer report quality, the training in and use of these techniques was found to reduce interviewer behavior variability, increase researcher control of interviewer techniques and reduce the use of interview methods that may bias results.

The general business literature is not helpful in regard to training either. For example, some authors have noted a lack of research that addresses effectiveness of training programs for salespersons (Farrell and Hakstian 2001), organizational leaders (Collins and Holton 2004) or employees in general (Mathews et al. 2001) or for specific training techniques. For example, the Collins and Holton

TABLE 1
STUDENT–INVOLVED RESEARCH: ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES TO STUDENTS AND FACULTY RESEARCHERS

Student Advantages	Student Disadvantages	Faculty Advantages	Faculty Disadvantages
Extra course credit	Often requires personal expenditures such as time, effort, and travel	Inexpensive	Dishonest or cheating students lead to bad data
Marketable experience to potential employers or graduate schools	Some students may feel the assignment is beyond the scope requirements of the class	Students are convenient "research assistants"	Little relevance to students
Potential for community service, depending on the research purpose	Some students may have difficulty approaching strangers	Provides faculty with a hands-on learning opportunity for students	Dissimilarity of students to respondents
Experiential learning and a self-development opportunity about the research process	Students might feel intimidated if they do not understand the research purpose or content of the questionnaire	Students have access to a diverse sample based on their diverse backgrounds	Inexperience of students might lead to inconsistent survey administration
Students may feel a sense of accomplishment and contribution to a worthwhile effort	Some students may consider their involvement in the research is unethical		Some students' personality types may not be suitable for data collection
Enhances interest in the course			
Provides exposure to research as a career option			
Creates an awareness of difficulties in collecting data			

meta-analysis of leadership development programs prompted the researchers to state that "few empirical studies were available for outcomes of on-the-job assignments, coaching, mentoring, or feedback interventions, which made it impossible to determine the effectiveness of those interventions through this meta-analysis" (pp. 239–241).

In the absence of empirical evidence of relevant interviewer training issues, we look to the normative literature to determine interviewer training factors that should be addressed and how. Clarkson (1949) says that every detail of the research should be explained and that interviewer trainers should work to build confidence and courage while training. Trainees must also understand what to expect and that "nothing but practice is going to improve the new interviewer's work" (p. 325). Nevertheless, trainees should be provided with a "general instruction book" to serve as a reference. Reed, Parker, and Vitriol (1948) stress the importance of easy-to-understand instructions, a questionnaire that is easy to understand and administer, careful attention to respondent quotas and eligibility, training about respondent approach,

and efforts to maintain interviewer interest, primarily through meetings. The authors also stress that interviewers should understand the purpose of the research and should receive a general training manual. These generalized instruction manuals should explain issues such as how samples and respondents are selected, how they are approached, how to make judgments about respondents, and how to administer various types of questions. Specific instructions for each survey that explains administrative issues, such as mailing dates, compensation rates, and technical instructions which detail instructions for the specific study being conducted should also be developed. Finally, the authors note "other training aides" such as newsletters and performance feedback that may be used in training interviewers.

Some guidance about training interviewers is found in marketing research textbooks. For example, Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2006, p. 460) suggest providing interviewers with instructions to help ensure consistency in survey administration. These instructions serve as "The vehicle for training the interviewer on how to select prospective respondents, screen them for eligibility, and conduct the actual interview." The Zikmund and Babin (2007) text "relies heavily" on a training manual published by the Survey Research Center, Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan in 1976 to offer some advice on training interviewers about contacting respondents, asking questions, probing, recording responses and ending the interview. Maholtra (2007) also provides guidance on much the same topics based, in part, on information published in 1983 by the same Institute for Social Research. Both the Burns and Bush (2006) and the Churchill and Iacobucci (2005) books focus primarily on errors that are introduced into the research process because of interviewers and offer some suggestions for minimizing error, rather than focusing on interviewer training.

While the information provided in these texts and the literature about interviewers is helpful in training student interviewers, appropriate training techniques and/or topics especially relevant to student interviewers are not addressed. This study about training needs should be helpful in guiding further research into interviewer training effectiveness in view of the paucity of academic research about interviewer training effectiveness and since "The first stage in any formal training process is the assessment of exactly what is needed (Mathews et al. 2001, p. 485).

METHODOLOGY

Considering the limited research and theoretical background regarding training of interviewers/data collectors, especially student interviewers, a phenomenological methodology was used in this research whereby "the text provides the focus for interpretation and the analysts must show where participants' descriptions support the thematic interpretation" (Goulding 1999, p. 865). Phenomenological methodologies focus on exploring and interpreting the lived experiences of people (Groenewald 2004; Hopkinson 1999). In this qualitative methodology, data are collected via interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and/or focus groups then, by reviewing and analyzing the collected data, the researcher seeks to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences" (Kvale 1996, pp. 1–2). Thus, the objective of phenomenological research is to "identify meaningful central themes" (Trulsson and Radestad 2004, p. 190) which may then be analyzed to identify the essence of the phenomena.

Students from two different southern universities located about 60 miles apart were involved in a survey designed to determine various attitudes, activities, opinions and spending patterns of consumers in a specific southern region that attracts consumers of different ages, countries of origin and economic backgrounds. The survey was conducted using the mall-intercept methodology in the three major malls within the region. Students in eight different undergraduate classes (business statistics, management, marketing research and consumer behavior) were asked to administer the surveys in face-to-face interviews but were allowed to choose both the mall and the two-hour time period that best suited their needs during 13 consecutive days of interviewing.

Most students were asked to complete 12 surveys while students in marketing research class were expected to complete 25 surveys, in return for extra credit in their course. While the same person did not train all student interviewers, the same general format for training was followed, primarily based on written instructions given to the students (see Appendix). In class, students were told the purpose of the survey, the student role as data collectors and interviewers, dress and manner, who and how to approach potential respondents, handling rejection, and administrative issues, such as how to get questionnaires, how to return them and so forth. Students were told to give the questionnaires to respondents on a clipboard for self-completion or to complete the questionnaire for respondents if asked. Most respondents chose to complete the questionnaire without student assistance.

Within two weeks of the mall-intercept study, three of the five instructors of classes containing students that participated in the community survey agreed to administer a follow-up questionnaire to survey-participating students so that not all participating students were given an opportunity to respond to the follow-up survey. Additionally, not all data-collecting students in the three classes participated in the follow-up questionnaire used in this study. The lack of participation by all interview-conducting students involved in the initial research may limit the study findings. However, the exploratory nature of this

study and the response rate (76 responding students of 201 interviewers for a 37.8%) make the results meaningful for further exploration.

The questionnaire contained four open-ended questions designed to determine issues most helpful in training students to conduct surveys. The questions were (1) What instructions were you given before you began the surveys that were the most helpful? (2) What instructions did you NOT receive that would have helped make your job easier? (3) What could have been done to make your job administering questionnaires easier? and (4) If you were asked to speak to a group of students next year who were about to conduct the surveys, what tips would you give them? While the number of questions, the open-ended format of the questions and the potential bias arising from misinterpreting student answers to the questions necessarily limits the generalizability and scope of the results, this study is exploratory in nature and designed to spawn a systematic line of inquiry into a topic important to many academic researchers.

In keeping with the phenomenological methodology, in the first phase of the analysis, responses to the 76 returned questionnaires were independently examined by all three authors who reflected on all student answers and then tried to identify patterns or themes of all student responses for each question as suggested by Anastasi and Urbina (1997). The three authors then met to resolve discrepancies so that each categories/theme would be both exclusive and exhaustive for all student responses as recommended by Crocker and Algina (1986). The discussions led to 13 identified themes and their definitions, as shown in Table 2, which were then used to classify each student response to each question. Again, the three authors independently coded all student responses into the appropriate theme. The resulting agreement/disagreement between authors on coding of each comment was used to determine interrater reliability coefficients for each theme following Winer (1971). The reliability coefficients ranged from 0.95 to 0.99, indicating a high level of agreement between and among the three raters. The authors then met to resolve differences in coding and in all cases agreed upon a code to use in subsequent analysis. The resulting themes of student responses and the relative importance of each are explained next using descriptive statistics and illustrative comments as mandated by the nature of phenomenological research.

INTERVIEWER TRAINING ANALYSIS
AND RESULTS

A total of 76 students returned completed questionnaires for analysis, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed students to respond with any number of answers to each question. The frequency distributions reported in this section are based on the total number of responses to each question: 122 different responses for question 1,

74 responses were given for question 2, 84 for question 3 and 137 for question 4. Each of these student responses was coded as one of the 13 themes identified by the authors: Instructions – written and oral in-class, respondent selection process, manners and etiquette while interviewing, partnering, approach to respondents, survey issues, handling rejection, interview assignment issues, no issues/problems or nothing was helpful, respondent incentives to participate, supervision, and self-preparation. The frequency results of student answers are presented next along with relevant extant academic research or comments in research about each identified category relevant to training interviewers.

Training Themes

Instructions. The student respondents in this study tended to believe that written or in-class instructions were most helpful in completing the surveys. As shown in Table 2 for question 1, 16.4 percent of the student comments identified written instructions as most helpful in conducting the surveys and 9.8 percent of the comments considered the in-class instructions most helpful. Examples of such student comments include "*All the instructions were specified on the instruction paper, that was sufficient," "The written instructions were very helpful"* and "*The instructions were pretty straightforward. Everything was included in the yellow packet handed out to us*." Although no student indicated that the written instructions could be improved or changed to assist in the survey administration process, a few students (6.8%) indicated that more or different in-class instructions would have been helpful. For example, in response to question 2, one student said "*Talk more in depth about the reasoning behind the survey*" and another expressed a need for "*Training of the process*."

The academic literature also indicates that instruction sheets are of key importance when assessing the quality of the data collected by interviewers (e.g., Clarkson 1949; Campbell 1999; Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948; Sanchez 1992). Instructions are usually distributed as part of the training process to ensure that all the participants receive the same information for conducting assignments and guarantees that the information given to participants will be accurate, complete, and current (Campbell 1999). Instruction sheets can be designed in several formats such as a Do's and Don'ts list (Chapdelaine and Chapman 1999) or as a step-by-step set of procedures when interviewing (Mundt 1996). Regardless of the format, these materials generally contain detailed information about the assignment and are a "time saver" for both instructors and participants (Campbell 1999). Verbal instructions are also important in training interviewers as mentioned by some students and research. In general, both methods should be used in training because findings from prior research have failed to find either method always best in persuasion

TABLE 2
TRAINING ISSUES FOR DATA COLLECTORS

Category	Definition	Q1. Most Helpful Instructions Given	Q2. Instructions Needed, Not Given	Q3. Would Make Survey Administration Easier	Q4. Helpful Tips for Future Interviewers
Instruction sheet	Information provided on the printed instructions given to students	16.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
In-class instructions	In-class instructions given before the interviewing	9.8%	6.8%	1.2%	0.0%
Respondent selection process	Way of selecting participants	15.6%	5.4%	1.2%	8.8%
Manners/etiquette	Manners- courteous, polite, confident, dress	9.8%	1.4%	1.2%	29.9%
Partnering	Others conducting interviews, their presence, timeliness, demeanor	0.8%	2.7%	2.4%	3.6%
Approach	Prepared script or information about how and where to gain respondent participation	20.5%	14.9%	1.2%	17.5%
Survey issues	The format, administration, and return of the questionnaire -- color coding, length, questions	6.6%	9.5%	40.5%	8.0%
Handling rejection	Being rejected and how to manage rejection or rude people	4.9%	5.4%	1.2%	10.9%
Administration issues	Specifics about time and place of interviews, seating, pencils, returns	4.9%	16.2%	23.8%	6.6%
Nothing	Nothing was helpful	4.9%	17.6%	3.6%	0.7%
Respondent incentives	Signs, contest, incentives to get potential respondents to participate	4.1%	18.9%	19.0%	5.1%
Supervision	Onsite supervisor, someone to answer questions, take care of problems	0.8%	0.0%	3.6%	0.0%
Self-preparation	Practicing, learning script, understand purpose of survey, etc.	0.8%	1.4%	1.2%	8.8%
Total Student Responses		122	74	84	137

(e.g., Ranger, Jordan-Jackson, and Infante 2003) and because verbal presentations generate positive attitudes, high motivation, and improve the level of participation of those involved (Bewley 1999). Additionally, verbal presentations allow direct feedback and a true two-way communication interchange (McConnell 2005). Mundt (1996) specifically recommends in-class instructions to present the project as something that the participants will be able to do, and that it is within the range of the abilities and talents of those taking part of the survey.

Respondent Selection Process. A number of students commented (15.6%) that the instructions about the respondent selection process were the most helpful in conducting the survey. Examples of such notations include "*I was told to count depending on my watch, the minutes after the hour and start asking people to participate*," "*To give certain type of person at the mall a certain type of survey*" and "*How to select the people according to the time.*" A few student comments, 5.4 percent, indicated their need for more instructions about what types of people to select: "*Do not interview full families, pointers on how to approach people that have worked in the past, no under age*," and "*Not to interview couples.*" Some 8.8 percent of the student comments indicated the respondent selection process as an area to be addressed, if they were asked to give interviewing tips to students in the future. Most of these comments focused on who to select, not how to select as in: "*Try to get people who seem to be bored or just standing around*," "*Only ask people who care.*" Several students, however, would suggest to future interviewers that they abandon a systematic respondent selection process and "*Approach as many people as you can.*"

The selection of respondents in a study is crucial to the generalizability of study results, and may result in biased inferences (Winship and Mare 1992), although interviewers are often solely responsible for implementing the sampling plan (Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948). Despite the critical role of interviewers in this process, no known academic research has examined how interviewers *actually* select study participants, ways to improve sample selection or the effects of the sampling method on interviewers and the job they do. Some researchers realize that interviewers may not follow the sampling plan and have made adjustments. Nevertheless, experience and anecdotes from our student interviewers and from others indicate that interviewers may often fail to follow the designed sampling plan, justifying the need for descriptive research to assess the extent of the problem and why and how best to overcome the problem.

Manners and Etiquette. Matters of interviewer manner, dress and etiquette were considered important by the study's student respondents. For example, manners and etiquette issues were addressed in 9.8 percent of all "most helpful instructions" comments and in 29.9 percent of the "tips for others" comments. In fact, no other single train-

ing theme received as many student comments as did the manners/etiquette category in the "tips for others" question. These types of tips for future data collectors mostly included information about the appropriate attitudes and dress as in the following quotes: "*They should have a positive attitude. Always smile, be in good mood and that will attract people*," "*dress well*," "*dress professionally*," "*dress casually*," "*Be very friendly. Smile all the time*," "*Ask and explain friendly. Talk to them, like in a conversation, not like a machine. Always say thanks and smile*," "*Don't be shy and give eye contact,*" "*Smile, be assertive, be professional and look professional, explain why you are doing this, speak clearly and don't hurry yourself if the respondent is hurried*," "*To be creative when they asked people to fill the surveys. Be confident, have fun, help the people along while they fill out the survey*" and finally, "*Smile, be prepared for rejection, be prepared to listen to annoying people talk your ear off.*" A number of comments (9.8%) indicated that the manner/ etiquette training they had received was most helpful as indicated by these comments: "*dress professionally,*" "*how to present yourself to the public, talk in a courteous manner and if people did not want to fill out a survey, not to press the issue*" and "*to keep smiling no matter if people still refused. Just move onto the next one.*"

The importance of the manners and etiquette training of interviewers is well-founded in the academic literature. For decades, logic, normative, anecdotal writings (i.e., Clarkson 1949; Morgan 1951; Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948) and some empirical evidence (Walker, Harriman, and Costello 1980) have preached the importance of interviewers' manners, dress and "match" or similarity to the respondent. For example, dirty/unpolished shoes, non-ironed shirt, inappropriate posture, inadequate clothes, failure to speak at an adequate level, or body odor may negatively affect the interview (*Computer Weekly* 2002). Interviewers should also use verbal and non-verbal behaviors to persuade respondents to continue study participation; although, the behaviors are more commonly seen in more experienced interviewers (Dudley and Blanchard 1976).

Partnering. Some student comments referred to partnering with others while conducting the study. Students were allowed to sign up for two-hour data collection time slots at any time during mall hours for a period of 13 days and most students signed up with one to three other interviewers. This high incidence of partnering may have led to the limited number of partnering-related comments, if students were well-satisfied with their partnering situation. As evidence, in response to the question asking what other instructions were needed but not given, only two comments were made, one saying that she wanted "*Instructions in case no other interviewers showed up.*" Some students did think partnering was sufficiently important to offer the following tips to future interviewers: "*Team up with somebody, it makes it easier,*" "*Working in*

teams of both genders will make it easier" and "*More people per shift could have helped.*"

Partnering data collectors together to conduct a study may well provide benefits to the researcher and to the participants. Partnering may reduce the opportunity for cheating or completing the surveys themselves (Bush and Gilbert 2002) and may increase confidence and comfort with the interview process which may lead to a more thorough dialogue with the interviewee (Zollo 1995). Clarkson (1949, p. 327) describes partnering in her firm as "a completely unorthodox procedure . . . but it works wonders for the morale of both interviewers."

Approaching Respondents. In this study, information about the approach was provided to the student interviewers prior to the study – both in-class and in written instructions, which included an introductory script. Our student interviewers recognized the relevance of training about the approach when soliciting participation in a study, as indicated by the approach-related comments, which received the most mentions (20.5%) as the most helpful of instructions provided. Examples of these comments about the most helpful training include, "*Prepared script or information about how and where to gain respondent participation*," "*How to ask people to participate*," "*Introducing myself as a student and assuring people that I was not selling anything*," "*To approach people with a friendly attitude and explain the reason of the survey*," "*Tell them we are doing research for the university. Most people that filled it out were sympathizing for college kids, not doing it for the prize!*"

Even though students in the study found the information about the approach most helpful in data collection, a large number of comments, 14.9 percent, suggested the need for even more information about the approach. Examples include, "*More information on how to ask people to participate, for most of us conducting the survey it was our first time*," "*Do not interview full families, pointers on how to approach people that have worked on the past, no under age.*" Additionally, a large number of helpful tips students would provide others were approach-related (17.5%) and would generally emphasize a "hook" or incentive to participate: "*Tell the opportunities that they have to win a prize, tell how important is the survey*," "*Tell people they can win a trip*," "*Tell them you come from [the university]. Extra credit for your class, please help*," "*Be sure to mention the trip, it's the hook*," and "*Have a small conversation while filling out the survey. Thank them afterwards. Be social.*"

Approaching participants to gain their participation in a study is not an easy task (Winter 2003) but is crucial to interviewer success. As Reed, Parker, and Vitriol (1948, p. 372) note, the interviewer "is faced with the necessity of selling himself to the respondent within a very few minutes." This issue has, unfortunately, only been addressed briefly and in a normative manner with regard to interviewer training, though extensively in the sales literature, generally with regard to the importance of canned versus flexible or approaches and scripts (cf., Jolson 1975; Shepherd and Rentz 1990).

Survey Instrument Issues. Some of our student data collectors were especially concerned about the survey length or ambiguous questions, because it may have affected their ability to complete the survey assignments. While 6.6 percent found pre-survey instructions about the survey most helpful, and 9.5 percent would like to have had more instructions about the survey itself, 40.5 percent felt that changes in the survey would have made their data collection efforts easier. Most of these types of responses were about having a shorter questionnaire or fewer questions as exemplified by these comments: "*There were so many questions that many people hesitated to complete, less questions would result in greater turnout*" and "*Redo the surveys, make them easier and shorter, people always looked at the fine print and length and walked off.*"

Surprisingly, little research has examined the effects of the survey design and questions on response rate (Fox, Crask, and Kim 1988) or on ease of survey administration. While conventional wisdom and some research suggests that a study's participation rate is negatively related to survey length and question complexity (e.g., Dillman, Sinclair, and Clark 1993; Lee, Hu, and Toh 2004), others have found little or no effects of survey length, especially on response rate (Linsky 1975; Roose, De Lange, Agneessens, and Waege 2002).

Handling Rejection. When conducting face-to-face interviews, interviewers face repeated rejection from potential interviewees, which may be disconcerting, especially to inexperienced, student data collectors. Nevertheless, few students (4.9%) mentioned rejection training as the most helpful instructions they had received before conducting the survey and only 5.4 percent of the "instructions needed" comments related to rejection issues. However, almost 11 percent of the students indicated that they would discuss rejection to help future interviewers, suggesting that rejection was a concern for our student interviewers. Examples of the helpful hints students would provide others include "*Do not feel bad if people reject or don't want to fill out the questionnaire*," "*Speak, don't be afraid of rejection, some people are in a hurry. There are always rude people in life but the way you handle yourself is the most important thing*," "*be patient because some people can be rude*," "*Keep asking, don't be afraid, and don't be shy, handle rejections and keep asking*," "*Be positive, expect rejections but handle them with a smile and move on*" and "*To not get offended by people who reject your survey offer.*"

The pervasiveness of rejection, especially in the sales field, is evidenced by the hundreds of articles published routinely in the press and trade magazines about rejection and handling rejection. Although no known studies have examined the effects of rejection on interviewers, rejection has generally been linked to negative emotions among

individuals having to approach strangers. For example Steinauer (1998) discussed the findings of a survey of salespeople that found almost 50 percent of salespersons experienced fear or failure when facing rejection and that more than one-fourth reported feeling performance anxiety and pressure. Likely, college students will also experience rejection and the concomitant fears from data collection activities so should be trained to expect and handle rejection while collecting data.

Administrative Issues. As an integral part of the survey process and of receiving course credit, some students were concerned about logistical and administrative issues that could affect completion of the assignment. Some 16.2 percent of the comments mentioned needing more assignment instructions and 23.8 percent indicated that additional assignment-type issues might have made their jobs in administering questionnaires easier. In general, these administrative-related comments were about the location for conducting the survey in the mall. After the study had begun and students could not be contacted, one mall manager changed the study site within the mall and another mall manager limited the area of the study to within a few feet of the table setup with survey materials. Primarily, in response to these last minute changes, students indicated a need for more instructions "*To set up the table*," "*Location of table was not accurate*" and "*The exact location of where the survey was to be conducted.*" Considering the restriction imposed by the mall, students made the following suggestions for facilitating the study: "*Increasing restrictions from ten feet to about twenty since not many people approached the booth*," "*If the location inside the mall was in a better place*" and "*If we could go to different locations in the mall.*" Comments about other survey administration issues were also made, such as "*Have a pencil sharper and file stack to organize the surveys*," "*During the week the mall was not so busy. You should look for busy weekends*," "*Bigger table, more chairs and pencils*."

The interview administration, such as specific instructions about the time and place of interviews, where interviews were to take place, supplies and so on, is another aspect that has not been largely addressed in the interviewer training. However, logic dictates that interviewers have clear instructions about where to go and appropriate supplies/equipment to do their jobs. Additionally, interviewers should also be aware of time and activity requirements of the job and probably be allowed to choose time and place that best fits their schedule, where possible, so the assignment does not interfere with other classes and other responsibilities (Mundt 1996).

Respondent Incentives to Participate. Entry into a drawing to win a two-night trip to a nearby island resort was offered as an incentive for study participation. The prize was announced to students and a posterboard announcing the prize was located at the study setup table but was hidden under the table each night. The morning shift

students were to display all materials, but may not have seen the poster or realized the need to display the poster. As a result, some students indicated the need for more instructions about the incentives provided, as in these comments: "*To set the poster in front of the table, so more people can come up to us and ask us how to win trip*," "*Was not notified of the advertising material (Poster-board) underneath the table. Could have helped in attracting more people to participate in survey*"and "*When the free hotel reservation was going to be?*" Some students indicated the need for other types of incentives, such as *"we should've had refreshments, then people would stop*," "*Have some coffee because many of the older people said it was too long and want some to drink while filling out the form*," "*Advertisements on the questionnaire around the mall*" or "*a small free item.*" One student believed that "*we should have had more advertisement on our college rather than the hotel.*"

The use of incentives has been found effective in increasing participation or response rates (Brennan 1992; Cobanoglu and Cobanoglu 2003; Huck and Gleason 1974; Shaw 2001). For example, monetary incentives can lead to higher response rates in surveys (i.e., Church 1993; Huck and Gleason 1974; Shaw 2001) and does not influence data quality (Shaw 2001). Non-monetary incentives, such as telephone cards, key chains, luggage tags, mini-calculators, and a drawing for a better prize have also been found previously to affect response rates (Cobanoglu and Cobanoglu 2003; Shank, Darr, and Werner 1990).

Supervision. Students received no supervision during the course of the questionnaire administration, although, once every day or two, a supervisor would stop by to check on supplies and compliance with mall requirements. Only three different students made a comment about supervision, such as "*Having an in charge person to answer any questions*" and no students indicated they would mention supervision as an issue to future data collectors. The limited number of supervision-related comments suggests that students, in general, felt comfortable and well-equipped to conduct the study on their own.

Nevertheless research suggests that supervision, when linked to training, feedback, and when practiced in a constant manner, may significantly improve the overall interview quality (Lamb, Sternberg, Orbach, Hershkowitz, Horowitz, and Esplin 2002). In fact, a lack of supervision can endanger the project by compromising the data itself and, as Snead (1942) suggested, marketing interviewers should give the necessary attention to ensure that field participants are actually conducting the assignment and collecting worthy data.

Self-Preparation. As with any job, student interviewers were asked to prepare for the study by rereading the instructions carefully and practicing the approach script. While only one student comment indicated that "*memorizing the script*" was most helpful in conducting the study, a number of students' comments (8.8%) were

about advising future interviewers to self-prepare. Students said they would tell others to: "*Make sure you learn what you're talking about,*" "*Practice your speech,*" "*Make sure to go over the questions and if you don't understand ask the professor to explain it because there are going to be people who might not understand the questions,*" "*Read your instructions,*" "*If you can go and observe other people before you*" and "*Read the instructions several times, go prior to the hours scheduled for the survey to check the site, practice approaching people.*"

One problem with using students to gather data may be a limitation in the time available to train them, making interviewer self-preparation essential for the successful completion of a study. Because interviewers could be a source of bias, if they are not adequately prepared to conduct the project (Chapdelaine and Chapman 1999), researchers may need to implement special training sessions outside of class, quizzes on instructions, or other methods designed to encourage students to self-prepare for the survey administration.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Data collection and interviewing of respondents is one of the most crucial steps in the research process, yet very little empirical evidence about training of data collectors and interviewers exists, especially when those interviewers are nonprofessionals. This research addresses this gap in the literature by identifying advantages and disadvantages of using students to collect data and in assessing student-interviewer training needs by taking the student perspective in identifying focal themes or topics for academic researchers in training students as data collectors and substantiating the topics with existing literature. The study found that data collectors should be trained through written and in-class instructions, about respondent selection, manners and etiquette, partnering, respondent approach, the survey, handling rejection, survey administration, incentives, supervision, and self-preparation.

This study identified the most helpful instructions given to students before they were to conduct a mall-intercept study as instructions – written and in-class – information about approaching respondents and the respondent selection process. The students surveyed felt they needed more information about the incentives for respondent participation, administrative issues and about the approach before conducting the survey. Interestingly, a large number of respondents indicated that no additional instructions were needed to conduct the survey. By far, students felt that changes to the survey itself, mostly the length of the questionnaire, would best facilitate the survey administration, although changes in some study administration procedures and incentives were suggested as ways to make survey administration easier. Finally, the students would be most likely to advise future interviewers about issues related to manners and etiquette, the approach made to respondents and survey administration issues.

Importantly, this study provides academic researchers with a better way of organizing their efforts to effectively train students to gather data. Just as importantly, the study uncovered a lack of systematic and published academic research about interviewer training and training effects/effectiveness, which suggests a number of future research topics. For example research is needed on training and the training topics specifically identified in this study, such as partnering, supervision and the respondent selection process, especially given the exploratory nature of this study. Future research should also focus on the best ways of addressing each category identified in the study. For example, information about manners/etiquette and respondent approach were identified by students as the areas they would address in providing tips to future interviewers. The specific types of etiquette and approach information needed to improve training and *how* that information should be presented to impact interviewer behavior could be examined in subsequent research.

Also important and relevant to training student interviewers, but receiving little attention in the literature is the training technique used. Training techniques, such as coaching, role-playing, mystery "shoppers," and videotaping, have been used and empirically examined in other areas of study, such as sales training and personnel interviewer training, While some of these training techniques have been used and tested in private research firms, the results of their effectiveness have not been widely or academically disseminated. Accordingly, the effects and effectiveness of different student interviewer training techniques on both the quality and quantity of data collected should be systematically and empirically examined and published in academic media. Additionally, the effects of various student motivational factors, such as grades, job-appropriate research skill acquisition, or other incentives, on student attitudes toward the data collection process and the quality and quantity of data collected should be examined. Finally, students may be more prone than professional interviewers to cheat in the data collection process for various reasons as seen in the Scott Peterson research project mentioned previously. Thus, the extent of cheating by students versus other types of interviewers should be examined along with reasons for cheating by all groups. These types of studies would lead to better proactive cheating prevention measures. The further study of this line of in-depth research about interviewer training is sorely needed to ensure integrity of the data collection process and resulting data quality, especially with regards to students, if "their attitude is not a mature one" (Reed, Parker, and Vitriol 1948, p. 366).

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTIONS

Dress
♦   Dress in business casual – nice slacks and shirt, not sloppy. Look business-like.
♦   Wear your ID badge.
Before Conducting Interviews:
♦   Read and practice the interviews.
♦   Bring a spare pencil or pen.
At the Mall
    ♦   Be on time at your selected time slot and go to the table set up for our survey at your mall.
    ♦   Clipboards, extra questionnaires and pencils will be provided in a box under the table, Be sure to get the supplies box when you arrive and return it when you are finished, if no other interviewers have arrived when you leave. Carry clipboard with a few questionnaires in one hand, pencil in the other. Look like a professional interviewer.
    ♦   Work in pairs, if possible, where one person (preferably a female) asks shoppers to participate in the survey (see script below) and the person helps participants complete the questionnaire.
    ♦   Look at your watch and note the time (see why below).
Participant Selection Procedure
RANDOMLY select people to interview by:
♦   Select a random number – Look at the time when you arrive at the survey table. Use the number for the minute you see (0 to 10) as the random number used to select participants. If the time is 1:16, use the number six, if the number is 1:00, 1:10, 1:20, etc., use the number 10).
♦   Select a person walking by according to the random number – if the number is 3, select every 3rd person, if it is 10, every 10th person, etc.
♦   Refusals – if your selected person does not participate, select every next person you see until you have a participant, then go back to selecting based on your random number.
♦   Keep track of the number of refusals. On the outside of your questionnaire packet, record the number of people you asked to participate, the number that actually participated and the number that refused to participate.
Script – What you say to people (memorize this)
Hello, my name is _____ and I'm a student at _____). We are very interested in your thoughts and opinions about [this region] and other tourism issues so we are conducting a survey of people like you shopping in the malls. I am not selling anything and the individual information you give us completely confidential and will only be used for research purposes. For participating, you may win a drawing for two nights at the [resort hotel]. Will you help? Thank you. First, please tell me where you are from" Then begin the interview.
Completing the questionnaires
    ♦   You may ask questions and complete the questionnaires or you may give the survey to the participant on a clipboard and let them complete it. You might want to simply ask the respondent which they prefer.
    ♦   If anyone refuses to answer a question, just continue on and don't press the issue.
    ♦   QUICKLY check to make sure all parts of the survey or complete, then
    ♦   THANK the respondent, given them a pencil, a [resort] brochure and a [tourist city] postcard.
    ♦   REMEMBER to write your name, the date, the mall and the time at the bottom of the back page.
For Results – If anyone wants to see the results or has a question about the research, tell them to contact: [provided].
When you finish
    ♦   Leave any unused questionnaires, pencils, clipboards, etc. in the box under the table.
    ♦   Place completed questionnaires in your packet.
    ♦   Put ID Badge holder in your packet.

APPENDIX (CONTINUED)

♦   Write the following information on the outside of your packet:

Your Name _____

Your Instructor's Name _____

Number of People You Asked to Participate _____

Number of Refusals _____

Completed Questionnaires _____

Good luck. This project will provide you with a valuable skill – research interviewing – that may help you land a job sometime in the future.