Statistics for Social Research I

Research Design and Methodology I

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Assignment #4 – Course Learning Journal

The journal is a written reflection of your learning journey while working in each course. The Learning Journal integrates the essential elements of the course within your professional field of interest. The objective of the course journal is to produce a degree of acculturation, integrating new ideas into your existing knowledge of each course. This is also an opportunity to communicate with your professor insights gained because of the course. The course learning journal should be 3-5 pages in length and should include the following sections:

1. Introduction –Summarize the intent of the course, how it fits into the graduate program, and the relevance of its position in the curricular sequence.

2. Personal Growth - Describe your personal growth–how the course stretched or challenged you– and your progress in mastery of course content and skills during the week and through subsequent readings – what new insights or skills you gained.

3. Reflective Entry - Add a reflective entry that describes the contextualization (or adaptation and relevant application) of new learning in your professional field. What questions or concerns have surfaced about your professional field as a result of your study?

4. Conclusion – Evaluate the effectiveness of the course in meeting your professional, religious, and educational goals.

# Introduction

This sub term provided instruction in introductory statistics focusing on descriptive statistics but also introducing inferential statistics. This helped to lay a foundation for understanding how to convert data to numerical values and provided a basic understanding of various techniques appropriate to various types of data. This tied in well with the course on research design and methodology as various statistical methods align with various research methods. This combination was especially valuable at this point in the academic program to begin strategic planning toward completion of a research project by helping to narrow down the approaches necessary to address various potential problems that could become the final focus of my research project. In this regard it stimulates an understanding for consideration of sampling techniques and the appropriate statistical methods that might be applied to the collected data, and well as formulating research questions and hypotheses which help to focus on who to examine for one’s sample. Instrumentation and data analysis was introduced. These courses not only provided insight into the essential major tools utilized for research design and statistical analysis but helped to show how these two which functions on their own also function together in a research project informing and shaping each other. This is helpful as the student continues to do literature review through additional course work that can inform the final project as it helps the student to better focus and narrow the scope to a manageable project. I leave this term with a better understanding of how my research should be designed, the types of data that will be needed for the research and how it may be gathered as well as how with the help of statistical methods this data can be processed and interpreted so that valid and useful conclusions may be drawn from the project.

# Personal Growth

This term has been valuable to my learning. I was previously in Omega Graduate School back in the early 2000s and had Statistics 1 and 2. At that time the focus was on learning to utilize the WINKS program with some introduction of the basics of statistical frameworks (statistics as a language). These two courses, statistics, and research design, coupled together, were more fruitful in generating learning and comprehension. I especially appreciated the direct application to a hypothetical but potential research project. The one I utilized was exploring failure to launch syndrome among young adults in the Texas District of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. At this point in my previous course work my learning had not progressed to the point of being able to narrow down to a potential project to apply the learning to. I appreciate how these two courses integrated together, but also how they integrated with the previous Core 2 courses.

Statistics as a mathematical technique has always made me somewhat nervous. I have a track record of academic success. My background is in philosophy and humanities, a bit of psychology, theology including systematic, historical, and exegetical focus in graduate school. I have supplemented my education in practical theology through clinical and military chaplaincy training as well as through learning about congregational systemic dynamics through training for interventional ministry with congregations. In all that training and course work the one weak point has always been math. In college I had to take one advanced math class, and it was the only class I have ever taken that I was concerned about failing. So, I approached statistics with some trepidation. However, the approach of statistics as a language was much more successful this time around than in my previous time back in the early 2000s. The current program design which integrates the various educational elements together is much more complimentary and facilitates learning. So, one big point of personal gain is a growing confidence and less anxiety about the utilization of statistical methodology for the doctoral program.

Beyond a growing confidence, there was skill building in this term. I much better understand the rationale behind research design and how various designs and methodologies line up with various problems and the data that is best for addressing that problem and is available. Before this course I might have chosen a data approach, say qualitative, to avoid having to go too in-depth into quantitative methods and statistical analysis. But now I believe the program will equip me with the ability to engage in more statistical dependent methods even utilizing a quasi-experimental approach. Some of the course work was a review, but a good review to be reminded for example of the value and limitations of descriptive statistics. When I did my developmental learning, my approach was to take the understanding of descriptive statistics and examine the actual studies to consider how the authors came to their conclusions and if the data supports their interpretations. So, the course was helpful in not only helping to hone skills to complete my own research, but also to evaluate the research of others informed by understanding of research methodology and basic statistical analysis of the data provided.

# Reflection

When I began my studies back in the 2000s, I was interested in how the emergency of postmodern trends in culture would impact Christian congregations and specifically LCMS congregations. As this was an emerging transition my focus was on understanding what was changing and what might be driving those changes. I left the program in Core 4 to enter active-duty service following 9/11 at my denomination’s call. As of Core 4 the first time around I was not clear on how what I was learning about the postmodernization of popular culture would apply to social research in the congregation. For one, what social research looked like was not very clear at that point. But secondly, I was not even sure of what the problems being generated were beyond a vague skepticism toward absolute truth and an increasing relativity in beliefs and practices. Perhaps because for the past 20 years I have continued reading in this area and have a much better understanding of this transition of worldview I am more aware of the problematic aspects of this cultural shift and how they are playing out in congregations. But beyond this, the postmodern turn coupled with the technological explosion has created problems related to young adults and the Christian church. In general, there is a growing skepticism among the “nones” of GenZ that the absolutes of Christian doctrine and worldview have a practical application for improving human life. This is compounded by a growing crowd of voices highly critical of traditional foundational theological claims about how God designed human life to be lived. Given that my church body is aging and many congregations are filled with older members to the point that it is expected that in the next 10 to 15 years many congregations will simply close as members pass onward, my focus in the past years has been on understanding GenZ, their worldviews and needs. GenZ responds positively to organizations including religious ones that enable positive social change. Given that I believe that Christian doctrine reflects not only God’s salvific plan for eternity but also reveals God’s design for human life that enables more abundant living, my focus on entering the program was to find a way to assist Christian congregations be more productive and visible in their community in impactful ways reflecting God’s design.

Last term, and more specifically this term has me considering a focus on failure to launch syndrome. This a documented problem among young adults and my experience with various congregations in a consulting role indicates that the problem is present in LCMS congregations. In the last term I presented a hypothetical project testing a potential intervention to empower parents and pastors in LCMS congregations to be assist FTL young adults. But to be honest, even though I had hypothetically presented this as a research scenario, my anxiety around statistics had me thinking I would probably pursue a qualitative study about how young adults are experiencing their lives with a focus on FTL and congregational experience. The reason was solely that I thought this would be an easier research design.

After these two courses I am taking a different approach. I may still do a qualitative design, but I am also considering the value of researching an intervention. I am more confident in my ability to complete such a quasi-experimental design in a way that would produce actual viable conclusions. Given there is significant research done on GenZ and FTL already, it may not be necessary to do a qualitative study of LCMS congregations. However, it might be. It may be that there are factors particular to congregational and LCMS congregation life that limit the effectiveness of intervention program within a congregational setting. The main practical shift here in my professional life is to allow the need of the problem and the nature of the data available to drive the research design and methodology rather than letting an anxiety about math drive the design. This increases my professional toolbox as I am growing more comfortable with a wider range of tools and am appreciating the value of the purpose of each set of tools.