

UnderStandingAmericaStudy

UAS CLIENT ROAD MAP



USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research

04/08/2016

WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in the UnderStanding America Study at the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research! We are very excited at the prospect of working with you on your data collection project.

Every project is different, but this guide is intended to give you an overview of the process and milestones of a typical project. Though naturally not intended to be exhaustive in nature, you will get an idea of what the UAS is, who the people behind the UAS are, what kind of services we offer, how we can assist you during survey development and programming, what to expect while your survey is in the field, and what happens after data collection has been completed.

More information about the UAS team, UAS surveys, and UAS datasets is also available online at uasdata.usc.edu. You may also contact us directly with questions or comments:

BY EMAIL

uas-l@mymaillists.usc.edu

BY PHONE/FAX

213.821.1819 (phone)

213.821.2716 (fax)

BY MAIL

Understanding America Study
University of Southern California
PO Box 77902
Los Angeles, CA 90007

WHAT IS THE UNDERSTANDING AMERICA STUDY?

The Understanding America Study (UAS) is a representative panel of American households at the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR). UAS respondents are adults (18 or older), recruited from households that were randomly selected from postal delivery sequence files. To ensure representativeness of the panel, respondents who do not have internet access are provided with a cell-enabled tablet or internet service. Panel members agree to answer researchers' queries once to twice a month via an online interface that is technologically powerful yet friendly for the respondents and quick to deliver results. Respondents are compensated for each completed survey. To ensure the reliability of the panel sample over time, UAS staff work closely with panel members to ensure technological and logistical issues are solved and respondent concerns are addressed. UAS panel procedures have been approved by the USC Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Academic and government researchers, and corporate clients have used the UAS panel to conduct surveys and methodological experiments focusing on decision-making, social and economic policy and health. The UAS panel provides an excellent platform for conducting methodological experiments (e.g. different ways of presenting information: video, text, or pictures), and testing new survey items or validating results of existing measures in a general or sub-population. Data collected by studies using the UAS panel are made publically available for secondary data analysis or for linking to later survey results.

Whether you have an idea for a survey, a research question to solve, or a fully completed survey instrument ready to begin collecting data, the UAS team at CESR is available to assist in development, design, and ensuring rigor and reliability with thorough testing before data collection begins.

More information about the UAS, its respondents, and its repository of available existing data sets is available on the UAS data pages at <http://uasdata.usc.edu/>. For a detailed look at the demographics of the UAS panel, visit the "My Household" item pages here: <https://uasdata.usc.edu/section/UAS90001/myhousehold>, or download the entire My Household data set here: <https://uasdata.usc.edu/My-Household> (registration required, see [here](#))

WHO ARE THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE UAS TEAM?

The team behind the UAS has extensive experience when it comes to developing and managing longitudinal data collection panels. Starting with the director of the Understanding America Study, Arie Kapteyn oversees the entirety of the panel, from its organizational to its technical aspects. He also conducts his own surveys in the UAS. Arie has been the driving force behind the development of several longitudinal Internet panels, e.g. the LISS and CentER panels in the Netherlands and the American Life Panel in the United States.

Working closely with Arie is Tania Gutsche, the study manager of the UAS. She is responsible for coordinating all survey work for the UAS, handling contractual matters for UAS and hosting projects using Nubis (our in-house developed software platform), managing human subject applications, new business contacts, and supervising the helpdesk team. Like Arie, Tania has been in this line of work for many years.

Expertise in survey research methodology and the design, development and testing of questionnaires and research data collections is provided by Jill Darling, the UAS Survey Director. Jill's long experience in the field of survey research includes two decades with the Los Angeles Times Poll, and many years serving as Survey Director and Research Health Scientist at the Veteran's Health Administration Center for Healthcare Implementation, Innovation and Policy in Los Angeles.

Bas Weerman and Bart Orriens provide technical direction and supervision for the UAS. Co-responsible for both the panel management infrastructure and the Nubis survey software, they have between the two of them over 20 years of experience when it comes to collecting data (as evidenced by countless US based and international data collection projects).

This group of people is complemented by multiple other key individuals who provide know how and expertise instrumental in the UAS' success. To learn more about the entirety of the UAS team, please just visit the [UAS team page](#) on the UAS web site.

WHAT SERVICES DO WE PROVIDE?

If you decide to conduct your study with UAS, we have a simple pricing structure based upon the estimated time a survey takes to complete. This includes programming and testing, and finalizing your draft survey instrument, selecting the survey sample, translating the instrument into Spanish, collecting data, and providing you with a final weighted data set. We are happy to provide an estimate of cost of your project in advance, based upon a draft questionnaire.

Basic pricing plus \$2000 handling is:

- \$3/per study participant/per minute for the first 500 participants
- \$2.50/per study participant/per minute for the next 500
- \$2/per study participant/per minute for 1000+

The UAS team of experts is also available to provide a wide range of other services: survey development and questionnaire design, item/survey testing, human subjects research advice, application development, visual displays, graphical Interface, sample management design, data cleaning, and data analysis. Contact us for project-specific estimates of costs for these services.

Finally, UAS offers the use of its feature-rich web-based software NubiS, which has been developed by UAS programmers to conduct our online surveys. The UAS team is happy to work with researchers who wish to conduct online surveys of non-panel populations using the NubiS software.

DEVELOPING A SURVEY WITH UAS

After you have decided that you are interested in working with the UAS, the first step in the process is to contact us (e.g. by email at uas-l@mymaillists.usc.edu or by phone at 213.821.1819). Typically, we will ask you for the following items of information:

- A brief description of your research question(s), including whether you will conduct methodological experiments or include visual displays. This information will help us guide sample selection and provide recommendations during finalization of your survey instrument.
- Your survey draft or a description of your survey. If you have not yet drafted a questionnaire, UAS can assist you in developing a draft based on your research needs. In developing your draft, note that UAS provides a set of [standard variables](#) with each survey, so it is not necessary to include these items in your survey. You may also consider investigating the use of items from datasets already collected through this panel, available at the [UAS Data Dissemination](#) web site. For the majority of the listed surveys the data is available free of charge except for data that is under embargo. All that you need to do is sign up by filling out the [registration form](#). You can then download data and combine it with the data you collect yourself. Note: you will be able to download your own data from the same web site.
- Your target population, and sample size. Some indication of the type and number of UAS respondents you intend to interview, i.e. the sample you are interested in targeting. To get a sense of the type of respondents in the UAS we recommend having a look at the [My Household](#) data set or the question summaries available on the UAS data pages here: <https://uasdata.usc.edu/section/UAS90001/myhousehold>. We are able to sample subsets of respondents (e.g. 65 or older), however, please be sure to inquire about any special sampling needs that you may have.
- UAS surveys are administered in both English and Spanish. We will take care of the translation of the final survey instrument into Spanish.
- A (tentative) time frame for when you would like to have data available for analysis. This will allow us to calculate backwards to assess whether the time frame is feasible (taking for example typical response rates into account) and to define intermediate milestones such as when the survey should be fielded in the UAS.

- Your final data set will include weights that adjust survey results to CPS estimates of the national US population (for national samples). Technical details about weighting in the UAS is located [here](#). We will provide you with an early data set for testing, and you may also request access to preliminary weighted data sets during data collection.

Based on the information you provide to us we will assess project feasibility e.g. in terms of the sample you are planning to target or the time frame you have in mind or any potential human subjects concerns. If needed, we may recommend changes. We will also provide you with information about how much we estimate the proposed data collection would cost. After this (typically iterative) process has been completed, we naturally hope that you decide to work with us!

Once you have reached such decision, we will ask you to fill out or edit a short form (the UAS Survey Author Form) to briefly describe your survey. This will help us provide accurate information about your survey to the public via the UAS Data Dissemination web site. Simultaneously, we will also move to the phase of survey Implementation.

SURVEY IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

Survey implementation – the process of implementing your survey in the UAS system and getting it ready for fielding – can often be accomplished quickly once you have developed a final pre-programming draft of your survey. We prefer to establish a single point of contact for your study, and provide you with a single UAS contact. Usually, this will be a programmer who will work with you on implementing your study. In our experience, survey implementation is most efficient and error is reduced if communication occurs between one person on the client side and one UAS contact.

Step 1: Initial Implementation

For the first step of survey implementation, you will provide your survey draft and work with our survey programmers to develop an initial implementation of your instrument in our system. All surveys within the UnderStanding America Study are programmed using Nubis. Nubis is a complete data collection tool developed in house at the Center of Economic and Social Research at the University of Southern California. Nubis surveys can be administered in any language depending upon each survey respondent's language preference. In the context of the UAS, surveys are fielded in both English and Spanish. Detailed information about the capabilities of Nubis is located [here](#).

Recommendations for Inclusion in Your Survey Draft

Please review our list of recommendations for specifications to include in your survey draft, below. Your UAS contact will be happy to answer any questions you may have about these specifications.

- **Naming variables** (optional). By default, we name variables by the manner in which they are grouped. For example, if you have a series of health questions these will typically be named something like 'HE001' and so on. However, if you have a preferred naming convention (e.g. if questions in your survey are also administered in other data sets), please indicate the variable names you wish to use in the survey draft, or work with your UAS contact to establish a desired naming convention.
- **Formatted question text**. Please clearly indicate any required text formatting in your survey draft. (e.g. bolding or italicizing). Given the web-based nature of our surveys we discourage the use of underlined question text, and may suggest alternatives ways of emphasizing text.

- **Skip patterns.** Please use a consistent notation in your survey draft to indicate skip patterns, e.g. IF (Q1=1 and Q2=1) or Q3=1 THEN. We will review your skip logic and provide feedback as needed, however, it is important for you to carefully think through your instrument logic, and carefully examine the test data that will be provided by your UAS contact to ensure you do not end up with inadvertently missing data.
- **Sources of survey questions.** If your survey includes validated measures, please indicate and provide measure references. Indicate if there are any other requirements such as notification, acknowledgement, or payment for use.

Step 2: Programming and Testing the Instrument

Once the survey has been programmed, your UAS contact will provide you with the details needed to test this initial implementation of your survey (typically just an URL).

At this point, please go through the survey carefully to verify that it is functioning in accordance with your expectations. UAS staff will test the survey, but please feel free to solicit others (for example in your research team who are familiar with project aims) to also test. Although we of course take every care to implement your survey exactly as you specified it, the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the well-functioning of the survey lies with the client.

Whenever possible, please test promptly and exhaustively and make note of anything that needs to be corrected to match the specifications you provided. When you provide feedback, be as specific as possible in terms of what you would like to change and where in the survey. A good method is to make modifications in the original survey document (e.g. using track changes in MS Word). This process will allow the programmer to easily ascertain what needs to be changed, and will also ensure you have a final implementation draft for your files.

During the testing process you may determine that you would like to change substantial elements of your instrument such as question order, or number or content of questions. Note that we are more than happy to make these changes to your instrument. However, we would anticipate those changes to be incremental in nature and become more minor as the number of programming/testing cycles grows. Should the need arise for major changes, such as adding many new questions, please understand that there may be both time and cost related consequences, including the need for IRB modification, and another round of testing to verify continued accuracy. Please be sure to discuss any changes you are considering with your UAS

contact, as sometimes changes are perceived as major by the client and minor by the survey programmer or vice versa.

Important: To reduce potential for confusion, once you have provided the programmer with a set of fixes or changes to implement, please refrain from further testing until you are notified that the changes have been made. The survey programmer will do his/her best to process your requested changes as quickly as possible, but this may sometimes take longer depending on availability of time and priority constraints. In this regard, it is prudent to test and send over any changes after testing as soon as possible, as this will allow the programmer to allocate his/her time appropriately.

Step 3: Test Data and Final Sign off

Lastly, when you are at a point that you feel happy with the survey, we can provide you with a set of test data (just ask your survey programmer). We strongly recommend that you carefully look at this data set, so that you can verify that, for example, variable names are in accordance with your preference, and your specified skip patterns are providing the data that you need. Moreover, it will help you gain an understanding of how the data will be formatted and allow you to start creating code to be used during data analysis process. Once the survey is in the field, changes to the instrument may result in loss of data and time.

When you have examined the test data, you may make any final incremental changes to your instrument, if needed, and when satisfied, you will indicate to your UAS contact that the survey is final and ready to proceed with the process of going into the field.

SURVEY TRANSLATION

UAS surveys are administered in the respondent's choice of Spanish or English. For the translation work we collaborate with trusted specialists to ensure high quality translations that preserve survey constructs across languages, and are consistent in nature across UAS surveys. This ensures our Spanish speaking respondents have a consistent experience across different surveys.

These translation specialists (as well as Spanish speaking members of our team) will verify that the Spanish matches the English in terms of intent. You are welcome to review the survey in Spanish as well. Please just be sure to ask us and we can provide you with the access needed to

conduct survey tests in Spanish. In this context, please note that the survey routing (i.e. skip logic) is programmed in NubiS in such a way that it is independent from a specific language. Any skip patterns verified during testing in English will still be the same when testing in Spanish.

The moment at which we perform translation depends on the client's preferences. It is most efficient to undertake the translation when you have signed off on the English version as final and ready to go out for data collection. In this case, the English version can be administered while the Spanish translation is being prepared. However, if the design of your study requires you to field the English and Spanish versions simultaneously, there are two options: (1) we can proceed with Spanish translation while programming the English version, or (2) wait until both versions are ready to go into the field. It is our preference to create the translation from the final survey instrument to limit the amount of required translation effort.

HUMAN SUBJECTS APPROVAL

Approval from the USC human subjects committee (IRB) is required before data collection can commence. UAS staff will submit the survey for approval on your behalf and acts an intermediate between you and the IRB. Typically, IRB approval takes about a week. Depending on what you tell us about the finality of your pre-programming draft, we can seek to obtain IRB approval while the survey is being programmed. This avoids delay, but does require that the survey specification that you provide for programming is close to final. For example, if several new questions are added during the survey implementation phase, we would need to request an IRB modification for the changes.

SURVEY FIELDING

Once you have signed off on the survey instrument and test data, and IRB approval has been obtained, the survey is ready to go into the field, i.e. to be administered to the UAS respondents.

Your UAS contact will verify your sample selection needs (e.g. are you surveying everyone in the UAS, or only respondents aged 50 or older, or some other group).

You may also indicate whether collected data should be embargoed for a period of time. By default, both a survey's questions and its data are publicly available through the [UAS Data Dissemination](#) web site as soon as the survey has gone into the field. However, if so desired, data can be embargoed (that is, not publicly available) for some time allowing you to analyze the data and write up results first. We typically aim for an embargo period not exceeding six months.

The survey will go into the field as soon as possible, once all conditions have been met. Typically, this is within a few days of satisfying all conditions, but the exact time will depend somewhat on any other surveys slated to be administered. Your UAS contact will give you an estimate of the start date, and then notify you when the survey has begun.

During the time the survey is in the field, we can provide you with intermediate data sets in a variety of manners:

- By asking us for a data set, e.g. by emailing the survey programmer. We usually provide data as a STATA or CSV data set. Should you need another format, please just let us know.
- By [signing up](#) for the [UAS Data Dissemination](#) web site (free of charge). This web site provides access to all UAS data sets (except a few where the data is under embargo), which will allow you to combine your data with data collected in other surveys. More importantly in this particular context, we will be able to give you access to your own survey and its data. Data sets are generated overnight, so you will be able to obtain a new data set every day if you wish. Moreover, you will be able to access a variety of supplemental data including timings, demographics on survey non-respondents, and platform information (e.g. device or browser used). A detailed listing can be found [here](#).

Survey Response Rates

A relevant question in terms of fielding is of course the expected response rate. Naturally, statements regarding how fast data comes in or how many respondents will answer your survey can never be certain in nature. These depend on the sample that you are targeting, the number of other survey(s) being administered at the same time, the availability of respondents, and so on. Overall, we expect a response rate of at least 70%, of which the first 40% or so will be realized within the first ten days. By keeping surveys in the field longer, and sending extra reminders a (potentially substantially) higher response rate than 70% can be achieved. Response rates of existing surveys can be viewed on the survey page on the UAS Data Dissemination web site (no sign-up is required for this).

In order to achieve these response rates, we employ the following steps: when a survey is ready for the field, UAS panelists receive an email or postcard inviting them to participate. Included is a one-sentence description of the survey, as well as an estimate of the time it should take to complete, a deadline (if there is one) and the pay they will receive for completion. Study members receive \$20 for every 30 minutes of survey time. They are paid monthly via funds added to a prepaid card provided by the UAS. Study participants expect at least one survey each month and most welcome more.

During the fielding period we send out reminders to respondents who did not participate in the survey yet. This is typically done once per week, but this can be customized based on the client's needs with regard to how fast data should be collected. Please just be sure to mention this prior to fielding; or for example any particular text you would like to include in the invitation and/or reminder emails. We are very much open to hearing your opinion and preferences.

AFTER SURVEY COMPLETION

At any time during fielding you can indicate to us that you wish to take the survey out of the field. A natural time is once the targeted number of respondents has been reached, but if needed this can also be done before or after that (e.g. for contractual reasons).

Once the survey is out of the field, we will provide you with the following data:

- A final data set including weights.
- Timings data listing how long respondents took to answer the survey as a whole as well as for single questions.
- Demographics of non-respondents
- Platform related information

In addition, we (or colleagues within the USC Dornsife Center for Economic and Social Research) can assist you with data cleaning and analysis if desired. As mentioned, this is not included in the standard services quotes that we provide.

Both in STATA and CSV all data comes out in a standardized fashion. To interpret the data please keep the following in mind:

- All questions come with short descriptions (in STATA only).
- ‘Please select one’ questions come with value labels for each answer option.
- For ‘select all that apply’ questions, a binary variable is created for each answer option indicating whether the option was selected or not. A summary variable is also provided in the format “1-3-2” reflecting which options were selected and in which order. If no options were selected, all binary and the summary variables will be marked by (.e) (see next item).
- If a question was never asked of a respondent, the corresponding variable in the data set will appear with a value of (.a). If it was asked, but left empty by the respondent, then it will have a value of (.e).

- Questions that are asked multiple times are often implemented as so-called array questions. Supposing the name of such question was Q1 and it was asked in 6 different instances, your data set would contain the variables Q1_1_ to Q1_6_.
- If there is anything about your data that is unclear, please be sure to consult the survey codebook available on the UAS Data Dissemination web site; e.g. if you used randomization in your survey and need details on how to de-randomize the data. You can always ask any questions you have about your data to the survey programmer as well of course.
- Descriptions of the standard UAS demographic variables can be found [here](#).

And of course if you have any other questions about your data, please just let us know.

In addition to the data files we provide, we can also assist with information about the survey (so-called metadata). Firstly, an online version of the programmed survey is available on the survey page of the UAS Data Dissemination web site (e.g. [UAS40](#) if that was your survey) through a 'Survey routing' link. Secondly, we develop codebooks for all UAS surveys available through the same site once they are ready.

Related, sometimes it is useful to have screenshots of the survey to be included in your presentation or paper. If this is the case, please just let us know. The same mechanism used for testing will be available both during and after survey fielding, and so will allow you to grab any screenshots that you would like.

Lastly, we are more than happy to help you with any other type of information about your survey that you would like, such as details on when survey invitations and reminders went out, graphs showing timings distributions, and so on. Depending on the nature of what you want these may cost extra, but please just inquire about anything you would be interested in to see what we can do to help you.

DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

In the case that you disseminate results based on the data you collected in the UAS, e.g. via a publication or presentation, we would love to hear this from you. This will allow us to update our list of publications using UAS data (located [here](#)).

As a recommendation for when you are referring to UAS data, we suggest the following text:

“The project described in this paper relies on data from survey(s) administered by the UnderStanding America Study, which is maintained by the Center for Economic and Social Research (CESR) at the University of Southern California. The content of this paper is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily represent the official views of USC or UAS.”