The Detroit Area Study
July, 1955
Detroit Area Study
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan
THE DETROIT AREA STUDY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

"The Detroit Area Study is a research and training pro­
gram at the University of Michigan. Its purpose is to train
graduate students in social science research methods by involv­
ing them in basic community research conducted so as to meet
professional standards. Basic to the training objective of the
project is the idea that students will learn most if their experi­
cence goes beyond practice and discussion to meet the rigorous
conditions involved in completing a field study at professional
standards. Basic to the research objective is the idea that
there is great value in the accumulation of systematic research
findings on different problems focusing on a cross-section of a
particular metropolitan community."¹

The Detroit Area Study first began operations in the fall
of 1951. Since then four annual survey research projects have
been completed and a fifth is now underway. In the 1955-56
school year the Study will receive its support from two sources:
the Ford Foundation and the University of Michigan. An ad­
ministrative relationship with the Survey Research Center of the
Institute for Social Research provides the Detroit Area Study
with professional aid and advice in such areas as sample selec­
tion and interviewer training. Center interviewers also take a
certain proportion of the interviews every year.

The major problem which the Detroit Area Study investi­
gates each year is selected by an executive committee com­
posed of faculty representatives from the Departments of Sociology,
Psychology, Political Science and Economics. This committee,²
which is the general guiding body of the DAS, makes its selec­
tion after reviewing research proposals submitted by interested
faculty members. The faculty participant then works with the
students and the DAS staff throughout the research period.

¹Ronald Freedman, "The Detroit Area Study," a paper presented at the annual meet­
ing of the American Sociological Society, Atlantic City, September 5, 1952.
²As of July 1, 1955, the members of the committee were: Ronald Freedman (chairman),
Angus Campbell, Ferrel Heady, Daniel Katz, and Daniel Sullins.
STUDENT TRAINING

Student participation in the Detroit Area Study requires first year graduates in sociology at the University of Michigan to enroll in two semesters of a field methods course. Also, the enrollment of interested graduate students in psychology, political science and other related disciplines is encouraged. Students in the course carry through a major piece of research on the Detroit community, from a preliminary statement of the general problem to the analysis of results. Thus, they are involved in every possible aspect of the research. For M.A. candidates in sociology successful completion of the year course takes the place of the traditional master's thesis.

The elaboration of the theoretical framework and related hypotheses of a given study, the specification of objectives and major variables, the construction and use of a "pre-test" interview schedule, and the development of a final schedule bring the student through the first term of the school year. This work is accompanied by discussions of sampling technique and training in the selection of a probability sample of the Detroit area. Also, an extended period is devoted to interviewer training.

Interviewing in the Detroit community takes place primarily in the late winter during the break between the fall and spring semesters. Most of the students live in Detroit during this period and a DAS office is established there. A few married students prefer to commute from Ann Arbor. Students' board, room, travel and other interviewing expenses are paid by the Detroit Area Study.

The second semester begins with the construction of a "code" for the recently collected data. Code construction involves the assigning of distinct numerical designations to the varied responses recorded on the interview schedules. This procedure enables the use of punched card machine methods in the analysis. Production coding begins only after a tentative code is tested and revised and the class is trained in coding the complete schedule. The entire coding operation covers the first third of the second semester.

While the numbers on the coding sheets are being transferred to punched cards the students are working on individual analysis proposals. These statements describe the background of their proposed analyses and request certain information from the punched cards. As soon as possible the requested data are
supplied; the student then spends the remainder of the spring term on his individual research project. Frequent consultation occurs with DAS staff members and faculty at this time. During the analysis period students become familiar with the use of machine methods of tabulation and often learn to operate some of the more simple punched card machines. The last two weeks of the spring term are devoted to an oral presentation of each research project to the class as a whole. Copies of final written reports, revised in the light of classroom discussion, are made available to all participants.

In the four projects thus far undertaken by the Study, the major method of investigation has been that of the interview survey. It is recognized that by concentrating on survey research, many other investigative techniques (e.g., participant observation, small group research, analysis of census material) remain relatively unexplored. The interview survey, however, has been well adapted to research in the areas covered in the past DAS projects. Also, throughout the school year students, associated faculty and DAS staff members evaluate alternative methods of investigation in light of research objectives.

Probably it is not possible in any one school year for the student to engage in a single major piece of research requiring the utilization of several field techniques; in other words, a project of the DAS type does not provide students with a working introduction to all field methods. Ideally, advanced graduate students will later engage in other research operations which complement the DAS experience. In addition, other required class work reviews all the standard techniques of social research.

Throughout the development of the research there is an attempt to involve the students as fully as possible in all aspects of the design. This means that, in most cases, decisions on theoretical and procedural points are made through the consultation of student, staff and faculty participants. At times, however, it is simply not possible nor desirable to reach a decision in this fully "democratic" manner. An example of such a time would be when the size and components of the final interview schedule have to be decided upon. In these instances it has proved wise simply to discuss with the students the rationale for the actions which were taken by staff and faculty participants.

On the whole, however, we have been able to keep the number of unilateral decisions surprisingly low. One basic reason for this is that the faculty participant does not come into the Study with a complete and detailed research design. Thus,
to a rather large degree the operationalization of the problem is worked out with the students.

A major concern in a research project such as this is the efficient use of student effort. To this end, at an early stage in the project student participants are asked to select a certain sub-area of the major problem upon which they prefer to concentrate. Each sub-group of the class is then responsible for the preliminary work in its area and, eventually, the relevant section of the final interview schedule. It is the job of the group as a whole, both staff and student, to fit the efforts of the several sub-groups into a single integrated product.

One of the most frequent questions raised about a program of this type concerns the qualification of the student as an interviewer. This was also a source of uneasiness on the part of the original planners. Fortunately, this has proved to be completely unwarranted. We have been able to make rather direct comparisons of the performance of student interviewers with that of professional interviewers on the staff of the Survey Research Center. On the whole, there seems to be little difference between the quality of interviewing of the two groups of interviewers. This is not surprising, since both professionals and students are trained intensively under the direction of the field section of the Survey Research Center.

It is true, of course, that not all students are able to perform as interviewers. Foreign students, those with speech impediments, and a few students for whom interviewing is personally traumatic are excused from the final interviewing experience. Where possible, however, these persons do take part in several of the pre-test interviewing stages. Students who do not interview also serve a very necessary function in editing production interviews as they come into the office. On the basis of a careful reading of each completed interview, possible errors in interpretation of the mechanics of the schedule or in the meaning of question objectives are discovered and relayed back to the interviewers.

Every year some students are initially concerned over the possibility of potential respondents refusing to be interviewed. Usually this fear is considerably reduced after some experience on pre-test interviews. Actually, refusals have always been a relatively small proportion of the total sample; in none of the four annual surveys conducted by the DAS have refusals constituted more than 7 per cent of the total original sample.
An important aspect of research training in the Detroit Area Study is the training of advanced graduate students. Each year three or four Ph.D. applicants are appointed as half-time research assistants. Together with a full-time director and a secretary, they comprise the staff of the DAS. Research assistants work with the students on all stages of the study design and function as liaison between the faculty participant and the student sub-groups. They coordinate group discussions and are responsible for the meeting of deadlines at given stages in the research. This is an important responsibility, for the academic calendar puts very real restrictions on the flexibility of a research undertaking which involves a comparatively large number of students.

While sociology students and faculty have been the most numerous participants in the DAS, the other social sciences have also been represented. The range of disciplines found in each year's project among students, research assistants and faculty has contributed a good deal to the value of the experience for all participants. Because of the general nature of the major problem area selected for investigation in any given year, a wide range of interests among the students can be accommodated. Since students can choose a sub-area which most interests them, they are seldom faced with the problem of working on a subject which holds no intrinsic appeal for them. It is felt that the student's personal interest contributes to a high quality of performance.

RESEARCH

In addition to the training function, the DAS serves as an important resource for faculty research. Of course, the training and research goals of the DAS are complementary. The value of the training to the student is immeasurably increased by the knowledge that his efforts are instrumental in the production of a major piece of research. On the other hand, the worth of the final research product is highly contingent on the quality of the training.

The analysis of much of the data collected through DAS facilities is primarily the responsibility of the faculty participant. The services of the DAS, when possible, are available to him, but he usually has to find outside support for most of the cost of machine tabulations and other analysis expense.
Several articles and more extended works based on DAS material and written by faculty participants have already been completed, and many more are in prospect.

Every effort is made to enable research assistants to develop Ph.D. dissertations out of DAS data. For example, certain questions in a given year's interview schedule are tailored, when possible, to fit the need of a proposed dissertation. To date, six dissertations in four disciplines have been completed on DAS material and several others are nearing completion.

Each year useful demographic and socio-economic data are collected by the Detroit Area Study. These materials are employed as necessary controls in the investigation of the major problem area. In addition, they are the basis for a continuing series of reports and articles written by DAS staff members. These publications have a comparatively wide circulation among many agencies in Detroit and throughout the country.

In the fall of each year the DAS publishes a pamphlet called A Social Profile of Detroit. In broad outlines the Profile describes the purposes of the DAS and presents some of the results of the survey taken the previous February and March. It is sent, free of charge, to all respondents who participated in the survey. The gratifying response to the Profile has contributed to the generally good reception which our interviewers receive each following year from the residents of metropolitan Detroit.

Many of the findings of the DAS have also been used in teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses in several departments of the University of Michigan. The frequency distributions of basic variables investigated by the DAS are made available to interested faculty members, as are all reports compiled by the Study.

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The four year record of the Detroit Area Study offers convincing evidence of the value of a program of this type, both with respect to faculty and student participants and to the final research product. Experience in the often difficult task of operationalizing important concepts in social science has noticeably increased the theoretical and methodological sophistication of the student. Faculty participants, on their part, have found the ever-questioning student an important factor in justifying, clarifying, and developing the general theory in which their
research is framed and the minute details necessary to test it.

The data collected through DAS facilities have already contributed substantially to an increased knowledge of the Detroit area both on the part of social scientists and action agencies in the community. Moreover, one of the most promising aspects of the Detroit Area Study with regard to research product is only now beginning to be realizable. As continuing data on Greater Detroit are accumulated over the years, trend analysis and longitudinal-type studies will become increasingly feasible. This form of research on an entire metropolitan community has rarely been possible in the past except for the limited types of data available in the United States Census.

Harry Sharp, Director
Detroit Area Study
PUBLICATIONS BASED ON DATA COLLECTED THROUGH DETROIT AREA STUDY FACILITIES

GENERAL PUBLICATIONS

1952


1953


1954


1955


BOOKS AND MONOGRAPHS

Eldersveld, Samuel. Political Affiliation in Metropolitan Detroit. To be published in late 1955.

ARTICLES*

1952


1953


1954


1955


*Many of the items listed in this and following sections of the bibliography are available without charge from the Detroit Area Study, 106 Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
REPORTS

1951

R-1 "The Detroit Area Study." 1951 (original statement of DAS objectives, mimeographed).

1952


952 "Comparison of Election Behavior of Negroes with the Total Population." 1952 (mimeographed).

951 "Comparison of Selected Demographic Characteristics for Negro and White Respondents in the 1952 Detroit Area Study Sample." 1952 (hectographed).

R-2 "Description of the Detroit Area Study." 1952 (mimeographed).

R-3 "Some Correlates of Formal Group Membership." 1952 (16 tables based on a national sample administered by the Survey Research Center, hectographed).

963 "Some Patterns of Group Association in the Detroit Area." 1952 (9 tables, hectographed).

1953


277 "Family Income in the Detroit Metropolitan Area." 1953 (mimeographed).

949 "Special Tabulations of Church and Union Membership." 1953 (mimeographed).

948 "Special Tabulations of Participation in Civil Defense Activities." 1953 (mimeographed).
REPORTS (cont’d)

1953

950 "Television Ownership in the Detroit Metropolitan Area." 1953 (mimeographed).

1954


R-5 "Major Subject Areas Covered in Previous Surveys of the Detroit Area Study." 1954 (mimeographed).


1955


PAPERS PRESENTED BEFORE PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS

1952

PAPERS PRESENTED BEFORE PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS
(cont'd)

1954


DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS**

1953


**Abstracts of these dissertations are available on request.
DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS (cont'd)

1954


1955


STUDY PROPOSALS

1951


STUDY PROPOSALS (cont'd)

1952


P-5 Swanson, G.E. "Individual Development as the Learning of a Sequence of Social Roles." 1952 (hectographed).

1953


1954


1955


METHODOLOGY REPORTS

1952

M-1 "Check on Use of the Split-Sample in the 1952 Detroit Area Study." 1952 (hectographed).

M-2 "Effect of Respondent Selection Within Households on Detroit Area Study Data for 1952." 1952 (hectographed).
METHODOLOGY REPORTS (cont'd)

1952


M-5 "Selection of a Sample of Dwelling Units for the Detroit Metropolitan Area." 1952 (mimeographed).

1953


M-8 "The Interview Response Rate for 1952-53 Detroit Area Study." 1953 (mimeographed).


1954

M-11 "Coding Reliability for the 1953-54 Detroit Area Study." 1954 (mimeographed).

M-12 "Determination of Social Class for the Detroit Area Sample, 1953-54." 1954 (mimeographed).

M-13 "The Interview Response Rate for the 1953-54 Detroit Area Study." 1954 (mimeographed).

METHODOLOGY REPORTS (cont'd)

1955

M-15 "The Mail Questionnaire as a Supplement to the Personal Interview." 1955 (mimeographed).


M-17 "The Interview Response Rate for the 1954-55 Detroit Area Study." 1955 (mimeographed).


M-19 "Selection of a Sample of Dwelling Units for the Detroit Metropolitan Area (Revised)." 1955 (mimeographed).

AREAS OF INVESTIGATION AND FACULTY PARTICIPANTS
IN THE DETROIT AREA STUDY: 1951-1955

1951-52


Stratification and Status Crystallization. Werner Landecker and Gerhard Lenski, Sociology.

1952-53


Attitudes and Perceptions of Consensus of Group Members. Theodore Newcomb, Social Psychology.

1953-54

Administrative Behavior in a Metropolitan Community. Morris Janowitz, Institute of Public Administration.

1954-55


1955-56


The Meaning of the Occupational Role to Urban Residents: Robert Kahn and Robert Weiss, Survey Research Center.