



June 29, 2018

Happening in SRO

Current and past "Happening in SRO" newsletters are [located here](#).

If you have items for the newsletter, or if you would like to highlight an event, please let Ann Vernier or your unit director know.

Save the Date

Our next All Staff Meeting will be on Tuesday, September 25th, at Palmer Commons. In addition to getting our usual new project and financial updates, we will be talking about "The Life of our Data," which will include a talk from a senior leader at our neighbor organization, ICPSR. A more complete agenda will be circulated as we get closer to the meeting date.

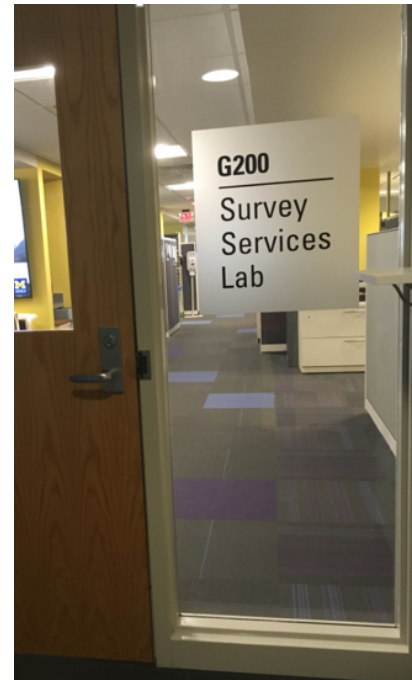
SSL Update

(Lloyd Hemingway)

These are busy days in the Survey Services Lab (SSL). In a one-month span from mid-April to mid-May, three recurring calling projects started a new wave—Health and Retirement Study (HRS), Army Study to Assess Risk and Resilience in Servicemembers-Longitudinal Study (STARRS-LS), and Monitoring the Future (MTF) Non-response. At the same time, Emergency Department Study to Assess Risk of Suicide (ED-STARS) and the Surveys of Consumers (SCA) continued to roll along. When you add in all the other types of tasks that the Lab undertakes on an ongoing basis—quality control

evaluation and verification, the respondent toll-free line, coding, data entry, and logging—you have an active place from morning into the night.

All this influx of activity required a matching influx of people. In order to have enough staff for the incoming and ongoing projects, we began recruiting for new hires at the beginning of February. All told, we brought in 102 applicants for testing, offered a position to 69, and ultimately staffed 51 new survey techs, increasing our survey tech staff by almost 155 percent over a period of two months. At one point in May, we had 144 survey techs working, though our current total number of active survey techs is 111. With many of our staff working on multiple projects and tasks, we have had days with well over 100 distinct shifts scheduled.



One exciting scope addition to an existing study was a text experiment protocol added to the SCA. The SCA is a pure cellphone sample, which offers both challenges and opportunities for contact. In May and June, we randomly selected 500 cases to receive an initial manual outbound text followed by a telephone attempt from the same phone, designed to see if we could increase our contact, cooperation, and completion rates. The experiment is on hold through September to allow study staff to analyze results and modify texting contact protocols further.

This increase in activity has created a space crunch at our peak times. We've accommodated this need by repurposing some areas. The respondent toll-free line has been moved back to its location of a few years ago. The area at the front of Lab that they vacated has been set up with four computers to accommodate work that doesn't require telephones, such as interview evaluations, coding, data entry, and logging. More space modifications are planned, as we expect the high volume of work to last for quite some time.

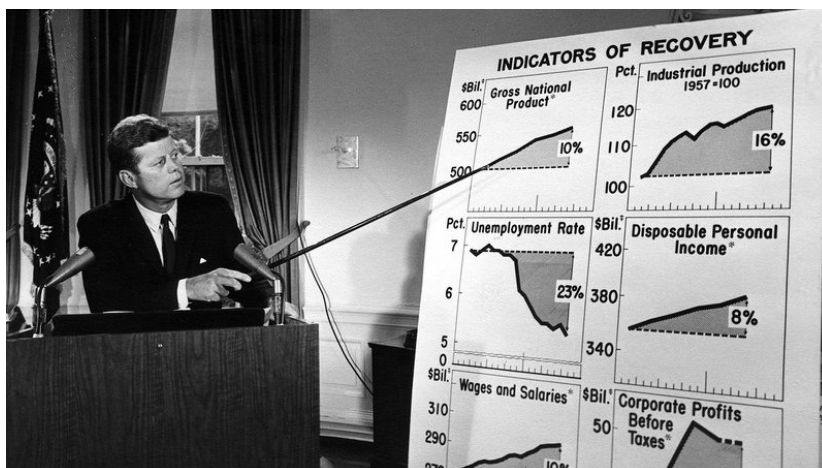
Getting all these projects going and incorporating all these new staff members has been a team effort, and the entire Lab staff has done a great job of pitching in to make everything go as smoothly as possible.

Archive Article

(Kelly Chatain)

The Revenue Act of 1964 was, at the time, the largest tax cut in history.

Proposed by John F. Kennedy, but signed into law by Lyndon B. Johnson, it was one of a number of economic and social



incentives put in place during the time to both sustain and grow a strengthening U.S. economy and move the country closer to Johnson's "Great Society"^[1]. The tax legislation had been anticipated since Kennedy proposed it in 1962 and the Survey of Consumer Finances had already added some questions about it before it was enacted; but when it was signed into law in February 1964, the President's Economic Council and others lost no time in asking SRC to find out what impact the approximately 20% personal income tax cut would have on consumer spending and savings, particularly for those households in the middle and upper-middle income brackets. The Economic Behavior Program of the Survey Research Center had progressed from collecting general household economic data in the 40s, to measuring attitudes and expectations in the 50s, to the recording of consumer reactions to change and current events in the 60s, and this new study was considered one of the most important in the program's history.^[2]

Given the incremental effect of a change in weekly/monthly income withholdings, SRC designed a panel study to include four waves of interviews with respondents who had already participated in either the Survey of Consumer Finances or the Omnibus Survey. Data was collected in June, September, and December 1964, and in May 1965. The number of interviews per wave ranged from just under 1,000 to a little over 1,200. The questions covered standard inquiries into spending, durable and non-durable purchases, savings, other assets, and debt. Respondents were not told the study was about the tax cut, but if asked, the interviewers were allowed to mention it as

one of the objectives of the research. The fourth wave included a consent to allow a bank to report on balances in the respondent's savings accounts^[3]. This is the first example of a consent for the use of administrative-type data that I've found in the archive.



News organizations were quick to pick up on the initial reports coming out of the surveys^[4]. In July 1964, the New York Times reported on the fact that only 5% of respondents said the money from the tax cut had made any difference in their financial situation. 40% of respondents did say that they were financially better off than they were a year ago, but only 2% said the tax cut had something to do with it. The economy had been expanding fairly rapidly as the country came out of the 1960-61 recession, wages were increasing and the unemployment rate was dropping. These factors seemed to "loom larger" in respondents' minds than the

change in withholdings. The immediate increase in consumer spending, an expected result of the Revenue Act, had not yet materialized. But, in 1968, George Katona wrote a monograph called *Consumer Response to Income Increases* that put the reaction to the tax cut in a broader framework of how people responded to all types of increases in income^[5]. From the distance of 1968, data showed a clear increase in spending and savings from 1964-1965, but it was still difficult to tease out what part, if any, the tax cut played in those trends.

PIs: George Katona and Eva Mueller

Funders: The Brookings Institution, The Ford Foundation, National Science Foundation

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timesmachine.nytimes.com

^[1] <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/great-society>

^[2] Instructor's Handbook, p740. SRO Archive

^[3] Permission to Report Savings Account Balances, p740d. SRO Archive

^[4] <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1964/07/09/118669709.html?>

<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015071812809>

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