

Economics 466: Economics of Population
University of Michigan
Fall 2008
Problem Set #4 – “Write Your Own Problem Set”/Term Paper Proposal

Guidelines for Term Paper

Two-Page Proposal Due: Wednesday October 8, 11:55 p.m., posted to CTools as PDF file

First Draft Due: Wednesday Nov. 12, 11:55 p.m., posted to CTools, hard copy handed in by Thursday noon

Final Draft Due: Wednesday Dec. 17 at 12:30 p.m., posted to CTools, hard copy handed in by 5:00 p.m.

Paper Length: 15 pages, including tables and figures

Grading: Grade on paper will be 30% of course grade. Grade on first draft is 30% of grade on paper.

Your paper must be based on statistical analysis of census data, using the IPUMS-International census files available in the AFS class folder. Your paper should address some topic that can be analyzed using one or more of these census data sets. You are encouraged to focus on questions related to the topics that are being covered in class, such as demographic outcomes, education, labor force participation, and inequality. You should feel free to be creative, however, taking advantage of the wide variety of variables that are included in these data sets. You are encouraged to use two data sets, either looking at change in one country between two censuses or comparing two different countries. You may also want to use more than two data sets.

The paper should include carefully constructed figures and tables that present the results of your analysis. These figures and tables should have titles and should be thoroughly explained and discussed in the text of the paper. The paper should include an explanation of the data sets you are using. You should be careful about explaining the variables you are working with, referring back to the original questionnaire if necessary to clarify the meaning of particular variables. (See more instructions on the back of this page).

The paper is not intended to be a review of other papers or books written on a topic. In order to develop a clear research question and to decide on the key variables involved in answering that question you will want to read some of the literature in your proposed research area. However, any literature review should be a small part of the paper itself (2 pages is the maximum). The paper should draw heavily on the data. Clear descriptive analysis of the data is more important than trying to explain the causal mechanisms driving your results. An important purpose of the project is to develop skill in the statistical analysis of data and the presentation of your results in a clear and effective written form. Although it is not required that you include regressions in your paper, it is strongly encouraged that you do so. Ideally your paper will include a mix of descriptive statistics using tables and graphs, along with multivariate regressions that provide a clearer picture of the relationships you are studying.

The first step in the process is to write a two-page proposal describing the paper you plan to write. This proposal should describe the questions you are interested in analyzing. It should indicate the data sets you plan to use for the analysis, including a description of some of the key variables you plan to use. Your proposal should include at least one table and one figure that begin to explore the questions you are interested in. Your proposal should consist of 1-2 pages of well-written text along with another 1-2 pages that present at least one table and graph. The table and graph should be thoughtfully constructed, should have numbers and titles, and should be discussed in the text.

You may want to think of your paper proposal an exercise in writing your own problem set. Take a topic you are interested in and try analyzing it using one or more of the census data sets. Pose some simple questions and create a table or graph to answer the question. Then think about where you might take this for a more detailed analysis.

The Structure and Presentation of Term Papers

Be sure to take advantage of the writing resources provided through the UM Sweetland Writing Center. This includes workshops and individual consultations with both peer tutors and professional writing consultants. The Sweetland web site has many useful resources, such as style sheets for bibliographies and general writing tips.

Sweetland Center web site: <http://www.lsa.umich.edu/swc>

Structure and Organization:

Your paper should be either double-spaced or 1.5 spaced, with about 1" to 1.5" margins. Be sure to put page numbers in your paper. Your paper should have a title page with an informative title. Use headings and sub-headings to break up your paper. It will make the paper easier to read and help the reader follow the logic of your analysis.

If you are citing articles or books, be sure to list the references at the end of the paper using some standard bibliographic style. The Sweetland Center web site has standard style sheets available to use as guides.

Clearly describe the data sets you are working with, including the year the data was collected, the size of the sample, etc. Describe the variables clearly – don't just use the variable name in the data set. Write the paper so that someone can understand it without knowing what "inctot" refers to.

Tables and Figures:

Put a number and title on each figure and table. Refer to these in the text. For example, you should say things like "Figure 1 shows the relationship between ...". Use the papers you are reading for the course for examples.

Make sure your figures and tables are effectively presented. Don't just paste in tables and figures from Stata without modification. You need to convert the Stata output into tables that make sense for the reader. Tables should contain key information, such as sample size, important sample restrictions (ages included, whether males, females, or both, etc.). Use the papers assigned for the lectures for good examples of tables and figures.

Use a reasonable number of decimal places in your tables and text. Don't just use the full number of decimals from the Stata output. Usually one or two decimal places are sufficient, depending on the variable.

Data Analysis and discussion:

Be sure to consult the census questionnaire and the IPUMS-I web site to be sure you understand the variables you are working with. Explain important features of the variables in your paper, such as the definition of work, the time period for an income variable, or the age restriction on an employment or fertility question. In general you should use the sample weights provided in the data in your analysis. You should make this clear in your paper.

Make sure it is always clear who is being included in a particular analysis. For example: are you including observations with zero in your measures of income or hours worked? Is your mean schooling measure for the entire population, or just adults? Are you using individuals or households as the unit of analysis? Does your table include both men and women?

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Suggestions for Term Paper

Examples of topics:

Changes in fertility and women's labor force participation
Impact of access to water and sanitation on child survival
Impact of schooling on earnings
Gender gap in earnings
Trends in poverty and inequality
Trends in unemployment
Regional differences in employment and earnings
Poverty, housing, and access to services
Rural-urban differences in fertility
Changes in rural-urban gaps in services, education, fertility
Female headed households and poverty
Impact of age, sex, and education on migration
Earnings and employment of migrants versus non-migrants
Intergenerational transmission of schooling
Determinants of school attendance and progress through school
Changes in the gender gap in schooling
Labor force participation of children and youth
Who marries whom (age, education, race)?
Impact of education on marriage patterns
Changes in marital status and fertility
Changes in household size and household composition
Race, schooling, and earnings
Changes in age structure
Age structure of immigrants versus non-immigrants

Examples of good papers from previous years are available on CTools in Resources/"Hall of Fame."

Available census data sets:

Argentina: 1970, 1980, 1991, 2001	Kenya: 1989, 1999
Austria: 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001	Malaysia: 1970, 1980, 1991, 2000
Belarus: 1999	Mexico: 1960, 1970, 1990, 2000
Cambodia: 1998	Palestine: 1997
Chile: 1960, 1970, 1982, 1992, 2002	Panama: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000
China: 1982	Philippines: 1995, 2000
Colombia: 1964, 1973, 1985, 1993, 2005	Portugal: 1991, 2001
Costa Rica: 1963, 1973, 1984, 2000	Romania: 1992, 2002
Brazil: 1970, 1980, 1991, 2000	Rwanda: 1991, 2002
Ecuador: 1962, 1974, 1982, 1990, 2001	South Africa: 1996, 2001
Egypt: 1996	Spain: 1981, 1991, 2001
France: 1962, 1968, 1975, 1990	Uganda: 1991, 2002
Ghana: 2000	United Kingdom: 1991, 2001
Greece: 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001	United States: 1960, 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000
Hungary: 1970, 1980, 1990, 2001	Venezuela: 1971, 1981,
Iraq: 1997	Vietnam 1989, 1999
Israel: 1972, 1983, 1995	

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Problem Set #7

Distributed: Wednesday, November 19, 2008

Due: Monday, November 24, 2008

(Submit electronically to the course web site on CTools by 11:55 p.m. Monday)

Improve your paper!

Your goal in this problem set is to begin revising your paper by focusing on one or two tables or graphs that you feel should be added to the paper or that exist in your first draft but would benefit from improvements. You should use our comments on your paper to guide your decision about what to work on.

Option 1: Take an existing graph or table (or a set of graphs and tables) for which we made suggestions for improvement. Or choose some yourself that you think can be substantially improved. Include the original version in your submission. Explain how the tables/graphs can be improved. Produce new graphs and/or tables. Include new text (no more than two or three paragraphs) that you can include in the paper that discusses the new graphs/tables. Work carefully on your writing. Aim for very polished graphs/tables with very polished writing.

Option 2: Develop some new graph or table that extends your analysis in some way. Include new text (no more than two or three paragraphs) that you can include in the paper that discusses the new graphs/tables. Work carefully on your writing. Aim for very polished graphs/tables with very polished writing.

Submit a PDF of your new graphs/tables and accompanying text. Also submit a nice clean do file that does the analysis.