COGS 14: Design & Analysis of Experiments

EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENT:  Stat Wars

Read Chapter 5, “Stat Wars,” of Joel Best’s book *Damned Lies and Statistics* and answer the following questions. The book is on reserve at the Social Sciences & Humanities desk at Geisel Library. Note, YOUR ANSWERS MUST BE IN YOUR OWN WORDS. You will get up to 2% extra credit points for your overall class grade by completing this assignment with satisfactory answers. You will get less than 2% extra credit if your answers are less than satisfactory. You can NOT get more than 2% extra credit points in the class. So if you participate in experiments for extra credit AND do this assignment, you can still get at most 2% extra credit points. You must turn this in to Dr. Groppe by the end of the last lecture on Thursday, June 4th.

1. According to Best, what are a couple reasons that people who feel strongly about an issue can unintentionally report misleading statistics?

2. How did Louis Farrakan, the U.S. Park Police, and some investigators from Boston University come up with very different estimates of the number of people who attended the “Million Man March” in 1995?
3. Why are U.S. census results inaccurate and for what sectors of the U.S. population are the results most inaccurate?

4. What’s a more accurate alternative to the conventional way the U.S. census is done?

5. How is it possible that per capita income has steadily risen in the U.S. since 1959, but hourly earnings in the U.S. peaked in 1974 (see Table 6)?
6. What does Best mean by the following quote (from pg 154): “Moreover, social statistics pose problems of interpretation. Even when data are available, they do not speak for themselves.”? Give an example from the chapter.

7. What’s the difference between primary and secondary sources of statistics? Give an example from the chapter of a suspect secondary source (i.e., a secondary source that’s probably not reliable)?

8. What information/issue in the chapter was the most interesting to you?