

Preface

Welcome to the wonderful world of research. Actually, as a reader of this book, you probably don't need a welcome; you're already in it, as a researcher or a student learning the ins and outs of design, methodology, sampling, statistics, focus groups, and all of the other arcane arts that are necessary to be successful. As researchers and teachers of research ourselves, for more years than either of us would like to admit, we know about these things and how they're presented, both in the classroom and in published papers. But we also know what's *not* told—that research is not a smooth, paved superhighway leading from the idea, to the proposal, through the funding agency, the execution of the plan, and ending in eventual publication. It's more like a rutted back road, full of dead ends, potholes, detours, and branching side roads. We also know that highways may be fast and efficient, but they're boring; the back roads are far more unpredictable and scenic. You never know what you'll find; sometimes it will be little more than a nondescript backwater town, but more often than not it will be a vista that takes your breath away.

There are many textbooks that act as tour books for the superhighway, but none that are guides to the back roads; this book is such a guide. It tells what *really* happens on the bumpy road of research; things you find out about only over a beer in the campus pub with a seasoned researcher who's in a melancholy mood. Each of the 42 vignettes describes how a carefully crafted, well-thought-out study has been derailed by Murphy's law—"If anything can go wrong, it will." In a few cases, the chapters are as cathartic as they are educational, with the authors sadly relating how the derailment was disastrous. What comes through in all of the chapters, though, is ingenuity, flexibility, resourcefulness, and—most of all—the love of research. Projects may have been derailed, at least for a while, but the researchers weren't. These vignettes describe how issues were resolved,

problems overcome, and, in some cases, projects modified to meet the exigencies of reality.

Most research goes through a number of stages: Approval must be granted by an ethics board—in some cases, a number of boards; participants have to be accessed, recruited, and retained; the study itself must be implemented; the data collected and then analyzed. Through it all, it's often necessary to maintain working relationships with collaborating agencies and institutions. The parts of this book are arranged in this order, so that the reader (or the instructor) can match the chapters to the phases in which research is done, although, as you'll see, most of the vignettes cover two or more topics. Each of the parts has its own introduction, placing the particular aspect of research in context and highlighting where things can go off the rails. Within each part, most of the chapters follow a common format: a description of the project (at least as it was initially intended); the problems that were encountered; how they were (or, in a few cases, were not) overcome; and the lessons that were learned from the experience. Key annotated references are included at the end of the chapters so that the reader can delve deeper into the topics. In order to make it easier to find specific readings, there's a matrix following the table of contents, tying key methodological issues to specific chapters in which they're discussed.

These 43 stories were written by 63 contributors. The authors come from a variety of backgrounds (e.g., psychology, nursing, evaluation, medicine, sociology, epidemiology, anthropology), from six countries (Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela), and range in experience from graduate students to seasoned (and well-traveled) researchers. The examples, though, transcend the specifics of the studies, and even of the disciplines—ethics boards constitute a troubling hurdle that must be overcome by most people studying humans and animals, and breakdowns in collaboration are universal.

So, we hope you enjoy reading the book as much as we enjoyed putting it together. Learn from others' mistakes and be forewarned, but mainly be heartened—despite the setbacks described here, all of the authors are still enthused about research and look forward to doing more of it.

In conclusion, we'd like to thank those who made the book possible and better. There were three reviewers—Paul R. Swank, University of Texas Health Science Center; Amanda L. Garrett, University of Nebraska–Lincoln; and Jessica G. Irons, James Madison University—each of whom made excellent suggestions regarding the format, such as the matrix and annotated reading lists. Mainly, though, our thanks to C. Deborah Laughton at The Guilford Press, whose support from the very beginning gave us hope that we could carry this off.

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