

# Case study

## Using *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* in undergraduate teaching at the University of Essex



*“Combined with a good textbook (I use Andy Field’s Discovering Statistics with SPSS) the SAGE Research Methods platform provides a wealth of resources to support my modules. What I particularly like, and what students really appreciate, is the way that it is possible in the SAGE Research Methods platform to find related materials to support student learning. With SAGE’s plan to add more datasets each year covering more techniques, I will be even more likely to use it in my teaching.”*

*–Nick Allum, PhD, Professor of Sociology, University of Essex*

### Executive summary

The practice of using datasets in quantitative methods teaching is widespread, as students learn best by practicing data analysis themselves. Preparing datasets for teaching is time-consuming – *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* saves faculty valuable time by providing over 120 datasets ready to use in teaching.

### Challenges

Before finding *SAGE Research Methods Datasets*, Nick Allum, Professor of Sociology at Essex, was sourcing datasets online via the UK Data Archive to use in his undergraduate quantitative methods course. He would use the UK Data Archive website to find data, download it, analyse it to see if it would work to teach a particular technique and then, if he found something suitable, he would need to register with the UK Data Archive to gain permission to use the data in teaching. Sometimes he also had to ask all of his students to register on the UK Data Archive to legitimise the usage. This was time consuming and laborious. Professor Allum wanted a source of easy to find, easy to use datasets to use in his teaching.

## How *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* helped

Professor Allum uses the quantitative datasets and accompanying how-to-guides from *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* with his undergraduate students. Each week there is a one hour lecture to introduce a topic, for example multiple regression, and a two hour lab session where he uses *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* to allow students to practice multiple regression themselves.

**“The *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* material is extremely useful for my teaching as it saves me a huge amount of time searching for datasets to use that have suitable variables and where the empirical relationships between variables provide a good demonstration of the statistical method I am teaching. Because the datasets in *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* are all clearly labelled showing the method they can be used to illustrate, I can plan my lab session and then find an appropriate dataset in minutes.”**

In Professor Allum’s lab sessions, students use the statistical software SPSS.

**“The how-to guides for SPSS that come with *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* include screenshots and precise instructions that make it easy for students to work out what to do. Having good guides that walk students step by step through a method simplifies the process of learning how to use the software and reduces student anxiety, which can be quite high.”**

## Results

Professor Allum uses *SAGE Research Methods Datasets* for the module **Researching Social Life II**.

This module exposes students to the methods and principles required to design and critically evaluate empirical sociological research. By the end of the module students will have developed key skills useful for their third-year project work and skills in critically evaluating the relative merits of different approaches to social research.

The module is taught through a series of weekly lectures that focus on key methodological issues involving mostly qualitative research in the autumn term, and quantitative research in the spring term. Weekly classes that accompany the lectures cover practical skills in research design, data collection and the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Instruction is provided in the use of computer software for data analysis supported by hands-on study guides from *SAGE Research Methods Datasets*.

Essex University is a public research university in Colchester, Essex. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) in 2014 ranked Essex in the top 20 universities in the UK for the quality of its research and the top 5 for social science.

The university is referenced by QS World University Rankings as being in the top 2% of universities in the world, and as a world leader in social sciences (top 150) and management.

Its departments of Economics, Government (Political Science) and Sociology are well-known and are among the best in Europe. In 2015, Essex was one of three institutions in the UK to be awarded Q-Step Affiliate Status, with a focus on developing quantitative methods skills.

[www.sageresearchmethods.com/datasets](http://www.sageresearchmethods.com/datasets)