

# Research Tips

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Barbara McNeice-Stallard

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Office of Research and  
Institutional Effectiveness  
(RIE)

Barbara McNeice-Stallard  
*Director*

Ann Marie West  
*Research Assistant*

Odette Richardson  
*Research Assistant*

For more information  
contact the office at:  
909.594.5611 x5408

Or

Visit our web site at:  
<http://research.mtsac.edu/>

## Survey research Fair is fair...or is it?

What does the word fair mean to you? What does it mean to the students? If something you wanted and worked really hard to attain was in the end unattainable, then your friends and loved ones tell you "it just isn't fair."

So why when we do survey research, do we use the word fair to mean something less than good, less than desirable and certainly not just? We've all seen it. The dictionary defines fair as "just, unbiased, equitable; in accordance with the rules" (The concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995). There are other definitions of fair, but none are close to meaning a negative aspect as seen in the typical scale noted here.

Excellent	Good	Neutral	Fair	Un-satisfactory
1	2	3	4	5

So, how did fair first become misused? Remember the old school report card system? Did you ever have to explain to your parents why you received a "fair" in a course? If you did, you'll remember your parents were not thinking fair meant unbiased, rather that it meant you were in for a huge lecture on the merits of a good education. Maybe this is where it all began and should have ended. Fair is unbiased, equitable and just plain fair.

Above article has been reprinted from Silverman, B. (November 30, 1998). Survey Research: Fair is fair- or is it? Centinel, Centennial College, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada.