Lab Assignment 1
Descriptive Statistics – Due February 2

The purpose of this lab is to familiarize you with the NELS dataset, the SPSS software, and with descriptive statistics. Several things to note:

• If you want to construct a variable from other variables in the dataset (e.g. make a variable by summing several variables or recoding a variable), that’s fine – you just need to tell me how you did it as part of your final report.
• What you do here, you should do as a first step every time you analyze data. Good researchers do this to become familiar with their data and check for errors, even if you don’t see the results in journal articles.
• Please don’t turn in a printout containing everything you did for a given lab project. Pick out only the tables and graphs that you need to make your points and demonstrate your work.

1. Select about 5 variables from the NELS dataset. You must include at least two qualitative and two quantitative variables.

2. For each of the variables, use SPSS to obtain the descriptive statistics appropriate to the variable type.

3. In addition, for each of the variables, use SPSS to construct a graph showing the distribution of the variable (again, be sure to choose a graph appropriate to the type of variable).

4. For the quantitative variable(s), check the shape of the distribution(s) (e.g. a histogram or box plot).

5. Write a brief (2 pages max) summary of your results for this lab. You may structure it in the way that makes most sense to you, but be sure to include:
   • A quick explanation of each variable and its values.
   • Why you chose to use the descriptive statistics and graphs you did.
   • A summary of what you learned from the analyses and graphs. For this first assignment, this will include (but not necessarily be limited to) things like: The average height of students in this sample is X, with a standard deviation of Y; Student scores on the ABC test are roughly symmetric but show a slight skew to the right; when students are asked what job they believe they will hold in the future, their most common response is Z.

6. Choose the descriptive output and graphs that show most clearly what you describe in step 5 (make sure there are both descriptive statistics and a graph for each variable). Add this to your summary above (table and figure labeling and insertion into text are nice but not necessary).