Chapter 5
Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations for Further Research

The fifth chapter represents the culmination of the research process. Earlier chapters identified the research question, evaluated previous scholarship on the subject, established the framework for running quantitative tests, and reported the statistical results of those tests. It is in this chapter that each student must analyze the statistical findings reported in chapter four and use them to address both the primary and secondary research questions associated with the project. This chapter also serves to assess the implications or meaning of the research project to those interested in the selected subject area and provide constructive suggestions for those who may wish to extend this line of research.

The chapter should begin with a very brief summary of the project. Do not attempt to rewrite any of the previous chapters here, but give an overview of the project and statistical findings. This discussion should be focused on the search for an answer to the overall research question introduced in the first chapter and developed fully in the third. A quick description of the organization of the chapter should follow these introductory thoughts. This will impose some structure on the chapter and provide a transition to the main body of the text.

Each of the secondary research questions and hypotheses must be evaluated based on the statistical findings produced in the previous chapter. **DO NOT** address the specific statistical conclusions in this chapter. The emphasis in this chapter should return to theories and concepts rather than focusing on nulls and t-values. Apply the statistical findings presented in the previous chapter to the conceptual and theoretical questions they were designed to address. This is the part of the process where the researcher must *assign meaning* to the outputs produced by the quantitative tests. Make the reader understand what the presence of a statistically significant
relationship between two variables means in the selected context. Draw special attention to findings that can be used to evaluate public policies and proposals, those that run counter to expectations, and those which contradict conclusions produced by other researchers.

The discussion of the secondary research questions provides an opportunity to discuss both the substance and importance of the findings produced within the project. Remember not to confuse the absence of statistical significance in the fourth chapter’s quantitative analysis with the absence of substance or importance. The absence of statistical significance often represents an extremely interesting finding. Most public policies are based on the expectation that they will produce significantly different outcomes than other policies. The failure of a policy to demonstrate an ability to produce outcomes superior to those produced by competing policies raises questions about the design and/or implementation of the policy. This may point to the need for modifications of the policy or the development of additional alternatives.

Efforts to address the research questions and hypotheses should also focus on the degree to which the findings of this study can be extended and applied to society as a whole. The quantitative analysis involved a sample drawn in time and space. To what extent can the conclusions by generalized to the larger population of individuals, states, or nation-states? Not all findings will be easily extended to society as a whole. Some may apply to a subset of the larger population or to a specific time frame.

The next portion of the chapter should address the overall research question based on the conclusions associated with the secondary questions and hypotheses. Weigh the evidence produced by the quantitative tests and the insights developed in the process of drawing the conclusions associated with the secondary research questions to develop a substantive answer to
the overall research question. Make sure to explain the rationale for this conclusion and cite the evidence that it is based on. This is the most critical component of the chapter because the entire project is to be directed toward answering the overall research question. Provide a direct and explicit answer to the overall research question in this chapter. The overall conclusions should have a strong emphasis on the implications of the conclusions that have been drawn. Explain why the findings of this study are important and how they should inform the policy decisions of government officials. Discuss the contribution of this project to the overall body of knowledge in this area of study.

The final section of the chapter is directed toward the future. In this section, each student is asked to provide recommendations for future research in the selected area of study. Identify what others can do to advance this line of research and build upon the insights provided here and by the researchers discussed in the second chapter. Some view this portion of the project as a useful outlet for frustrations with the absence of data, time, or resources believed to have impeded the research process. If better data is needed, explain what that data would look like and how it could be collected. Identify the shortcomings and limitations of the current project and explain how others can work to overcome them. Stretch the limits of research in this area and give several examples.
Outline for Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Research

I. Introduction.
A. Introductory paragraph which transition from chapter 4 and purpose of the chapter. Also include in the introduction how the chapter will be organized.
B. General summary of the entire research project.
   1. This is not a rewrite of chapter one. Be general not specific.
   2. What was the overall research question and hypothesis?
   3. Overview of the findings. Focus on the conceptual issues and ideas, not specific variables and levels of statistical significance.

II. Conclusions.
A. Introduction to how the conclusions will be presented.
B. Draw attention to the “most interesting findings”, “most surprising findings”\(^1\), “most unusual findings” and other type findings that are to be distinguished in some special way.
C. You could group the conclusions in a number of ways.
D. DO NOT include any actual statistical conclusions in this chapter.
   1. Remember that negative findings are still important in academic research. Do not assume that the only valuable information is provided by the results of tests where null hypotheses were rejected
E. Make references to the inferential nature of statistical studies and draw conclusions related to the populations from which the samples were selected.
F. **Answer the overall research question and other related research questions.**
   1. The entire purpose of the project is to answer the research question.
   2. Be sure to explain the rationale used to produce this conclusion

III. Recommendations.
A. Introduction to this section.
B. What additional research could or should be done on this topic?
   1. What is the next logical step for those seeking to build upon your findings?
   2. Stretch the limits of research in this area and give several examples.

\(^1\)Be careful not to be “surprised” by too many of the findings. That may give the impression that you had no idea what you were doing.