The New Retirement
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This magazine is printed using vegetable-based inks on Rolland Enviro100, a Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)-certified and 100-percent post-consumer fiber paper that is chlorine-free and manufactured using biogas energy.
ISR has always shaped the direction of the social sciences. And we are working hard to ensure that this will be true well into the future. As construction of our beautiful new Thompson Street building addition progresses, we are building for the future by creating the critical physical space to house our growing repository of biological data and to enhance our many campus and global scientific collaborations. This space instantiates the new and promising frontiers that our enterprising researchers are now exploring – the interface of genetics, biology and the social sciences that is on the verge of revolutionizing these disciplines. New collaborations are already underway that will extend our understandings of human behavior and lead to novel ways of solving the problems that both individuals and societies face.

Ground-breaking as these collaborations are, in many respects they are simply an extension of ISR’s long and distinguished history. We have always been a leader in shaping the future of social science in the public interest. We have always been a leader in identifying and developing social science methods that push the boundaries of our disciplines. We have always been a leader at creating the data that policymakers use and that shape public views. Examples of ISR’s leadership over the decades abound. To mention just a few of them:

- We correctly modeled the outcome of the 1948 U.S. presidential election, demonstrating the value of scientific sampling techniques and permanently changing the practice of polling and public opinion research.
- We established the Monitoring the Future study, which provided the data to fuel a successful lawsuit against Big Tobacco’s infamous Joe Camel-type marketing campaigns aimed at young Americans.
- We founded the influential monthly consumer confidence survey, which has measured trends in consumer sentiment and expectations since 1946 and exerts a major impact on U.S. monetary policy.

ISR economist George Katona, who founded the consumer confidence survey in 1946, helped to establish the discipline of behavioral economics. We are delighted to be able to honor his legacy and at the same time “pay it forward” to the Next Generation by establishing the George Katona Economic Behavior Research Award Fund in 2013.

Honoring our past while preparing for our future is a vital part of ISR’s mission. As we advance toward new frontiers of knowledge, the support of our friends is more important than ever to continue attracting the best and brightest researchers in the Next Generation of empirical social scientists.

You’ll read about some of these young researchers in this issue, and we’ll bring you additional stories about our latest award winners and young faculty in the coming months.

Join us online, on social media, and in person at the many stimulating brown bag presentations we host with our colleagues at the University of Michigan and around the world.
The New Retirement: No Retirement?

by Susan Rosegrant
Back when baby boomers were young—and sex, drugs, and rock and roll were at their height—many commentators questioned what this feckless generation of do-nothings boded for the future of the country. Who was going to run the government, engage in commerce, teach the young, provide services? Who was going to do all the work?

Wouldn’t those commentators be surprised. Because the boomers now hitting retirement age are hanging onto their jobs like pit bulls, and sometimes forgetting to retire altogether. In fact, it would be easy to conclude that boomers—those born between 1946 and 1964—are a bunch of workaholics.

The reality is more complicated than that. But there’s no question that the average age of retirement in the United States is rising, and not just among boomers. Close to 24 percent of men aged 70-74 still work, up about 7 percent from ten years ago, and one-in-three men aged 65-69 are still on the job, according to recent data from the Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers. Women are staying in their jobs longer, as well. More than 14 percent of women aged 70-74 are still employed, an increase of about 3 percent in the last decade, and one-in-four women aged 65-69 currently work, up almost 6 percent.

Substantial numbers of more senior Americans—those 75 or older—are also working: one-in-ten men and one-in-twenty women. “For most of the 20th Century we saw retirement ages fall while life expectancy rose,” says David Weir, a research professor at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) and director of the Health and Retirement Study. “About 20 years ago, the trend in retirement age reversed, and it has been inching up slowly ever since.”

For many institutions of higher education—including the University of Michigan—working into later age has been a trend for some time. The average age of retirement for U-M staff is 62 and for faculty members 66, up just slightly from 10 years ago, according to Thomas Palmer, a senior business analyst with the university’s human resources department. Meanwhile, the number of faculty in the 20-29 age group has actually fallen in the last ten years from 160 to 133, while those 70 and above has doubled to 181. Staff employment trends are similar: those aged 30-39 have increased by less than 8 percent in the previous decade, but those aged 60-69 have jumped an astonishing 200 percent.

You don’t have to look hard to find individuals who are pushing up the numbers. Take Jim Craven, a bookbinder and conservator who started working at the university full time in 1949. When he retired in November 2012 at age 81, his 63 years on the job made him the longest serving staff member on record. (Long-serving staff are not an oddity. Once staff members work at U-M for 10 years, they typically stay at the university for the rest of their careers, Palmer says.)

And who is the oldest faculty member? That’s a complicated question. Until 1994, tenured professors nationwide had to retire at age 70. The rule led to the not uncommon sight of faculty “retiring” when they hit the limit...and showing up the next day to work—no longer bringing in the same paycheck, but still doing research, writing papers, and engaging with colleagues. A perfect example of this: ISR researcher Robert Kahn, now 95, who drives to work many days and participates fully in the life of the institute.

Since the 1994 rule change, the number of older faculty has been rising slowly but steadily. About 18 percent of U-M faculty are in their 60s, 70s, or beyond, up almost 4 percent in the last decade. Currently some 40 U-M employees are 80 years or older, most of them faculty and most of them part-time. That’s up from 11 five years ago. Half of tenured and tenure-track faculty will be eligible to retire by 2018, although the university estimates that only 28 percent will do so.

Money for the Golden Years

People are retiring later for a lot of reasons, but a key one is economic. Employer health insurance benefits for retirees are eroding, spurring many employees to hold out until they qualify for Medicare at age 65. Changes to Social Security, such as the increase in the age at which people can receive full benefits from 65 to 67, may also be playing a role. And people are living longer, requiring additional savings to support those extra years.

How people amass those retirement savings has also undergone a sea change. Employer-provided defined benefit pensions, which typically were structured to provide maximum benefits at or before normal retirement age, are mostly a thing of the past now, making early retirement less affordable. Their replacements, defined contribution plans, accrue until an employee leaves and don’t penalize late retirement. They also require employees to manage their own accounts, which can expose savers to financial risk.
Indeed, many retirement and savings plans took a severe hit during the recent economic downturn, a hit that was particularly devastating for those nearing or already in retirement. Some 40 percent of older Americans delayed retirement in the years after the Great Recession, according to an analysis of data from ISR’s Health and Retirement Study and its Cognitive Economics Study. “The typical household lost about 5 percent of its total wealth between the summers of 2008 and 2009,” says ISR economist Brooke Helppie McFall. People don’t intend to work long enough to recoup all the money they lost, McFall says, but on average, those who postponed retirement expect to work about 1.6 years longer than planned.

And even as the economy has begun to turn around, many households still find themselves facing a more precarious future. “While the stock market has recovered most of its pre-recession value, housing prices have not, and for most people their house is their biggest asset,” says ISR’s David Weir.

Karen Semenuk and Lorna Hurl, who run retirement workshops and meet with individual employees as part of U-M’s Faculty and Staff Assistance Program, say that concerns about delayed retirements may not be the primary reason why people set up counseling sessions, but retirement fears are often woven in. “They don’t come because they’re trying to figure out retirement but because it’s raised some other issues for them,” says Hurl. “There’s a certain amount of sadness, or it’s caused some problems between the spouses: ‘This was the plan, and now we can’t do that.’”

Loving the Job

Of course, economic motivations are just part of the older worker phenomenon. Many married men are likely to stay on the job longer now because their wives are working. Couples typically want to coordinate their retirements, and if a wife is working until age 62 or 65, that’s an incentive for her often slightly older husband to keep working, too.

And some people aren’t retiring for a simpler reason: they love their jobs. Witness the aforementioned professors, who don’t want to leave the stimulation of their research or forego the camaraderie of their colleagues. In a 2010 TIAA-CREF survey, about one-third of faculty respondents said they planned to work until at least age 70.

Not surprisingly, working beyond normal retirement age by choice is particularly common among the wealthier and more highly educated, those who are likely to have better health and jobs they can still do effectively at an advanced age. (Workers in low-paying and physically demanding jobs often are ready to retire as soon as finances allow.) Overall, many more jobs than before rely on cognitive skills, rather than physical abilities, studies show, and the number of retirement-age employees who are physically able to do work into later years has increased, as well.

"People who are very identified with either their profession or their work wonder what happens when that’s no longer how they define themselves. How do I define myself?"

Finally, fear of change and the unknown may keep some people at their desks. In the retirement workshops they run, Karen Semenuk and Lorna Hurl deal not with the economic repercussions but with the emotional ones. “People who are very identified with either their profession or their work wonder what happens when that’s no longer how they define themselves,” Semenuk says. “How do I define myself?”

A Gradual Fade

Although people are working longer, most still decide to retire at some point. But even that process has changed. According to an analysis of Health and Retirement Study participants born between 1942 and 1947 that appeared in the January 2009 edition of Research on Aging, nearly two-thirds of those who retired from full-time work passed through some sort of bridge job—either part time or of short duration—before leaving the work force entirely. “Our findings further reinforce the notion that for many older Americans, retirement is a process, not a single event,” wrote the authors of “Bridge Jobs: A Comparison Across Cohorts.” “Only a minority of older Americans now retire all at once, with a onetime, permanent exit from the labor force.”

Going part-time may seem an obvious bridge step. More surprising is the move to different full-time work after retirement. Nicole Maestas, a RAND economist and researcher with U-M’s Michigan Retirement Research Center, says the number of people who retire, take a break for a couple of years, and then return to work has been increasing since the early 1990s; some 40 percent of workers between the ages of 51 and 61 who stop work will return in some full-time capacity, according to her
of people may now be returning to work who fit her original financial hardship assumption.)

So is there an economic downside to the number of older workers still on the job? Yes and no. U-M and many other universities generally offer a finite number of jobs: If older faculty and staff aren’t leaving, there are fewer opportunities to bring in new blood. But ISR’s David Weir is quick to point out that universities shouldn’t be seen as a microcosm of the country overall. The national economy isn’t limited in the same ways and can create new jobs and new ways for people to participate in the workforce. “The kinds of policies that seek to force older people out to create jobs for others don’t end up creating any more jobs,” Weir says.

And the positives of later retirement for society and individuals—including easing potential labor shortages, producing more goods and services, funding Social Security and Medicare, postponing claims on those public funds, and shoring up personal assets for a more financially stable future—speak for themselves.

Besides, those who aren’t able to retire as early as they wanted can comfort themselves with this: a recent study drawing on data from the Health and Retirement Study and its international sister studies suggests that working longer may help to preserve memory and other cognitive abilities, even when the work itself isn’t mentally stimulating. “There is evidence that social skills and personality skills—getting up in the morning, dealing with people, knowing the value of being prompt and trustworthy—are also important,” Robert Willis, a U-M professor of economics, ISR researcher, and one of the authors of the study told The New York Times. “They go hand in hand with the work environment.”

Three Faces of the New Retirement

Delayed Retirement

Ronald Inglehart
Considered retiring from teaching at 70, but at 78 is still working and loving it.

Phased Retirement

Judith Nowack
Plotted a careful transition to retirement that included dropping to part-time status.

Retirement...And Back

Tonya Thompson
Retired, regretted it, and returned to a job that she hopes will last for years.

How a chance connection paved the way for the nation’s gold standard study of adolescent drug use

by Susan Rosegrant

On a grey day in 1974, three researchers left the Carnegie Corporation’s imposing building on Madison Avenue in New York City in a low mood. Jerald Bachman, 38, Lloyd Johnston, 34, and Robert Kahn, 56, all from the University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research (ISR), had come from Ann Arbor in high spirits to pitch an idea for an ambitious new study on youth to Carnegie President Alan Pifer. But Pifer wasn’t interested in putting any money into the project. It was too big, too broad, too expensive.

The researchers headed back to Ann Arbor deflated. It wasn’t clear where they could turn next, or even whether the study would go forward.

Bachman had come up with the idea for an expansive new study on youth back in 1969. In part, he was inspired by Youth in Transition (YIT), a national study he and Kahn had launched three years earlier. YIT’s main thrust was examining the causes and consequences for young men of dropping out of high school. But Bachman wanted to do something bigger—a study that would encompass attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs in many areas of adolescent life, such as race relations, gender roles, politics, and conservation.

Bachman figured the new study could rely exclusively on questionnaires administered to high school seniors in schools, and follow-up mail questionnaires. He also wanted the new project to be a panel study—following respondents over time to see how their attitudes and behaviors changed. But the researchers would have to be careful to interpret any observed changes correctly. It was the early 1970s, and social turmoil in America was reaching a peak. So would a decrease in government trust indicate an age effect, as the respondents grew older; a change specific to this one class or cohort; or a broader change in society? In order to sort those factors out, Bachman believed they needed to add a new cohort of respondents each year.

When Johnston saw the responses to the drug questions, he wanted to do something with them. Most drug surveys at the time were local studies, Johnston says, and there wasn’t good national data available. “The ones that found high levels of drug use are the ones that made it into the paper, and the ones that didn’t would not get any coverage,” he recalls. In contrast, the national YIT survey showed that drug use was not yet as widespread as people assumed.

Johnston analyzed the data and in 1973 published Drugs and American Youth. The book, which shed light on a problem that had only recently grabbed the attention of mainstream America, ended up in the hands of Robert DuPont, who under President Richard Nixon had just become the nation’s second drug czar. DuPont read the book on a plane trip back to Washington, D.C., and was so engaged that he invited Johnston to his D.C. office to discuss the findings. “Very heady,” Johnston recalls. “I was still a graduate student.” Based on that conversation, the White House Office on Drugs, predecessor to the Office of...
National Drug Control Policy, agreed to help fund YIT for another round so that it could continue gathering data on adolescent drug use.

Back in Ann Arbor, with the failed appeal to Carnegie behind them, Bachman and Johnston considered their options. (Robert Kahn had shifted his attention to other projects.) They knew they would need a major funder to do the kind of ambitious study they envisioned, which they had dubbed Monitoring the Future. But they’d already shopped the idea around to the obvious benefactors without any bites.

Then Johnston had an idea. “We can’t sell all these things in a basket to anybody. Why don’t we try to figure out a way to make it valuable enough to one sponsor that they will pay for it and allow us to carry along some of these other subjects?”

Specifically, Johnston thought of DuPont and his deep interest in getting a better fix on drug use among American youth. DuPont was about to become the founding director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA); Johnston and Bachman figured NIDA would be the perfect sponsor.

The two researchers tinkered with the study proposal to put a stronger focus on drugs, cigarettes, and alcohol—content that would appeal to DuPont. But they worried that the drug czar wouldn’t grasp the need for adding a new group of respondents each year. “We went there prepared to tell him about the many advantages of what is called a cohort sequential design,” Bachman recalls. “We got to his office and the wall is plastered with charts showing cohort sequential design data for heroin addiction in D.C.” Bachman smiles at the memory. “He was presold.”

DuPont had enough of a global perspective to appreciate how this might be used.”

NIDA gave the researchers $3 million for the first five years—a huge grant in 1974—and Johnston and Bachman set to work. They hired five graduate students to research what surveys had been done in the target areas, designed several questionnaires, contacted school principals, and launched the first data gathering the following year. Johnston presented the results along with DuPont and NIDA to a small media gathering in a Washington, D.C. hotel conference room in 1976.

In the decades that followed, Monitoring the Future—later expanded to include 8th and 10th graders as well as seniors—became the nation’s measuring stick of substance use and abuse by the young. Among its early contributions was demonstrating that an increase in the perceived risk of a drug would cause its use to fall. The study also has served as an early warning signal for the spikes in cigarette smoking in the early 1990s and the constant arrival of new drugs, giving policy makers the information they need to respond effectively.

Johnston’s presentation of each year’s study results, along with the NIDA director and usually other high government officials, has become an annual Washington event. Meanwhile, Bachman; Patrick O’Malley, who joined soon after the study’s launch; and John Schulenberg, who became a fourth partner “just” twenty years ago, have done extensive analysis of respondents’ evolving responses over time, and have drawn on the study’s data to report on non-drug issues ranging from self-esteem to attitudes towards military service.

Last year, Monitoring the Future was renewed with another five-year grant, this time for $35 million. In addition to surveying 45,000-50,000 students in schools each year, the study is now tracking 36 graduating classes of respondents, with a cumulative total of more than 60,000 continuing participants; members of the first group are now 54-55 years old. It is the longest running independent investigator-initiated research study at ISR, a fact that clearly makes Johnston and Bachman proud.

Would the study have happened if DuPont had not happened upon Johnston’s first book? “Monitoring the Future would probably not exist,” Johnston says bluntly. “A piece of luck.” Bachman agrees. “We thought about this as a design that ought to go on and on and on. And then we finally found a sponsor that had the same perspective.” He adds: “We’re now fond of saying that the study ought to outlast the original investigators.”
When researchers work in the same building, the likelihood of forming new collaborations and obtaining funding increases dramatically, a U-M study shows.

Researchers who occupy the same building are 33 percent more likely to form new collaborations than researchers who occupy different buildings, and scientists who occupy the same floor are 57 percent more likely to form new collaborations than investigators who occupy different buildings, the study said.

ISR's Jason Owen-Smith is the lead author of “A Tale of Two Buildings: Socio-Spatial Significance in Innovation”. The report details the findings of a two-year study on collaboration and physical proximity funded by the U-M Office of the Vice President for Research, ISR, and the U-M Medical School.

“This kind of rigorous social science research is very much in the ISR tradition,” said ISR Director James S. Jackson. “Similar principles were used by the ISR founders in designing the 1965 ISR building. We invested in this study in order to assist the NCRC but also to inform our decisions about how the new addition to the ISR-Thompson building, now under construction, can maximize interdisciplinary collaborations and success in achieving funding for research from a variety of external sources.”

The most extensive attempt to date to elucidate the socio-spatial dynamics of successful scientific research collaborations, the study tests assumptions about proximity and social networks that have stood unexamined for half a century.

One of these assumptions is that passive contacts between inhabitants of a building—just bumping into people as you go about your daily business—makes it more likely that you’ll share ideas and eventually engage in formal collaborations.

Owen-Smith and colleagues examined the relationship between office and lab proximity and walking patterns, and found that linear distance between offices was less important than overlap in daily walking paths. They developed the concept of zonal overlap as a way to operationalize Festinger’s idea of passive contact.

“We looked at how much overlap existed for any two researchers moving between lab space, office space, and the nearest bathroom and elevator,” Owen-Smith said. “And we found that net of the distance between their offices, for every 100 feet of zonal overlap, collaborations increased by 20 percent and grant funding increased between 21 and 30 percent.”

Other members of the study team are U-M researchers Felichism Kabo, Margaret Levenstein, Richard Price, Gerald Davis, Yongha Hwang and Natalie Cotton Nessler.

Read more about the study and download a full copy of the report at http://bit.ly/sharingspaceum.
Faculty Research

ISR renews global partnership with Qatar University

ISR’s Center for Political Studies renewed its partnership agreement with Qatar University’s Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) in late 2012 in Doha, Qatar. The agreement expands on an earlier partnership to develop SESRI’s capacity as a leading social science research organization in Qatar and a key contributor to social science research in the Gulf.

“All of us at the U-M have consistently found our collaboration with SESRI not only enjoyable but also deeply rewarding,” said Mark Tessler, U-M Vice Provost for International Affairs. “In four short years, SESRI has built a fully operational survey research institute that carries out studies of a quality and scope that are unmatched in the Gulf. Inspired and assisted by the ISR, the surveys SESRI conducts are state-of-the-art and consistent with the standards of leading survey research centers anywhere in the world.”

Read more about the partnership and the surveys being carried out at SESRI at http://bit.ly/SESRI-ISR.

Mark Tessler (left) with SESRI director Darwish Al-Emadi.

Pacific Islander Health

Pacific Islanders living in the U.S. have alarmingly high rates of obesity and smoking. That is one of the key findings from the Pacific Islander Health Study conducted by ISR’s Sela Panapasa and colleagues.

For the study, the research team interviewed a random sample of 239 California households in 2011 and 2012. Half were Tongans living in the San Mateo area and half were Samoans living in the Los Angeles area. Trained Samoan and Tongan interviewers collected information on a wide range of health conditions and health behaviors among adults and adolescents.

Among the findings:

- Smoking rates among Pacific Islanders were three to four times higher than for other Californians, and more than twice as high as in the U.S. overall. Approximately 46 percent of adults said they were current smokers, compared to 13 percent of California adults and 20 percent of U.S. adults. Among Pacific Islander adolescents, 23 percent said they had tried smoking cigarettes, compared to just 3.5 percent of California teens.
- More than half of Pacific Islander adolescents were overweight or obese based on their body mass index (BMI). More than 80 percent of Pacific Islander adults had a BMI that indicated they were overweight or obese.
- Pacific Islander teens were much more likely than other adolescents to engage in risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol and smoking marijuana. For example, nearly 47 percent of Tongan teens surveyed admitted to trying alcohol, compared to 36 percent of California teens overall. And 25 percent of Pacific Islander teens had tried any drug, compared to just 14 percent of California teens overall.

“By identifying the problem areas facing specific Pacific Islander communities, we can finally begin to chart a course to develop interventions that will help to reduce these health disparities and build healthy communities,” says Panapasa.

Panapasa’s collaborators on the study include U-M researchers James Jackson, Cleopatra Caldwell, Steven Heeringa, and James McNally, and David Williams of Harvard University.

Funding for the Pacific Islander Health Study was provided by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, the Asian Pacific Islander American Health Forum and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

Age and Empathy

Looking for someone to feel your pain? Talk to a woman in her 50s.

According to a new study of more than 75,000 adults, women in that age group are more empathic than men of the same age and than younger or older people.

“Overall, late middle-aged adults were higher in both of the aspects of empathy that we measured,” says Sara Konrath, co-author of an article on age and empathy published in the Journals of Gerontology: Psychological and Social Sciences. “They reported that they were more likely to react emotionally to the experiences of others, and they were also more likely to try to understand how things looked from the perspective of others.”

For the study, researchers Ed O’Brien, Konrath and Linda Hagen at the University of Michigan and Daniel Grühn at North Carolina State University analyzed data on empathy from three separate large samples of American adults, two of which were taken from the nationally representative General Social Survey.

They found consistent evidence of an inverted U-shaped pattern of empathy across the adult life span, with younger and older adults reporting less empathy and middle-aged adults reporting more.

According to O’Brien, this pattern may result because increasing levels of cognitive abilities and experience improve emotional functioning during the first part of the adult life span, while cognitive declines diminish emotional functioning in the second half. But more research is needed in order to understand whether this pattern is really the result of an individual’s age, or whether it is a generational effect reflecting the socialization of adults who are now in late middle age.

“Americans born in the 1950s and ‘60s – the middle-aged people in our samples – were raised during historic social movements, from civil rights to various antiwar countercultures,” the authors explain. “It may be that today’s middle-aged adults report higher empathy than other cohorts because they grew up during periods of important societal changes that emphasized the feelings and perspectives of other groups.”

Earlier research by O’Brien, Konrath and colleagues found declines in empathy and higher levels of narcissism among young people today as compared to earlier generations of young adults.

O’Brien and Konrath plan to conduct additional research on empathy, to explore whether people can be trained to show more empathy using new electronic media, for example. “Given the fundamental role of empathy in everyday social life and its relationship to many important social activities such as volunteering and donating to charities, it’s important to learn as much as we can about what factors increase and decrease empathic responding,” says Konrath.

The research was supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship to O’Brien, and an American Association of University Women Fellowship and a grant from Wake Forest University’s Character Project to Konrath.

Konrath is affiliated with the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, and with the University of Rochester Medical Center, New York.
Upward Mobility in the U.S.

The rhetoric is relentless: America is a place of unparalleled opportunity, where hard work and determination can propel a child out of humble beginnings. But the reality is very different, according to an ISR researcher who is studying inequality across generations around the world. “Especially in the United States, people underestimate the extent to which your destiny is linked to your background,” says ISR sociologist Fabian Pfeffer.

Pfeffer has compared data on two generations of families in the U.S., drawn from the ISR Panel Study of Income Dynamics, with similar data from Germany and Sweden. He finds that parental wealth has an influence above and beyond the three factors that sociologists and economists have traditionally considered in research on social mobility – parental education, income, and occupation.

“Wealth not only fulfills a purchasing function, allowing families to buy homes in good neighborhoods and send their children to costly schools and colleges, for example, but it also has an insurance function, offering a sort of private safety net that gives children a very different set of choices as they enter the adult world,” Pfeffer says.

Pfeffer is now expanding the number of countries he is analyzing, and is also examining the influence of grandparents’ wealth.


Making metadata better data

Researchers will have access to improved metadata and new tools to search through and analyze two major national studies under a new joint initiative launched by ISR’s Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, and several other partners.

Supported by a collaborative research grant from the National Science Foundation, ICPSR, together with the American National Election Studies program at ISR’s Center for Political Studies and NORC, will carry out the two-year “Metadata Portal for the Social Sciences” project. Technical support will be provided by Metadata Technology North America and Integrated Data Management Services.

The first phase of the project, now underway, involves bringing the metadata for the existing General Social Survey (GSS) and the American National Election Studies (ANES) datasets up to the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI) standard. For a sample of the surveys, the project will also capture enhanced metadata on questionnaire flow and variable transformations.

“We are thrilled to be able to work toward improving the GSS and ANES metadata to create tools that both experts and novices can use to better understand these foundational studies of American society,” said Principal Investigator George Alter, Director of ICPSR. “We hope these advances can serve as models for future research as well.”

Tom W. Smith, GSS Principal Investigator, said: “NORC is pleased to link its capacity with that of ICPSR to provide the social science community with new and innovative products to facilitate the use of the GSS and ANES.”
Suppose your spouse had a serious illness today with very low chances of survival. First, what if he were mentally intact, but in severe and constant pain? Would he want to continue all medical treatments or stop all life-prolonging treatments?

So reads a question in the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study. It’s one of a series of questions about end-of-life treatment that comes towards the end of the hour-long survey, which has followed the lives of a random sample of Wisconsin high school graduates for more than 50 years.

Researchers use this information to study how the elderly view end-of-life choices. But for Dana Garbarski, who recently completed her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, the questions provided an ideal opportunity to learn more about how interviewers and respondents interact. Could an interviewer’s skill in handling such potentially sensitive questions at the end of a long interview affect whether a respondent would stay involved in the survey? And what if respondents paused and sounded uncertain? Did that mean their responses were less likely to agree with that of their spouses?

To answer these questions, Garbarski transcribed and coded audio recordings of 500 respondents from the 2004 study. Her analysis is focused not on the content but on how people answered.

“I think that respondents who seem to be displaying some sort of discomfort or uncertainty when answering these questions about end-of-life planning will be less likely to participate in the future, particularly if the interviewer isn’t able to establish a sense of rapport,” Garbarski says. “If the interviewers are responsive to respondents, if they are able to keep respondents’ motivation in answering these questions, I think that’ll be related to participation in the future.”

To see if respondents stuck with the survey, Garbarski has tracked how many returned a DNA kit mailed to them a few years after the study.

Garbarski concedes that the second question, looking at whether hesitation or uncertainty signal a less accurate report of a spouse’s preferences, is a harder one to parse. For example, cognitive problems could affect the answers of one or both members of a couple, or respondents might never have discussed the issue with their spouses, and might simply report what they want for their own care.

Still, Garbarski expects that respondents who are hesitant will be less reliable reporters—a hypothesis she can check, because in each case she has the spouse’s response for comparison. Knowing that hesitant behavior is a warning flag could help researchers interpret the data from surveys that rely on respondents to report on the actions or beliefs of others.

Garbarski used the money she received from the Charles Cannell Fund in Survey Methodology for the transcription and coding of the interviews, and she has started analyzing the data. She is now a post-doc at the University of Wisconsin Center for Women’s Health and Health Disparities Research, and is also the mother of two young children—Lucy, 3 ½, and Levi, 2. “If you think of parenting as my primary job, then what I do for fun is my work,” she says. “And if my work is my primary job, then what I do for fun is parenting.”

Garbarski concedes that the second question, looking at whether hesitation or uncertainty signal a less accurate report of a spouse’s preferences, is a harder one to parse. For example, cognitive problems could affect the answers of one or both members of a couple, or respondents might never have discussed the issue with their spouses, and might simply report what they want for their own care.

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Garbarski with her husband and kids. Photos courtesy of Dana Garbarski
When Natalie Sabik went to Ohio State University as a freshman in 2000, it didn’t take her long to notice she was different. While Sabik was comfortable in her own skin, most of the women around her were dieting or talking about dieting; exercising to lose weight; and bemoaning the size and shape of their stomachs, thighs, and other body parts. “I looked around and could not understand how so many women could dislike something as fundamental as their bodies,” Sabik recalls. “I wanted to understand where those messages were coming from, how they were being internalized, and what we might do to interrupt or change them.”

Sabik began tackling issues of body image in her psychology and women’s studies courses, and soon developed her own research question: Are college-age women who self-identify as feminists less likely to dislike their bodies? With the support of faculty mentor Tracy Tylka, Sabik collected and analyzed her own data, and the two published an article. Their findings: Women who consider themselves to be feminists and who are critical of how women’s bodies are portrayed in the media have lower levels of eating disorders and body shame.

Sabik’s hunger to deepen that research eventually landed her in a joint Ph.D. program in psychology and women’s studies at the University of Michigan. It didn’t take Sabik long to spot a hole in the literature: there were plenty of studies examining body image among young women, but almost none looking at older women. “This really surprised me, because the aging process has a lot to do with changes happening in your body and how you negotiate and perceive those,” she says. For her dissertation, Sabik decided to explore how older women perceive their bodies and how that affects their health and wellbeing. She also wanted to see if there were racial differences between her two samples—one made up primarily of white women living in Ann Arbor and one of African-American women living in the Detroit area. All the women were over the age of 65, and the average age for the sample was between 75 and 80.

What Sabik learned surprised her. Unlike young women, the 260 older women she studied said they cared less about what their bodies looked like and more about how well they functioned. They were also less satisfied with function than appearance. In addition, women who were less satisfied with the function of their bodies were more likely to be depressed, but there was no such correlation between appearance and depression. These broad patterns were true for both white and Black women, although African Americans were somewhat more satisfied with their bodies overall.

So have older women simply come to terms with their appearances or stopped caring? It’s not that simple, Sabik says. If she had posed similar questions in the context of social interactions, for example, the results might have differed. Also, she says, the pattern might reflect selective optimization and compensation—the theory that older adults selectively optimize the things they still do well in order to compensate for areas where they’re experiencing loss or decline. “It’s not like older women just wake up one day and completely stop caring about how they look,” she says. “It might be a coping mechanism or a way that older women are dealing with bodily changes.”

Sabik successfully defended her dissertation in May 2012, and now lives with her husband—a communications professional and avid organic gardener—in the Boston area. Sabik is doing postdoctoral research at Brandeis, and using the grant she received as a Douvan Junior Scholar to develop her dissertation research and present it at workshops and conferences. “It is so incredibly wonderful to have received this grant,” she says. “It showed that other people recognize that we need more information about body image and older women.” Sabik also makes and sells modern quilts, a craft she took up two years ago. “It’s my big creative endeavor, and a great way to use other parts of my brain.”
Polls showed these to be among the hot button issues for voters in the recent presidential election. But if the theories put forth more than 50 years ago by Philip Converse still hold true, many voters don’t have consistent opinions about these burning issues of the day. Nor do they vote based on a coherent ideology.

Converse, now 84, was a young research scientist at ISR back in 1960 when he collaborated with fellow ISR researchers Angus Campbell, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes to write *The American Voter*, a groundbreaking book that reshaped the world’s understanding of political behavior. Among the central—and controversial—themes of the book was the assertion that most voters were remarkably unsophisticated in their thinking.

Converse developed that argument further in his 1964 article, “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics.” Drawing on surveys conducted during the 1950s, Converse concluded that less than four percent of the voting public had a well-formed political belief system and the ability to think abstractly. The rest of the pack based their decisions on how they felt a particular party treated different groups; on whether they associated a party with a particular good or bad event, such as a war or a recession; or on “no shred of policy significance whatever.” Converse put that last group at 17.5 percent.

Many political scientists, including Converse, would argue that the voting public has become somewhat more sophisticated in the five decades since he wrote his article; Converse credits a more educated populace and the easy availability of information for that improvement. But the ideas from his legendary article are still discussed today. In fact, ISR’s Center for Political Studies (CPS) is celebrating the 50th anniversary of the article at two events—the annual Miller-Converse lecture held in April 2013, and a conference one year later. The events will also feature the seminal article by colleagues Miller and Stokes, “Constituency Influence in Congress,” examining the degree of control that voters have over the congressmen they choose to represent them.

And CPS is making sure that the ideas and energy of these two scholars live on in other ways. With early financial support from Converse, the Center recently created the Philip Converse and Warren Miller Fellowship in American Political Behavior, to be given annually to a U-M graduate student and his or her faculty mentor to pursue research on elections, public opinion, or representation. The first Converse Miller fellowship was awarded in April at the Miller-Converse lecture to John Jackson, professor of political science, and Elizabeth Mann, a Ph.D. student in political science, who will be using the award to study American political behavior.

Contributing to a student fellowship was a natural move for Converse, given his formative experiences as a student and young academic at ISR in the 1950s and ’60s. Before coming to Michigan, he earned a master’s degree in English literature, and did research for a Shakespearean scholar; he liked the details, but was convinced there was more significant research to be done in the social sciences. Then, as a graduate student at U-M, he discovered ISR. “I managed to infiltrate the place by hook or by crook, and that’s where it all started,” Converse recalled in a 1997 interview. “I was absolutely thrilled off my feet by this marvelous new tool of survey research which could give one snapshots of what was going on in the minds and behaviors of the American public.”

Converse went on to head CPS in 1982, and he became the fourth director of ISR in 1986. He left that position in 1989 to become director of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford. But after retiring from Stanford in 1994, he moved back to Michigan, where as a professor emeritus of sociology and political science he has continued his close association with the Institute. The Fellowship, he says, should help students continue to make breakthroughs in understanding American voting behavior.

More than fifty years have passed since Converse came to U-M as a student, but the intensity of his early years at ISR still resonates. “I felt like a kid in a candy shop,” Converse said. “I felt I had come to exactly the right place at exactly the right time.”
After months of planning, construction on ISR’s five-level, 56,700-square-foot Thompson Street building addition began in September 2012 and is progressing well. You can watch the construction in progress via this live action cam: http://bit.ly/ISRconstructioncam.

Ann Arbor photographer Phillip Dattilo, whose work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal and Fortune, has been documenting this project from the start. A few of Dattilo’s striking images are shown below. See more on ISR’s Facebook page at http://bit.ly/ISRconstruction.
Jerome Johnston directs
ISR Research Center for Group Dynamics

Jerome Johnston has been appointed director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics, part of the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research.

“I am delighted to make this appointment. Jere has interesting new ideas for supporting junior faculty, and his long experience brings a valuable perspective to this important leadership position,” said ISR Director James Jackson. “In addition, his research on educational interventions and evaluations not only harks back to the early days of ISR research, but also looks to the future in its exploration of the uses of technology and online learning throughout the life span.”

Johnston began his three-year term as RCGD director on Jan. 1, 2013. He succeeds L. Rowell Huesmann, who returns to his role as an ISR research professor.

“RCGD has a long and storied history,” Johnston said. “It is one of the two original centers that came together in 1948 to form ISR. Over the years many of the national leaders in social psychology were leaders at RCGD—Dorwin Cartwright, Jack French, Bob Zajonc and Dick Nisbett.

“Under Rowell’s able direction, the Center has grown significantly in recent years, adding researchers in fields as diverse as experimental economics, child development and psychological neuroscience. Many common threads run through their work, and I want to help faculty explore the ways that their work contributes to the broader body of research on individual and group behavior.”

Over four decades of research, Johnston has explored how learning and teaching are shaped by interactions among the design of digital materials, such as video and online text, and human and spatial factors, such as instructional strategies, student assignments, classroom interactions and the organization of learning spaces.

The author of more than 150 books, chapters and journal articles, Johnston has examined learning and teaching in technology-intensive environments using methods ranging from large-scale surveys to small-scale controlled experiments and ethnographic field studies. His research has focused on those as young as five and as old as 80, in a wide range of content areas from social studies, science, writing, adult literacy, foreign languages and social development. Johnston received a B.A. in American Studies from Yale University, and received an M.A. in psychology from U-M in 1968 and a Ph.D. in education and psychology here in 1971.

He began his research career at ISR in 1967, and served as co-director of the ISR Center for Research on the Utilization of Scientific Knowledge in 1981. From 1995 to 1998, he served as senior consulting director of technology on special assignment to the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

Working with RCGD’s new Associate Director Rich Gonzalez, Johnston hopes to integrate new ideas about the tools and analytic techniques available to understand human behavior with the center’s traditional strengths in social psychology.

“It’s an exciting time, with researchers turning to biological markers and brain imaging to understand how humans respond to their environment,” Johnston said. “Along with these new tools, new analytic techniques are being developed to understand the data derived from these tools. I want to support these new approaches, to make sure that our researchers have the best tools possible to support their work.”
Honors & Awards

**SHELDON DANZIGER,** ISR Population Studies Center, has been appointed president of The Russell Sage Foundation (RSF). Commenting on the appointment, current RSF president Eric Wanner said, “Sheldon’s strong commitment to rigorous social science research and its implications for policy will make him an excellent steward of the Foundation’s long tradition of working to strengthen social science and apply it more effectively to the analysis of social problems and the design of social policy.”

**EMILY FALK,** ISR Research Center for Group Dynamics, has received a 2012 National Institutes of Health Director’s New Innovator Award. This prestigious honor, which awards up to $1.5 million for five years, stimulates innovative research and supports promising new investigators. Falk’s research uses brain activity to forecast the success of large-scale health campaigns. She is one of two U-M researchers and among 51 total to receive the award, which was established in 2007.

**ANNA GRZYMALA-BUSSE,** ISR Center for Political Studies, has won the 2012 Alexander George Award. This award is given by the Qualitative Methods section of the American Political Science Association for the best article published during the past year. Grzymala-Busse’s winning article, published in *Comparative Political Studies,* was, “Time Will Tell? Temporality and the Analysis of Causal Mechanisms and Processes.”

**JAMES HOUSE,** ISR Survey Research Center and ISR Population Studies Center, has been selected the University of Michigan Henry Russel Lecturer for 2013. The Henry Russel Lectureship is awarded each year to a U-M professor for exceptional achievements in research, scholarship or creative endeavors, and an outstanding record of teaching, mentoring and service. Read more about House and his March 2013 Russel Lecture at http://bit.ly/JHouseUM.

**JAMES S. JACKSON,** ISR Director, was elected 2013 president of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA). COSSA is an advocacy group that promotes the social and behavioral sciences, serving as a bridge between the academic research community and the Washington policymaking community. Its members consist of more than 100 professional associations, scientific societies, universities, and research centers and institutes.

**WALTER MEBANE,** ISR Center for Political Studies, was the co-winner, along with University of California at Berkeley’s Jas Sekhon, of the American Political Science Association 2012 award for the Best Statistical Software. Mebane and Sekhon won for a program they developed called GENOUD (GENetic Optimization Using Derivatives). The program combines evolutionary algorithm methods with a derivative-based (quasi-Newton) method to solve difficult optimization problems.

**MARY BETH OFSTEDAL,** ISR Population Studies Center and ISR Survey Research Center, has received the 2012 Research Faculty Achievement Award from the University of Michigan Office of the Vice President for Research. The award cites Ofstedal as an outstanding scientist, administrator and collaborator in the field of population aging, respected for the originality of her research and the managerial skills she brings to the ISR Health and Retirement Study.
The new addition to ISR's Thompson Street building is a major step forward for the Institute. But out-growing our physical space is nothing new. Since 1946, we've relocated or added onto our buildings every few years, occupying a variety of spaces on the University of Michigan campus and around the City of Ann Arbor. Over that same period, the number of full-time, permanent ISR employees has increased from 14 to more than 600 and our research volume has grown from about $233,000 to more than $100 million. Read about our many expansions and relocations, and the important research programs initiated at each stage of our growth in an interactive feature about ISR in space over time at http://bit.ly/ISRspacetimeline.

In 1962, ISR moved to the Argus Building, pictured above, and consolidated many of its operations in the former camera manufacturing plant west of campus.