Look around: It’s a new and connected world out there. The Internet revolution has made it possible to instantly access and share information ranging from recipes to research. Electronic databanks store information on who we are, where we go, what we buy, and whom we talk to. And globalization—spurred by technology advances—is stretching political, economic, and cultural boundaries, rearranging attitudes and perceptions in the process.

Profound shifts like these are shaking up how the world works. It’s not surprising, then, that researchers are looking hard at how they collect information, what kind of information they collect, where they conduct surveys, and even who funds them. Perhaps the most obvious change, and the one for which the Institute for Social Research (ISR) has been preparing for years, is the how of collection. In-person and telephone interviews have been the bread and butter of surveying since ISR’s inception 60 years ago. But economic, technological, and even generational pressures are mandating new approaches. “The survey of the future is probably going to look very little like what we’re doing now,” says U.S. Census Bureau Director nominee Robert Groves, former director of ISR’s Survey Research Center (SRC).

Continued on page 8
The author, co-author, or editor of several classic books on survey methods, he received the 2001 Distinguished Achievement Award from the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

Groves received a bachelor’s degree in sociology from Dartmouth College in 1970, master’s degrees in statistics and sociology from U-M in 1973, and a doctorate in sociology from U-M in 1975. He joined the U-M Department of Sociology as a lecturer in 1975, attaining the rank of full professor in 1990. From 1990 to 1992, he served as associate director of statistical design, standards, and methodology at the U.S. Census Bureau, on loan from Michigan.

Robert M. Groves has been nominated as Director of the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

“His selection is an honor to the university and to ISR,” said ISR Director James S. Jackson. Groves is an excellent choice for this important job, Jackson says, and he will be sorely missed at ISR. An internationally recognized expert in the scientific conduct of surveys, Groves has directed the ISR Survey Research Center from 1992 to 2001.
Late last year, ISR celebrated the successful end of the Institute’s first Capital Campaign, during which we raised over $35 million from individuals, corporations, and foundations. That figure was 131 percent of our fund-raising goal – a remarkable achievement.

More than 1,000 individuals contributed $3.8 million to support ISR students, bringing our Next Generation Endowment to over $4.7 million. To date, more than 130 students and young scientists have received support from this endowment. The profiles of some of the newest award-winners appear in this issue, along with statements from earlier winners attesting to the impact this support has had on their lives and their careers.

In 2003, we significantly expanded our educational programs by launching the Michigan Program in Survey Methodology, offering certificates, masters of science, and doctoral degrees. The first Ph.D.s from that program are now practicing what they’ve learned, working in the field and teaching survey research theories and techniques to others. But our commitment to education doesn’t end after conferring the Ph.D. degree. The ISR Survey Research Center has recently joined the Population Studies Center in offering a Research Fellows program at the post-doctoral level. The ISR Center for Political Studies has formed a new partnership with Qatar University, and the Survey Research Center is broadening the scope of our relationship with Peking University. These initiatives expand our formal international educational initiatives beyond our long-standing collaborations with the University of Warsaw and Cape Town University.

Many of the features in this issue of the ISR Sampler celebrate this educational mission – which is, in essence, a form of creating connections between generations. You’ll see this emphasis reflected in the timeline commemorating ISR’s 60th Anniversary that runs throughout this issue. A fuller, multimedia version of the timeline can be found through the ISR homepage at www.isr.umich.edu, along with lively profiles of ISR people. Excerpts from a few of these profiles appear on pgs. 14 and 15. Enjoy, and stay in touch. We intend to strengthen connections with all our friends as we move ahead to build the future of social science and survey research and education together.

“Creating Connections” was the theme of our Campaign celebration, which brought together donors, retirees, current ISR leaders and students. As I look to what lies ahead for ISR, it’s clear that this theme applies to a great deal more than a single event. In many respects, creating connections between generations has become a central part of the ISR mission.

This mission is most evident, perhaps, in our growing commitment to education. In the last year, we have received important assistance from a new $200,000 teaching fund from University of Michigan Provost Teresa Sullivan. This fund will enhance the ability of ISR research faculty to share their knowledge with students in a variety of U-M colleges, schools, and departments.

Historically, ISR has always had a commitment to education, starting with the Summer Institute in Survey Research Techniques established in 1948. In 1961, ISR founder Leslie Kish deepened this commitment by starting an intensive, eight-week, Sampling Program for Foreign Statisticians. Along with the ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods of Social Research, founded in 1963, these programs have attracted more than 10,000 students from some 105 countries, creating connections with people who now head up government statistical agencies, non-profit organizations, and corporate market research firms all over the world.

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ISR Sampler, Summer 2009
Social psychologist **Robert Zajonc**, who conducted groundbreaking research on the complexities of social life, died after a five-year battle with pancreatic cancer Dec. 3, 2008, in Palo Alto, Calif. He was 85.

Born in Lodz, Poland, Zajonc’s parents were killed during World War II in a German air raid when he was 15 and he spent several of the war years in Nazi work camps until he escaped by walking 900 kilometers to Quimper, France.

Zajonc came to the United States after the war, receiving his bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral degrees from U-M.

During his tenure at Michigan, he served as director of the Institute for Social Research and of the ISR Research Center for Group Dynamics. After he retired in 1994, he joined the Stanford University faculty as an emeritus professor.

It was at U-M that Zajonc conducted a series of well-known studies that made him one of the most widely cited and influential social psychologists in the world.

The scope of his work ranged from the impact of familiarity on attitudes to the emergence of individual preferences and the influence of family dynamics on intellectual performance.

“Robert Zajonc was one of the most distinguished social psychologists in history,” said psychologist Richard Nisbett, a long-time colleague. “The range of his interests and accomplishments is virtually without parallel. His work was central to many different fields of psychology. His students include some of the most highly regarded social psychologists in the world. His piercing intelligence was matched by his generosity of spirit.”

One of his early lines of research established how the presence of others influenced performance for better and for worse, in creatures from cockroaches to college sophomores. Zajonc showed that people performed tasks they knew faster and better when they were with other people, and that they made more mistakes at new tasks than they did when alone.

He also conducted a series of studies that belie the common belief that familiarity breeds contempt. He showed that mere exposure to a stimulus, in and of itself, led people to rate that stimulus more positively. He demonstrated that this was the case using stimuli as diverse as faces, Turkish words and Chinese ideograms.

Zajonc also conducted a series of studies on social behavior that explored the relationship between feeling and thinking. He maintained that preferences need no inferences, that feelings precede cognition, and that affect and cognition operate independently of each other.

But it was his work on the link between birth order, family size and intelligence, conducted with U-M psychologist Gregory Markus that attracted the most popular attention. In the mid-1970s Zajonc and Markus conducted research showing that as family size increases, the overall IQ of the family drops. First-born children, born into adult-only families, tend to have higher IQs than younger siblings, the research showed, while the youngest child in the family tends to have the lowest IQ.

During his long career, Zajonc received many honors and awards. In 1989 he received the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award from the American Psychological Association. He was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and earned Guggenheim, Fulbright and Rockefeller fellowships. He held honorary degrees from the University of Louvain and the University of Warsaw, where he established a partner institution with ISR to advance research, scholarship and teaching designed to improve understanding of societies in transition.

Zajonc is survived by his wife Hazel Markus of Palo Alto, and their daughter Krysia Zajonc of Costa Rica; sons Peter of New York, Michael of Belgium and Joseph of Seattle, and their mother Donna Zajonc of Ann Arbor; and grandchildren Jonathan, Oliver, Zoe and Lucy.

The family requests that memorial contributions be made to the Robert Zajonc Scholars Fund at ISR. For more information, contact ISR Director of Development Patrick Shields, peshield@umich.edu.
The Robert Kahn Fellowship for the Scientific Study of Social Issues has received contributions of $940,000 so far, making it the largest fund-raising effort in ISR history.

"With matches from an anonymous donor and the University of Michigan, we quickly exceeded our original goal of $750,000," said ISR Director James Jackson. "We are now working to meet a new goal of $1 million to link Bob's name with the most prestigious social science fellowship on a campus which is internationally known for its strengths in the social sciences."

Reaching that goal will produce additional income allowing Kahn Fellows to collect original data on major social problems. They would be able to design and conduct their own surveys, buy questions on existing surveys, and run experiments of their own. Fellows will also receive a substantial stipend, tuition, and health care for one year.

"Despite the difficult financial times, there has been a tremendous outpouring of support for Bob," said Jackson. "Contributions have come from colleagues, former students, friends, and family members – a testament to Bob's stature as a scholar and to his character."

According to ISR External Relations Director Patrick Shields, support for this fund not only honors Kahn but also advances the success of the ISR Next Generation Initiative, designed to assure a flow of well-trained empirical social scientists.

For more information about Robert Kahn, visit the ISR 60th Anniversary website and read the profile of him at www.isr.umich.edu/home/anniversary/. For information on contributing to the fund, contact Patrick Shields at 734-764-8369 or email peshield@umich.edu

ISR Launches PSM Sponsors Program

ISR has launched a new Sponsors Program designed to partner Master's level students in the Program in Survey Methodology with corporate and non-profit sponsors. "This unique and mutually beneficial partnership will help ensure that the Michigan Program continues to attract the best and brightest students who will go on to become leaders in the field of survey research," said ISR Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Wayne McCullough. "At the same time, sponsors will receive many benefits as well, including an annual executive briefing and priority access to interns and graduates."

To date, according to McCullough, the following companies have signed on as PSM Sponsors: Millward Brown, Mayo Clinic Foundation, Survey Sciences Group, LLC, Ford Motor Company, and Marketing Strategies International.

"Even in this economic climate, the need for highly trained survey research specialists is growing," said McCullough. "But only a handful of programs exist to meet the demand." Since the Michigan Program in Survey Methodology was established in 2003, dozens of Ph.D. and M.S.-level graduates have entered the field. Their impact is beginning to be felt in sectors as diverse as market research, political polling, economics, criminology, and public health."

All fees from Program Sponsors are being used to support tuition grants to Masters level students. For more information, contact McCullough at wrmccull@umich.edu or (734) 615-6655.
Old as you wanna be

Older people tend to feel about 13 years younger than their chronological age, according to ISR psychologist Jacqui Smith.

With colleagues Anna Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn and Dana Kotler-Gruenh at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, Smith analyzed the responses of 516 men and women age 70 and older who participated in the Berlin Aging Study, tracking how their perceptions about age and their satisfaction with aging changed over a six-year period.

"People generally felt quite a bit younger than they actually were, and they also showed relatively high levels of satisfaction with aging over the time period studied," said Smith. "We examined individual changes over time, and expected the gap to increase. But we were surprised to find that it was maintained, on average. Perhaps feeling about 13 years younger is an optimal illusion in old age." The analysis appeared in the November 2008 issue of the *Journals of Gerontology: Psychological Science*.

Jackson named to new MacArthur Research Group

ISR Director James Jackson has been named to The MacArthur Research Network on an Aging Society. The new inter-disciplinary research network created by The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation is designed to help America prepare for the challenges and opportunities posed by an aging society. The new Network on an Aging Society will draw on the collective expertise of members from a wide variety of academic disciplines to examine the potential benefits of remodeling the distribution of education, work, leisure, and other key activities across the life course.

ISR partners with Qatar University

ISR has formed a partnership with Qatar University (QU) to establish the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute at QU as a leading source of social science research in the Arab Gulf region. "This partnership exemplifies the increasing importance of international collaborations," said ISR Director James S. Jackson. "ISR has a long history of working with social scientists around the world to build capacity and experience in conducting independent research with both scholarly and applied value."

As part of the five-year project, ISR and QU will prepare to launch an on-going national survey designed to monitor social trends in Qatar, and to understand the forces underlying these trends.

U-M political scientist Mark Tessler is principal investigator of the project and ISR researcher David Howell is co-principal investigator. Michael Traugott, Steven Heeringa, James Lepkowski, Myron Gutmann, and a number of other ISR faculty and graduate students are also working on the project.

Michigan moves ahead with National Children’s Study

ISR Survey Research Operations is part of the Michigan Alliance for the National Children’s Study, a consortium of the state’s top research universities, health care systems, and state and local health agencies. The alliance is part of the National Children’s Study, designed to be the largest and longest study ever conducted of the health and development of children across the nation.

"The first, five-year phase of the study will include work to enroll a representative sample of about 5,000 Michigan women before conception, followed by a wide range of environmental, health and developmental assessments throughout the prenatal and neonatal periods, then up to the age of two,” said Daniel Keating, director of the U-M Center for Human Growth and Development, and lead investigator of the U-M portion of the study. Keating is also a faculty associate at ISR, which will assume primary responsibility for identifying and enrolling study participants in Genesee, Grand Traverse, Lenawee, Macomb and Wayne Counties. ISR biostatistician Michael Elliott is working with Keating on the project, along with a large team of ISR survey research specialists including Beth-Ellen Pennell, Steven Heeringa and William Axinn.
USA Learns helps immigrants learn English

A new website that teaches English to Spanish-speaking immigrants – usalearns.org – has attracted more than 500,000 visitors in its first three months of operation.

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the site is the result of a collaboration between Project IDEAL at ISR and the Sacramento County Office of Education in California.

“We couldn’t be more pleased with the usage this new site has attracted so far,” says Jerome Johnston, ISR research professor and Project IDEAL director. “It’s an important attempt to increase our capacity to supplement classroom-based English as a Second Language instruction for some 12 million U.S. adults who have low levels of English proficiency.”

ICPSR to archive NCAA data

The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) will distribute data on college athletes through ICPSR – a major step forward in increasing access to data for researchers while protecting respondent confidentiality and privacy.

Four major NCAA datasets will be available this year: a user-friendly, longitudinal graduation-rates database; a longitudinal database of team-level Academic Progress Rates; data from the NCAA Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences; and the Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in college study.

“The NCAA recognized that broader dissemination of data will encourage scholarly research on intercollegiate athletics,” said ICPSR Director Myron Gutmann. “So we crafted a data sharing plan with them, to ensure that their data will be more accessible and at the same time will maintain the privacy of respondents.” The plan was developed with advice from Margaret Levenslein, Executive Director of the Michigan Census Research Data Center, and reviewed by the NCAA Data Analysis Research Network.

For more information, go to http://www.ncaa.org/wps/ncaa?ContentID=43825

When a child’s birth is unplanned

Nearly one-third of all children born in the U.S. are the result of unintended pregnancies. And according to a new study published in the current (May 2009) issue of Child Development, not only do these children receive less attention and warmth from their parents than children whose births were planned. So do their older siblings.

The study, funded by the National Center for Child Health and Development, was conducted by ISR sociologist Jennifer Barber and University of California, San Diego, sociologist Patricia East. Across the income range, the study found, children whose births were unintended had access to fewer family resources and less maternal warmth. And the resources provided to older children decreased more after the birth of an unintended child than they did after the birth of a child who was planned.

Getting smart: Intelligence vs. genes

Environmental conditions are much more powerful than genetic influences in determining intelligence, according to ISR social psychologist Richard E. Nisbett.

Nisbett is the author of “Intelligence and How to Get It: Why Schools and Cultures Count,” published earlier this year by W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. In the book, Nisbett analyzes a large number of such studies, showing how environment influences not just IQ as measured by standardized tests but also actual achievement.

“We need intensive early childhood education for the poor, and home visits to teach parents how to encourage intellectual development,” Nisbett writes. “Such efforts can produce huge immediate gains in IQ and enormous long-term gains in academic achievement and occupational attainment.”
Survey Research - continued from p. 1

Most likely, respondents to that future survey will be interacting with a computer. A web survey, at its simplest, can be like a piece of paper on a computer screen: SRC’s operations unit already has begun building such straightforward web questionnaires. But ISR Research Associate Professor Frederick Conrad, who teaches a course titled Envisioning the Survey Interview of the Future, wants to exploit the interactive character of the medium. One way would be to use the computer’s “videophone” capability. Whether through Skype, iChat, or another service, interviewers and respondents could see each other while talking—like a face-to-face interview, but mediated by a screen.

More innovative is the work of Conrad and colleagues to develop virtual interviewers, or avatars. The hope, Conrad says, is that these animated “talking heads”—which in sophisticated versions can change expression in a lifelike fashion—may combine the benefits of different interviewing modes: the increased responsiveness and some of the conversational abilities of an in-person human interviewer with the lower cost and more candid responses associated with a self-administered survey. To some, a computer-generated interviewer might seem frivolous. But Conrad sees it as a practical tool for engaging the next generation of respondents. “People who are less exposed to online games might be turned off by an avatar interviewer,” he muses. “But future respondents who are now teenagers might almost not respond without something like that.”

Conrad and other ISR researchers don’t expect web-based surveys to replace more traditional modes any time soon. Although market research firms have switched en masse to the web as a cheaper and easier way to recruit respondents, SRC’s Survey Research Operations first wants to understand how this technology might affect survey participation and data quality. But Conrad predicts such surveys increasingly will be available to respondents, and that mixed mode surveys—which combine, say, phone interviews and mail-out and web questionnaires in one survey—will be the norm.

The what of data collection is also in flux. Until recently, surveys primarily measured attitudes and self-reported behaviors: Is the government getting too powerful? How risky is it to use LSD once or twice? Have you ever been unfairly denied a promotion? Would you say that you are better off or worse off financially than you were a year ago? But new thinking about what can be collected, coupled with new caches of information, has changed all this.

ISR already is supplementing some surveys with biological specimens. Blood samples and cheek swabs provide health information to augment respondents’ self reports, and dirt samples add environmental data. For some surveys, Robert Groves foresees taking that a step further, for example, installing sensors in respondents’ houses to track electricity use or the quality of air.

But researchers also are eyeing the wealth of behavioral and transactional data already being collected by commercial and government enterprises. Google, for example, knows what its users have searched for and which results they’ve clicked. Credit card companies track purchases. Cell phone services know who users call, when they call, and how long they talk. Hospitals keep detailed medical records. And public cameras in buildings and on city streets record people’s movements.

Many of these databases interest researchers, says Groves. In some cases, access to such data could shorten research questionnaires. “Why do we have to burden people, asking them about things that are in publicly available records?” asks Groves. Electronic databases also include all kinds of information about the choices people make—where they travel, whether they vote, what medical care they receive, what they buy, and how they spend their time—information that could provide a much more complete and nuanced understanding of behavior.

As with web-based surveys, though, there are obstacles to overcome. Commercial data tends to be of variable quality and its usefulness to ISR may be limited, Groves says. Many promising databases, such as medical records, are largely off limits, though Groves notes that this is changing. (Scandinavian medical forms include a small disclaimer at the bottom stating that by filling out the form, the patient has agreed to let the information be used for research, and the Obama administration’s healthcare reform proposals may embrace a similar approach.) ISR already adds medical information to certain household surveys protected in enclaves where use is restricted and confidentiality is absolute. SRC also must assure that the treatment of the people they study conforms to the highest ethical standards, and that individuals freely give consent for their data to be used. And, more than ever, researchers will need to be scrupulous in maintaining respondent privacy and anonymity.
As the data that survey researchers collect broadens, where they do their research is also changing. Unlike commercial market research firms, whose clients are global, academic survey research organizations have been much less international in scope. Groves calls that “a deep weakness,” given that most social scientists are interested in discovering social and behavioral principles that apply across cultures.

Of course, a few ISR programs already have forged highly successful international relationships. David Lam, interim director of the Population Studies Center (PSC), has been working with institutions in South Africa for more than a decade. The collaboration unfolded organically: South African students came to ISR for training in the early 1990s, developed a shared language and perspective, and returned to South Africa to launch projects investigating issues of mutual interest, such as how family background and community characteristics affect the outcomes of young South Africans.

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Now, ISR is intent on expanding such collaborations. The plan is to cultivate long-term institutional relationships in just a few countries with partner institutions that are as multidisciplinary as ISR itself. The institute’s recent work in China is a case in point. In 2005, ISR established a Program in Quantitative Social Science at Peking University, and faculty and students are now flowing back and forth between the two countries and doing joint research. The Center for Political Studies just announced a partnership with Qatar University, and the Inter-University Consortium on Political and Social Research has members and datasets from all over the world. “By partnering we can actually do more work without tapping the same funding sources that we do here,” Groves says.

One of the original arguments for international diversification was that it would bring new funding sources to ISR. In fact, though, the who of funding is still largely the same: the United States government. Foreign governments support their own researchers, and although ISR is trying to cultivate major foundations and international organizations, their interests are often narrowly defined and focused on action rather than research.

Other new funding prospects exist in the corporate realm. The television and movie industries have supported ISR research on media effects on violence conducted by scientists at the Research Center for Group Dynamics. Reuters sponsors the Surveys of Consumers in exchange for the right to distribute the survey index numbers through its news and media services for six months after their release. And SRC is collaborating with a council made up of Nielsen Company clients to learn whether problems of nonresponse are skewing the Nielsen ratings. The project was well funded, ISR is free to publish its findings, and—best of all—it involved “really fascinating design problems,” Groves says. “We now have one of the coolest non-response bias studies I’ve ever done in my life.”

But unlike in the natural sciences, such opportunities are few and far between. For example, the kind of support biological scientists get from pharmaceutical firms and even individual donors has no counterpart in the social and behavioral sciences, according to ISR Director James Jackson. “People are giving money to find the cure for Alzheimer’s,” he says, “but no one’s giving money to find the cure for loneliness.”

Instead, Jackson thinks the answer to diversification lies within the federal government. For example, over the last decade the National Institute on Aging has begun to support significant ISR research on aging. Jackson would like to see the Institute make similar strides in energy research, such as the recent survey for the Department of Energy, which looked at the likelihood of people buying hybrid electric vehicles. “There’s been a lack of understanding or interest in the human dimensions of the subject,” Jackson says, “even though humans are at the core of the issues.”

The push to take on new research objectives—along with changes in how and where to collect data and what data to collect—is transforming ISR. But, Groves says, nothing should challenge the fundamental value of the survey. “American business, American government, and the nonprofit sector have bought into the notion that you can make good decisions when you have standardized quantitative information about the phenomenon you’re in charge of,” he says.

“We may not do surveys the way we do now, but something that looks a lot like a survey is going to be part of how we make decisions and try to understand the world, because there doesn’t seem to be a good substitute.”
Toni Antonucci was elected President of the Society for the Study of Human Development. She was also appointed Special Expert on Aging to the United Nations by the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

Jennifer Crocker was elected 2008 President of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology. She also received the 2008 Distinguished Service Award from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues.

Carmen Green was selected to receive the American Pain Society’s 2009 Elizabeth Narcessian Award for Outstanding Educational Achievements.

Anna Grzymala-Busse received the Ed A. Hewlett Book Prize from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies for her book, Rebuilding Leviathan: Party Competition and State Exploitation in Post-Communist Democracies.

She also received the Gregory Luebbert Article Award from the Comparative Politics section of the American Political Science Association for the best article in the field of comparative politics published in the previous two years.

Steve Heeringa was elected a Fellow of the American Statistical Association.

Ronald Inglehart was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

John Jackson received the 2008 Career Achievement Award from the Society for Political Methodology, a section of the American Political Science Association for “an outstanding career of intellectual accomplishment and service to the profession in the Political Methodology field.”

Daphna Oyserman received the 2009 Society for Social Work Excellence in Research award for her paper “Identity-Based Motivation and Health” with University of Arizona’s Stephanie Fryberg and Teach for America’s Nicholas Yoder. The paper was published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

Rosemary Sarri received the 2009 Civil Liberties Champion Award from the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan.

Robert Schoeni and Richard Suzman of the NIA won the 2008 Heidelberg Club International prize for significant contributions to the field of gerontology on behalf of all those involved in the Demography of Aging Centers Program.

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Yu Xie is elected to NAS, delivers Distinguished University Professorship Lecture

Yu Xie was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) for excellence in original scientific research. Membership is one of the highest honors given to a U.S. scientist or engineer. Xie also delivered an April 2009 lecture at U-M honoring his appointment as the Otis Dudley Duncan Distinguished University Professor of Sociology. Inequality is growing in China, he said, although the impact may be smaller than predicted by many Western observers.

Born in a small city in Jiangsu Province, Xie, 49, received a B.S. in Metallurgical Engineering from Shanghai University of Technology in 1982. “I was in the first group of university students admitted after the Cultural Revolution,” he said. “We all studied science and technology, because we were told that’s what the country needed.” Xie soon realized that China also needed to understand the social changes sweeping the nation. So at the earliest opportunity, he altered his own career path, studying first the history of science and then sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

Since arriving at Michigan in 1989 right after receiving his Ph.D. from Wisconsin, his interests have come to center on statistical methods, demography and social stratification, along with the sociology of science. These interests are reflected in the faculty appointments Xie holds: he is a professor of sociology and of statistics, and he is a Faculty Associate at the U-M Center for Chinese Studies. He is also a Research Professor at ISR, where he directs the Quantitative Methodology Program.

With ISR support, Xie has established a Survey Methodology and Quantitative Analysis Laboratory at Peking University, bringing two of Michigan’s unique strengths in social science research to his native land. Top ISR and other U.S. experts in the field come to Peking each summer to teach graduate students and junior faculty there.

Xie is also leading an ambitious new initiative with Peking University, with the goal of launching a nationally representative longitudinal survey of more than 50,000 individuals in 16,000 Chinese households in 2010. The survey is designed to provide crucial data that will enable academic researchers to better understand key aspects of contemporary Chinese society such as economic well-being, family life, intergenerational relations, migration, education, and health. In consultation with an international academic advisory committee, Xie is helping Chinese colleagues design this study, which will follow the same respondents year after year.

As part of the effort, the ISR Survey Research Center is providing survey management software to Peking – a form of social science technology transfer that Xie believes will help ensure the success of the endeavor and the quality of the data being collected.
ISR Next Generation Initiative Awards have helped fund a growing number of young scholars at ISR – from graduate students and post-doctoral fellows to junior faculty members.

We are proud to announce the 2009 winners of the Marshall Weinberg Research Fellowships. We also catch up with two ISR award-winners from previous years, learning about the impact of these awards on their careers.

2009 Marshall Weinberg Research Fellows

Brian Kovak, Doctoral candidate, U-M Economics Department

Kovak will examine the relationships between trade policy, local labor market outcomes, and income inequality in Brazil.

Meeta S. Pradhan, Doctoral candidate, U-M Sociology Department

Pradhan will use her Weinberg Research Fellowship to support travel to the Chitwan Valley of Nepal where she will conduct in-depth interviews for her dissertation.

Jennifer Ailshire, Doctoral candidate, U-M Sociology Department

“My research focuses on identifying and understanding the social determinants of health and whether social factors explain existing racial/ethnic and socioeconomic disparities in health. In particular, I am interested in exploring the role of neighborhood environment on health and health disparities.”

To do this, Ailshire is using data from a community health survey of Chicago adults that includes detailed information about respondents’ neighborhood environments. In one line of research, she is examining the link between neighborhood characteristics such as sidewalk quality and safety, and mobility disability among older adults. In the second line of research, she is investigating the connection between the local food and recreation environment and resident obesity, physical activity, and diet.

“The Weinberg Research Fellowship will enhance my research and advance my career by providing me with funds for research assistance, and travel to professional conferences and to my study site,” said Ailshire. “I’ll be able to get a first-hand perspective on the neighborhoods I study – visiting grocery stores in different neighborhoods, for example, to get an idea of the quality of these stores, and seeing the street and sidewalk conditions that may act as barriers to mobility among older adults.”
Past winners reflect on the impact of their awards

John Sandberg, Associate Professor, McGill University, Montreal
2001 winner, Innovation in Social Research Award

This award has had a profound impact, both professionally and intellectually, and I will always be grateful.

As a graduate student in sociology, receiving this grant allowed me to pursue a somewhat (as was suggested at the time) Quixotic line of research, trying to identify interpersonal social learning effects on beliefs and behaviors regarding fertility in a very small village in Nepal. At the time, the prevalent view was that people in less developed areas were somehow ‘fatalistic’ about their family building and did not try to control it in the face of high infant and child mortality. I saw the problem differently, and sought to test whether their behaviors might be related to their perception of mortality derived from the experiences of those around them. This is what I found to be the case, and although I can’t say this research completely changed other demographers’ understanding of the process, I do know it has had an influence in the field.

This research had a profound impact on my professional career. Based in large part on the strength of the work in progress from my dissertation, I landed a tenure track job at McGill University. Two pieces from this research were eventually published prominently, in Demography and the American Sociological Review. It is without a doubt that this had a strong impact on my being granted tenure last year.

Shawna Lee, Assistant Professor, Wayne State University
2004 winner, Daniel Katz Scholars Fund

The Katz Fellowship has been instrumental in facilitating my research career in several ways. First, it provided me with resources during my final year of graduate study that allowed me to finish the Joint Doctoral Program in Social Work & Psychology one year ahead of schedule, thus allowing me to take a prestigious post-doctoral position at Columbia University. While at Columbia, I wrote several manuscripts as well as successfully obtained grant funding from the Centers for Disease Control to support my research.

The Katz Fellowship also allowed me to continue to participate in the NIMH pre-doctoral prevention training fellowship (rather than teaching) while in graduate school. This has been extremely helpful in terms of providing an academic foundation that I am currently building upon in our on-going efforts to develop interventions that will help prevent child abuse.

Specifically, my colleagues and I are examining factors directly implicated in fathers’ corporal punishment and physical maltreatment of children, and how fathers influence maternal risk for child maltreatment. To date, few studies have directly examined the role of fathers in child abuse.

To address this gap, my colleagues and I are using the Fragile Families and Child Well-Being Study, a diverse community-based sample of over 4,000 families, and one of the only studies that includes self-reported information from fathers. We have successfully obtained funding for this research agenda from the CDC and we are currently submitting another grant to fund an intervention focusing on fathers to prevent child abuse.

I am very grateful to the Liebermans for making these opportunities possible.
Robert Kahn: Embodiment of Successful Living

On the evening of November 6, 2006, Bob Kahn’s professional life and personal fortunes converged in a single, devastating moment.

For the previous 22 years, Kahn’s research had focused on the challenges of aging well, and in 1998 Kahn had co-authored a landmark book titled Successful Aging. At age 88—with his quick smile, level gaze, and firm handshake—he seemed the living embodiment of his work. The research scientist and professor emeritus walked or drove to his office at the Institute for Social Research (ISR) at the University of Michigan every day. He and his wife Bea, also 88, had recently celebrated their 66th anniversary. And Kahn—a compact man with an unstoppable appetite for work—was launching into a new project on aging societies for the MacArthur Foundation.

That evening, heading to a rendezvous with friends at a nearby restaurant, he and Bea parked their car on the third level of a downtown Ann Arbor parking garage, and strolled to the elevator. Before they reached it, a car rounding the corner too fast plowed into them. Bea suffered a deep gash in one leg and compression fractures in her cervical vertebrae. Kahn’s injuries were worse. His left leg was shattered, and a skull fracture and brain bleeds left him at risk of memory loss and other cognitive problems. It was an accident that could have derailed a 20-year-old, let alone a man of 88. As his long rehabilitation began, Kahn challenged himself to apply the lessons of his own book to regain his health and get back to work.

Back in 1984, when the MacArthur Foundation approached Kahn about doing some work on aging, he wasn’t particularly interested in gerontology. “I didn’t know anything about aging except that I was getting old,” he says drily. Kahn, a Detroit native, had earned undergraduate and master’s degrees in English from Michigan, then worked as a substitute teacher in Detroit when he couldn’t get a fellowship to pursue a Ph.D. To bring in extra cash, Kahn took a part-time job as an interviewer for a monthly survey of unemployment. A year later, he became the full-time supervisor of this research for the state of Michigan, gathering and analyzing data on unemployment and related issues. He proved a natural, and in 1942 the U.S. Census Bureau recruited him to the capital to work on its national data analysis. But as his understanding of survey methodology grew, Kahn became convinced that he needed a broader background in underlying concepts—psychology or sociology or political science. He wanted to dig deeper into survey research and he wanted a university career. In 1948 Kahn moved to Ann Arbor with his young family. Four years later he received his Ph.D. in social psychology from Michigan, all the while working full time at ISR.

Kahn became best known for his pioneering work on organizational theory. His signature 1966 book, The Social Psychology of Organizations, written with fellow ISR founder Daniel Katz, had a major influence on the field of organizational research, applying a framework of open system theory—the assumption that an organization continuously interacts with its environment—to research on leadership, role behavior, and organizational effectiveness.
Courtney Kennedy: Giving Voice to People

Cell phones have unnerved the world of survey research. Let’s say you’re planning to conduct a telephone survey. You can restrict your calls to landlines, or to cell phones, or include both—makes no difference, right? Or does it? It’s not just that cell phone users are demographically different from landline users. They use the phones in different places, often while multi-tasking. And they pay for them differently—for example, paying out equally for incoming and outgoing calls. Still, current research suggests that none of this seems to have much of an impact on survey responses. But Courtney Kennedy, a third-year graduate student at the Institute for Social Research’s Program in Survey Methodology, isn’t so sure. By the time she finishes her dissertation, “Nonresponse and Measurement Error in Mobile Phone Surveys,” the question of impact should be a whole lot clearer.

How did an accomplished golfer from the tiny city of Brighton become an up-and-coming survey methodologist at ISR?

At 27, Kennedy is one of the fresher faces at ISR, but her youth belies her experience: she’s been working at the institute for eight years, ever since she found her way there as a freshman political science major in 2000. How did an accomplished golfer from the tiny city of Brighton, 15 miles north of Ann Arbor, become an up-and-coming survey methodologist at ISR? To hear Kennedy tell it, it was all about luck. She was already a political junkie when she arrived at the University of Michigan—the kind of teenager who had taken every political science class in high school, devoured political biographies, and dissected the evening news with her mother every night. She also had watched her father, a regional sales manager, move from software company to software company—a stress that made her vow to avoid the corporate world.

But the pivotal moment came when Kennedy decided to join UROP—the Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program that pairs first- and second-year students at Michigan with faculty to serve as assistants and learn about research. As she searched through the thick book of UROP listings, a particular opportunity caught her eye: a chance to do research on the accuracy of election polls with Michael Traugott, research professor at ISR’s Center for Political Studies, and then chair of Michigan’s Department of Communication Studies. The two met, and Traugott, spotting “a great deal of potential,” quickly offered her the position. Things took off from there. “It was November 2000—what a year to be involved in election polls!” Kennedy states, with unabashed enthusiasm. “This was Gore/Bush, and it just hit the fan.”

According to Kennedy, the work they undertook was immediately riveting. Despite polling error horror stories then prevalent in the media, Traugott concluded that the 2000 pre-election polls generally were quite accurate—as were such polls going back several decades. When Traugott was invited to present the findings to the annual conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), he helped Kennedy arrange UROP funding to accompany him. “He taught me how to do the software, the statistics, how to write an article—I mean, he taught me everything,” says Kennedy. “I was one-on-one as a freshman with the chair of the communications department.”

Kennedy worked for Traugott all four years as an undergraduate, soon switching to a dual major in political science and statistics. She and Traugott also discovered something else they had in common: a love of golf. “I think there’s some overlap in the skill sets,” Kennedy muses. “When you’re working with data, when you’re designing surveys and analyzing the data, no detail can go unnoticed without you compromising the quality of the work that’s produced. With golf there tend to be a lot of details, too. The golf swing is not a natural movement, and there are a lot of different planes and angles to play with. You have to pay attention.” Kennedy, who as a high school senior was on the state’s Division I All-State team, adds: “I was lucky. As a kid, I seemed to have a bit of a knack for it.”
In one of the most comprehensive analyses ever conducted of presidential primary polls, ISR survey experts working with the American Association for Public Opinion Research identified several reasons polls picked the wrong winners in New Hampshire and other states.

The results showed that a handful of methodological missteps and miscalculations combined to undermine the accuracy of predictions about presidential primary winners in New Hampshire and three other states.

One source of error the researchers were able to eliminate was the so-called ‘Bradley Effect,’ in which people say they support a Black candidate in order to appear unbiased, but then cast their ballots for a white candidate in the privacy of the voting booth.

For the report, supported in part by a grant from ISR, ISR polling expert Michael Traugott chaired an AAPOR committee composed of leading academic and private sector experts in public opinion and survey research.

Traugott and colleagues analyzed individual, household-level response data provided by seven polling organizations. They also compared information on question wording, weighting, interviewer characteristics, sampling frames, and other methodological issues from up to 19 other firms, in many cases relying on publicly available information gleaned from the Internet.

“The materials we received from polling organizations showed that there was much more variation in the methodology of pre-election polls than I ever imagined there would be,” said Traugott.

The full report is available on the AAPOR website at http://www.aapor.org/