Cutting-edge conversations
ISR hosts a wide range of talks

This fall and during the academic year ahead, ISR is hosting a range of symposia and meetings on cutting-edge issues in social science, ranging from data management to political inequality to mass incarceration. Some of these events, such as SRC’s PRS Seminars, are “invitation only,” but many others are open to anyone who’s interested. See below for more information.

RCGD’s fall seminar series, Psychological Mechanisms for Regulating the Self and Social Group, features speakers from U-M, the United States, and Canada. Upcoming seminars include a talk by Michael Inzlicht of the University of Toronto on self-control and ego depletion, and a seminar by U-M’s Sonya Dal Cin on media, self-regulation, and substance use.

http://sites.isr.umich.edu/rcgd/seminars.aspx

CPS is hosting Interdisciplinary Workshops on Politics and Policy. Elisabeth Gerber and Jeffrey Morenoff presented the first workshop on “Perceptions of Inequality: Preliminary Results from the Detroit Metropolitan Area Communities Study.” Future sessions will include Arthur Lupia’s talk, “Uninformed: Why People Know So Little about Politics and What We Can Do About It.”

https://www.isr.umich.edu/cps/events/

PSC’s Brown Bag seminar series highlights recent research in population studies by scholars at U-M and elsewhere. Topics include the impacts of mass incarceration, demographic patterns of eugenic sterilization in California, and population-level approaches to adolescent and young adult mental health.

http://www.psc.isr.umich.edu/events/bb.html

Meanwhile, ICPSR’s recent Biennial Meeting for member institutions focused on Delivering Effective Data Stewardship. More than 17 workshops and sessions highlighted current ICPSR data collections and taught strategies for working with data producers to share data, writing data management plans, and locating tools and resources to assist in curating and managing research data.

“While the 2015 biennial ICPSR Meeting brought over 156 participants from 81 institutions to Ann Arbor, the true measure of success is the excitement and ideas shared across the attendees,” said Linda Detterman, ICPSR Director of Marketing and Membership.

“For three days, ICPSR and the data community shared ideas and expertise on data curation, data sharing, and data management. ICPSR staff on campus were left as invigorated as the attendees who have gone back to their home campuses ready to carry on as data stewards within their institutions.”

Written by Susan Rosegrant and Dory Knight-Ingram

L-R: William H. Flanigan Award recipient Michael Martinez (University of Florida); Warren E. Miller Award recipient Gary King (Harvard University); ICPSR Assistant Director Mary Vardigan; ICPSR Director George Alter; and Warren E. Miller Award recipient and former ISR Director James Jackson. All are pictured after the ICPSR Awards Banquet, October 1, 2015, during the 2015 Biennial ICPSR Meeting. Photo by Dory Knight-Ingram
As online customer surveys increase, so does the reluctance of consumers to complete them. That’s the finding of a September 30 article in The Week, which noted that one study found online survey participation rates averaged as low as 2%. “I have heard the phrase ‘feedback fatigue’ about constant requests to evaluate services like flights and hotel stays,” said ISR researcher Fred Conrad. It doesn’t help that the goals and approaches of many corporate surveys bear no resemblance to those of legitimate data-gathering research organizations. For example, Conrad cites a case in which hotel desk clerks tell guests they’ll be getting a survey while also saying, “I hope we can count on you for all 5’s.” This kind of “electioneering,” Conrad said, “is clearly not about eliciting unbiased information to improve service.”


ISR researcher John Knodel has received an honorary doctorate degree from the University Council of Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. The degree recognizes Knodel’s contributions to the field of historical demography and the demography of developing countries, in particular, Thailand and neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Knodel was lauded as a pioneer in combining qualitative methods, such as focus group discussions, with more traditional quantitative approaches to demography, thus altering how demographic research is conducted. The award also recognized Knodel’s four decades of collaborative research with colleagues at the Chulalongkorn University College of Population Studies and other population organizations in Thailand and the region.

News story: http://bit.ly/1M8Spdh

ISR researcher Megan Patrick, an international expert on alcohol and drug use and alcohol-related risky sexual behaviors among adolescents and college students, has received a Research Faculty Recognition Award. Patrick focuses on topics of urgent public health importance in the fields of developmental psychology, alcohol research, and prevention science. She has examined events such as spring break and 21st birthdays to identify individuals whose drinking places them at risk for injuries, alcohol poisoning, and victimization. Patrick proposed and validated new guidelines to define extreme binge drinking, and has studied risk behaviors in South Africa, alcohol use and heavy drinking in the United Kingdom, and alcohol and energy drink use among U.S. college students.


New data initiative launches at U-M, with social sciences a central focus

By Kelly Chatain

“No question about it, this is a game changer for us,” said U-M Provost Martha Pollack in her opening remarks at the inaugural symposium of the Michigan Institute of Data Science (MIDAS) on October 6.

MIDAS is the centerpiece of U-M’s recently announced $100 million, five-year, Data Science Initiative (DSI). Plans include a core faculty of 35-40 selected from within and without the University, expanded computing capacity, stronger data management resources, greater educational opportunities, and new methodological approaches to big data.

The symposium, “The Future of Data Science: A Convergence of Academia, Industry, and Government,” filled Rackham Auditorium with top data scientists from around the country, as well as faculty, staff, and students representing more than 20 disciplines. The packed, one-day program highlighted the multidisciplinary research being conducted in four main areas of application on which the DSI has initially focused and which build on U-M’s strengths: learning analytics, transportation, social sciences, and health sciences.

Susan Murphy, H.E. Robbins Distinguished University Professor of Statistics and Research Professor at ISR, presented her work on mobile health applications and micro-randomized trials. Using data collected from an mHealth smoking cessation program and cardiac rehabilitation program, she discussed the challenges of assessing treatment effects, developing learning algorithms for prevention, better understanding sensor data and outcomes, and reducing the burden of self-reporting. The long-term goal of this work is helping people achieve their health goals with limited intrusion while adjusting to life changes. For more on Murphy’s research, see the Fall 2015 ISR Sampler: http://bit.ly/1OULiUA

George Alter, Director of ICPSR, is serving on the MIDAS Management Committee and will chair a monthly workshop on metadata. Richard Gonzalez, RCGD, and Joshua Pasek, CPS, were a part of the DSI Working Group established prior to the creation of MIDAS.

More about the DSI: http://midas.umich.edu/dsi/

MIDAS symposium: http://midas.umich.edu/symposium/

More about MIDAS: http://midas.umich.edu/about/
Inside the design of the 2020 Census

By Dory Knight-Ingram

The 2020 Census is now.

That’s one of the messages ISR heard recently from Lisa M. Blumerman, the U.S. Census Bureau’s Associate Director for the Decennial Census Programs. Blumerman spoke on October 20 at a Survey Research Center PRS Seminar on the “2020 Census Program Overview, Testing and Technological Innovations.”

Blumerman described a rapidly evolving environment in which the 2020 Census is being conducted. Changing times require cost savings, more flexibility in design, and an ability to use new technology and data sources while continuing to ensure an accurate, high-quality count, she said. “Our goal is to count everyone once, only once, and in the right place.”

Canvassing will look very different.

“In 2010, we walked, literally, with boots on the ground. With this Census, we have access to automated information we didn’t have before. We’re still going to canvass, but we’ll canvass differently. Instead of walking, we can conduct a 100% review and update of the nation’s address list with in-office canvassing. We believe when we complete this review, we will then need to do an in-field verification of about 25 percent. So we are moving from walking to verifying canvassing.”

Self-response efforts will be maximized.

The Census is working to generate the largest possible self-response to reduce the number of households that need follow-up, Blumerman said. Changes will include outreach with traditional and new media, staggered mailings, more localized advertising, and community partnerships to target specific audiences and inspire participation. In tests, “every time we did a partnership activity, we saw an increase in response rate,” she said.

Administrative and third-party data will be used.

Using administrative records and third-party data can reduce expensive in-person follow-up, improve the quality of the address list, increase the effectiveness of outreach strategies, and validate respondent submissions, Blumerman said. “If we can use administrative data to determine which addresses are vacant, we can remove those addresses from our nonresponse workload,” she said, adding that use of this strategy in 2010 could have prevented sending canvassers to at least 6 million vacant households.

The 2020 Census will maximize technology.

Automatic determination of routes for enumerators will increase productivity and save costs, Blumerman said. “Our field workers will use handheld devices to collect data, and we will utilize technology to help manage work and people,” she said. Enumerators will have the ability to conduct address update and enumeration on the same device.

The 2020 Census is expected to cost less.

“If we implemented the same design we had in 2010, with minor modifications, we predict the cost of 2020 would be $17.8 billion. If we execute the design we propose, we believe we can save more than $5 billion.” Blumerman expects infrastructure to look dramatically different than in 2010, with fewer regional centers and area Census offices and trained enumerators necessary.

For more information on the 2020 Census, visit https://www.census.gov/2020census
Health shocks and retirement: The impact of the unexpected

By Susan Rosegrant

Feiya Shao, winner of the 2015 George Katona Economic Behavior Research Award, is examining the impact of sudden health downturns on retirement.

Health is a central factor in many people’s decisions about when to retire. Chances are we all know someone who has run calculations in their head—or on paper—about how many “good” years they have left, and on how they want to spend them.

But what happens when health unexpectedly goes downhill? How does a health shock affect retirement, and what impact might that have down the road? Feiya Shao, a 5th-year doctoral student in economics at the University of Michigan, is trying to answer these questions by analyzing data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), conducted at the Institute for Social Research since 1992.

HRS provides an ideal way to dig into this problem, Shao says. Every other year, the nationwide study collects a wealth of information about the health of older Americans, asking participants to rate their own health as well as collecting more objective measures of actual health.

The study also asks questions regarding anticipated health. In the 2006 and 2008 HRS, respondents were asked to assess the likelihood of one of two situations: that they would be in better health in four years, or in worse. (Respondents answered one version of the question in each survey wave.)

Now, with the data from the 2010 and 2012 HRS available, Shao is able to compare respondents’ actual health with what they predicted four years earlier.

Shao’s preliminary results suggest that people are more affected by unanticipated changes than anticipated changes. So, for example, a person who experienced some kind of health shock would be more likely to retire precipitously than someone who expected their health to decline and planned accordingly.

This first stage of research is fairly theoretical, Shao says. But she hopes her research may eventually help identify those people who are most likely to have to adjust their retirement plans because of unanticipated shocks—perhaps increasing the likelihood that they could better prepare for these kinds of events.

“When people have to retire unexpectedly, they end up with dramatically less wealth,” she says, “because they have less time to save. It could have a huge impact on their quality of life just because they retired three years earlier.”

Join ISR on Tuesday, Dec 1, in support of U-M’s second annual day of giving.

http://home.isr.umich.edu/giving/gbd-2015/

ISR NewsNotes is produced by the ISR Director’s Office, September to June.

Comments, suggestions, and ideas for future issues are welcome.

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