

History of the Social Science Research and Instructional Council (Korey)

John L. Korey, Cal Poly, Pomona, 2012; revised 2013, 2017

ORIGINS

On December 10, 1971, on behalf of the political science faculty at her campus (San Diego) and those of Fullerton and Los Angeles, Betty Nesvold [wrote](#) to the political science departments of the other Cal State campuses. At this time, only four schools in the California State system (the three just mentioned as well as San Francisco State¹) held memberships in the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research (ICPR). Then, as now, the Consortium was the nation's leading social science data archive, though its focus at the time was primarily on political data.

In her letter, she described conversations that Cal State faculty had been having with Richard Hofferbert, ICPR Executive Director, about the possibility of forming a joint membership in the ICPR “for interested branches of the California State Colleges.” She noted that financial pressures were threatening existing memberships as well as inhibiting other campuses from joining. Presciently, she wrote that “while the core of the membership support is in the political science departments,” the data were valuable in other disciplines as well. She urged interdisciplinary support for a multi-campus membership.

At about the same time, pressure was growing from junior faculty at smaller campuses for membership in the Consortium. According to a [history of the Council](#) authored in the mid-1970s by Richard Mendes of Cal State Stanislaus, “Fresno, Bakersfield, and Stanislaus were discussing a combined membership in early 1971.”

On January 5, 1972, Gene Geisler, a political scientist at San Francisco State, forwarded a copy of the Nesvold letter to Isaac Main, Associate Director of Information Systems at the Chancellor's Office. In his [cover letter](#), he urged systemwide support for social science data bases, specifically including those of the ICPR. Over the next few weeks, additional correspondence from Ralph [Frisbie](#) (of the Chancellor's Office) (to Geisler), [Hofferbert](#) (to Geisler, Nesvold, and others), [Geisler](#) (to Nesvold), [Geisler](#) (to Hofferbert), [Geisler](#) (to Frisbie), and [Hofferbert](#) (to Geisler) discussed further the possibility of a combined membership in ICPR,

¹A [letter](#) of Dec. 10, 1971 from Betty Nesvold to Gene Geisler conveys her impression that San Francisco State had recently dropped its membership in the ICPR, but see the January 5, 1972 [letter](#) from Geisler to Isaac Main, Associate Director of Information Systems at the Chancellor's Office.

and explored what this might look like.

By the end of the 1971-72 academic year, an agreement had been worked out that would allow all 19 California State campuses to join the Consortium in a “federated” membership. Dues paid to the Consortium (initially \$30,000 per annum) would be more than what the few campuses that were already members were paying, but less than the \$76,100 total cost to all the campuses were they to join individually. In exchange for the break on prices, all requests for data would go through the Chancellor’s Office, which would act as the central contact point (hub) for such requests. Data would be mailed to the hub on 2,400-foot magnetic tapes that the Chancellor’s Office would store at the State University Data Center and distribute as needed to individual campuses.

Each political science department in the system was asked to send a representative to a May 5 meeting at Cal State Los Angeles to discuss the proposal. According to [Mendes](#), most campuses were represented, along with representatives from the Division of Academic Planning and the Division of Information Systems of the Chancellor’s Office, and several representatives of the ICPR (including Richard Hofferbert, Jerome Clubb [director of the historical archives], Charles O. Jones [chair of the ICPR Council], and staff members) .

A May 10 [memo](#) to this group (referred to in the memo as the “Ad Hoc Committee for Political Research Data”) from Gerhard Friedrich, CSU Dean of Academic Planning and John Harrison, Director of the Division of Information Systems, summarized the results of the meeting, which called for creation of a council to oversee and coordinate the federated ICPR membership.

On June 8, Cal State presidents met and [endorsed the agreement](#). On June 28, Charles H. (Chuck) Wilmot of the Chancellor’s Office sent a [list of campus representatives](#) to the ICPR. These representatives (Official Representatives, or “ORs” in ICPR parlance) were all political science faculty, except for Frisbie, the hub representative from the Chancellor’s Office. The faculty representatives formed the basis of the council called for in the May 10 memo. The group held its first meeting in the Fall of 1972, took the name “ Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, California State University and Colleges Council,” elected Nesvold as its first chair, and adopted its original bylaws, which have been [amended](#) a number of times since. The Council has met three times a year, usually at one of the campuses.

At the time of the Council’s founding, involving undergraduate students directly in quantitative research was a new and sometimes controversial idea. That it has become mainstream has been in no small part due to the Council’s pioneering efforts. We received crucial help in these early years by allies at the Chancellor’s Office and the State University Data Center, including but by no means limited to Ray Clark, Penny Crane, Terry Dunn, Gene Geisler (temporarily on loan from the faculty at San Francisco State), Ralph Frisbie, Mark Hayes, Joyce Hayes, Jim

Hightower, Jeff Johnson, Ike Main, Karen O'Malley, Gloria Rummels, Frank Tarquinio, and Chuck Wilmot.

The breath of the Council's representational role can be seen in [those who have chaired it](#). They have come from 19 different campuses and from political science (including public administration), sociology, geography, history, economics, and academic technology.

While the bylaws have been amended many times over the years, the basic objectives and structure of the Council have remained fundamentally the same. Names, however, have changed. In 1976, in recognition of the fact that its archive and activities were no longer confined to political science, the ICPR became the Inter-University Consortium for Political *and Social* Research (ICPSR). At the Spring 1977 meeting, the Council renamed itself the Social Science Research and Instructional Council (SSRIC). The California State University and Colleges (which, from 1935 until early 1972, had been called the California State Colleges) became simply the California State University (CSU) in 1982.

A much more significant change, reflected in the Council's new name, was a substantial expansion of the ways in which it has carried out its mission.

MISSION AND ACTIVITIES

The objectives of the Council, as stated in its bylaws are:

- to encourage the use of quantitative methods in the teaching of social sciences to undergraduate and graduate students,
- to facilitate social science research,
- to support the development of quantitative literacy of students and faculty, and
- to support and implement the collection and distribution of social science data and computer-aided instruction.

The ways in which the Council has acted to achieve these objectives have expanded over the years on several fronts.

Data bases.

In 1977, the California State University and Colleges, along with the University of California, entered into an agreement with the Field Research Corporation to provide students, faculty, and staff with access to the Field Poll (formerly called the California Poll). Founded in 1947, The Field Poll was widely regarded as the most authoritative survey research operation in California. Field Research ceased operations at the end of 2016.

Later, the system negotiated an arrangement with the Roper Center at the University of Connecticut allowing access to the vast public opinion archives of that organization. Today, the Council oversees the CSU's memberships in Roper as well as in the ICPSR. Specific activities and events involving our relationships with these data base providers have included:

- Participation in ICPSR governance. Five Council members have served on the ICPSR governing council: Betty Nesvold (1972-1975), Charles McCall (1976- 1980), Ed Nelson (1996-2000), John Korey (2000-2004), and Lori Weber (2008-2012). The first two of these (Nesvold, 1974-1975 and McCall, 1978-1980) served as chair of the Consortium. ICPSR council members from the SSRIC have, with some success, served as advocates for the importance of undergraduate instruction.
- Recognition for individual achievement. ICPSR Official Representatives (ORs) from the CSU have distinguished themselves in other ways as well. In 2004, Ed Nelson was selected as a winner of the prestigious Flanigan Award, given in recognition for outstanding contributions as an OR. Lori Weber (Chico) was chosen for an OR sabbatical fellowship at the ICPSR headquarters in Ann Arbor, Michigan for the summer of 2006.

Provision of value added resources.

The CSU is one of 17 federated ICPSR memberships in North America (in addition to national memberships from various countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe). A [federation roundtable](#) at the 2001 biennial meeting of ICPSR Official Representatives clearly demonstrated the unique role of the SSRIC. Most of the other federations served merely as a convenient mechanism for housing and distributing data. Only one other (the western Canadian federation) met on a regular basis, and that federation did so only once a year. Only the SSRIC had developed as an important agent (as detailed below) for “value added” resources to individual campuses. To the best of our knowledge, this remains true today.

Participation in the ICPSR Summer Program.

Each year, our membership in the ICPSR allows us to send one or more faculty members or graduate students to study in the ICPSR's Summer Training Program.

Participation in the Field Faculty Fellowship.

Our membership in the Field Poll allowed us to select a faculty member annually for the Field Fellowship. The fellow selected then carried out a research project that included placing up to 12

questions on the Field Poll.

Workshops.

At about the time that the Council was forming, Geisler, who became the first Council representative from San Francisco, received an NSF grant for a “Curricular Interchange Project” that included a variety of workshops, some in the social sciences. One of these was held March 1-3, 1973 at Cal State Long Beach. Presenting the workshop was Jay Stephens, the Long Beach campus representative on the Council. A [list of attendees](#) included one additional then-current and one future Council representative. Other multi-campus workshops put together by Council members included several in the early 1990s on exploratory data analysis using STATA. Ted Anagnoson (Los Angeles) and Rich DeLeon (San Francisco) conducted the workshops, supported by funding from two NSF grants.

The Council itself has put on a number of workshops over the years. In the summer of 1983 a 10 day workshop on SPSS (which originally stood for the “Statistical Package for the Social Sciences”) and statistics was held at San Luis Obispo, hosted by Dick Shaffer. Several other summer workshops, now shorted to 5 days, were held between then and the mid-1990s at San Luis Obispo and, later, at Fresno (hosted by Nelson). Funding for these workshops was provided by grants from the Chancellor’s Office. In the Fall of 2004, a new workshop model was developed. The first was held at San Jose in conjunction with the regular Council business meeting. The new model provides for a three-hour workshop conducted by one to three Council members. A number of these workshops have been held since, on various topics, including the Social Sciences Data Bases, SPSS (beginning and intermediate), Survey Documentation and Analysis (SDA), and Data in the Classroom. There has generally been no charge to the host campus, other than providing lunch to participants and presenters. Initially, the Council had a small budget to pay the travel costs of presenters. More recently, as a result of cutbacks in travel funds, travel expenses have generally been borne by the presenters or, in a couple of instances, by the host campus.

The changes that have taken place over the years in large part have been the result of increasing budget constraints, but the emergence of new technologies has also played an important role. Software such as SPSS is much more user-friendly than was once the case, making it possible to cover more material in less time. Most recently, the Council has begun exploring ways of conducting workshops online.

The Social Science Student Symposium (S⁴).

S⁴ (called the Student Research Conference until 2015) was begun in 1976 and has been held annually ever since. It is modeled on professional conferences in the social sciences. The Council

invites both undergraduate and graduate students, from all CSU and California Community College campuses and in all areas of the social sciences, to present their research to their peers. The atmosphere of the Conference is relaxed, and the emphasis is on meeting and sharing with students with similar interests from throughout the CSU. Three prizes are awarded. The Charles McCall² Award for the best paper by an undergraduate student or students; the Betty Nesvold³ Award for the best graduate paper; the Gloria Rummels⁴ Award for the best paper making the best use of quantitative data. Until 2014, awards were quite modest, not exceeding \$100. Beginning that year, thanks to the generosity of Gene Geisler, winners of these awards have each received \$5,000, with small grants, intended primarily to defray travel expenses, for other presenters

Teaching Resources

The Council has, sometimes with Chancellor's Office funding, developed a number of value added instructional materials. These currently consist of:

- Modules. For use in social science research methods or substantive courses, modules include conceptual and substantive chapters, plus downloadable codebooks, data sets and exercises using SPSS or other statistical software packages.
- Exercises. Stand-alone exercises, with downloadable codebooks and data sets, are for use in introductory, substantive, or research methods courses in the social sciences using SPSS or other statistical software.
- Online Textbooks. At present, we offer three of these, an SPSS Primer, a series of statistical exercises (available in SPSS, PSPP, and SDA formats), and an introduction to political science research methods.

Other Teaching Tools (instructional data subsets, instructional handouts, links to external instructional sites).

² Charles McCall was one of the SSRIC founders. He was SSRIC Council Chair (AY 1974-75), served on the Council of the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research, and was ICPSR Council chair. He died in 2013.

³ Betty Nesvold was the very first SSRIC chair (AY 1972-73). Like Charles McCall, she served on the Council of the ICPSR, and was ICPSR Council Chair. She died in 1992.

⁴ The late Gloria Rummels was a staff member at the State University Data Center (SUDC). From the time of her [death in 1985](#) until SUDC was disbanded in the early 1990s, Gloria's SUDC colleagues, demonstrating the great esteem in which she was held, funded this prize out of their own pockets.

COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Decentralization (see below) added to the workload of Council members, especially that of the Council Chair. Rich Taketa, chair in 2004-2005, created an executive committee to assist him in carrying out his responsibilities. His innovation proved quite successful, and the Council has followed this model ever since. Other changes have included an amendment to the bylaws allowing a campus to have multiple representatives (but only one vote) on the Council. The Council originally consisted only of political scientists. Most members today are from political science, sociology, and geography, but the Council also includes members from psychology, Chicano studies, economics, and academic technology.

On May 26, 2016 the Council, the oldest of what were at one time called “discipline councils” in the Cal State system, was [officially recognized](#) as an “affinity group” under the terms of CSU [Executive Order 1103](#).

OTHER CHANGES

Funding for the databases and other Council operations has been contentious almost [from the beginning](#).

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Cal State system’s State University Data Center (SUDC) had served as the central “hub” for database acquisition, administration, and distribution. In 1990, the Chancellor’s Office shut down the SUDC as part of a broader effort to decentralize operations. This change threatened to wipe out systemwide support for the databases. The threat was averted when a “specialty center,” [the Social Science Data Base Archive \(SSDBA\), was set up at Cal State LA for AY 1991-92](#). Later, the specialty center moved to San Francisco State, and is now called the Social Science Research and Instructional Center (SSRIC). Because of improvements in technology, datasets are no longer stored at a hub; users download them directly from providers.

As part of the arrangement for the SSDBA, individual campuses were asked to pay fees to support the data bases and other Council operations. At first, the Chancellor’s Office continued to provide some central funding⁵, all or almost all funding has come from campus fees.. At this writing, all campuses save for the Maritime Academy and Pomona are subscribers.

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⁵ Letters (written in 1995 and 1997) from Barry [Munitz](#), CSU Chancellor, and Richard P. [West](#), Senior Vice President for Business and Finance, to state senator Mike Thompson provide assurance that funding for the data bases “will continue in future years until the services are not available or until faculty who use the information in their classes and research determine that they are no longer of sufficient value to merit continuation.”