

ICPSR BULLETIN

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Director George Alter outlines future plans for ICPSR

George Alter accepted a five-year appointment as ICPSR's director this fall, and recently answered a few questions about the future of the Consortium



George Alter at the 2011 OR Meeting

What are some of the things you hope to accomplish as director?

My overriding concern is to be sure that ICPSR stays at the forefront of developments in social science research and the digital archiving world.

The types of data used in social science research are changing, and to fulfill our mission, ICPSR must be ready to archive these new kinds of data. We recently made a commitment to archive video files, as part of the Measuring Effective Teaching (MET) project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (see page 3), but video is just the beginning. Every day, most of us walk around with a device in our pocket that connects us to the world with voice, data, GPS, still photography, and even video. In addition to answering questions, a subject can hold up her smartphone and take a 360-degree video of her environment. We can ask a teenager to photograph his computer screen to

show us how many internet chats he is following while he does his homework. Researchers are just beginning to imagine ways that new technologies can be used to study important questions in social, political, economic, and health research.

ICPSR's role in this new research must go beyond archiving new types of data. We have always provided training in the latest quantitative methods, and these new types of data will provide new challenges for research. There are new technologies for analyzing audio, video, geo-spatial data, and even interview transcripts. Many fields are looking at the enormous quantity of data created by schools, health care, and other government and online systems like Google, Facebook, and Twitter. Most of these data look nothing like the rectangular data files analyzed by our standard statistical tools. An electronic medical

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record may consist of hundreds of interactions between a patient and doctors, nurses, pharmacists with dozens of different diagnoses and treatments. How do we turn this mass of information into a form that a researcher can analyze? ICPSR can play an important role in solving these problems and teaching new generations of social scientists how to use these new kinds of data.

How might your background as a historical demographer inform your leadership of ICPSR?

Demography is a very interdisciplinary field. As a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania and a post-doc at the Michigan Population Studies Center, I participated in conversations involving sociologists, economists, geographers, and others. Historians are by nature eclectic, so I tried to learn as much as I could from each field. Sometimes, I found myself in the position of translating between colleagues from different disciplines, who could not understand each other, because they started from divergent assumptions and models. I learned that the best way to communicate across disciplines is to focus on the data. A sociologist and an economist might attach entirely different meanings to concepts like “status” and “rationality,” but it is much easier for them to talk about how they will use a census question in their research. At ICPSR, we see this every day. We provide data to all of the social sciences, and we often provide bridges between them. In the Summer Program, young researchers make unexpected connections to people, ideas, and methods that change the course of their careers.

Into what new areas, either in terms of disciplines or technology, should ICPSR expand in the coming years?

As I mentioned, exciting things are happening in research and technology in a number of disciplines. The capabilities that we are developing will help us serve a number of new research areas. The MET project and our partnership with the American Educational Research Association have greatly expanded our links to education research, and I expect that area to continue to expand. As we develop our expertise in working with video, we will be reaching out to disciplines like psychology and anthropology that use videos in research. We are also talking to the Association of American Geographers about using our Virtual Data Enclave to provide a secure way to share geo-referenced data.

What will ICPSR’s strategy be for pursuing grants from the government and/or private foundations considering the economic and federal budgetary situations? Will there be more of an emphasis on partnerships with the private sector?

Many of ICPSR’s most successful partnerships have been with agencies that fund researchers to collect data. In times of shrinking budgets, these agencies are increasing their emphasis on data sharing and secondary analysis, so that they can maximize the scientific returns from their investments in data collection. Government and private funding agencies understand the economic logic of data sharing, and I expect the number of topical archives at ICPSR to continue to grow. In the private sector, two very different kinds of partnerships are possible. First, researchers are extremely interested in

data collected by private firms in the course of their daily activities. Every time that you scan a bar code or click a button on a Web site, a digital record is created somewhere that may be used by a creative graduate student in a path-breaking dissertation. We have had a few very preliminary conversations with private firms, but they are still reluctant to part with information that may have commercial value to them. I feel very strongly that ICPSR data needs to be open to everyone, and I think that private firms will begin to realize that there are benefits to them from sharing their data with the research community. Second, we have been talking to several firms that produce tools for data sharing, metadata creation, and digital archiving. As these tools become more mature, they will allow us to change the way that we process data for archiving in ways that provide more and better services to users at lower costs.

ICPSR has experienced nearly constant growth in its 50 years of existence — do you expect that to continue or will the focus be on maintaining the current size (again, considering the economic situation)?

The future of federal funding for research does not look bright, but appreciation of the value of the services provided by ICPSR is growing. My expectation is that we will continue to expand into new areas.

How can ICPSR take advantage of the trend toward interdisciplinary research?

All of ICPSR’s activities — from data archiving to training in the Summer Program — are inherently interdisciplinary. The best example

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New MET project focuses on video data

By Dan Meisler

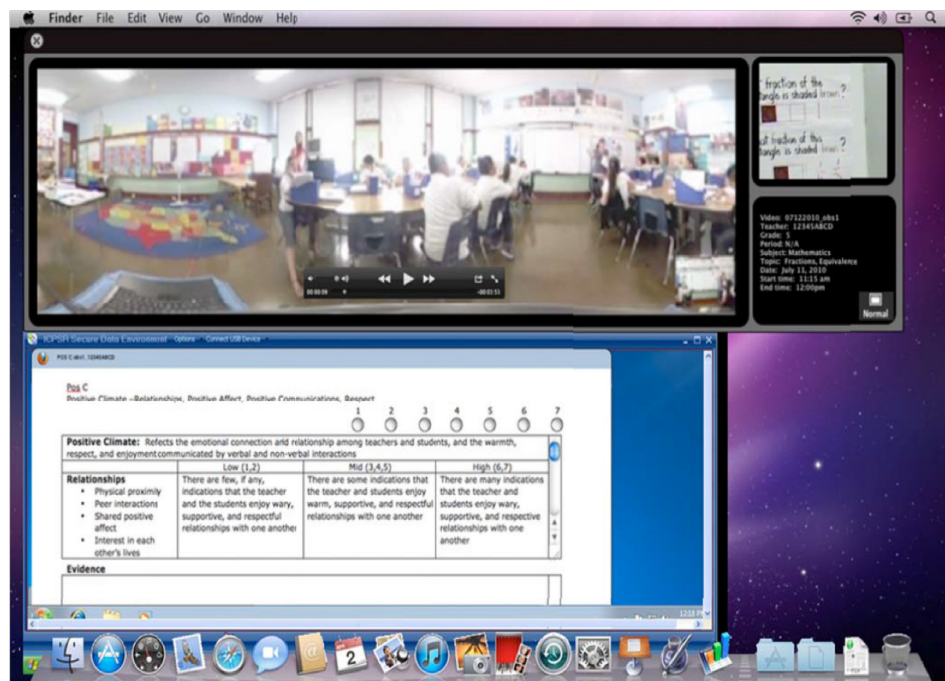
ICPSR Editor

ICPSR recently received word from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that the University of Michigan would receive a two-year, \$1.3 million grant to archive videos and related quantitative data from the foundation's Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) program.

This project provides important new data to analyze various teaching methods and also will allow ICPSR to develop the infrastructure and expertise necessary to archive video material from other sources.

"The videos from the MET project are extremely valuable to education researchers," said George Alter, ICPSR director and Principal Investigator. "And this project represents a great step forward for ICPSR as we develop new capabilities to archive and disseminate emerging types of research data."

The MET project gathered video from the classrooms of more than 3,000 teacher volunteers across the country in the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years. The videos captured a 360-degree view of the classroom, so



A screen shot of the user interface for the Measures of Effective Teaching project.

that student reactions to the teacher can be viewed. Two groups of researchers will have early access to the data. The initial analysis will be done by the MET research partners who collected the data. The second group is expected to be recipients of grants that will be competitively awarded to use the new MET Database beginning in summer 2012. Authorized data users will be able to securely access the videos through a Web-based streaming service, and quantitative data through a secure virtual data enclave.

Robbin Gonzalez will serve as ICPSR project manager, leading a University of Michigan consortium including the Brandon Center at the School of Education, the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Social Research, and the U-M Libraries. ■



Gonzalez

Alter (cont. from page 2)

is the Bibliography of Data-Related Literature. When researchers download datasets from ICPSR, they can search the Bibliography for previous publications using those data regardless of discipline. A sociologist may find that a geographer has an explanation for a puzzling pattern in the data. An economist may find an article in a social psychology

journal with a new way to measure a difficult concept like "happiness." Some of the most important breakthroughs in science have occurred when a researcher learned a concept from a different field and applied it in a new way. Successful interdisciplinary collaborations often begin with data.

NOTE: Alter was recently profiled in the Institute for Social Research newsletter [ISR Sampler](#). ■

News and Notes ...

INTER-UNIVERSITY CONSORTIUM FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

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ICPSR is a center within the Institute
for Social Research at the University of
Michigan.

New leaders in place for three topical archives

ICPSR is pleased to announce new directors for three topical archives:

- Mary McEniry joined ICPSR this fall as Director of Data Sharing for Demographic Research (DSDR) after 10 years at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she was an associate scientist in the Center for Demography and Ecology, and the Center for Demography of Health and Aging. McEniry's research interests are focused on the demography of aging, cross-national comparisons of early life conditions and older adult health, and health and mortality in U.S. Hispanic populations and developing country populations. McEniry earned a Ph.D. in Industrial Engineering with a focus on organizational and group decision theory and statistics; a Master's in Industrial Engineering; a Master's in Social Work; and a Bachelor's in Social Work, all from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She also holds a teaching certificate from the University of California, Berkeley. For the last five years, her work has focused on early life influences on elderly health in the developing world, with support from an award from the National Institute on Aging.
- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Data Archive (SAMHDA) is now led by John E. Marcotte, whose research specialties include data management and security, power analysis and sampling, and longitudinal data analysis. His latest publications examine long term care of the elderly. Marcotte came to ICPSR from the University of Pennsylvania, where he most recently served as Director of Research Data Services for the School of Arts and Sciences and Senior Statistician for the School of Nursing. He holds a doctorate in demography from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.
- The new leader of the National Addiction & HIV Data Archive Program (NAHDAP) is Amy Pienta, who also serves as ICPSR's Director of Acquisitions. Pienta's areas of research specialization include the demography of aging, marriage and family in later life, and health and retirement. Her work has also addressed the use of addictive substances later in life, including a paper published in the Journal of Health and Aging on smoking cessation and marriage. She has been with ICPSR since 2003. She holds a Ph.D. in Sociology from the State University of New York at Buffalo.



Notable data releases

Moving to Opportunity (MTO)

[Moving to Opportunity \(MTO\) for Fair Housing Demonstration: Interim Impacts Evaluation, Tier 1 Restricted Access Data, 1994-2001 \[United States\]](#) was designed to answer questions about what happens when very poor families have the chance to move out of subsidized housing in the poorest neighborhoods of five very large American cities. MTO was a demonstration program: its approach combined tenant-based housing vouchers with location restrictions and housing counseling. MTO was also a randomized social experiment, carefully designed and rigorously implemented to test the effects of this approach on participating families. The interim evaluation included the collection of data on a wide range of outcomes that could potentially be affected by the MTO intervention. These outcomes fit into 6 study domains: (1) mobility, housing, and neighborhood, (2) adult and child physical and mental health, (3) child educational achievement, (4) youth delinquency and risky behavior, (5) adult and youth employment and earnings, and (6) household income and public assistance receipt. The restricted access data being made available through ICPSR includes many such analytic variables constructed from surveys and administrative data. The Tier 1 data also includes a census tract ID that allows researchers to link other neighborhood-level data.

Users may order this collection (ICPSR Study Number 31661) by completing an [application to obtain the restricted data](#) per standard ICPSR policies.

Fourth IFSS harmonized dataset

The [Integrated Fertility Survey Series](#) (IFSS) project at ICPSR is pleased to announce the release of its fourth harmonized dataset, adding fertility intention, infertility diagnosis and treatment, HIV, and other medical diagnosis variables to previously harmonized pregnancy summary, sociodemographic and union history variables. The dataset combines information from 10 surveys and over 71,000 respondents spanning 1955 to 2002 into harmonized variables for easy analysis.

The fourth release data are available for download on the [Data and Documentation](#) page, can be explored and extracted from the [Harmonized Data Extracts](#) page, and can be analyzed online using [SDA](#).

NCAA dataset on academic progress

The [NCAA Student-Athlete Experiences Data Archive](#) has updated its data on Division I Academic Progress Rates.

The dataset, [NCAA Division I Academic Progress Rate, 2011](#), now includes the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 seasons. The data contains team-level academic performances available by division, by conference, and by school.

The Student-Athlete Experiences Data Archive includes user-friendly data collections related to graduation rates; team-level Academic Progress Rates in Division I; and individual-

level data on the experiences of current and former student-athletes from the NCAA's Growth, Opportunities, Aspirations and Learning of Students in college study (GOALS), and the Study of College Outcomes and Recent Experiences (SCORE).

2010 Monitoring the Future (MTF)

[Monitoring the Future](#) is an ongoing study of the behaviors, attitudes, and values of American secondary school students, college students, and young adults. Each year, a total of approximately 50,000 8th, 10th and 12th grade students are surveyed (12th graders since 1975, and 8th and 10th graders since 1991). In addition, annual follow-up questionnaires are mailed to a sample of each graduating class for a number of years after their initial participation. The Monitoring the Future Study has been funded under a series of investigator-initiated competing research grants from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, a part of the National Institutes of Health. MTF is conducted at the Survey Research Center in the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

The data and documentation files for both the 2010 MTF 8th/10th grade [study](#) and the 12th grade [study](#) have been released and are available for download. The 12th grade core data file is also available for [online analysis](#). The SDA codebooks for both studies can be accessed on SAMHDA's [SDA Codebooks page](#).

Official Representatives gather in Ann Arbor

By Dan Meisler

ICPSR Editor

ICPSR welcomed nearly 100 Official Representatives and Designated Representatives or their substitutes to Ann Arbor in early October for three days of workshops, seminars, networking, and, of course, some wining and dining.

The 30th biennial meeting of ORs and DRs also served as the start of a year-long celebration of ICPSR's 50th anniversary, and the theme of the meeting was "Building on 50 Years of Leadership."

Including ICPSR staff, Council members, and invited speakers and guests, 175 people attended the meeting.

Ninety-eight institutions were represented at the meeting.

The meeting provided a few notable firsts for ICPSR, such as the live video streamed on the Web (and archived [here](#)) for many of the sessions, and the tours of ICPSR's facilities in the Perry Building. Nearly 200 people viewed sessions over the Web, and the tours proved extremely popular with attendees.

Of the 44 participants who filled out an evaluation form afterward, 98 percent said they found the meeting to be worthwhile.

More than half (55 percent) were attending an OR meeting for the first time, compared with 33 percent in 2007, the last OR meeting that was held in Ann Arbor. ■



1: From left, Piper Simmons and Amy Pienta talk to ORs during the tour of ICPSR.
2: Audience members listen to a session during the OR meeting.
3: Lynette Hoelter speaks during a session on marketing ICPSR.
4: From left, Kevin Schürer; ICPSR Director George Alter; Laine Ruus; Paula Lackie; Tom Smith. Schürer and Smith won Miller Awards, and Ruus and Lackie won Flanigan Awards.