History of the CSU Social Science Research and Instructional Council (Mendes)

Excerpts (full report not available) from a paper prepared by Richard Mendes, CSU Stanislaus, mid 1970s

In 1972, The California State University and Colleges (CSUC) became the first multi-institutional member of the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research (ICPR). Prior to this joint membership, several of the individual campuses of the CSUC system were separate members of the ICPR. The cost of membership was borne by the individual campus, and very often by the operating budgets of the political science departments. Many of these schools were either in the process of terminating, or were contemplating termination, of ICPR services by early 1971. Such schools felt that the ICPR materials were not being used sufficiently to justify the membership expense.

At the same time, some smaller campuses of the CSUC system, which could not afford to join the ICPR, were being pressed to obtain membership. Because of expansion of quantitative training in graduate institutions, these smaller schools were beginning to have their first methodologically-oriented social scientists. The new social scientists were pushing for the type of resource material which they had used in graduate work.

Some small and medium-sized schools considered joint membership on a limited scale. Fresno, Bakersfield, and Stanislaus were discussing a combined membership in early 1971.

Most of the credit for initiating the concept of systemwide membership in the ICPR goes to Professor Betty Nesvold of California State University, San Diego. She "sounded out" the ICPR about a group membership and arranged for ICPR representatives to meet with representatives of the CSUC campuses. This meeting took place in Los Angeles in May 1972 with most of the nineteen campuses represented. Also present were representatives from the Division of Academic Planning and Division of Information Systems of the Chancellor's Office. Richard Hofferbert (director), Jerome Clubb (director of the historical archives), Charles 0. Jones (the then Chairman of the Council of Representatives), and members of their staff represented the ICPR.

From the outset of negotiations, it was obvious that both sides were anxious to reach an agreement. Two central problems had to be solved: (1) Could systemwide membership provide economies of scale great enough to allow a fee which was within the range of the CSUC system and at the same time acceptable to the ICPR? (2) How could the CSUC campuses be allocated Organizational Representation and spaces in the ICPR summer training program? The ICPR also felt that it would be necessary for the CSUC users to organize some sort of operational body, but carefully avoided suggesting how such a body should be constituted.

As a result of this meeting a set of working arrangements was hammered out which allowed the CSUC system to become a member of the ICPR for the 1972-73 academic year. These arrangements solved the two problems outlined above to the satisfaction of the interested faculty, the Chancellor's Office, and the Presidents of the various CSUC campuses. On June 8, 1972 the

Chancellor's Council of Presidents approved funding of membership for the coming academic year.

The annual fee which the CSUC system pays for ICPR services is $30,000. In return for this sum, the CSUC system has access to all the ICPR data and services. Data requests are sent through a central clearinghouse, the Information Systems Division of the Chancellor's Office. Because Information Systems serves as a channel for data requests the ICPR is saved from the need to supply each of the nineteen campuses independently. Information Systems can duplicate a copy of the data already obtained and fill second and subsequent requests.

When the CSUC system became a member of the ICPR, a council was created from the framework of the original ad hoc committee which had assisted in obtaining ICPR membership in 1972. The policy council is now responsible for a number of tasks. (1) It selects participants for the summer program, (2) it deals with complaints about data acquisition, (3) it serves as a link between Information Systems and the local campus data users, and (4) it selects the O.R.'s who attend the annual ICPR meeting. The members of this council are without exception the O.R.'s of the nineteen CSUC campuses.

The principal area in which ICPR has had an effect lies in the teaching of social science methodology. Access to the holdings of the Survey Research Center has improved the techniques of teaching quantitative analysis.

Also, members of the CSUC-ICPR Council (who are generally the individuals who teach social science methods) use council meetings to exchange ideas on a regular basis. This ability to interact encourages teachers to share new ideas and techniques.

"Learning packages" have been developed, based upon ICPR data sets, which are potential components of substantive courses in political science, history, sociology and other disciplines. These packages are teaching aids which can be incorporated into a course without monopolizing the entire semester. Instructors need not be skilled methodologists to use such packages. One can quickly learn the method of using the teaching aid and can then utilize it with only a little assistance. Over time, an instructor may develop skills in using quantitative data without any special training, simply by using such materials in his classes.

Finally, the availability of ICPR data has opened new vistas to students who wish to undertake research which goes beyond the usual library - secondary source - book report. Many students develop the tendency to accept whatever is presented in some published analysis as gospel, and are not critical of the methods employed or the data utilized therein. Access to ICPR data allows the student to do either original analysis of previously collected data or replicative analysis of standard works in his field. The availability of ICPR data is especially important to the graduate or advanced undergraduate student, who has moved beyond the type of work mentioned above and wishes to do original research and to become familiar with the techniques most common at the professional level. In short, the availability of ICPR data is not unlike the opening of a whole new library.