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

Elizabeth Nelson, CSU Fresno, 2005 or 2006

The California State University Social Sciences Research and Instructional Council (SSRIC) began in 1972 as the California State University Social Sciences Research Council, which was an advisory group to the Office of Information Resources and Telecommunications at the Chancellor's Office. The goal of the Council was to promote quantitative analysis in the social sciences. The Council was made up of one representative from each campus. In the beginning, most of the representatives to the Council were political scientists, but later it came to include sociologists, economists, historians, geographers, and public policy analysts. The CSU belonged to the Inter-university Consortium for Political Research (ICPR) that provided access to national data, and the SSRC served as the CSU representative to it.

An important function of the SSRIC has been to provide support for faculty and student use of social-science data. Data bases for social science research were supported by the Chancellor's office until the Social Science Data Base Archive at California State University, Los Angeles was formed in 1991. By 2004-05 changes in data access and retrieval made it possible for the SSRIC to provide the access to and support for them at lower cost. (During 2004-05 six faculty workshops on the use of the data and teaching materials were held.) The data bases include data from:

- The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research at the University of Michigan
- The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut, and
- The Field Institute-California Field Poll in San Francisco, California

One of the goals of the Council was to teach social-science faculty the basics of the most up-to-date technology for data analysis with empirical data. This began with workshops training faculty to use the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) on the PC. Summer workshops for CSU faculty were held in 1983 and 1985 in San Luis Obispo and 1989, 1994, and 1996 in Fresno.

An ongoing emphasis of the Council has been the development of instructional materials using computer-based data for social science courses. In 1985 the Council received a grant from the Chancellor's Office to develop a series of modules for use in social science courses. (At that time The ICPSR science had instructional materials called SETUPS for analyzing data, but most of those had not been kept up to date.) The Social Science Instructions Modules were small books with chapters on social-science content particularly relevant for teaching in California, for example, women's issues, AIDS and tolerance, crime, student attitudes and behavior, immigration. Each module also included a section on beginning research methods including survey research, sampling, concepts, measures frequencies, percent distributions, dependent and independent variables, crosstabulation, and statistics for analysis; as well as data sets with exercises for student analysis. The authors trained faculty to use these materials. Ed Nelson, Jim Ross, Dick Shaffer, and Elizabeth Nelson presented a workshop on the modules at the CSU Teaching and Learning Exchange in February 1992. The Nelsons obtained a dissemination grant

from the Fresno to offer workshops on campuses on using the modules [date?]. Ed & Jim and Liz did a presentation at WSSA early on with borrowed computers. [date?] Presentations were also made at various professional meetings.

As SPSS became available for Windows on the PC, several members of the Council developed beginning instructional materials starting with SPSS for Windows Version 6: A Basic Tutorial by Nan Chico, John Korey, Edward Nelson, Elizabeth Nelson, James Ross, and Richard Schaffer (McGraw Hill, 1997). The most recent edition is SPSS for Windows Version 13: A Basic Tutorial (McGraw Hill, 2005) by Linda Fiddler, Laura Hecht, Edward Nelson, Elizabeth Nelson, and James Ross.

SSRIC members continue to develop empirically-based instructional materials for use in their own classes, sharing them with one another and making them available to other faculty. In 1997-98, the SSRIC obtained funding from the CSU Academic Opportunity Fund to develop a social-science teaching resources depository on the internet to house instructional materials and data sets that could be downloaded and used in classes. The website included:

- Modules---self-contained units focused around a data base for student analysis. (Topics include opinions on women's issues, opinions on social issues, standard cross-cultural data from the famous anthropological studies, a beginning course in macroeconomics, representation in the California State Legislature, and an intermediate-level course on census data)
- Exercises with data sets for analysis
- Glossary of terms for social science, research methods, and SPSS
- Latest version of the SPSS primer

These resources complement in-class or distance instruction in a variety of social science disciplines. Beginning in the fall of 2005, San Francisco State University will host the SSRIC web site and the Teaching Resources Depository at http://www.ssric.org/. Council members demonstrated these materials at the California Sociological Association meetings in October 1999 and at the Western Social Sciences Association meetings in April, 2000.

As part of the emphasis on empirical research in the social sciences, the SSRIC sponsors a student research conference for undergraduate and graduate students each spring. [When did this start?] Thirty-one students from 15 campuses presented their research at the most recent conference held in Fresno in 2005. The 2006 conference will be in Northridge may 3, 2006.

The SSRIC has been involved in several related projects to increase the use of instructional materials. In the summer of 2000, Ed Nelson, Jim Ross, Nan Chico, and Elizabeth Nelson received an award from the American Sociological Association's Teaching Endowment Fund to present workshops for college and university faculty in California. These were held in Los Angeles and Hayward in June focusing on on-line data analysis for classroom instruction with materials from the Teaching Resources Depository and the Survey Documentation and Analysis resources developed by UC Berkeley. This involved special outreach to community-college teachers and emphasized resources that did not require SPSS or other statistical software. In 2000-01 the sociology departments at CSU Bakersfield and CSU Fresno collaborated on an

information competency project that developed instructional materials to teach information competency with research-based quantitative skills. These materials were also put on the Teaching Resources Depository so all faculty could access them and were presented at the California Sociological Association in 2002. The Nelsons presented "Teaching Critical Thinking Using Quantitative Data Analysis," at the California Sociological Association meetings in October, 1999 and "Critical Thinking Using SSDBA and TRD" at the Sixth California State University Symposium on University Teaching, February, 2000 at CSU San Marcos.