2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Stanford Institute for Research in the Social Sciences

Stanford Institute for Research in the Social Sciences
Exploring bold, inventive research questions
A letter from the Directors

Since its inception, IRISS’s greatest strength has been its flexibility. The past year put that flexibility to the test in a way that we never could have anticipated. Nevertheless, thanks to the creativity, perseverance, and dedication of our faculty, staff, students, and community partners, IRISS was able to continue offering a robust suite of programs and providing crucial support to our research centers.

Election years are inevitably a busy time for the American National Election Studies team, but that was especially the case during the historic 2020 presidential election. In July 2020, ANES senior researchers announced they had made the difficult decision to forego in-person interviews for the first time. They developed an innovative approach to mixing survey modes, allowing respondents to participate over the phone or the Internet. 2020 also saw the implementation of an exciting new study, funded in part by a gift from Facebook. ANES researchers were given permission to link survey respondents’ answers to their Facebook accounts, providing access to a treasure trove of data on the posts and ads they viewed, for example, and what they liked and disliked. The first of several waves of results from these studies was released to the public in February 2021.

While the pandemic complicated and slowed construction activity on campus, IRISS was nonetheless able to open its new Federal Statistical Research Data Center this past year. The secure facility quintuples the research space and technology that enables researchers to access administrative microdata held by several different federal departments and agencies. This work includes COVID-related studies on data held by the Centers for Disease Control, immigration policy analysis, trade dynamics, civic engagement, social mobility and much more, wherever the federal government is enacting policy and collecting data.

Responding to the need for evidence-based analyses of the social and economic effects of the ongoing pandemic, the Center on Poverty and Inequality published a series of four reports on preliminary data gathered through the American Voices Project. Meanwhile, the Immigration Policy Lab released a toolkit for collecting data remotely through automated WhatsApp surveys, as well as a digital tool that enables researchers and journalists to track congressional tweets related to the immigration debate.

Thanks to the exceptional generosity of our board members and individual donors, IRISS and its affiliate centers were able to prioritize supporting graduate student research at precisely the time when it was needed most. IRISS itself convened its fifth cohort of Dissertation Fellows, and awarded data grants for the second consecutive year. The Center for American Democracy likewise convened its second cohort of Fellows and enrolled 17 students in its biannual Laboratory for the Study of American Values. The Center for Global Ethnography directed its resources for the year into an online video series that was responsive to the formidable and unpredictable challenges involved in conducting ethnographic fieldwork during a pandemic.

In keeping with Stanford policy, our Research Experience Programs transitioned to being fully online for 2020-2021, providing nearly 5000 subject-hours for Stanford researchers. Over the course of the academic year, an additional 22 local community college students participated in our Research Assistant Internship Program. We also piloted a new Academic Transition Advising Program for Foothill College students transferring to a four-year institution.

In lieu of our usual in-person keynote event, IRISS organized a series of online research briefings for board members. Our speakers came from across the entire Stanford community, including members of the faculty; Stanford’s tenth president, John Hennessy; director of the Freeman Spogli Institute, Michael McFaul; and Fouad and Michelle Ajami Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, H. R. McMaster. The series culminated with presentations by three of our graduating Dissertation Fellows, Kari Leibowitz, William Marble, and Jeff Sheng. We are grateful to all our invited guests for helping us to stay abreast of the latest developments in the social sciences during such a turbulent year.

We would like to extend a special, heartfelt thanks to two outgoing staff members, Isabel Lopez and Joshua Quan, whose ingenuity and hard work were indispensable to our success this past year. We wish them all the best in their new endeavors.

Finally, by way of closing, a quick word on the updated format of this year’s annual report. What follows is by no means a comprehensive summary of the many different programs, projects, and activities that IRISS and its affiliate centers pursued over the past year. It is rather a compendium of some of our more noteworthy accomplishments during an exceptionally challenging year. Please refer to the IRISS website, http://iriss.stanford.edu, for more information about anything that catches your eye.

With high hopes for the year ahead,

Sandy Smith
Advisory Board Chair
Karen Cook
Director
Michael Tomz
Deputy Director
Chris Thomsen
Executive Director
This year alone, IRiSS’s finance team administered over $5 million in grants and gifts.
IRiSS supported 135 researchers in 2020-2021

- 6 FACULTY
  - SEED GRANTS

- 18 FSRDC
  - USERS

- 13 ADD HEALTH
  - USERS

- 17 REP
  - USERS
Working with the best and brightest, IRiSS ensures that Stanford researchers are prepared to tackle critically important social science questions.

That means: pilot testing proofs-of-concept, providing access to sensitive data in secure, state-of-the-art computing environments, and preparing findings for publication.
Planting the seeds
Faculty Seed Grants support early-stage research by funding proposal development, pilot research, and other essential tasks to create the proof-of-concept needed to attract external funding for further, large-scale research.
What can teachers do to improve Black students’ academic outcomes?

Psychologist Jennifer Eberhardt and graduate student Camilla Griffiths have studied how providing written feedback constitutes an opportunity for White teachers to build deeper relationships with their Black students, affecting not only their own views about Black students’ potential but also those students’ educational outcomes. Eberhardt and Griffiths are in the process of designing and testing a professional development session for English Language Arts and Social Studies teachers in a national network of 40 charter schools.
Why do sudden eruptions of extreme beliefs recur in American politics?
Through a series of survey experiments, political scientist Paul Sniderman and his team are identifying rhetorical techniques that could act to mitigate the social stigma associated with extreme beliefs. They hypothesize that populist claims to be the defenders of embattled democratic ideals create broader latitude for extreme beliefs than previously recognized. Their findings will have implications not only for our understanding of such extreme beliefs as authoritarianism and conspiratorial thinking, but also more pervasive social issues like racial prejudice and xenophobia.
How are social media technologies changing the ways people express emotion?

Linguistic anthropologist Miyako Inoue is drawing on ethnographic fieldwork to contextualize and illuminate user data from Line, a Japanese social media firm. By analyzing the widespread adoption of emoji by political parties in Japan, Inoue’s interdisciplinary research will deepen our understanding of how signaling emotional connections to the electorate can take precedence over articulating a specific policy agenda.
Nurturing the numbers
IRiSS builds up the university’s social science data resources, provides access to restricted-use data for Stanford researchers, and serves as a liaison between Stanford and providers of sensitive data.
The National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent and Adult Health

Thanks to a partnership with the Carolina Population Center at the University of North Carolina, IRiSS is pleased to provide Stanford faculty, postdoctoral scholars, and graduate students with access to a considerable archive of restricted-use data generated by this ongoing, one-of-a-kind study.

Starting in the 1994-95 school year, a nationally representative sample of over 20,000 young Americans has participated in five sequential waves of this landmark study. Tracking this same cohort of research subjects for twenty years, Add Health (as it is called for short) has collected a wealth of information, including socioeconomic, psychosocial, and health survey data; contextual data about participants’ schools, neighborhoods, and areas of residence; and biological data collected from in-home visits and venous blood draws.
April 2021 saw the opening of our new location for Stanford’s Federal Statistical Research Data Center (RDC) in Lathrop Library. The RDC provides local researchers with secure computing labs where they can conduct approved statistical analysis on sensitive data collected by the Census Bureau, the Social Security Administration, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other government agencies.

Currently, 18 researchers at Stanford are authorized to access the RDC, including faculty, graduate students, and predoctoral fellows in the Departments of Economics and Sociology, the Graduate School of Business, the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy and Research, and the School of Medicine.
In a recently published article in the *Election Law Journal*, IRiSS Senior Researcher Matthew DeBell and Stanford political scientist Shanto Iyengar draw on ANES data from 2016 and 2018 to test key assumptions in the Supreme Court’s major rulings on campaign finance regulation. DeBell and Iyengar find that, contrary to the Court’s expectations, even contributions well below the current legal ceiling of $2,800 per candidate can produce the appearance of a moderate amount of congressional corruption. This is an important finding, since even the appearance of corruption can be detrimental to democracies by eroding public confidence in government institutions.
The American National Election Studies Project

Stanford has partnered with the University of Michigan since 2006 to administer the NSF-funded American National Elections Studies Project (ANES). In anticipation of the November 2020 presidential election, ANES leadership made the difficult and unprecedented decision not to conduct any in-person interviews. Instead, all data was collected through a combination of a web-based questionnaire and video and telephone interviews. The first full release from this data set was made available to researchers in July 2021.

This past year also saw the advent of two new initiatives: a partnership with the General Social Survey (GSS), for which ANES interviewers asked respondents to the GSS about their political views; and a Facebook study that involved administering a condensed version of the ANES survey to Facebook users who then gave permission to identify their responses with their Facebook accounts. These new restricted-use data sets will be a boon to researchers as we begin to examine how social media affects the thoughts and electoral choices of voters.
Having the time and resources to analyze one’s findings and think deeply about their implications entails its own set of constraints. Our Faculty Fellows Program provides Stanford social scientists with office space, reduced teaching loads, and an interdisciplinary community of peers. Together these help them tighten their focus on making their work available to their fields and to the world at large.
How Lawyers, Politicians, and Ideological Incentives Shape the American Judiciary

Political scientist Adam Bonica received an IRISS Faculty Fellowship in 2019-20 to complete his book *The Judicial Tug of War* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). He and co-author Maya Sen argue that the politicization of the American judiciary has involved the convergence of two processes.

First, the legal profession has used the courts to consolidate its political advantage. Through their efforts to hold the exclusive power to regulate the legal profession, bar associations have “captured” the judiciary. In brief, the bar exercises a monopoly over who can become a judge. The historical consequences of this situation are crucially important: for much of the twentieth century, women, African Americans, and Jews were formally excluded from the bar, which meant that they were unable to become judges until quite recently.

Nevertheless, the bar has never exerted absolute control over who from among its ranks would be appointed to the nation’s courts. The power to select judges is shared with politicians and in some cases with voters. As the bar has shifted steadily to the left over the course of the past several generations, the political class has become more ideologically varied, introducing a relatively recent divergence between legal and political elites. Whence the judicial tug of war: “The more politicians pull on the ‘rope,’ the more the judiciary will shift to match the preferences of politicians; the more the bar exercises control over its ‘captured judiciary,’ the more preferences of the judiciary will resemble those of lawyers.” In the end, Bonica and Sen argue, the judiciary represents the winner of a complicated and highly strategic contest of strength between political and legal elites.
“The more politicians pull on the ‘rope,’ the more the judiciary will shift to match the preferences of politicians; the more the bar exercises control over its ‘captured judiciary,’ the more preferences of the judiciary will resemble those of lawyers.”
Informing Solutions to Society's Great Challenges
The social problems we face today are enormously complex. Tackling them effectively requires a holistic approach and a readiness to collaborate across disciplinary lines, but operating a multidisciplinary research center itself entails a host of practical tasks. This is where IRiSS comes in.

We provide a combination of financial administration, grant administration, human resources, IT, communications, and logistical support so that our affiliate centers can focus on what they do best: producing relevant findings that provide timely information and insight to policymakers and service providers.
Monitoring the Crisis

After years of planning, fundraising, and piloting, the Center on Poverty and Inequality (CPI) launched data collection for the American Voices Project (AVP) in 2019. Since then, AVP researchers have conducted over 2,700 immersive interviews to deliver a comprehensive portrait of life across the country. The AVP, based on nationally representative samples of hundreds of communities in the United States, blends qualitative, survey, administrative, and experimental approaches to collecting data on such topics as family, living situations, community, health, emotional well-being, living costs, and income.

Starting in February 2021, CPI affiliates have been releasing their findings in a series of reports available through the CPI website. These reports explore how the low-income population, people of color, and other historically disadvantaged groups were affected by the pandemic, the economic downturn, and mass protests. They go beyond what can be discovered via quantitative surveys, using in-depth interviews to examine such topics as how essential workers feel about the risk they assumed during the pandemic, how race mattered in perceptions of policing after George Floyd was murdered, and how views of government aid might be shifting.

2,700+ INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED SINCE 2019
New CPI Initiative: Subsidized Employment Lab

Subsidized employment programs provide temporary work placements to low-income individuals who experience chronic barriers to work. The key goal: To help them build skills with a long-run employment payoff.

The newly launched Subsidized Employment Lab is building partnerships with county agencies in California that administer Expanded Subsidized Employment (ESE) programs. CPI researchers are analyzing administrative data from seven counties (and counting) to understand the long-term economic impacts of these programs. Because the CPI is working directly with agencies that are in a position to shape ESE programs, this evaluation will help counties foster client-centric and evidence-based service delivery, thereby reducing disparities and promoting economic security.
A Low-Cost Method for Conducting Surveys with WhatsApp

Surveys are an indispensable part of many research projects, whether the goal is building academic knowledge or providing outreach to a business or nonprofit’s clients. But traditional survey methods can be expensive and time-consuming, and they don’t always deliver enough meaningful data. IPL researchers wanted a solution that would be budget-friendly, easy to deploy quickly, and reliable over time even when respondents move or travel between countries.

They found it in WhatsApp, which can deliver surveys to respondents’ mobile phones in the form of automated text messages. In partnership with Mercy Corps and Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), IPL developed a new survey system that uses the WhatsApp Business API, Twilio (a web service API communications platform), and Google systems.

Contacting clients and research participants over WhatsApp provides benefits to both users and researchers. With more than 2 billion monthly users worldwide, the WhatsApp platform is already familiar to many participants, accessible over WiFi or cellular data, and can minimize respondent attrition, since WhatsApp numbers often stay the same even if respondents move to new places and change SIM cards.

In a series of webinars this past year, IPL introduced their WhatsApp survey methodology, providing a live demonstration of the experience for respondents as well as the researchers receiving the data. Presenters also shared results of WhatsApp panel surveys with 1,000 resettled refugees in the United States and 2,500 Venezuelan refugees in Colombia—at an average cost of $1.43 per completed 22-question survey.
Mapping the Immigration Debate through Legislators’ Tweets

Every member of Congress has a Twitter account, and most use it daily. For many legislators, tweets have replaced press releases as their main platform for staking out positions on salient issues, establishing themselves as leaders in policy debates, and reacting to breaking news. Twitter allows legislators to communicate directly with their constituents, the media, and other politicians in real time, constantly adapting and updating their messages on key policy issues.

IPL's Congressional Tweet Tracker allows researchers to track the U.S. immigration debate through legislators’ tweets. It collects all tweets produced by members of Congress from 2013 to present—that’s data from over 2 million tweets, updated weekly. With this tool, researchers don’t need to be data scientists to access all the rich political information and insights that Twitter data deliver.

For academics and journalists, the Congressional Tweet Tracker is a powerful vehicle for scouting out surprising or counterintuitive stories that challenge the common wisdom or dominant media narrative about what’s going on in immigration politics. For advocacy groups, the tracker brings the ability to immediately identify states or regions that are becoming more receptive to their messages, offering solid evidence of where and when their preferred policies are most politically viable.
In full bloom
At the heart of IRiSS’s mission is helping to place Stanford graduates at the forefront of social science research through rigorous training in cutting-edge methods, financial support in the form of grants and fellowships, and strong mentoring relationships with affiliate faculty. IRiSS is also committed to serving the local community through partnerships with faculty at Foothill, De Anza, and Mission Community Colleges.
Taking the Pulse of the American People

The “Survey Lab” (as we call it for short) supports graduate students who are writing dissertations about American public opinion by helping them conduct original surveys of nationally representative samples of adults. The Center for American Democracy provides students with funds to run online survey experiments with specific audiences, generating invaluable data tailored specifically for their dissertations.

Professors Paul Sniderman and Michael Tomz teach the Survey Lab seminar every other academic year, guiding students through each stage of the experimental survey research process. The 2020-2021 seminar had 17 students, representing the Political Science, Sociology, and Economics Departments, as well as the Graduate School of Business.

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What counts as “family” in the United States today?

Does public admiration of the virtue of open-mindedness change depending on whether it is exercised toward a person rather than an idea?

To what extent are social media users aware that they are not being exposed to a representative sample of the views of the American population? Does such a lack of awareness contribute to partisan polarization?
How To Do Fieldwork during a Pandemic

Since its launch in the fall of 2019, the Center for Global Ethnography has convened faculty and graduate students to foster rigorous, meaningful, and ethical ethnographic fieldwork across the disciplines. To date, the Center’s public programming has drawn over three hundred attendees to live in-person and virtual events, and faculty outside Stanford have used the Center’s online video series Doing Ethnography Remotely to help train their own graduate students to adapt to the current circumstances.

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the Center continued to contend with the challenge of training ethnographers at a time when conventional in-person fieldwork was impossible. In the wake of a summer of protest sparked by the police murder of George Floyd, the Center opted to produce a new series of online videos, Methods of Protest: Engaging Black Lives Matter Movements. A combination of recordings and live sessions, the series focused on the Black Lives Matter movements in Italy, Australia, and the Bay Area.

These videos were more than panel presentations or roundtables. By putting researchers in dialogue with activists, the series offered an object lesson in how to conduct ethnographic interviews. During its first two years of existence, the Center has thus supported students from across the social science disciplines to pursue innovative Internet-based techniques for building relationships and eliciting rich, multidimensional data when the field is inaccessible by other means.
Grants and Fellowships

Research Data Grants

Social science research often entails a range of expenses that fall outside the scope of the kinds of support that academic departments can provide to graduate students. Starting in 2019-2020, IRiSS has piloted a Research Data Grant program open to graduate students at all stages of their education. This year, we awarded 26 grants of $1,500 each to help defray the cost of equipment and software, accessing restricted-use datasets, recruiting and compensating survey participants, transcribing interviews, and hiring research assistants.

26 GRANTS AWARDED IN 2020
In 2020-2021 the Executive Committee of the Center for Computational Social Science decided to prioritize funding graduate student research. Nine projects from across all six social science departments at Stanford were awarded grants ranging from $2,000 to $10,000 each.

Economics PhD candidates Christina Kent and Sarah Eichmeyer, for example, received funding to purchase a cell phone location dataset from commercial provider SafeGraph. Their strategy is to draw on anonymized data to develop a new method of counting the number of people in cities across the US who spend their nights out on the streets, in shelters, or moving frequently from residence to residence, suggesting that they could be doubling up with friends and family. Kent and Eichmeyer’s research promises to address significant gaps in governments’ and service providers’ ability to generate accurate, up-to-the-minute measures of the number of people experiencing homelessness at any one time.
Center for American Democracy Fellowship

Now in its second year, the Center for American Democracy’s Graduate Fellows Program is a competitive fellowship open to students across the social science disciplines who are studying questions related to American democracy. Organized by Center Director Michael Tomz, the Fellowship provides financial support as well as a community of researchers who offer guidance and feedback on all stages of experimental survey research. The 2021 cohort consists of 17 fellows from across the social sciences and the Graduate School of Business.
The Dissertation Fellows Program supports 12 PhD candidates from the social science departments by providing funding to help them complete their dissertations. Through discussion and research presentations —conducted online this year— fellows receive feedback on their dissertation research from colleagues in different social science disciplines, inducting them into a boundary-pushing community of their peers.
Launching Careers in Research and Policy

Graduate students and post-doctoral scholars are among the most immediate beneficiaries of the research opportunities provided by IRiSS affiliate centers. Joining one of them as a research assistant offers another crucial opportunity for advanced, hands-on training in social science research.

“As a data scientist in civic technology, I collaborate with government agencies and academics to build technology and run experiments that reduce poverty and improve both the access to and the effectiveness of the US safety net. The methodological skills and the substantive expertise I acquired through my training at the Center on Poverty and Inequality remain assets of unparalleled value, not only to obtaining these kinds of opportunities in the first place, but to my ongoing professional duties. Working for research centers like CPI is a highly effective way for students to demonstrate commitment and competence in a particular field.”

— Maximilian Hell, Senior Data Scientist at Code for America
As a prospective student, CPI was the primary differentiator that made my decision between coming to Stanford and other graduate programs. Before admission, I knew CPI’s reputation as a hub of scholarly insight on poverty and social stratification and its connections to the preeminent inequality scholars around the world. What I didn’t know was how vital CPI would be for the development of my own scholarly ideas, for offering critical mentorship as a first-generation graduate student, and for later launching my career as an expert on racial inequality. Through CPI, I earned my first publications and contributed to scholarship that has been taken up by academics and policymakers alike. Unlike any other place on campus, and even perhaps in the academy, CPI offers students the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills to make real-world impact on the most pressing social challenges of our time, alongside an unparalleled intellectual community.

— Jasmine Hill, Assistant Professor of Public Policy & Sociology, UCLA
Connecting to the Bay Area Community

IRiSS runs a suite of collaborative year-round programs that partner with local community college students in a variety of capacities. Despite the significant, ongoing hardships occasioned by the pandemic, we were able to deliver these programs by transitioning to a fully online model of engagement.

The Research Assistant Internship (RA) Program has connected hundreds of local community college students to Stanford social science research teams, where they support Stanford postdoctoral and graduate students and learn valuable research skills.

“Working with my RA has been the highlight of my dissertation work. My RA became a true intellectual collaborator by assisting with interviews on sexual assault, transcribing interviews, and coding transcripts. I was so impressed with his performance over the year that I had the honor of writing him a letter of recommendation for his Stanford transfer application — and he was admitted! I believe that the RA program was an influential element of his application. It is partially because of the RA program that his life is now on an incredible trajectory that he never imagined he would be on only a couple of years ago.”

— Bethany Nichols, PhD candidate, Sociology

The Community College Research Experience Program (REP) is a collaboration between IRiSS, Foothill College, De Anza College, Mission College, and other local community colleges. REP provides an opportunity for community college students to experience Stanford social science experiments as a part of their introductory social science coursework in college.

In 2020-2021, community college students volunteered nearly 5000 hours of their time in support of social science research in Communication, Business and Psychology.

5K HOURS VOLUNTEERED BY COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS
This year, IRiSS piloted a new **Academic Transition Advising Program**, matching 12 Foothill students with Stanford alumni and staff for support during the transfer process. Despite having to shift to online meetings, this program garnered positive feedback from advisors and advisees alike, and we plan to continue offering it in the future.
Growing our base of support
The considerable challenges of 2020-2021 notwithstanding, the Institute’s Advisory Board saw its second consecutive year of significant growth. Five new members added to the broad range of leadership experience and professional expertise represented on our board.
Direct access to the latest in social science research at Stanford

IRiSS advisory board members serve as ambassadors not only for the Institute itself, but for the social sciences at Stanford more generally. To help board members continue to stay apprised of the latest research, the Institute’s leadership expanded the series of online research briefings it had begun developing at the outset of the pandemic in early 2020.

Over the course of the academic year, the board heard from a variety of social science faculty, graduate students, and invited guests. Political scientist Shanto Iyengar provided an update on the 2020 ANES Data Sets. Psychologist Claude Steele discussed a scientific approach to diversity. IRiSS Dissertation Fellows Michael Webb, Kari Leibowitz, William Marble, and Jeff Sheng all briefed the board on the findings from their IRiSS-funded research.

Michael McFaul, Director of the Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, offered a prospective analysis of the geopolitical landscape in the wake of the US presidential election. Incoming board member and President Emeritus of the Spencer Foundation, Michael McPherson, disentangled the relationship between inequality and higher education. Former president of Stanford University, John Hennessy, spoke candidly about the lessons in leadership he had distilled from his long and storied career. Finally, retired Lt. General H. R. McMaster gave a presentation from his recent book, Battlegrounds.
Advisory Board and Leadership

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