

THE ROPER CENTER: DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL FOR DATA ACCESS

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For their part, the University of Connecticut and Yale University saw the prospect of a cooperative arrangement through which they would host the Roper Center as especially attractive. Many faculty at both institutions shared the view that social science research should be based to a greater extent on laboratory structures and to a lesser degree on the private musings of scholars working in a singular fashion. They wanted a model more inclined to tap new sources of information and new technology such as survey research and computers provide. These faculty considered the Roper Center an already significant resource in this more recently evolving social science, one that could provide much value and impact, and hence one which they would like to see associated with their two universities.

WHAT IS THE ROPER CENTER?

Established thirty-two years ago, the Roper Public Opinion Research Center (now The Roper Center, Inc.) is today the oldest and largest archive of sample survey data in the world. The raw data and supporting documentation from over 9,000 individual studies, carried out in more than 70 countries, have been deposited in the Center. Between two and three thousand social scientists annually avail themselves of this rich data resource by requesting various services of the Center, such as dataset duplication, information retrieval or specific data analysis. More than 40 colleges, universities, and research organizations are members of the International Survey Library Association (ISLA) the cooperative membership arm of the Roper Center.

Yale University had brought together a distinguished faculty in the social sciences with an international reputation for scholarly excellence. Still, its faculty and administrative leaders were convinced that the advancement of social science research and teaching on their campus required the elaboration of their social laboratory structures, and that formal association with the Roper Center as a host university would constitute a significant step in this elaboration.

THE ROPER CENTER IN TRANSITION

In 1975, the trustees and staff of the Roper Center began to consider seriously a major revision of the Center's organizational structure and institutional base. The first action following from this was to establish the Center in July 1975 as a non-profit corporation normally governed by a Board of Trustees. At about the same time, discussions were initiated between Center personnel and the officials of a number of American universities about the possibility of a new hosting arrangement. The University of Connecticut and Yale University entered into such discussions with the Roper Center in the fall of 1975.

For its part, the University of Connecticut in the late 1960's started making a major effort in this sector of social science through the development of a social data facility. The Social Science Data Center (SSDC), established in 1968, had assumed a central place in both social science teaching and research at the institution. By 1976, it had acquired a competent staff of twenty professional men and women comprising many of the skills and experience appropriate to a partnership with the Roper Center. The SSDC would provide, an "in-place" structure which could offer immediate aid in the development of the Roper facility and which would itself benefit greatly from a hosting arrangement with an archive of the scope and international associations of the Roper Center.

A variety of considerations prompted the Roper Board's exploration of new hosting possibilities. Foremost among them, however, was the judgment that there are severe limits to what a small college can do to develop an archive such as the Center's to its fullest potential. Mindful of the significant accomplishments of the Center over its three decades, appreciative of the Williams College contribution and desirous of maintaining an association with Williams, the Trustees came to feel that the appropriate base for the Roper Center is the research university.

Yale and Connecticut approached the possibility of a partnership

with the Roper Center, then, as a natural extension of plans and commitments which had taken shape over a period of time. In addition to this, faculty at the two schools shared strongly the judgments of the Roper trustees that the research University setting was appropriate to further Center development, and that the two schools were well placed to provide the kind of assistance that the Center required. They would be able to make a contribution to social science nationally and internationally through provision of expanded faculty expertise and technical facilities. It appeared, then, that a hosting arrangement with the Roper Center would mean a happy marriage of legitimate institutional interests and the requirements of an important social science resource.

By late fall, 1975, Connecticut and Yale had agreed that their invitation to the Roper Center would be a joint one. It was felt that such a cooperative venture would represent a sensible utilization of the resources of two neighboring schools. Yale and Connecticut faculty considered their institutions well matched in resources, in attainments, in interests, and concluded that their closeness geographically would make for an easy collaboration. The further development of the Roper Center would require all that both institutions would be able to contribute and would be advanced especially by the fact that the contributions of the two schools would be, to such a striking extent, complementary rather than overlapping and redundant.

In late 1976, the administration of Williams College expressed its support for the new hosting arrangement and its desire to be associated with it, and all of the necessary elements were in place. Meeting on February 2, 1977, with representatives of Yale, Connecticut and Williams, the Roper Center Board of Trustees formally approved the move and reorganization. The trustees of the three institutions separately endorsed the new partnership.

The Roper Center is now an independent corporation in formal partnership with the University of Connecticut, Yale University, and Williams College. Divisions of responsibility have been agreed upon. The development of a new staff structure is proceeding. The transition of the Archival Development section to Storrs is well underway, and the transfer of User Services to New Haven has been com-

pleted (see "News and Notes" in this issue of the Newsletter).

ADVANTAGES OF THE ROPER CENTER REORGANIZATION AND RELOCATION

The Roper Center will be able to function more effectively in its new setting than it has been able to in the old one. We identify the following gains as the most important.

Access to improved technical facilities

The Roper Center requires sophisticated computational facilities. As a result of the move, it has full access to the Yale and University of Connecticut computer centers, to all of the software in place at those facilities, and to the technical staffs associated with them. (Both Centers, it might be noted, have fully compatible, same-generation IBM computers.) In addition, the technical services staff of the Social Science Data Center, is available to assist the Roper Center in a number of ways. For one thing, it will be possible to achieve "economies of scale" which are so important. It has access to staff help enabling it to respond to the directions in which the user community is likely to proceed in the future.

The new administrative arrangements

We are confident that the new administrative arrangement will work effectively, and that it represents the best possible arrangement for attaining a variety of quite disparate objectives. First, it was considered essential that the place of the Roper Center as a repository for commercial survey data -- foreign and domestic -- be maintained. The various commercial survey firms have looked upon Roper as "their own," and this encouraged them to contribute to the Center. On the Roper Board of Trustees have sat Burns W. Roper of the Roper Organization, George Gallup of the American Institute of Public Opinion, William J. Wilson of Starch/INRA/Hooper, and other important leaders of the survey world.

Second, we wanted to add to this historic element of Roper Center organization the skills and facili-

ties of the research university. The absence of this component has been a decided debit in past Roper efforts to service the social science community. Yale, as the setting for User Services, is easily accessible to scholars from around the world.

A complete copy of the entire holdings of the Center will be maintained at the University of Connecticut, with another complete copy at Yale University. There is no unnecessary duplication here, of course, because one copy serves as a backup for the other. Williams College will continue to house various portions of the archive it chooses to maintain. The User Services Division will be located in New Haven. Requests for the duplication of data sets, for searches of the archive, and the like, will be the responsibility of this staff. The archival development component will be housed in Storrs. It will bear responsibility for bringing new data sets into the archive, for interactions with data suppliers, for reformatting data sets and bringing the data into one of various levels of accessibility for most effective utilization. This division of responsibilities is an entirely natural one. The fact that the two schools are separated by a distance of about 60 miles should not pose any serious obstacles. Linkage of the two computer centers will be achieved, and driving time between the two institutions is just over an hour. An operating committee, with two representatives from each of the three host schools, has been established, and it is charged with coordinating institutional involvement.

The Williams College continued to bear the major responsibility for servicing user requests during the transition year (July 1, 1977 - June 30, 1978), although user services and archival development activities now reside in New Haven and Storrs respectively. But we look to a continued prominent Williams role, through such areas as the publications program of the Roper Center, the development of teaching materials and packages where the standing of Williams as one of the outstanding undergraduate institutions in the country will be a major asset, in the hosting of special seminars, conferences, and training programs.

THE CONTINUED IMPORTANCE
OF THE ROPER CENTER
TO THE SOCIAL
SCIENCES

Implementation of the new organizational arrangements was predicated upon the assumption that they would help an already valuable social science instrumentality become even more important, more successful in meeting research and teaching objectives of faculty in the social sciences. The move to new facilities at Connecticut and Yale becomes desirable, of course, only because the Roper Center is a valuable resource.

The following is a partial list of some of the archival resources available at the Roper Center:

1. It maintains the raw data (in reformatting, numeric files) from polls conducted regularly by the American Institute of Public Opinion (The Gallup Poll). This series of nearly 1,000 studies dating from 1936 is clearly one of the most impressive collections of attitude and behavioral data available anywhere for the investigation of social change.
2. It is the repository for studies from many other major U.S. polling organizations, including the Roper Organization, National Opinion Research Center (NCRC), Bureau of Applied Social Research, Belden Associates (Texas), The Minnesota Poll, and dozens more. These thousands of surveys are keyed question-by-question into a machine-retrievable instrument which makes subject searches efficient.
3. It annually acquires between 300 and 400 surveys conducted by major non-American research organizations and the overseas affiliates of U.S. survey groups. Today, approximately 7,000 non-American survey data sets, from 72 different countries and dating from 1938, are available through the Roper Center. These include, for example, 275 studies from Denmark, 415 from France, 450 from Germany, 900

- from Great Britain, 250 from Japan and other major survey series.
4. It distributes the General Social Survey conducted annually by NORC.
5. It has brought together and standardized the response data filed, with support from the U.S. Bureau of the Census, for major family planning (KAP) surveys conducted in scores of countries over the past two decades. These data include many of the landmark surveys in the field of population such as the CE-LADE urban (1964) and rural (1969) studies, the U.S. GAF and NFS series.
6. It is the archival site for surveys sponsored around the world by the U.S. Information Agency. The use of identical questionnaires in many different countries as part of the USIA World Survey effort, makes this impressive data series extremely valuable in the field of international relations.
7. It provides data resources to investigators wishing to study highly specialized samples: foreign elites, U.S. business executives, high school youth, racial minorities, aged persons, university students and religious groups.
8. It has archived data from surveys undertaken by major national commissions. Examples include: The National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse (1973) and The Commission on Population Growth and the American Future (1971).
9. It publishes an annual summary (NEWSLETTER) of recently acquired data sets -- containing sample information and content abstracts.
10. It has published a monthly digest (CURRENT OPINION) of significant findings from recent opinion surveys throughout the world. This phase of the publications

program will be taking on new dimensions this month and I will explain the details below under Cooperative Projects.

The point is often made by Roper Center supporters that this is the largest collection of survey data in the world. And so it is. But size is not, by itself, the decisive consideration. It is far more important to note that the Roper archive contains a very rich collection of survey data, well suited to a wide variety of forms of comparative social research. Comparative research may be thought of as having two primary dimensions -- research across time, and research across national boundaries. The Roper collection is especially well structured to sustain both. It is our hope that by devoting attention to making our data sets easier to access and less expensive, a larger segment of the social science community will come to share this awareness through first-hand experience.

NEW INITIATIVES FOR THE FUTURE

Doing what has been done better

The Roper Center today is the repository for a very large proportion of the best survey research conducted by commercial survey organizations in 73 countries. It should continue to be this. That is, the collection, maintenance, and dissemination of these data to the social science community should remain the principal raison d'être for the Roper Center. But the various activities defined by this mission can and should be brought to a higher performance level. A number of new initiatives are being planned.

Increased accessibility to present holdings

Large segments of the archive are now on tape. A substantial portion -- some eight million cards -- were available in punched card form only when we started transporting these data to Connecticut. Over the next several months, all of the data will be brought into tape storage. Major efforts will then be necessary with the tape-based holdings to clean the data and to reformat them. The presence of multiple punches in much of the data represents one problem requiring special attention. The Social Science Data Center has already de-

veloped special-purpose software for "recoding and spraying" multiple punch data. A high proportion of the American Gallup collection is available in "cleaned" standard card image and OSIRIS formats. Work of the remainder of the archive will proceed as quickly as funding permits, following a set of priorities established through close consultation with the user community. It is in everyone's interest, of course, that extensive reformatting work be confined to those portions of the archive which have the most serious social science value and that the most important data be brought to a form facilitating contemporary social science research before other portions of the holdings are touched.

Active Role for Member Institutions

We expect to establish consultative mechanisms actively involving the user community. We hope to host a users' conference as one means of achieving advice and counsel on priorities. One component of this conference would be a session attended by representatives of all member schools. The intention of this session would be to establish some means for extending the role of member schools in the process of decision making for the Center. It will be necessary, as well, to establish committees in the various areas of research touched by the Roper holdings to aid Center staff in establishing specific priorities.

Re-construction of the fee schedule

One of our major tasks in the future must be to encourage new participants to join the ISLA program. The present fee structure has not supplied sufficient incentive to potential members. We at the Center are committed to bringing the per study cost down significantly and to the development of "special packages" of related data at more attractive prices.

In the case of "special packages", efforts to improve fees have already been implemented to some extent. The price of NORC General Social Survey Single year files is now 25% of what it was previously. Similar pricing structures are also available for the NORC 1972-1977 Cumulative Data Set, the Gallup Presidential Election Series 1936-1976, and the American Soldier Surveys (Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, 1949). A com-

pletely new fee structure will be implemented July 1, 1978, which will favorably affect all users of the Center.

Cooperative Projects

Recently, members of the Roper Center staff have been active in exploring new areas of cooperation with various organizations involved in social data research. In January, 1978, representatives from the ICPSR and The Roper Center met and agreed upon the following specific collaborative enterprises:

1. working on the development of joint ICPSR - Roper data sets, such as integrated longitudinal files of election surveys;
2. sharing resources in the future processing of the NORC General Social Surveys;
3. establishing jointly operated booths at professional meetings;
4. exploring the development of teaching packages and social science applications of minicomputer technology.

Similarly, discussions between representatives of Carleton University's Social Science Data Archive and The Roper Center have occurred relating to the sharing of resources to clean and document surveys from the Canadian Institute for Public Opinion.

On another front, The Roper Center and the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research have entered into an agreement whereby the Center produces a sixteen-page section reviewing current survey data for Public Opinion. The first issue of Public Opinion will appear in February, and the magazine will be published six times a year. Both the Roper Center and AEI intend this section to be an objective and comprehensive review of popular opinion on the range of important issues involving the United States. As part of this arrangement, AEI has agreed to take over the subscription list for Current Opinion. All Current Opinion subscribers would have a choice -- to get their money back or to receive a couple of years subscription to the new magazine without additional charge.

There is, inevitably, a trade off in the organization I have just described. We are getting some additional administrative complexity, but we are bringing the resources and commitments of two major research universities to the needs of

The Roper Center. We are not going to succeed unless we satisfy user needs. We very much hope data consumers will communicate any thoughts concerning the new arrangements or unmet needs which seem especially acute.