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Academic Affairs Update, February 2017

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A Half-Century of Service

By Mary Losch, Department of Psychology; Center for Social and Behavioral Research Director

In 2017, the Center for Social and Behavioral Research (CSBR) will celebrate 50 years of service to UNI and the broader community, region and state.

Although the details of the genesis are a bit murky, the story suggests that then-UNI President Maucker was seeking specific data from campus constituencies and asked survey-savvy faculty for assistance. Building on class survey projects, a group of Sociology faculty formed the Center for Sociological Research, focusing on faculty-led survey project assistance to local agencies.

The first formal project (of six) in 1967 was titled "Socioeconomic Characteristics of Foster Families in Black Hawk County, Iowa." The last was titled "Study of Mailed Questionnaire Validity." The Center's commitment to applied social science and rigorous survey methods research was evident from that first year.

Over the first two decades, Sociology instructor Robert Kramer would lead projects focused on an array of topics, including racial attitudes, recreation activities, housing patterns, attitudes toward pornography, community attitudes toward new freeways, radio listener surveys, views toward evolution, partner violence, and capital punishment.

Both number and scope of projects expanded in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1988, Sociology professor Gene Lutz became Director of the now CSBR. Twenty-two projects were

completed annually in 1988 and 1989, including a large United Way community needs assessment for Black Hawk County.

The 1990s also saw partnerships with local, county, state and federal agencies such as public school districts, the Black Hawk County Health Department, the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, and the Iowa Consortium for Substance Abuse Research and Evaluation. In 1994, under the leadership of Director Lutz and in partnership with the Iowa Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control, the CSBR began conducting the Iowa Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey (BRFSS) and has collected these important health data every year since. In this project alone, over twenty-two years, carefully trained telephone interviewers (largely UNI students) have spoken with over 180,000 Iowans.

In the past decade, CSBR has continued to spread its methodological wings and embraced new modes of data collection including cell phones, online, and SMS (text) survey modes. The increasing need for accountability and documentation of value has extended the Center's reach toward more mixed-method research approaches. The Center has shaped its services and expertise to include program evaluation and qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups.

To date, CSBR has completed over 760 projects, ranging in size from less than \$100 to over \$11 million. Many have involved UNI faculty partners, which have resulted in interviews and data collected from more than 550,000 Iowans via telephone, face-to-face, in-depth and web interviews, mailed questionnaires, and focus groups.

With over \$1.5 million in combined project budgets during Fiscal Year 2016, Center staff now includes two faculty administrators, ten professional staff (six holding Masters or doctoral degrees), five student research assistants and 60 student interviewers. Most core research staff are active members of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and/or the American Evaluation Association (AEA).

CSBR also is a founding member of the Association of Academic Survey Research Organizations ([AASRO](#)) and a Charter Member of the AAPOR Transparency Initiative (TI), which recognizes those organizations that pledge to practice transparency in their reporting of survey-based findings.

As we plan our 50th anniversary celebration, we honor those who laid the solid social and behavioral science research foundation and moved us along our journey. We look forward to the next 50 years of academic excellence and dedication to the mission of advancing, applying and facilitating the high standards of social and behavioral research practice that inform scholarship and public policy decision-making.

The celebration will take place on March 9 between 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. in the Great Reading Room.

Click [here](#) for more information on the Center for Social and Behavioral Research.

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Academic Affairs Update is edited by Dr. Adrienne Lamberti (Languages & Literatures)

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