



Carolina Population Center

In 1966, the Carolina Population Center was founded at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. To celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2006, a project was conducted to document the history of the Center. This transcript is an excerpt from an oral history interview.

Interviewees: Chirayath M. Suchindran and Richard E. Bilsborrow, and David K. Guilkey

Interviews conducted by: Grace Camblos

Interview dates: Suchindran and Bilsborrow were interviewed on February 24, 2005, and Guilkey was interviewed on February 21, 2005

Chirayath M. Suchindran has been a CPC Fellow since 1977 and a Statistical Core Consultant since 1984. Richard E. Bilsborrow has been a CPC Fellow since 1977. David K. Guilkey has been a CPC Fellow since 1981 and a Statistical Core Consultant since 1984.

CS: The next thing was the statistical services.

GC: Was, I'm sorry?

CS: Statistical services core for which I'm a part. He [Udry] and I went to a program- CPC-training- not training program- a Center grant program review at Hopkins. So when we were both there, I found out that Hopkins has a statistical service core over there, which I was- that's why I was invited to review that program. So, sitting in the hotel, I told Udry, "look, I'm really helping you a lot. You let us find out if we also start a statistical service core." So he said, "that's a great idea, let's do that."

Then I told him that, "look, Dr. Namboodiri [Krishnan] is here to work with. There's no need for Dr. Namboodiri and I to be there." So I told him, "let's get Guilkey and I to be in that one." So there- he was writing the Center grant at that time we created a statistical service core. And it got funded. So that was in 1982.

RB: It was you and Guilkey?

CS: Guilkey. And it just two of us were there.

RB: That's right. Yup.

CS: So that is why I was, then I became, took the office here so I needed to help people with the statistical services core. So.

DG: Since I'm part of the statistical core of the Center, a lot of people come by and ask

questions. And Ron [Rindfuss] frequently brings the students by to ask questions about statistical matters, and help on writing grant proposals, or help on what methods to use, and stuff like that. So even though we're not collaborating, we're kind of collaborating because of my role in the Center on the statistical core, which was started by Udry in, I think it was like '85, wasn't it?

DG: It was about '85. Suchindran had been on a review team for some other Center, and they had a statistical core, and they were paying people to give statistical advice. And Suchindran, like I, was giving out lots of free statistical advice. And so Suchindran came back, and wisely went to Udry, and said, "Other people are *paying* for statistical advice, and you're not! So Udry came to us and said, "I don't want you to do anything different than you're already doing, but I think we should recognize you and add you as a core." So we were added as a core, and we've been a core ever since. Since then we've added [Ken] Bollen to the core. I think maybe even just the second time around, I'm not sure. I think he's been around a long time. Maybe under you, I can't remember. And for a while the core got bigger, and we added some computer programmers to the core. But it's now shrunk back just to the three guys. Because of the way they're doing the new center grant funding, we had to cut back on it.

GC: What kind of things do you do as part of the core?

DG: As part of the statistical core, basically, most of it's ad hoc. In the beginning, people just kind of stroll into your office and say, "Here's my output, what am I doing wrong? What can I do to get this paper in a good journal?" And you kind of have to tailor the work – less now than you used to. Because you know, a sociologist would come in back in the '80s, you'd say, "Well you've really got an endogeneity problem, but in your journals you don't have to worry about it, so just do this." But now if a sociologist comes in, you say, "You've got an endogeneity problem, and this is how you're going to have to fix it," because a sociologist gets nailed just as bad as an economist now on these types of issues. Because life has just changed fairly dramatically, so the statistical methods have kind of converged. It's mainly just consulting. But now, I'd say, 90 percent of it is email. Somebody is emailing you a question, and you respond. But then what we do is we get together once a year and say, "Okay, what are we getting lots of questions on? What should we have seminars on?" And then each one of us gives a seminar to the CPC every year.