



# UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR SOCIAL AND URBAN RESEARCH

OUR STORY: CELEBRATING **50** YEARS



# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS

The University Center for Social and Urban Research serves as a resource for researchers and educators interested in the basic and applied social and behavioral sciences. Here are just a few examples of the milestones in the center's distinguished history.

## TIMELINE

### 1972

The center is established as the University Center for Urban Research (UCUR) with a mandate to "bring together, in an organized and integrated fashion, the many research activities and some of the service activities of the University of Pittsburgh which focus on urban phenomenon." Brian Vargus and Clyde McDaniel served as the founding codirectors.



### 1973

Jiri Nehnevajsa assumes the role of director, expanding the programmatic areas of research within the center and establishing the foundation for the development of what later became the Survey Research Program. The small staff at UCUR during Nehnevajsa's tenure (1973-78) confined itself mostly to surveys of use to community groups and planning agencies for boroughs and to developing studies for policymakers to use for managing nuclear accidents.

Under the direction of Jiri Nehnevajsa, the center's electronic data processing unit was established. In addition, the Risk and Emergency Management Program evolved from a highly focused concern with issues of civil defense to broader based, policy-oriented research in the areas of natural and man-made disasters. With major funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), some of the larger studies of the program related to emergency preparedness and emergency management. George Rogers served as associate director of the Risk and Emergency Management Program from 1985-87.

### 1978

Vijai Singh is appointed director. Through a series of discussions with a great many members of the faculty, it became clear that the University needed a high quality, multidisciplinary social science research facility with a strong quantitative methodological orientation. This organization was



to assist the University in fulfilling its urban mission by undertaking social and policy-oriented research and providing technical assistance to local governments and community organizations. Thus, in November 1978, with the approval of the Program Policy Committee, the Chancellor and the Provost, the center was renamed the University Center for Social and Urban Research (UCSUR), and its mission was expanded. During Singh's tenure (1978-95), UCSUR broadened both the scope of UCUR's areas of inquiry and the breadth of agencies to which its information would provide a service.

Under the direction of Steven Manners, the Survey Research/Data Processing Program (later renamed the Survey Research Program) is formed to expand the resources offered to University researchers and outside clients, with the ability to carry out all phases of a survey research project. One example of the larger surveys led by Manners was the State Demand and Needs Assessment Studies, Drug and Alcohol Survey, funded by the DHHS through the Pennsylvania Department of Health. The statewide and targeted area telephone surveys produced estimates of drug use prevalence and the need for drug treatment statewide and at the sub-state level. An additional number of parallel surveys were conducted with a special subgroup of the homeless in shelters in Philadelphia and Allegheny counties.

The Gerontology Program is formed under the codirectionship of Edmund Ricci and Barbara Shore and tied together University resources in more than a dozen departments and centers to further research on aging and better training of caregivers for the elderly.

## 1979

Generations Together (GT), the first university-based intergenerational studies program in the United States, becomes a part of UCSUR. The program was founded by and under the direction of Sally Newman as executive director (1979-2000). GT developed programs to help older residents feel useful and stay involved in their communities, in part to help them remain independent. Such programs as the Senior Citizen School Volunteer Program and the Artists Resource Program used the region's larger than average elderly population as a resource to help educate the young. GT earned broad recognition for its work, including two Presidential Awards at the White House in 1986 and 1989. In 2000, James McCrea took over directorship until GT ended in 2004.

## 1980

The Urban and Regional Analysis (URA) Program is formed under the direction of Vijai Singh with a grant to study the economy of the Pittsburgh region. Under the URA Program, UCSUR conducts studies on the quality of life, present and future employment trends, and economic competitiveness of the area. It also provides technical support for agencies and communities in Southwestern Pennsylvania.

## 1983

Researchers begin constructing the Pittsburgh Regional Econometric Model. UCSUR and the Department of Economics received a major grant to construct an econometric model of the Pittsburgh region under Frank Giarratani, principal investigator; Shirley Cassing and Roger Ahlbrandt, coinvestigators. This research helped to set a basis for econometric modeling in policy analysis for the Pittsburgh region.



# CELEBRATING 50 YEARS



## 1984

Richard Schulz is recruited by the Department of Psychiatry and UCSUR to serve as director of the Gerontology Program, a University-wide position charged with building the research capacity on aging throughout the University. He played a pivotal role in developing the expertise and infrastructure to support research on aging through recruitment, mentoring junior faculty, providing pilot grant support, and raising the profile of research on aging both locally and nationally. By the end of the 20th century, the research portfolio on aging at Pitt was second to none among U.S. universities.

Director Vijai Singh and researcher Ralph Bangs begin The State of the Region report, a series that ran through the 1990s and focused on regional change and regional economic revitalization in Pittsburgh and Southwestern Pennsylvania.

## 1986

The Office of Child Development (OCD) is established, with Robert McCall as director, to promote multidisciplinary research on and educational programs for children, youth and families, disseminating research to policymakers and citizens. In the early 90s, OCD became part of UCSUR.

UCSUR joins with the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs and the Center for Hazardous Material Research to form the Environmental Policy Studies Program.

## 1989

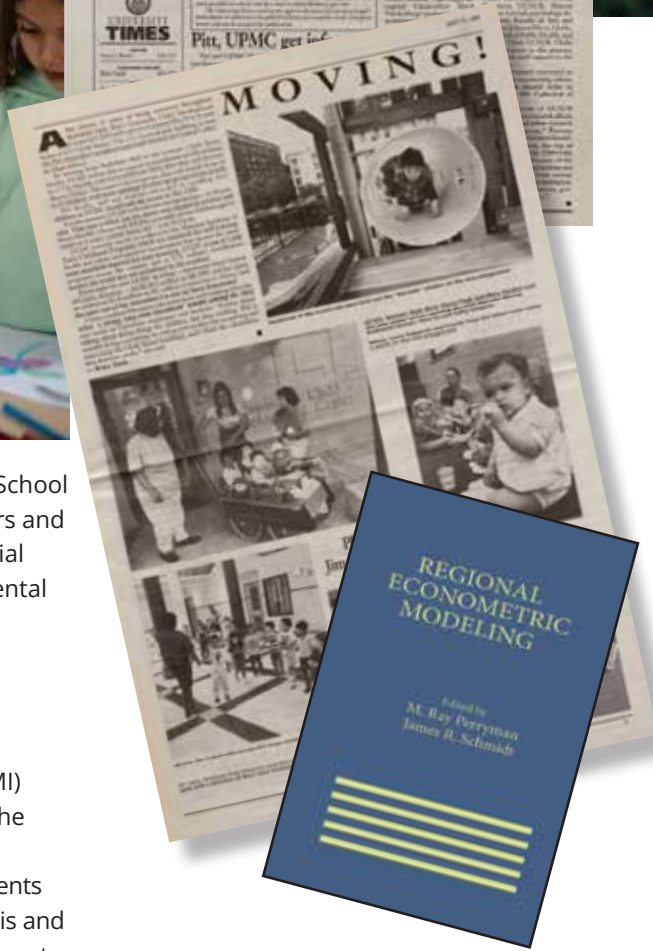
UCSUR contracts with Regional Econometric Modeling, Inc. (REMI) to build an economic model of the Pittsburgh region. REMI uses an input/output database to help clients perform economic impact analysis and economic and demographic forecasts. UCSUR, along with Allegheny County and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Regional Planning Commission, purchased the Pittsburgh REMI model for local projects. UCSUR continues to maintain the most recent versions of the REMI model for an 11-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

## 1990

The Environmental Policy Studies Program is relocated to UCSUR under the directorship of Gene Gruver.

## 1992

Christina Groark joins the Office of Child Development (OCD) as codirector with Robert McCall. OCD remained part of UCSUR until it was transitioned to the School of Education in 2002.



## 1993

Urban and Regional Analysis Program director Ralph Bangs begins the series Economic Benchmarks, focused on quality-of-life indices in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County, with a central focus on differences by black and white residents.

## 1995

Richard Schulz is appointed interim director of UCSUR and appointed director in 1999. During his tenure as director (1995-2016), he continued to serve as director of the Gerontology Program. He also served as director of the Geriatric Education Center of Pennsylvania (1985-2020), cofounded the Institute on Aging of UPMC and the University of Pittsburgh (2003), and established the Gerontology Graduate Certificate Program in collaboration with Jennifer Bissell (2004).





## 1996

UCSUR launches a seed grants program to promote faculty research development. Five years later, the program was renamed the Steven D. Manners Awards in memory of Survey Research Program Director Steve Manners, who also served many years as assistant director of UCSUR.

Stephen Farber is named director of the Environmental Policy Studies Program.

## 1999

Scott Beach is named director of the Survey Research Program. Under his direction, the Survey Research Program has continued to expand. The program now includes 15 full-time staff and typically conducts between 10 and 20 survey projects per year with Pitt faculty and others doing research in the public interest.

Under the direction of Stephen Farber, the Environmental Policy Studies Program is renamed the Environmental Decision Support Program. This program was established in response to a regional need for environmental resource management decision support. It brought together researchers from a broad range of natural sciences, social sciences, and engineering disciplines to focus on complex environmental issues using geographic information systems as a tool for data integration and modeling.

## 2000

Sabina Deitrick, faculty member at the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs, becomes codirector with Ralph Bangs of the Urban and Regional Analysis Program. She later becomes director of the program.

Regional economist Christopher Briem is founding editor of the Pittsburgh Economic Quarterly, dedicated to analyzing and understanding economic change in Pittsburgh. The quarterly publication continued through 2019.

## 2001

The Environmental Decision Support Program releases the report, *The State of the Environment in Allegheny County: Land, Water, and Air*, providing a baseline of environmental conditions at local levels in Allegheny County.

## 2003

Sabina Deitrick becomes editor of the Pittsburgh Economic Quarterly, a role she continued through 2017. She expanded the economic analysis of Pittsburgh with feature articles on neighborhood change, environmental conditions, and equity and gender issues.

UCSUR releases *The State of Aging and Health in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*, a report that incorporated Census information as well as data from one of the most comprehensive surveys of older persons ever conducted in Allegheny County. The report provided a body of knowledge on older individuals in Allegheny County at a level available nowhere else in the country and served as a tool for providers of health care, social services, business, and all who interact with older adults to identify different methods and strategies to provide

appropriate services and make them accessible for older adults. UCSUR released a follow-up 2014 *State of Aging in Allegheny County* report, and, more recently, the 2022 *State of Aging, Disability & Family Caregiving in Allegheny County* report.

## 2004

The Qualitative Data Analysis Program is formed under the direction of Stuart Shulman to offer a rigorous approach to managing and analyzing text-based data, including data preparation and cleaning, data management and storage, data distribution and unification, code development and testing, rater reliability reporting, and results analysis and expression.

John Craig, retired executive editor of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, joins UCSUR's Urban and Regional Analysis Program as a visiting scholar to create the Pittsburgh Regional Indicators Consortium, later renamed Pittsburgh Today, a regional benchmarking program to track social and economic progress across the Pittsburgh region.

## 2005

The Geographic Information Systems and Visual Analytics (GIS / VA) Program replaces the Environmental Decision Support Program and continues to serve the growing need for spatially represented data and analysis in many disciplines.

## 2006

UCSUR, with partners at Carnegie Mellon University and the City of Pittsburgh, launches the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS), a grass-roots neighborhood-based open data system under the direction of Sabina Deitrick and Carnegie Mellon's Bob



Gradeck. Bob relocated to UCSUR to serve PNCIS and, later, the Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center.

## 2008

The Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System (PNCIS) joins the National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP), based at the Urban Institute, to promote the use and expansion of neighborhood information systems by local policymakers and neighborhood stakeholders. UCSUR continues as a partner in the NNIP.

UCSUR research associate Don Musa becomes director of the Qualitative Data Analysis Program (QDAP). He was instrumental in QDAP taking the lead on completely restructuring how the qualitative/open-ended student responses for Pitt's Leavers/Student Retention interviews were coded and analyzed, the applications of which are still in place to this day.

## 2010

Sabina Deitrick and Bob Gradeck start the Urban and Regional Analysis Program's Brown Bag seminar series on social and economic research issues with local, national, and international experts. The series continued through 2019.

Douglas Heuck is appointed Pittsburgh Today program director. Under his direction, the project expanded its use of narrative journalism to augment the several hundred statistical indicators already published, bringing this information about the region's future to a larger audience.

## 2011

UCSUR conducts the Pittsburgh Regional Quality of Life survey, the most extensive survey of Greater Pittsburgh residents since the historic Pittsburgh Survey of 1908.

## 2012

Scott Beach creates the UCSUR Research Registry, a panel of local residents recruited by the Survey Research Program who are willing to be contacted for additional surveys and research studies. To date, the registry contains more than 9,000 participants and has been a highly valuable resource to the research community.

## 2013

UCSUR releases the 2013 Pittsburgh Regional Environment Survey report. The report was the most in-depth and methodologically sound environmental survey to have been undertaken in Greater Pittsburgh.

## 2014

Richard Schulz is appointed chair of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's landmark study, Families Caring for an Aging America. The report outlined the prevalence and nature of caregiving, as well as its impact on the caregiver's health, employment and overall wellbeing; it examined the effectiveness of programs and supports aimed at supporting caregivers; and lastly assessed and recommended policies to address the needs of family caregivers and minimize barriers.

## 2015

The Western Pennsylvania Regional Data Center (WPRDC) is launched as a partnership among the University of Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, and the City of Pittsburgh. The WPRDC provides an inclusive infrastructure for openly sharing civic information, and project staff provide a range of services as a civic data intermediary. Bob Gradeck, project manager for several community data efforts

at UCSUR, including the Pittsburgh Neighborhood and Community Information System, becomes project director of the WPRDC.

## 2016

Scott Beach is appointed UCSUR interim director and continues to also serve as director of the Survey Research Program.

Research associate Mike Blackhurst is named codirector of the Urban and Regional Analysis Program.

## 2018

Ellen Kinnee joins UCSUR as Geographic Information System (GIS) database analyst. She has contributed geocoding, mapping, and spatial analysis support for UCSUR survey initiatives including Caregivers (2017), Quality of Life (2018, 2023), and State of Aging (2022). She also developed the Age-Friendly Community Indices of spatial indicators of aging resources for both Allegheny and Westmoreland counties.

UCSUR conducts its 2nd Quality of Life Survey of Allegheny County residents with Pittsburgh Today, with Allegheny County respondents drawn from UCSUR's Research Registry.

## 2023

UCSUR conducts its 3rd Quality of Life Survey of Allegheny County residents under the direction of Sabina Deitrick. This survey partnered with UrbanKind, a Pittsburgh nonprofit organization, to include broader quality of life issues in the survey questions and dissemination to an expanded group of stakeholders and policymakers.

UCSUR looks forward to continuing its evolution as a valuable resource for multidisciplinary collaboration and a source for the latest data to inform public policy on the most pressing issues facing society.

## SELECT MAJOR INTERDISCIPLINARY GRANTS LED AND / OR CO-LED BY UCSUR

### **Center for Research, Training, and Dissemination of Family Support for People with Disabilities Across the Life Course (2019-2024 / Donovan PI; Beach Co-I)**

*Funding of approximately \$4 million from The National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research*

The Center's mission is to facilitate the rapid translation and dissemination of state-of-the-art research and training to inform direct services and support programs designed to improve care, health, and quality of life of people with disabilities and their families.

### **Understanding Factors Influencing Financial Exploitation Among Diverse Samples of Older Adults (2017-2022 / Beach PI)**

*Funding of approximately \$3 million from the National Institutes of Health*

The project examined: the impact of financial scam susceptibility on incidence of financial exploitation (FE); the impact of socio-demographic factors and social integration/isolation on scam susceptibility and FE; the impact of general cognitive abilities and financial skills/advice and support; and the impact of psychosocial factors on scam susceptibility and FE.

Understanding multiple pathways for FE is important for the development of interventions to heighten awareness and minimize risk.

### **Quality of Life Technology Engineering Research Center (QoLT ERC) (2006-2015 / Kanade PI; Schulz and Beach Co-Is)**

*Funding of approximately \$30 million from the National Science Foundation*

The QoLT ERC focused on the development of intelligent systems that enable older adults and people with disabilities to live more independently. Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh jointly ran the Center.

### **Center of Excellence in Partnerships for Community Outreach Research and Training Project (2002-2007 / Thomas PI; Schulz Co-I)**

*Funding of approximately \$6 million from the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities*

The Center focused on enhancing the early academic career survival skills of postdoctoral and junior faculty investigators doing research on minority health disparities.

### **The Pittsburgh Mind-Body Center (PMBC) (1999-2011 / Matthews PI; Schulz Co-I)**

*Funding of approximately \$15 million from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute*

The Pittsburgh Mind-Body Center (PMBC) focused on understanding shared psychological, behavioral, and psychobiological pathways that contribute to the onset of and recovery from diverse physical illnesses and provided a training resource locally and nationally regarding mind-body relationships and health.

### **Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health (REACH) (1995-2005 / Schulz PI)**

*Funding of approximately \$16 million from the National Institute on Aging and the National Institute of Nursing Research*

The REACH study was a multisite caregiver intervention study that compared a variety of interventions for dementia caregivers to control conditions. The study was a landmark in its large sample size, use of multiple sites, and inclusion of large numbers of White, Hispanic, and African American caregivers; it is recognized as having developed the most effective intervention for improving the quality of life of caregivers of person with dementia.

### **Caregiver Health Effects Study (CHES) (1992-2002 / Schulz PI)**

*Funding of approximately \$7 million from the National Institute of Mental Health*

The CHES was a landmark study demonstrating the adverse health effects of being a family caregiver and was designed as an ancillary study of the Cardiovascular Health Study (CHS) of the elderly, funded by the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

### **The Geriatric Education Center of Pennsylvania (GEC/PA) (1985-2015 / Schulz PI)**

*Funding of approximately \$10 million from the Health Resources & Services Administration*

The GEC/PA is a consortium of the University of Pittsburgh, Penn State University, and UPMC, with Pitt as the lead institution. The GEC/PA focuses on training to enhance geriatric mental health expertise throughout the state.





University Center for Social and Urban Research

3343 Forbes Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

412-624-5442  
Fax: 412-624-4810  
[ucsur@pitt.edu](mailto:ucsur@pitt.edu)  
[ucsur.pitt.edu](http://ucsur.pitt.edu)

To learn more about UCSUR's survey research capabilities, programs, ongoing projects, and staff, visit our website at:  
**[ucsur.pitt.edu](http://ucsur.pitt.edu)**

Follow us on X (formerly Twitter): [@PittCSUR](https://twitter.com/PittCSUR)