

**IRP SPECIAL REPORT**

**FINAL REPORT OF THE IRP  
NATIONAL ADVISORY  
COMMITTEE: EVALUATION  
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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**Final Report of the IRP National Advisory Committee:  
Evaluation and Recommendations**

April 1992

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## Preface

The Institute for Research on Poverty is a national, nonprofit, university-based center for research into the causes and consequences of income poverty and social inequality in the United States.

The Institute was established in 1966 at the University of Wisconsin-Madison by the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity, the organization given responsibility for waging war on poverty at the national level. In the years since then, the Institute's multidisciplinary affiliates have formulated and tested basic theories of poverty and inequality, developed and evaluated social policy alternatives, and analyzed trends in poverty.

Most affiliates of the Institute hold regular teaching appointments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and divide their time between teaching and research. Some Institute affiliates are faculty members at other institutions who visit the Institute regularly to consult with colleagues and present seminars. The Institute also hosts visiting scholars who, on leave from and supported by their permanent affiliation, come to conduct poverty-related research.

The principal activities of the Institute are sponsorship of the original work of staff members and dissemination of their findings. Seminars, workshops, conferences, and a publications program are designed to achieve those ends. The Institute maintains an internal support staff of editors, computer programmers and analysts, technical typists, and administrators who oversee IRP business operations.

As a university-based institution, the Institute operates under University of Wisconsin regulations in receiving grants and disbursing funds. Appointments of the director and members of the internal Executive Committee are made by the University's College of Letters and Science. Within this framework the Institute is allowed substantial latitude in building a staff and research program.

Over the years, a National Advisory Committee of distinguished social scientists serving rotating terms has played an important role in developing Institute research priorities. Half of the members of the Committee are appointed by the Institute and half are appointed by IRP's federal sponsor, the Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services. In September 1991, the National Advisory Committee conducted a thorough evaluation of the Institute. The Committee report follows.

IRP National Advisory Committee  
1991-92

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Carnegie Mellon University

June O'Neill  
Baruch College

Reginald Clark  
California State University, Fullerton

Patricia Ruggles  
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Christopher Jencks  
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Final Report of the IRP National Advisory Committee

Evaluation and Recommendations

Drafted November 1991

Approved March 1992

INTRODUCTION

On the occasion of the transfer of the directorship of the Institute for Research on Poverty from Charles Manski to Robert Hauser, the National Advisory Committee of the Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP) met to undertake a top-to-bottom review. This special meeting, which took place on September 28-30, 1991, was convened at the initiative of both the past and present directors and their counterparts at the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

The review we conducted was the first in a decade. It was not a reaction to a crisis. Rather, all the relevant parties saw the arrival of a new director as an opportunity to be seized, especially since the new director had not previously been closely associated with the Institute. It is one measure of the interest which this meeting generated that all members of the Committee were present.

The general perception of the Committee was that the Institute is the best it has been in a decade. During the past three years its research has been marked by a notable advance in statistical methodology and modeling. A new generation of high-quality researchers has largely replaced an earlier one. Relations with DHSS have continued to improve. These positive developments do not imply that the Institute cannot be better, however. In our view further improvement requires two

things: a longer planning cycle and a Director with time to devote to leading the organization, rather than just raising its annual budget. Both these changes require a more secure long-term funding base. The future remains more uncertain than is warranted by the Institute's past record of accomplishment. Both DHHS and the University should combine to create a funding environment which permits a longer research planning horizon.

The remainder of this report proceeds as follows. First, we briefly evaluate the Institute's research activities. Then we turn to its support structure, its external relations (other than funding), and finally its funding. In each section we offer a small number of suggestions directly pertinent to the findings of the Board. We conclude with a short discussion of more far-reaching recommendations.

## EVALUATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

### Research

The Agenda. The research agenda of the Institute has evolved as the political and economic environment has altered and as knowledge has accumulated. In the very early years key concepts were defined, data bases created, and the negative income tax experiments conducted. The experiments then became one data source for a large number of studies of unintended policy outcomes--particularly labor supply effects. The negative income tax was the policy instrument that received the greatest attention.

Starting around 1973, the Institute began to put more emphasis on time-series analyses of poverty and inequality. The accounting impact of adding the benefits of cash and in-kind transfers to money income and then deducting direct and indirect taxes was carefully studied. Later, the Institute began to investigate the effects of transfers on wages, hours of work, and household living

arrangements. Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Old Age and Survivors Insurance and disability programs attracted the greater attention. The impacts of policy changes were analyzed as they occurred. Emerging out of the concentration upon AFDC, child support issues became a significant part of the research agenda.

Most recently, education, family relations, and the homeless have come to the foreground. This line of research shifts the focus of the Institute from identifying proximate causes of poverty and evaluating the effects of direct remedies like higher AFDC benefits to a concern with more basic causes of poverty and more structural solutions.

The Committee finds the evolution of the research agenda to be natural and desirable. But we do caution that the Institute should continue to describe the historical record and analyze program impacts. Careful attention to the quality of the data and to producing authoritative narratives in timely response to changing policies and economic conditions is expected of the Institute. Despite the growing role of the Congressional Budget Office, many in Congress continue to depend on IRP to synthesize, organize, and present an independent assessment of progress against poverty.

The Faculty. As with the research agenda, the composition of the faculty has evolved through time. What could be called the Institute's third generation of poverty researchers is now in place. It represents an appropriate mixture of ages, disciplines, and skills. It is smaller than earlier cohorts because, in real terms, the budget is relatively small.

The Committee has two concerns about the changes in faculty. First, while we think the concerns of the new faculty appropriate and in some cases overdue, we are worried that the Institute's old agenda may be completely abandoned. The faculty members most intimately involved in documenting and analyzing the historical evolution of poverty in the United States have left the University. At least one substitute needs to be found. Second, the Institute's faculty now have



multiple memberships in many University research and academic communities. The new director himself has many allegiances. A special and continuing effort will be required to maintain the sense of the Institute as a research community. Leadership in this regard will have to come from the top.

The Role of Large Data Sets. Central to a very large proportion of the Institute's research agenda has been the analysis, and sometimes the creation, of large data sets. The Committee regards with approval the plans of the new director to contribute to the creation, maintenance, and distribution of key data sets. Getting the Mare-Winship uniform Current Population Survey tapes comparatively error-free is especially important. Providing primary data can, however, be terribly time consuming and expensive. Ventures into primary data collection or distribution need to be approached with considerable caution, and in most cases should proceed only with outside funding. In any event, the Institute should deal with data needs outside the Institute only when the data sets involved are being intensively used by researchers inside the institute. That is, for a whole host of reasons, the data bases must serve the Institute researchers, not the other way around.

### Support

Computing and Administration. Computer hardware, data acquisition and archival arrangements, networking capacity, and access have all been excellent in the past and remain state of the art. The Committee applauds the cooperative relations developed with Center for Demography and Ecology and Sociology and the financial support given it by the University.

Similarly, support for maintaining financial records and providing clerical assistance appears to be first rate. These services have created attachments and loyalties to the Institute in the past and appear to continue to do so.

External Relations

ASPE. The Committee is please to acknowledge the positive contributions of various of the staff of ASPE and the special effort made by the Deputy Assistant Secretary to convey her interest in our deliberations. The wide variety of joint activities now being undertaken--exchanges of personnel, planning of conferences, the seminar series in Washington--enhances the role of the Institute in elucidating the causes, consequences, and cures for poverty. It helps focus the Institute's research on those policies and program opportunities that are most likely to be implemented or improved in the near term.

The focus of the Committee was on the long term. But it is important to recognize that even two years is often a very long time horizon for ASPE staff. IRP should certainly consider it appropriate to do studies on a shorter time horizon if the task allows the Institute to produce a product of high quality. And certainly the staff should be ready to lend its knowledge of both data and the research literature to ASPE staffers who want to call upon it. Staff exchanges, a long tradition, should continue despite the greater funding difficulties they now face.

Congress. As evidenced by the testimony of Scott Lilly and a fax from Wendell Primus, Congressional interest is of two kinds. First, the Institute has provided data with short turnaround time on request to a small number of staffers. Naturally they would like that to continue, and within the limits of a shrinking Institute such requests should be honored. As already indicated, the Congress appears very much to value the Institute as an independent source of expertise on the incidence of poverty and the effectiveness of public programs in reducing it. The Committee thinks it important to continue meeting this need.

University. The financial contribution of the University to the Institute has grown considerably over the past ten years, and, while we turn to funding issues later, we wish to acknowledge that contribution here. We also note with satisfaction that the University has resisted what must be an ever-present temptation to integrate the Institute with other policy-oriented research activities on the campus. As with the computing cooperative, the Institute has shown its willingness to reach out to other units when there are real economies of scale to be achieved. All other virtues of neatness in the organization are likely to prove ephemeral at best, while the complex relationships which IRP has forged outside the University, as well as the sense of identity and cohesion within the Institute, long so fruitful but now perhaps a little fragile, could be jeopardized.

The Research Community. The Institute continues to play a critical role in enticing new talent into poverty-related research. The Committee sees this role as fundamental. Reaching out to faculty on other campuses, as the Institute has done for a decade now, was widely applauded. The working group on "Problems of the Low-Income Population" was also highly regarded by the Committee, although a broader membership with a greater focus on low income struck many as desirable.

The most extensive discussion was devoted to the Small Grants competition. Great concern was expressed about the quality of the grant awards. Not all the winning proposals were thought to be of high quality, and those that were often came from rather well-established researchers, which defeats the major purpose of the program. Some thought the program should be ended. Others thought that the program should continue, but that not all money reserved for it should be awarded if the quality of the proposals did not merit it. It was suggested that the Institute might arrange a three-day stay at IRP before work started for those who would benefit from a careful review of their plans and the data sets and analytical packages they intended to use.

Any expected financial savings that are likely to accrue from this more tough-minded approach should go to better ways to nurture new talent. Several suggestions were made. A return to the very successful postdoctoral program of the mid-1970s was one. A substantial annual prize for the best paper of the year was also suggested. Linking the award to the summer program might yield a better pool of applicants.

More generally, IRP with the aid of ASPE, the Committee, and whomever else might usefully be drawn into this discussion should consider afresh the most appropriate ways to widen the pool of poverty researchers. In undertaking those deliberations it would be well to examine whether the careers of prior winners were affected in the desired ways. It would also be useful to know how many of the awards resulted in published pieces.

### Publications

The Committee finds the publication staff and its output to be most commendable. *FOCUS* has proven to be of great value to outside researchers, policymakers, the media, and the reputation of the Institute. *Insights* too has proven to be extremely helpful despite its short history. Three suggestions were offered by the Board. First, *Insights* could be made more visually appealing. Second, a way should be found to distribute summaries of Discussion Papers. Third, the contribution of both publications as well as the Discussion Paper, Reprint, and Special Report series would be greater if more effort were made to bring them to the attention of the media. Mailing the papers to the appropriate media people is not enough. Topical research should be brought to their attention by phone promptly. The editorial staff cannot bear this responsibility alone. The researchers too must be prepared to speak with reporters.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

All of the Committee's more far-ranging recommendations relate to the process of agenda setting. While the Committee fully understands that any research agenda for the Institute must reflect the current interests of the key faculty, it nevertheless believes that those interests should be embedded in and perhaps molded at the margin by broad-ranging interaction with the entire poverty research community.

For example, one area ever present (but never central in the work of the Institute) is the pervasive role of race. Given the special interest of the director in the interconnections of poverty, education, and race, the Committee wondered if such a set of interests could not somehow be forged into a cohesive part of the Institute's long-term research agenda.

Rather more generally, the Committee hoped there would be a clearly defined and coherent set of ideas which would conjure up the Institute in the minds of informed persons in the poverty policy community. The negative income tax served that function. Analysis of the historical record served at a later date. What will serve now?

One reason IRP needs one or two central foci is to offset the centripetal forces that are so powerful in a university. Such a focus also brought suggestions for further work from researchers outside the Institute who deferred to the Institute's comparative advantage. Today, when IRP no longer has a monopoly on poverty research, carefully delineating its comparative advantage and finding its niche will serve to maximize the government's return on its poverty research dollar.

Particular data sets, different from those which define Michigan's role, seemed to be the latent source of comparative advantage among the current staff. Cutting-edge econometric methodology may be another. But, as already indicated, perhaps race and education form a more substantive niche.

One way to proceed toward this sharpened, but very long-range, agenda would be to return to having two Committee meetings a year, with the additional meeting in Washington in February. That meeting would have as its primary focus the long-run research agenda. The meeting would be loosely and leisurely organized. It could be in DHHS space and involve members of that organization who do not normally participate in the deliberations between ASPE and the Institute. It could bring Institute researchers together with relevant ASPE outside contractors, and so on. This is but one option, however, and is meant to be an example only.

No long-range agenda will be taken seriously unless the Institute leadership can expect IRP to have a long and healthy life. Nothing is more important than establishing that presumption. Surprisingly, it would appear that the Institute is reasonably close to achieving that status. We found it comforting that spokespersons for the University and for the ASPE expressed their support in achieving that objective. The University especially seems in a position to guarantee the presumption of long-term support, as shall now be argued, without much greater cost.

While the faculty constitute the heart of the Institute, their shared research interests can hold them together if the infrastructure and some funding for filling in periods between individually won grants is available. Endowed chairs would help, of course. But of more direct practical assistance would be picking up something more of the programming staff and software management costs. That sum plus a backup research fund would go a long way toward expanding the time horizon of researchers. These needs should appeal to some potential donors to the University. If, as the Chancellor said, the Institute is the campus "jewel," it seems appropriate to the Committee that its basic needs be included in the University's fund drives.

With the infrastructure satisfactorily funded by the University, long-term faculty commitment to the Institute would be strengthened but not assured. If faculty find it easier to finance their research in other areas as those become fashionable, the long-term perspective could still be lost. To

support new staff and program initiatives and to encourage a long-term perspective, it would be desirable to restore the Institute's real resources to their level in 1979, when the Institute was last reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences. It would also be desirable if ASPE and the Institute (or if need be IRP and the Congress) were to find a way to get on a five-year funding cycle. Centers organized with five-year funding horizon are quite common and could easily serve as precedent.

**Summary of the IRP National Advisory Committee Meeting**  
(Special meeting to evaluate the Institute)

Madison, Wisconsin  
September 26-28, 1991

**Note:** This summary has been prepared from notes taken by IRP staff and does not necessarily reflect the views of the National Advisory Committee.

Participants (all or part of the time):

- NAC members: Alfred Blumstein, Reginald Clark, Christopher Jencks, Alfred Kahn, Marvin Kusters, Walter Oi, June O'Neill, Patricia Ruggles, James Smith, Eugene Smolensky, Aage Sorensen, Robert Willis
- DHHS/ASPE: Jane Baird, Stella Koutroumanes, William Prosser, Steven Sandell
- IRP, faculty: Robert Hauser, Director; Tom Corbett, Martin David, Robert Lampman, Robert Mare, Charles Manski, Margo Melli, Dan Meyer, Irving Piliavin, Gary Sandefur, Judith Seltzer, Michael Wiseman
- IRP, staff: Pat Brown, Paul Dudenhefer, Betty Evanson, Stephanie Fassnacht, John Flesher, Deanna Mack, Alice Robbin, Liz Uhr, William Wambach
- University: Martin Cadwallader (Graduate School), Donald Crawford (Letters and Science), Peter Eisinger (La Follette Institute), Donald Hester (Economics), Robert Mare (Center for Demography and Ecology), Maurice MacDonald (Consumer Science), Donna Shalala (Chancellor), James Sweet (Sociology), Gary Sandefur (American Indian Studies), Virginia Sapiro (Data and Program Library Service), Paul Voss (Rural Sociology), Halliman Winsborough (Social Science Computing Cooperative)
- U.S. Congress: Scott Lilly, David McMillen



### Introductory Remarks

Robert Hauser welcomed the members and outlined the purpose of the meeting (a list of the questions to be addressed, formulated by Hauser, is on file with these minutes). Steve Sandell thanked the members on behalf of Martin Gerry, Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) in the Department of Health and Human Services, for undertaking this evaluation effort and expressed his own appreciation of the Institute for providing the policy community a window onto the academic world.

Robert Lampman described the particular forces that shaped the Institute at the time it was established, when there were competing views of what the role of IRP should be. Those forces included tension between IRP and the University (national center vs. university center), between the University and the federal government (long-term vs. short-term research interests), and tensions within the federal government (involving ASPE's important connection with both research and policy).

Charles Manski, Dan Meyer, and Gary Sandefur in turn described three forthcoming conferences--one on evaluation, one on paternity establishment, and one on poverty and public policy that will commemorate IRP's twenty-fifth anniversary. Manski noted that conferences provide a means to solve the tensions identified by Lampman, as they provide a means of expression for the interests of diverse groups.

### Selected IRP Research Activities

Irving Piliavin described his proposal for a large research project on homeless children and their families, a project resulting from a relatively small study undertaken at ASPE's suggestion five years ago. Margo Melli, Judy Seltzer, Dan Meyer, and Tom Corbett sketched the evolution of the Institute's program of research on child support reform, supported by the State of Wisconsin since 1980, now nationally recognized and emulated. Charles Manski outlined the program of projects on education and social welfare that will be conducted in the 1991-93 biennium. Encompassing a diverse set of projects reflecting the individual research interests of the investigators, this program illustrates, Manski observed, a meshing of personal faculty interests with the interests of the Institute and of ASPE.

### ASPE Research Interests

At this point Jane Baird, Deputy ASPE, joined the meeting and described ASPE's plans for policy research. Martin Gerry is working with Senator Moynihan on a project to develop indicators of dependency. Funds permitting, ASPE's intent is to conduct a competition for two research centers, one on dependency issues, the other on child and family issues. Gerry asked Baird to mention that IRP would have a leg up in a competition, in view of its long history. Jim Smith commented that it would be advisable not to make the centers so specific--better to label them both as poverty research centers, making dependency or child and family issues a subfocus of research within either. Bill Prosser stated that Congress would have a major role in the final decision on whether to hold a competition. Steve Sandell outlined the features envisioned for the centers: intermediate-term

policy focus; some risk-taking in choice of topics; public good in nature (by providing definitions of poverty, ongoing dependency statistics); a mix of established and developing scholars; interdisciplinary approaches.

Discussion followed on the optimum character of federally funded poverty research conducted within an academic setting. There was general agreement that the question of time horizon was crucial: to realize its potential, an academic poverty research center requires funding on a basis of five rather than two years; but it must also be flexible enough to carry out short-term projects in response to the emerging policy needs of its federal sponsor. Robert Hauser expressed the view that ASPE funds can be regarded as a multiplier--a base upon which researchers can seek additional funding sources. Scott Lilly presented the House Appropriations perspective: (1) that IRP merited funding because of its independence as a research organization, not as an arm of ASPE; (2) that it should maintain its focus on long-term research.

#### Selected Research Activities, continued

IRP data resources were the final subject of discussion under the heading of current activities. Hauser sketched the historical development of data archives within or close to the Institute: the Negative Income Tax experiments, Occupational Changes in a Generation, the 40-50 Project (data tapes for the 1940 and 1950 censuses), Child Support Project, Homelessness Project, SIPP Access, and the National Survey of Families and Households. Michael Wiseman described his new project to create public use tapes from the data collected by the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation for its welfare reform evaluations. Rob Mare recounted the history of his undertaking with Christopher Winship to construct uniform files from the March Current Population Surveys for cross-sectional analysis. The usability of these files prompted requests to the point of deluge from other researchers, leading the investigators to donate the files to ICPSR. Errors in the tapes have gone uncorrected, owing to shortage of personnel and funds to perform this task, indicating a need that IRP might fill. Hauser presented the case for using IRP resources to produce regular statistical series, exemplified in the past by analyses of CPS income data and perhaps in the future by such other series as the dependency statistics mentioned earlier.

#### The IRP-ASPE Relationship

In after-dinner remarks, Steve Sandell listed what he regarded as the merits of a cooperative relationship: research products and agenda-setting that meet ASPE's needs; conferences as an outreach activity; staff exchange between Washington and Madison; procurement of work by high-quality researchers without having to follow restrictive contract rules. One drawback, he noted, is that academic personnel are not always politically sensitive to the need for institutional distribution when a range of perspectives is sought.

Explaining that he had recommended an evaluation of IRP in view of its sustained funding at Congressional direction, Bill Prosser identified five audiences for this exercise: IRP's governance group (Executive Committee), the University, IRP's larger collegial community, ASPE and the federal executive branch, Congressional committees. He then discussed the IRP-ASPE relationship in several areas, as follows.

Research planning: The funds expended for IRP are 10 percent of the entire ASPE budget for Research and Evaluation. ASPE and IRP must have a balanced portfolio; Prosser personally would like to see more research focused on social policy activities at the state and county level.

Planning cycle: Both ASPE and IRP agree that a time horizon of two years is too short. The present review process, on the other hand, seems right, striking a good balance of academic interest and policy relevance.

Faculty performing the research: There is a tension between the need to maintain a critical mass of scholars in Madison and the need to involve scholars at other institutions. Prosser recommended giving thought to expanding the base of affiliates. He applauded and encouraged the exchange of ASPE and IRP personnel.

Dissemination and information exchange: ASPE serves as a kind of translator between the research community and the decision-making community. For this purpose, Insights is better suited to reach policymakers; Focus is directed more at the academic community. The rotation of Small Grants Workshops between Madison and Washington is a commendable mechanism for information exchange.

Data: ASPE shares the IRP interest in improving data resources. ASPE has its own data capabilities, e.g., computational work performed for Child Trends, and it is often asked to comment on construction of questionnaires. IRP expertise in issues concerning data is a valuable resource for ASPE.

Dan Meyer recommended that even stronger links be forged between IRP and ASPE: ASPE might be given access to IRP computing facilities; graduate students might be available to work on ASPE projects; IRP might develop mechanisms permitting faster turnaround on policy topics that tend to emerge on short notice in Washington.

Several points were made in ensuing discussion: (1) that an organization such as IRP is essential to inform policymaking; (2) IRP is widely recognized as a source of accurate data, but work coming from it is too incremental, needs longer time frame; (3) the national research shortage at present concerns not numbers, which are in many cases available, but of basic ideas, for which IRP is well-suited to serve as a resource--it is time to move from study of the correlates of poverty to its causes.

### IRP Infrastructure

This session consisted of presentations by IRP staff members and others concerning the day-to-day activities of the Institute:

Social Science Computing Cooperative (Halliman Winsborough and Tom Flory). The cooperative is supported (50%) by the Center for Demography and Ecology, which is funded by NICHD; the University contributes to agencies which in turn contribute to the cooperative a total of about 25-30% of its cost. IRP's contribution is now 20%, an accurate proportion, in terms of usage.

IRP Computing Support (John Flesher, Pat Brown, Stephanie Fassnacht). IRP computing staff members have special expertise in collecting and managing Child Support data, managing SIPP data, and preparing extracts from the Current Population Surveys and the PSID, in addition to general programming skills.

Publications (Liz Uhr and Paul Dudenhefer). To the regular series of Discussion Papers, Special Reports, Reprints, and Focus has been added Insights, an occasional bulletin summarizing research findings in readable form intended for the media and policymakers. Discussion following this presentation recommended that more publicity, especially in the form of press releases, be given to IRP research results, and that consideration be given to a continuing series in the vein of Progress against Poverty, prepared by Felicity Skidmore and Robert Plotnick in the early 1970s.

Outreach (Betty Evanson). The primary outreach activities of IRP consist of conferences, the Research Working Group on Problems of the Low-Income Population, Small Grants and Sabbatical Grants program, IRP-ASPE Seminar Series, and hosting visitors. Discussion focused on continuation of the Small Grants program versus using some or all of its funds to support postdoctoral affiliates. Offsetting arguments were presented.

Governance and Administration (Bob Hauser and Bill Wambach). A formal policy for affiliation of faculty members was instituted and approved by the Executive Committee three years ago, after the Committee was established at the request of Chuck Manski, then incoming Director. Appointed annually by the Dean of the College of Letters and Science, the Committee provides internal advice on research priorities and staffing policies. IRP now has 60 affiliates; 40 are on the Madison campus. The diversity of sources of Institute funding makes bookkeeping complicated. The University currently supports IRP by providing half of three salaries--the Director, the Assistant Director for Administration, and a data manager--all of the salary of the Departmental Secretary, and physical equipment through the annual capital exercise.

### The IRP-University Relationship

Comments presented by chairs and directors of University organizations related to IRP:

Donald Hester (Economics) noted that the Institute was a factor that had originally drawn him to Wisconsin, commended the training of graduate students made possible by work on IRP projects, and described the close relationships between economics faculty and IRP research. Rob Mare (Center for Demography and Ecology) referred to overlapping membership in CDE and IRP, indicating shared research interests and the benefits to be gained by cumulative knowledge. Jim Sweet (Sociology) commended the Institute for creating avenues of communication between economists and sociologists and for motivating scholars to examine the policy relevance of their work. Peter Eisinger (La Follette Institute of Public Affairs) characterized the relationship of the two institutes as an informal one of overlapping membership rather than formal connections or dialogue. Hal Winsborough (Social Science Computing Cooperative) noted that the Cooperative is important for IRP computing capacity. Gary Sandefur (American Indian Studies) expressed appreciation for IRP support of research on Native American issues. Maurice MacDonald (Consumer Science) observed that the demographic and applied economic work of his department fit closely within IRP research interests. Paul Voss (Rural Sociology) cited the shared activities of IRP and the Applied Population Laboratory,

both of which respond to information requests from outside parties. Virginia Sapiro (Data and Computation Center) described the close connections between IRP and DACC personnel in data archiving and documentation.

Martin Cadwallader (Associate Dean, Graduate School) stated that among UW applicants for research money from outside sources, IRP affiliates have a competitive edge owing to the support staff available to them and the benefits accruing from collegiality and knowledge-sharing among the group. IRP affiliates have been especially successful in acquiring seed money that has led to further funding support.

Donald Crawford (Dean, College of Letters and Science) described the University's Capital Campaign, a multi-million-dollar fund-raising effort that is being conducted nationwide. IRP will be on the list of possible recipients of targeted gifts; any moneys so received would become an endowment for the Institute, to provide security for its funding base.

David Ward (Vice-Chancellor) stated that the University is in the process of reducing the proliferation of centers and institutes that occurred over the past decade; these organizations will be rated, and those with high ratings will be designated for University support. It is likely that the Institute will receive a high rating.

Comments from the National Advisory Committee were to the effect that the University had gained the benefits of the Institute at very little expense; it had received high-quality training virtually free. It was recommended that endowed chairs be established within IRP, if possible.

### Congress

Hauser read a letter from Wendell Primus, senior staff member of the House Ways and Means Committee (copy on file with these minutes). Primus expressed appreciation for the publications of the Institute, Focus in particular, and urged that IRP conduct studies less mathematical and more public-policy-oriented in nature. He pointed to growing wage inequality as an issue of acute concern, and generally encouraged IRP work on the description and explanation of major trends in U.S. society.

David McMillen, staff member of the Senate Committee on Governmental Regulation, stated that the Subcommittee on Government Information is turning attention to assessment of the federal statistical system. IRP research findings are used by staff members, who have expressed appreciation for the quality of information available. McMillen recommended that every IRP study contain a summary of results, in nontechnical language. In his opinion, IRP should take the lead in defining terms and setting guidelines for statistical series on poverty.

Scott Lilly, staff director of the Democratic Study Group, stressed the importance of IRP in providing accurate information upon which to craft public policies--the countries of Eastern Europe, he pointed out, are severely handicapped in this time of transition by the lack of any reliable data or statistical series to guide intelligent debates. Regardless of ideology, he stated, those who deal with policy agree that a statistic obtained from the Institute forms a solid basis for debate to begin.

General Discussion

General agreement appeared to prevail on several points:

- IRP should play a major role in reporting, describing, and interpreting social and economic trends, but it must also continue to move forward in basic research involving modeling and statistical techniques. Hauser expressed intent to promote and enlarge IRP efforts in the first area by maintaining the staff capability of routinely presenting descriptive statistics and their trend. He was urged to do so within a well-defined context so as to make the implications easy to grasp by the general public. In regard to basic research, Manski stressed the need for continued advances in methodological problems of identification so as to permit judicious sorting among competing explanations for observed data.
- Because it is a university-based research center, the Institute is well situated to move beyond the presentation of numbers and try to get at the heart of poverty-related phenomena (Sandell). Investigation of reasons for changes in the wage distribution could serve as an example of IRP-focused work. A full understanding of this phenomenon could take ten years; only an institute of this nature could accomplish the task (Smith).
- Another suggestion for Institute work was a review of the Green Book, to investigate the reliability of methodologies used and the soundness of statistics reported. Criticisms of this idea were expressed, on the grounds that IRP should not get involved in an exercise involving truth in government data and that it would have to be highly selective in approaching this task.
- The IRP agenda should be driven by the larger issues of our times (consensus). A device is needed to permit that agenda to be shaped in consultation with the National Advisory Committee, ASPE, congressional staff, and other concerned parties to identify subjects that will generate genuinely useful policy debate. Agenda-building, in other words, should consist of more than agreement by ASPE and the IRP director on a set of one- and two-year projects (Jencks)

Executive Session

The balance of the meeting was given to a closed session of the Committee, at which consensus was arrived on the content of a report evaluating the Institute.

Attachment A

List of Exhibits Prepared for the Meeting

The following materials were prepared as background information for the Special Meeting of the IRP National Advisory Committee, September 28-30, 1991. Copies are available as Xerox on demand from the IRP Publications Office.

1. A List of IRP National Advisory Committee Members, 1983-1992
2. Notes on IRP Researchers: Biographical Sketches of Affiliates
3. IRP-ASPE Research Agenda for 1991-1993:  
"Education, Families, and Welfare"  
Robert M. Hauser, Project Director
4. Preliminary Report of the IRP-ASPE Research Project, 1989-1991:  
"The Dynamics of Poverty and Well-Being among Children and Young Adults"  
and  
"Historical Perspectives on Poverty"  
Charles F. Manski, Project Director
5. IRP Conferences, Workshops, and Seminars, 1988-1992
6. IRP Small Grants Program: Research Papers, 1988-1991
7. IRP Publications with Graduate Students as Coauthors, 1988-1991

support new staff and program initiatives and to encourage a long-term perspective, it would be desirable to restore the Institute's real resources to their level in 1979, when the Institute was last reviewed by the National Academy of Sciences. It would also be desirable if ASPE and the Institute (or if need be IRP and the Congress) were to find a way to get on a five-year funding cycle. Centers organized with five-year funding horizon are quite common and could easily serve as precedent.



**Summary of the IRP National Advisory Committee Meeting**  
(Special meeting to evaluate the Institute)

Madison, Wisconsin  
September 26-28, 1991

**Note:** This summary has been prepared from notes taken by IRP staff and does not necessarily reflect the views of the National Advisory Committee.

Participants (all or part of the time):

NAC members: Alfred Blumstein, Reginald Clark, Christopher Jencks, Alfred Kahn, Marvin Kusters, Walter Oi, June O'Neill, Patricia Ruggles, James Smith, Eugene Smolensky, Aage Sorensen, Robert Willis

DHHS/ASPE: Jane Baird, Stella Koutroumanes, William Prosser, Steven Sandell

IRP, faculty: Robert Hauser, Director; Tom Corbett, Martin David, Robert Lampman, Robert Mare, Charles Manski, Margo Melli, Dan Meyer, Irving Piliavin, Gary Sandefur, Judith Seltzer, Michael Wiseman

IRP, staff: Pat Brown, Paul Dudenhefer, Betty Evanson, Stephanie Fassnacht, John Flesher, Deanna Mack, Alice Robbin, Liz Uhr, William Wambach

University: Martin Cadwallader (Graduate School), Donald Crawford (Letters and Science), Peter Eisinger (La Follette Institute), Donald Hester (Economics), Robert Mare (Center for Demography and Ecology), Maurice MacDonald (Consumer Science), Donna Shalala (Chancellor), James Sweet (Sociology), Gary Sandefur (American Indian Studies), Virginia Sapiro (Data and Program Library Service), Paul Voss (Rural Sociology), Halliman Winsborough (Social Science Computing Cooperative)

U.S. Congress: Scott Lilly, David McMillen